

## EDITORIAL

The Latin etymology of the word 'intimacy' conveys the following meaning; it is making known (*intimare*) what is innermost (*intimus*) to a close friend (*intima*). Intimacy, thus, incorporates a notion of sharing by acknowledging an urge of belonging together, almost inseparably. The questions arise then: Out of all that we develop, how many are intimate relations for us? Out of all that we feel, how many can be identified as the innermost feelings and how much of even those can we express intimately in a familiar circle? The paradox of intimacy lies in the fact that it is objective but personal, somatic nonetheless psychological, affective in its dimension yet without having a firm reflective/self-conscious foundation. Most importantly, intimacy of the 'self' is dependent on 'other' and yet belonging together in such a manner as if the sharp distinction between the 'self' and the 'other' is annihilated in an act of intimate destruction. The notion of Intimacy thus proves that the 'self' cannot resist from belonging to the 'other'. To be specific, the 'self' can only be known through the 'other', where it seems possible that the innermost qualities can be shared. Here comes the question of the anxiety of choice. Unlike the bond with and among the non-humans, intimate bond among human beings depends on, firstly, the palpable possibility of sharing and, secondly, on the mutual consensus and commitment of belonging from both the parties. Is the tangibility of such probability of intimacy purely apolitical? Are the motivations for belonging, through closeness/fidelity, fully impulsive sans politics? What is the politics that drives us from the intimate awareness of belonging-to (externally related) towards/against belonging-with (related internally)? How does one address the anxiety that comes with the apprehension of losing one's distinctiveness through intimacy?

Initially viewed as the 'sociology of personal life' as a part of the discourse of everyday life, intimacy now has been recently melded with the complex broader issues related to economies, social justice, commodification and body shopping. The possibility of finding new ways of belonging together cannot be understood without understanding the complex connection of intimacy with changing notions of nationhood, citizenship and community. From the

ancient erotic practices of 'shringara' to 'prem', the armed debate on valentines' day to interreligious, interclass, intercaste romances/marriages and their consequences, including shaming, stigmatizing to honour killing—all are symptomatic of the progress of intimacy in Indian hands in new and newer forms.

Specifically, these are the questions we are asking: What are the benefits and challenges of unconventional intimacies? What is/possibly be the politics of belonging if the contemporary forms of intimacies ever attempt in the intersecting of the issues related to nature/ecology, class, race, disability, Dalit subalternity, and sexual minority and thereby aim at germinating alternative sub-cultural praxes? Is there an essential anxiety behind the fusions of intimacy, commodification, bodies, care, and social justice?

The question of "Dalit" as a political identity is facing a crisis in the recent times. Dalit Panthers proposed Dalit identity as a pedagogic identity open to social groups subjected to caste and other forms of discrimination and subordination. In the course of history, Dalit identity remained the identity of Scheduled castes and more recently, it was reduced to the identity of specific sub-castes in the Scheduled caste list. K. Satyanarayana, in "Identification, Belonging and the Category of Dalit", has argued that "Dalit" is a category of political identification and belonging than a natural and birth based identity.

Intimacy is usually posed as the antithesis of technology. Orienting its engagements with intimacy through the recent surge of exchanges between people, groups and communities via technological means, the next article, "Routing Techno-Intimacy, Risk, Anxiety and the Ambient Political" by Geeta Patel, while expanding the range of technologies to also include statistical collaboratives such as risk pools, identification cards, regulatory practices, scientific analyses and to revisit intimacies between people that are engendered, encouraged, cemented by routing intimacy through such a plethora of technologies, finally challenges the presumptions that underlie these commonplace understandings of intimacy.

"Emotions in the Context of Caste Slavery: Exploring the Missionary Writings on Kerala" by P. Sanal Mohan is an endeavour to understand the emotional world of the slave castes as represented in missionary writings. The idea of community that was impossible in the traditional slave society was articulated through the forms of worship that the missionaries introduced in the fledgling congregations. Such developments in various parts of Kerala are relevant in understanding the everyday life of the slave castes. The oral tradition of the slave castes refers to emotional aspects of life-

pain, separation, longing, love—in a substantial manner in the context of oppression by landlords and caste elites.

Taking as its primary sources the different renditions of the story of Madurai Veeran, the warrior-hero of Madurai in the *nontinatakam* tradition, as well as in the oral form of the *Madurai Veeran Katha*, Shilpaa Anand, in “Worth an Arm and a Leg: Disability and Intimacy in the Making of Madurai Veeran”, explores how caste-in-action, disablement and intimacy intersect to conceptualize bodily difference within a specific Tamil historical geography. Examining different aspects of the Madurai Veeran story, the article while critiquing the ‘moral model of disability’ as an inadequate theoretical framework with which one needs to combine disablement and concepts of bodily difference as available in different cultural contexts, further argues for a contextual understanding of the corporeal at the intersections of multiple overlapping bio-social hierarchies.

Akshaya K. Rath and Rasheda Parveen’s article, “The ‘Mating Dance’: Love and Exile in Ifti Nasim and Agha Shahid Ali”, focuses on the two un-accommodated sons of Islam. The representation of familial and societal spaces being central to their poetry, this paper argues that their personal / political resistance to heteronormative family / society / nation projects the longing for creating an ethno-sexual frontier through which they interact with the world that seeks their banishment. Attempting to explore how both the poets negotiate intimate love and exile through their writings, this article argues that Ifti Nasim and Shahid Ali through their performative poetry plunge into a mystic dance making it a paradigmatic vision for queer resistance, liberation, and empowerment.

In her article, “Concern for Belongingness: Visual Impairment and the Anxiety of Intimacy”, Nilanjana Sen focuses on the experience/identity/consciousness of persons with disability compounded by multifarious multi-dimensional elements racing with/against each other and creating a productive chaotic space—constructing and reconstructing itself. The process of categorization/classification often dissociates “belonging” from “intimacy” as the categorized persona experiences a forced alienation from other categories in order to maintain distinction and feels bound to re-position her/his personal choices. Thrown into a commonality shared by accessible disabled peers, one is sometimes forced to compromise and re-adjust the contour of her/his own distinct class-caste-regional-religious-ethnic-linguistic-cultural-economic-familial and many more facades of identity into the majoritarian identity adopted by the interest group in order both to strengthen the political voice and cope up

with their own sense of isolation, as felt outside the community. The study aims at delving deep into the anxiety created by such reduction of human complexity and social relation into metonymic representationality.

“So Near Yet So Far: Nature as Intimate and Nature as the Other” by R. Umamaheshwari is an engagement with the ideas of distance and proximity; with the creation of the illusion of distance, as well as the illusion of proximity, in the contemporary discourse of ‘development’, or ‘modernity’ (within which the idea of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ is construed) and within the modern political-economic discourses. The starting point is a few examples from real-life situations on the ground across geographical and socio-economic spaces, to engage with what Nature (inclusive of landscapes and the general ideas of nature or in the ‘Nature’ of things) means and comes to mean and is made to mean. Finally it tries to explore some vital issues like the marginalised communities’ perception of Nature in a different manner and the debate between a mere ‘romantic’ (within a ‘universalised’ category of ‘romantic’) affection vis-a-vis a ‘genuine’ intimate association, side-lined by the whim of an anthropocentric, corporate, political ideology.

The USA channel PBS’ in its *Faces of America* series, explored ancestry information that exposed how people were connected to people they never knew. This connectedness and belonging were mapped using genome sequencing. In the age of the Personal Genome Project (PGP), modes of belonging change, and India has also entered the genomic age. Adapting the work of Kate O’Riordan, Kim Tallbear, Michael Kent and others in his article, “The Double (H)elixir of Life: Genetic Citizenship and Belonging in the 21st Century”, Pramod K. Nayar notes the shift in self-fashioning and the rise of genetic knowledge as commonplace. The article also examines the changing concepts of identity in the age of the genome changes that alter irrevocably the role of other modes of identity-construction (territory, relationships with ancestors, cultural practices, memory) and how in this seismic shift in notions of identity and modes of identity construction, ways of belonging also undergo a change.

Kaustav Chakraborty’s “Beyond Anxiety: Intimacy and Belonging” finally tries to address if at all it is possible to overcome the anxiety of being intimate with other by a cross cultural ‘longing-to-belong’ across differences, with the recognition of and respect for the differences.

This special issue, focusing on the emerging forms of intimacies in contemporary India, is an attempt to understand/address the anxiety

behind the changing notion/nature of belonging. What causes or inhibits intimacy and what restricts or disfigures one's identity of belonging? Questions have been asked, if at all the transformation in the modes of intimacies—resulting from 'non-normative' ties, rise of alternative socio-cultural doctrines, new communication technologies and/or transnational media, and thereby giving rise to intimate spaces/ intimate settings for intimate encounters—have in actuality, paved way for transversal and emancipatory structures that can politically challenge the hegemonic, traditional, Indian concepts/norms of belongings, erstwhile restricted to the rigid boundaries of class, caste, religion, (dis)ability and normative conformity.

