

## EDITORIAL

Like other issues of this truly multidisciplinary biannual journal of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, this one also includes articles in humanities, fine arts, and social sciences. Varieties are its forte.

The opening article is on 'Liberation (*moksha*) as Experience of Power (*Siddhi*), and Absolute Freedom (*swatntrya*) in *Trika Shaiva* Philosophy' by Alka Tyagi. Readers would do well to read this piece in conjunction with Mark Dyczkowski's article in the previous issue of this journal on the same topic which is more esoterically and textually studied. But beginners would better begin with Tyagi's more accessible exposition. She sets out to understand the nature of *moksha* in non-dual *Trika Shaivism* of Kashmir focusing on Acharya Abhinavagupta's text *Tantraloka* dating 10-11th centuries AD. She also tries to clearly delineate Trika Shaivism from various other systems of Vedantic and Buddhist thoughts. For example, Advaita Vedanta thought as expounded by Shankara regards the manifest world as *maya* (illusion) and Brahma as real and the nonduality of the *atma* with Brahma as the liberation. Buddhists also do not believe in the reality of the manifest world; they regard the universe as succession of ideas in consciousness of the individual which in itself is empty (*sunya*). The realisation of the emptiness is to them the liberation. The *Trika* philosophers regard Buddhists as their predecessors. In their (*Trika*'s) view the universal reality is purely non-dual and diverse manifestations of the objective reality are reflections in the pure consciousness (*paramshiva*), just like images reflected in a mirror.

Dasarath Gatt explores the construction of gender in two plays – Manjula Padmanabhan's *Lights Out!* and Gurcharan das' *Mira*. Padmanabhan claims that her play is based on a real life incident in an urban housing complex in the early 1980s, whereas Das takes a re-look into the life of the 16th century saintly queen Mrabai. Both are concerned with lives of women in a patriarchal Indian society at two points in time — modern and medieval. Alas, the changes over centuries have not significantly altered the position and oppression of women in all strata of the patriarchal society! The two plays very vividly as well as realistically depict this lamentable phenomenon. Gatt concludes by invoking the French literary theorist and semiotician

Roland Barthes' thesis of the 'death of the author' and the 'birth of the reader' in as much as both Padmanabhan and Das leave the conclusions to be drawn by the readers.

Sanghamitra Sadhu dwells upon the ethos of orality in the select writings of India's Northeast, with special reference to Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from the War Zone* (2006) and Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* (2006) in the Adis and the Ao Naga culture that treats orality as a way of life. Sadhu maintains that this intersection of orality and story-writing brings forth a dynamics of story-telling and history-writing as also gives the ordinary people the autonomy to write their own narratives or history. Here fictional literature and history seem to intermingle in a way that raises the methodological questions about the relationship between fiction and positive history that Sadhu must delve into in quest of a satisfactory resolution.

Orindrila Ghosh offers an interesting glimpse of Thomas Hardy's Indian readers' unpublished correspondences to him preserved at the Hardy Archives at the Dorset County Museum. India is sparsely referred to almost as a geographical unit in Hardy's minor novel, *A pair of Blue Eyes* and one of his short stories, *Destiny and the Blue Cloak*. Ghosh presents an interesting aside of Hardy's Indian correspondents if not a 'meaningful extra-textual perspectives on his published works,' in Ghosh's own words.

Venusa Tinyi deals with the concept of 'permission' in philosophical discourse. It has, according to him, remained in the rain shadow relegated for long to the dry side of the mountain in the literature whereas concepts such as duty or obligation have been on the rain side. Even when directly dealt with, permission is mostly treated as a transactional term in the common parlance, such, for example, as seeking permission from someone to do something. Trying to dissect the term philosophically, Tinyi explores the ideas of John Austin and some others and finds certain shortcomings in the way permission has been conceptualised in various philosophical perspectives. In trying to overcome these limitations, Tinyi gives emphasis on the idea of agency and a norm-subject. He concludes that permission is not a simple concept to be dealt with in deontic logic or in legal studies. An interdisciplinary approach is called for. It needs to be considered in relation to various other normative concepts like rights and sanction. The article ends with some reasonable insights but without any conclusively definitive answers.

Satish Kumar Jha dilates on a somewhat inadequately explored subject of the authorial identity of the Indian people as the source

of the Indian Constitution whose Preamble attributes as the source of all political power to the 'We, the People of India...' He goes into the comparative history of modern constitution-making as a product of the modern bourgeois revolutions in the West, which prepared the ground for the advent of the middle class elite who invoked the 'People' on the stage of democratic governance. This was in contrast to the 'working class' (or the peasants in reality as in Russian and Chinese revolutions) as the prime movers of the socialist revolution that organised the one-party Leninist or Maoist states, pregnant with the dictatorship of the communist party in the name of the proletariat class. Jha's article is a fascinating articulation of the theory of democratic governance in the West and in India.

Shakti Sinha, who was a senior IAS civilian, including the Private Secretary to the former BJP/NDA Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, explicates the working of the Indian Union executive centred around the personality of the Prime Minister during a one-party dominant system. He postulates that Indian democracy under such a party system has moved in practice to a mix of the US presidential system and the British prime ministerial system in parts. Sinha is cognisant of the probabilities of this system changing under the constraints of the federal nature of the Indian polity coming into greater play and the sea change during a multiparty system with federal coalition governments. Sinha in his article in this issue has valiantly and competently sought to synoptically sketch out the Indian polity under the various Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru to Narendra Modi. I recommend to the readers his recently released book, *Vajpayee: The Years that Changed India* (Gurgaon: Penguin Random House, December 2020).

In the article that follows Rajani Ranjan Jha traces the evolution of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) from Nehru to Modi. The PMO was known as the Prime Minister's Secretariat until 1978, when the first non-Congress, Janata Party government's PM Morarji Desai renamed it as PMO and considerably downsized it. Jha recounts how the Office has undergone significant changes under various PMs, both under one-party-dominant system and multiparty system with coalition governments, some extremely unstable and some relatively stable but otherwise subjected to blackmail and corrupt deals among coalition parties in the various governments. Things have radically changed under PM Modi since 2014 and 2019, when in back-to-back electoral successes the BJP has been the first national party after a gap of three decades since 1984 to secure its own single-party majority in the Lok Sabha, even though it has continued its NDA

coalitional framework under the domineering leadership of the PM. Jha regards the Modi PMO as the most dominant one during the phase of federal coalition governments since 1889.

Ujjwal Kumar Singh and Anupama Roy rather unconventionally seek to map the contours of political culture of India through a look at two very widely read post-Independence works in Hindi literature, namely, poet Ramdhari Singh Dinkar's *Sanskriti Ke Chaar Adhyaaya* (which Dinkar calls more a work literature than in history) and novelist Shri Lal Shukla's *Raag Darbaaree*. Both in their own ways underscore the features of inter-community tolerance and social and political pluralism that are consistent with the values and institutions of democracy in the country.

Without discounting the importance of political culture highlighted by Singh and Roy, I find it tempting to bring in here a notable work I have become freshly familiar in comparative political theory by two leading contemporary democratic theorists – Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, *How Democracies Die: What History Reveals About Our Future* (Penguin Random House UK, 2018). It goes beyond somewhat limited concern with a theory of cultural causation for democratic success, and argues the primary factors of Madisonian and Hamiltonian system of checks and balances, freedoms and equality, and absence of extreme partisan political polarisation at the core of the political process, plus the larger sociological and political economy ecosystem of a robust middle class, economic wealth and education, and a large and diversified private sector as firmer foundations of democratic success and sustainability.

Asaf Sharabi and Ruchi Ramesh explore the role of the deities in Shimla district (HP) during covid-19 pandemic. The deities help prevent their followers from contracting coronavirus. Nevertheless, some locals became infected and even died. The article investigates how did the *devtas* and the locals explain this? The authors conclude that the older generation used terms like *karma* and *greh* to explain the misfortune of infection, disease, and death. The *devtas* themselves confirmed this view by saying that they too are subject to the laws of *karma* and cannot affect the destiny assigned to a person at birth (*greh*). Nevertheless, so the authors argue, the balance between gods, *karma* and *greh* is not explicit. At the end, the *karma* theory is very vague for the locals. It operates as a satisfactory mechanism, organizing the thought of the locals towards what the locals see as a reasonable reality.

The issue concludes with special lecture of Smita Barooah in the Institute on 29 April 2019 on “Youth and addiction in India”

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