

EDITORIAL

As part of the long celebrations of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th anniversary, we begin this issue of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* with an essay reflecting on what it means to grow up in the manifold presences of the poet. To be accurate, what we have is not an essay as such but the text of a lecture that the noted anthropologist Ravindra Jain delivered at a conference of the Indian Anthropology Association in Kolkata last November. In course of these 150 years, Tagore, I think it is safe to say, has become part of the habitus of modern India, irrespective of language or location. Appropriately, Jain calls his enterprise 'a personal anthropology', evocatively blending scenes from his own boyhood with those from Tagore's reminiscences. As a lecture-text, the paper is not expected to be meticulously choreographed, but this in a way works to its advantage: A bit like a kaleidoscope, it gives a new picture at every turn as one issue is put aside and another introduced.

Ravindra Jain has raised a number of important questions in his deliberations, of which I shall discuss just one: that of gender. He could not be more correct in suggesting that in Tagore's novels, the women characters not only move out of the physical confines of home but do so without having to stake or jeopardize their femininity. The novels are truly celebrations of sexual identity. In more ways than one, this coming out without having to be either denigrated or, for that matter, placed on a high pedestal perhaps heralds the real beginnings of Indian modernity. Nonetheless, while this is eminently true, Tagore's women also do not sever their links with the earlier trope of the dutiful, chaste wife and the loving, all-giving mother that Bankim Chandra Chatterjee had imagined as the ethical, affective fulcrum of the future nation. There is a distinct sense of the maternal in Tagore's female characters. Take, for example, Charulata in *Nastanir*. Her affection, warmth, care and patience for Amal's careless ways as well as for her husband Bhupati with whom she otherwise had very little going not only not diminish but are actually very much part of her sensitive, writerly, imaginative persona.

True as this is, we may need to remind ourselves that this wife/mother/nation trope is not as neat as we might think it is even in Bankim; the fractures within the paradigm are quite apparent in any close reading of the novels. As an adroit novelist, Bankim does not make his female characters merely represent the political-ethical positions of the novelist but portrays them as living beings caught in the currents and crosscurrents of life. If we consider a novel like *Krishnakanter Will* ("Krishnakanta's Will", 1878), we will find how Bankim in his bid to keep the efficacy of the

ideal of the pure chaste woman beyond all doubts, disciplines, almost stifles, himself in depicting the aberrant and extremely complex Rohini. Her ambiguities are also Bankim's ambiguities.

In the course of the novel what is ultimately vindicated is of course the ethical yardstick that Bankim champions but there are moments when this seems quite vulnerable, and the tensions between the psychological and the ethical registers are palpable. I am thinking of that particular point in the novel when driven by desire, Gabindalal leaves his virtuous, committed wife, Bhramar, and starts living with the beautiful Rohini, a widow. Bankim describes a certain day when Rohini – looking particularly gorgeous on that occasion – is playing the sitar for the enthralled Gabindalal. At that moment Bankim addresses the reader directly and says something to the effect that one has to remain content seeing only till here, and not try to know the amorous, ugly underside of this beautiful moment. He seems to be suggesting that to allow the reader knowledge beyond the merely functional in an erotic, transgressive relationship is a sin for the novelist, tantamount to being party to titillation. In other words, it is morally wrong to either describe or read about unethical lovelocks. This mode of almost elementary self-censoring in an otherwise rich and complex plot structure as well as modes of enunciation shows the extent of the novelist's own vulnerability to desire. The issue of familial and personal ethics in the novel escapes being didactic since Rohini is not a seductress as such but in many respects a tragic character, stalled by the genuine adversities of life and caught between a keen longing for marriage and family on the one side and an active interest in men on the other.

As in Bankim, Tagore's novels too, much more than being mere conduits for certain discourses, functioned as a kind of a platter for the readers to produce a near ceaseless discursive elongation. To return to the novella, *Nastanir*, once again, it is fascinating to see how through the imaginative ambiguity of the word, Tagore makes the formal-political and the erotic co-constitutive. After locating Bhupati in the big issues of public life – the big events, the big writings, the big language (English) – the story moves to the interiors, to the other drama of life, one that has largely escaped our editor-husband, engrossed as he is with the larger business of politics and the language of its official transaction. This is the drama that has been taking place quietly in the inner quarters of the house, a private drama of love, desire and emptiness as Bhupati's bride Charulata slowly blooms into her youth. What should have been a very significant news does not reach the editor-husband, who has been preoccupied with Indian government's boundary policies, the swelling ambitions of which, he thought, were searing away traces of any restraint. Consequently, he remains oblivious to a territorial geography of another kind: Within the cloisters

of the wealthy household, the young wife spends her days and nights empty, blossoming with no one to appreciate her.

In this world of Charu's solitude and deprived passion enters the word – not the word as the vehicle of formal politics but the word of literary vocation, of imagined transgression. Charulata has a natural inclination for reading and learning. Living in the same household under Bhupati's care is his cousin, Amal, a third-year student in college. Charu gets him to help her with her studies, something Amal will not do without being profusely rewarded. She grants his demands – numerous and capricious even though they are, and to fulfill some of which she has to indeed work very hard. She grudges him but only mockingly; at least someone is making demands on her. The early, rudimentary pedagogy inaugurates a literary theatre where the word comes flying on the wings of Eros, inaugurating a space for intimate bonding between the two souls.

A piece of land lying mostly unkempt – formally a garden with nothing much beyond an English hog plum – at a corner of Bhupati's estate becomes the site of enormous investment of imagination for the two. It is no idle daydreaming but a serious affair of land development which warrants that a 'committee' be formed between Amal and Charu. The budget, however, will not permit the scale and quality of things planned. But compromise is a taboo for Charu. The garden project might have failed to take off, but can't the impossible be realized through other means? Yes, of course, and through words only, written words in the realm of which imagination attains its full life, life at the limits of the possible. The idea of writing about the garden as it has shaped in their imaginations appeals to Charu since no one else will get the import of the piece – a patch of simmering privacy in the transactional world of the literary public. She encourages Amal to take the ever-postponed garden as his first writing assignment. Amal agrees but demands that she embroider leaves and creepers on the roof of his mosquito net. That exceeds all limits of indulgence, thinks Charu. Amal gives a long lecture against keeping the mosquito net in an unaesthetic state, much like a jail cell. By making an embroidered mosquito net the centre for discursive investment and a condition for writing, Tagore once again implicates the act of writing in the scenario of the erotic. The evocations are deepened as Amal starts reading out from an essay already written and kept hidden from Charu: 'My Notebook', a hymn to the pristine white pages, as yet untouched by the author's imagination and the ink stain of written words. From this point, the intoxicant that literature is will start working in their lives, taking its own course beyond what the two of them can possibly control. It brings in their midst almost inevitably the anonymous reader, thus jolting their world of privacy as Amal's writings will start getting printed. Initially

hurt, Charu will soon follow suit. She draws more applause than Amal from the critics. Their world of privacy becomes fissured as is the texture of affect.

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We believe we know what we are thinking about whole and part when we employ such categories. Then we subconsciously consider a whole as a simple collection of parts, each part being either an individual or a sub-collection of individuals belonging or contained in the collection. This is also the case with mathematical wholes—called sets or classes—made up of clearly distinct elements or subclasses. This is eminently useful in mathematics as well as in daily life. Yet it is an abstract conception. The concrete fact is, argues Florencio Asenjo in the article "The Whole in the Part", that wholes are often part of their parts. This is true of the physiology of a living organism where the whole organism is actively present in its totality in each of its functioning organs. It is also true of a physical field of forces, where the whole dynamic structure of the field functions from within any partial region of the field, the field being replicated inside each of its portions. Yet we are content to think of a living organism as a mere collection of organs – a set – or of a field of forces as divisible when one of its most essential properties is to have a location in toto in each of its parts, that is, multiple location.

To make these facts clear in general, this work is divided into four sections: "Parts," "Wholes," "The Part in the Whole", and then a final summing up, "The Whole in the Part". The first section describes how some significant fragments, physical or linguistic, spill beyond their apparent confines in different concrete directions. They are pregnant with meanings that go beyond their first impressions. Following this is a discussion dealing with the dictum: "the whole is more than the sum of its parts." Often coextensive with its parts, a whole has distinct properties of its own that we overlook when we see the whole as being merely the sum of its parts. On the tracks of this line of interpretation, the final section extends the investigation of the notion that a part influences another by a detour through the whole to see the whole influencing itself by a detour through the part as it goes beyond itself.

Saumabrata Chaudhury's essay, "Counting and Trembling during the French Revolution – Elements of a Historical Multiplicity" has two main contentions. The first is that sovereignty, in its general structure, has a numerical logic. The second states that in specific historical conjunctures and sites, this logic is played out with a special intensity such that we are confronted not with the simple confirmation or refutation of the logic

but with its *contestation* and *division*. The French Revolution names one such conjuncture and site. In four parts, the paper tries to formalize certain key moments and processes of division during the Revolution and in its subsequent historiography. For the archive of the revolutionary material (between 1789 and 1794), the author consults some declarations of the leading pamphleteer of that time, Abbe Sieyes. For inaugurating the great tradition of history-writing with the French Revolution as its vital subject – and infinite object – Chaudhury reads Jules Michelet. For counter-revolutionary logic and polemic, he goes to Michelet's near contemporary in the 19th century, Joseph de Maistre.

The method of this paper is to excavate certain 'numerical' operations that run through the sources. It is a veritable archeology of the 'mathematical unconscious' of historico-political discourse during the Revolution. The stakes and motivation for this effort lie in the imperative that we must inquire anew whether the paradigmatic 'will' to a modern, secular and popular sovereignty that is often imagined to have begun with the French Revolution (as opposed to the theological and monarchical sovereignty of the Old Regime) is sustainable as to its *axiomatic* logic: This is the logic that declares – whether in the field of mathematics or politics – that the One *exists* and is that with which we subsequently *count* the sovereign(s) – whether the 'one' king or the 'many' people. Then the question to ask is: what are the ontological and political implications of this *prescribed* existence? And what happens, what strange 'trembling' is induced, if one wagers another prescription, an errant one, that the One is *not*....?

Pravu Mazumdar's essay, "Machiavelli and the art of government: on Michel Foucault's non-reading of Machiavelli", as the titles indicates, explores Foucault's strange 'non-reading' of Machiavelli but does so that in a way that throws light on the larger issue of Foucault's method as such. Even though for Foucault Machiavelli plays a central role in the genealogical processes leading to the birth of governmentality in Europe and even though he never denied Machiavelli a position of importance in conceptualizing his own analytics of power, it was not part of Foucault's enterprise to give a well-rounded account of Machiavelli's works. Instead, he concentrated on the historical reduction of the philosopher to the one posthumous text alone – i.e., *The Prince* – by the commentators of the 16th and 17th centuries. Foucault viewed this historical reduction as 'a positivity of discourse' that allowed the framing of the discourse of the reason of the state. As Mazumdar puts it succinctly: "His (Foucault's) main interest is in how this positivity helped to carve out a new discourse that will lay itself in contrast to the Machiavellian emphasis on sovereign and territory."

If Machiavelli's central problem was the security of the Prince and his

territories, the new discourse emphasised the government of populations. Machiavelli stands at the threshold of political thought, as the last and most important frontier of the old. His priority was not the state as such but to save the principality as a power relation between the prince and his territory. Mazumdar elaborates how locating Machiavelli as a negative constituency for the framing of an upcoming discourse (in this case, the reason of the state and, subsequently, governmentality) ties up with an important component of Foucault's genealogical method – namely, problematization which he reads in the light of the process of becoming unknown and subsequently dangerous for the known and the familiar. In an innovative motive, he reads the consolidated attack on Machiavelli by political commentators of early modernity in conjunction with the emergence of the *dispositif* of madness as part of the way reason consolidated itself. Just as *The Prince* came under critical scrutiny to make room for the new political rationality, the problematisation of madness was the background which produced the surface effect the historical constitution of psychiatric reason – the whole notion of *inclusion* and *betterment* of madness, supported by the clinical and psychiatric *dispositifs* of modern power. It is only after the French Revolution when the typically Machiavellian problems of sovereignty, territoriality and force relations became relevant again that there was a kind of Machiavellian renaissance.

Sasheej Hegde's paper, "Seeking after Traditions: Analytical Forays" lends a distinct analytical twist to the academic engagement with traditions. While avoiding an excessive historical self-consciousness about the problem, the attempt is to get a measure of the contemporaneity attaching to the question of tradition and to place it along a normative-analytical grid implicating, among others, the work of Wittgenstein and Bernard Williams. The author adduces to a level of normativity that goes beyond an *internal* and *external* norm in operation and held to underlie the study of traditions generally. (Here by 'internal' is meant, broadly, understandings in which traditions are made intelligible by being revealed to be, or to approximate to being, as they rationally ought to be; correspondingly, 'external' refers to a style of understanding in which one makes traditions intelligible by representing their coming into being as a particular instance of how things generally tend to happen.) Indeed, the East-West matrix of genealogy implicating the study of traditions simplifies what is really a complex matter – about judgment, about the translatability of traditions and the kinds of necessity that bind previous or parallel instances of a tradition (or practice) with a new one – while also failing to reflect upon the ontological status of discourses directed at creating a normativity out of themselves. Accordingly, then, the near-programmatic outlines attaching

to the paper should not be lost sight of in responding to my formal grounds of appraisal herein.

Calling attention to the civilizing mission as an effective strategy of imperial control, postcolonial writers and scholars have sought to unpack the complex process through which the larger part of the world's population was denied human status by the nineteenth century ethnoscience in British and other imperialisms. For this reason, black writers and intellectuals have implicated European religion, history and philosophy in the dehumanizing project of imperialism through which imperial reason staked its moral claims to rule the colonies. The Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's oft quoted characterization of Conrad as 'a bloody racist', for instance, was endorsed by fellow Nigerian Wole Soyinka in his Nobel Address when he made a similar charge against some of the greatest Western thinkers and philosophers just as African-American writing bears witness to the dehumanization of black slaves. Through an examination of imperial and postcolonial texts, Anjali Gera-Roy's paper, "The Dehumanizing Mission of Imperial Reason", focuses on the nexus between reason, writing and the imperial text in writing black people out of history, culture, and humanity and their reinscription into the human race through the technology of writing.

In his paper "Concepts of Society and Community in the 19th Century North India: Reflections of the word "samaj" in Hindi", Mohinder Singh argues that the process of conceptualization of the social in 19th century India in different regions is related alright but there are at the same time crucial differences because of the differing nature of political and social transformations they undergo during this period. The author analyzes the conceptualization of the social in the nationalist discourse in Hindi inaugurated by the Banaras-Allahabad centred Hindi literati of colonial times. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the linguistic, reformist, and nationalist issues became intertwined. In the second part of the essay, the discourse of the social is analyzed along two axes: the religious and the political. Here Singh takes up journalistic writings, pamphlets, and public speeches of the prominent Hindi public intellectuals of this period: Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balkrishan Bhatt, Pratapnarayan Mishra, and Chaudhary Badrinarain Upadhyay "Premghan". Though this literati is opposed to the programme as prescribed by social reform movements like the Arya Samaj, they don't defend the existing status quo and try to devise their own strategy of reform. They do so by trying to separate the question of social reform from that of religious reform. The question of social reform is instead linked to the question of the progress of the nation. The paper tries to contextualize the meaning to the term

'samaj' against the background of these debates. Conceptual historical considerations are taken up in the last section where the paper focuses on the contextual meaning of the words *samaj* and *samajik*. In modern vernaculars like Bengali, Hindi and Gujarati, the Sanskrit terms *samaj* and *samajik* come to acquire new meanings in order to express the new conceptualization of the social during this period. The contextual meaning of the term *samaj* is then related to other important concepts of vernacular political thought during this period such as *jati*, *desh*, *unmati*, etc..

Joya Chatterji's "Migration myths and the mechanics of assimilation: two community histories from Bengal" offers a sustained engagement with two community histories – Yousuf Choudhury's "The roots and tales of Bangladeshi settlers" and Ahmed Ilyas' "Biharis: The Indian emigres to Bangladesh" – the first produced by a Bengali-speaking working class Sylheti Bangladeshi in London and the second by a representative of the literati of Bihari Muslim settlers in Bangladesh. It makes the important point that migrant histories are not about becoming a melting pot but about ethnicities assimilating without giving up their cultural specificities – in other words, assimilation involves a degree of choice and agency.

Following a comparative method, Chatterji privileges the shared narrative conventions of the histories of these two migrant communities while registering some of the differences between them. There are three areas in which the two texts are found to have overlapping concerns and conventions. The first is that of origins which is mythicised into an amalgam of earthly fruitfulness and sacrosanct plenitude. Within this the difference lies in the emphasis given by Ilyas to the traditions of syncretism and learning in Bihar, while in Choudhury's account it takes a more explicitly 'originary' mode as he describes, dreamily, how the central lowlands of Sylhet, a swan-shaped gulf, rose out of the sea in the misty past and nestled among 'low hills covered with lush monsoonal forest'. The second overlap pertains to the ways in which they narrate their stories of dramatic arrival to their present "host" countries, escaping the tumultuous happenings on the way – of hazardous seamanship in Choudhury's account (which happily denies historical time its share of accuracy) and the bloody riots of Bihar back in 1946 in the case of Ilyas. Finally, the stories commonly record a service of past loyalties to the host nation even as Ilyas complicates this narrative by a sustained auto-critique of his community's standoffish-ness vis-à-vis the Bangladeshis and, more challengingly for his narrative, the community's pugnacious role during the Bangladesh War. Chatterji proceeds to show how these accounts – be it of British Bangladeshis or 'Urdu speaking Bangladeshis' – work towards seeking assimilation with a measure of self-respect and cultural difference, taking recourse to the host country's civil society organisations, the law, political activists and so

on. The essay, thoroughly empirical even as it is, makes two significant theoretical gains. One, along with recognising the migrant communities in their ethnographic particularities, it views them as operating within the ambit of legality. Second, instead of chanting hybridity as a mantra every time one discusses a migrant community, it locates the textured quality of 'hybrid' subjectivities in the complex reality of community rights.

C. Ayyappan (1949-2011) is among the most significant Dalit writers from Kerala. The majority of his stories are told by the unquiet ghosts of Dalit men and women who took their own lives or were murdered. Udaya Kumar's paper, "The Strange Homeliness of the Night: Spectral Speech and the Dalit present in C. Ayyappan's Stories" offers an analysis of the complex figuration of the subject in these stories and argues that Ayyappan's work, through an innovative use of elements from Dalit traditions of remembrance and narration, advances distinctively new idioms for presenting a contemporary experience of disinhabitation.

The Dalit issue has traditionally been seen as part of the lower-caste reform movement, comfortably placed in the larger phenomenon of the socially disadvantaged. There was no recognition of an autonomous Dalit social articulation. Only recently as the progressivist narratives of Kerala modernity are losing in credibility has Ayyappan's concern with the metaphors of fractured vision given him an 'unseasonal legibility'. "The stripped body" writes Udaya Kumar, "cowers, making the gesture of wanting to disappear into itself, to erase itself from the field of visibility." The twisted, skewed world of the social belies the transparency of daylight and can only have spectral expression. He is a writer who chooses to work in the dark room of social time. His art, as the author observes, is more like 'nocturnal photography', a 'spectrography of the night'. The stretch of time between the midnight siren of factories and the early morning call of the rooster is the time of his stories; this is the time when the thanatographic lives of the characters flash out in the spectral darkness of night.

Ayyappan's characters are possessed, each character a site of double existence and as such are at once both over-filled and hollow. The spectral becomes the sign of a social alchemy that transforms the promises of inclusion into entrenched disavowals. The author's lonely childhood with his grandmother in central Kerala as part the Pulaya community sets the ambience of the stories. The sound of sirens and shrieks of birds is the soundscape of a world where the execution of untouchable lovers of caste Hindus or Christians are a normalized practice. If atheism and rationalism enabled him to acquire the minimal courage for survival in this world of dark frightening spirits, by the same measure they prevented him from engaging with that world, from delving into their midst. As part of his

childhood inheritance one might say, Ayyappan carries a streak of allegiance to rationalism all through his literary life only to find it being disavowed every time. The ghostly characters are busy giving rational explanations of their actions – a narrative technique that almost inevitably leads to greater disorientation, the fulcrum of an excess of unsocial, searing energies.

There is another strand of stories where Dalits are not victims, but 'successful', Dalits who have done well in life, managed to marry higher than their own, have secured well-paid salaried jobs. But even they are caught in strange behaviour and are busy explaining the rational of such strangeness. Did the familiar rituals of the farewell function conceal suppressed upper-caste sarcasm, wonders one such successful Dalit. His way of getting back was to write a novel to humiliate a fellow Dalit, exposing his inferior caste status. In one such story, the protagonist clarifies that when a protest march demanding a hike in salary was in progress, a group of beggars and lepers and prostitutes – onlookers from the street – joined them in support and started shouting the same slogans. In contrast to Joya Chatterji's article, Udaya Kumar's essay explores how assimilation into middle class life can often turn into a nightmare of anxiety and deception.

Like the last issue of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences*, this issue too includes what can be called a special essay: Susan Visvanathan's "Summer Hill: the building of Viceregal Lodge", a fascinating tale of the coming into being of Simla as the summer capital of the British Raj that blends freely techniques borrowed from history, sociology and literature. Visvanathan's particular focus is on the process of the construction of Viceregal Lodge (or, 'Summer Hill', as it is known). She uses primary and secondary material to highlight two aspects of the making of this grand palace: one, electrification of the building and two, the management and cost of labour. In her account, they also serve as two indexes for analyzing power and control in British India. The summer capital moved in and out of the hills every year on the backs of coolies till the railways tracks were laid up to Simla in 1903. Part of the essay is also about the cartographic adventure of the empire, the coming in of Simla into the visual register of the empire – 'sighting' Simla in course of mapping the terrain – as it itself opens out to a vast, unspoilt vista.

Along with the sinewy history of labour that the roads and the palaces contain – labour which quite often went unpaid – was the other history of pomp and mirth of the summer capital. The essay in a way is a tribute paid to the immense labour involved in transforming Simla from a sleepy sanatorium in the lap of the Himalayas into an imperial habitat – "*This dear Simla!*" in the exilic exhortation of Emily Eden. Dalhousie: "Balls here, balls there, balls by the society; amateur plays, concerts, fancy fairs, investitures of the Bath and co and co. I quite sigh for the quiet of Calcutta".

In the last quarter of the essay, Visvanathan changes register and moves to fiction to tell the same story but from a very different perspective, bringing in the paranoid reveries of Lord and Lady Dufferin over unpaid labour. Much like Calvino's account in *Invisible Cities* of Marco Polo's narration of the cities he visited during his expedition, Visvanathan's fictional patch attributes a third, invisible dimension to the palace, one between the planned and the executed, with the ghostly shadows of the unpaid workers haunting the Dufferin domestics, like "the sea in an endless ebbing, a threat of return, a lost country." At one point, it seemed to Lady Dufferin that they were "prisoners of their own invention, prisoners of a grandeur which was so hollow it left them enchanted and removed from real things." Is this the ultimate story of all empires? Here is Calvino: "Only in Marco Polo's accounts was Kublai Khan able to discern, through the walls and towers destined to crumble, the tracery of a pattern so subtle it should escape the termites' gnawing."

MANAS RAY

