

EDITORIAL

This issue of *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* carries a distinction. As per ongoing talks, in all possibility Sage India will take up the responsibility of publication and distribution of the journal from the next issue onwards, when it will also have a different look and format. As such, the present number is both a swansong and a harbinger of the new. We have put in our best efforts to commemorate what *was* by offering a wide range of topics from a chosen set of contributors. The collection genuinely represents some of the very best of current scholarship in India. Regardless of the large spectrum of interests, the themes at times overlap but seldom do the viewpoints. In keeping with the mandate of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, we believe that *Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences* should be the platform for disseminating scholarship engaged with the large questions of human existence from a variety of perspectives. All entries went through the refereeing process. The following is a synoptic account of each article.

The collection begins with Tridip Suhrud's deliberation on M K Gandhi's deep and abiding engagement with the *Gita*, a 'spiritual guide-book' for the philosopher-politician and the *ashram* community. In its attempt to understand the nature of this engagement, Suhrud's short essay gives a new spin to this well known understanding. The author explores, in a mode of speculation, the embedded nature of this ancient text in Gandhi's life and experiments, and the role this relationship played in shaping a community of values. The essay also highlights Gandhi's translation of the *Gita* and his need to be a *satyagrahi* and a *shitpargnya*.

The second essay is also on the *Gita* but placed against a more elaborate canvas. In this paper, "Translating *Gītā* 2.47 or Inventing the National Motto", Sibaji Bandyopadhyay embarks on a truly ambitious project: a conceptual

cartography of the text by investigating the discursive turns that occur in the modern reception of the Gītā. In the process, the paper attempts to outline the semantic displacements – at times fairly unobtrusive – surrounding certain base concepts intrinsic to pre-modern Indian philosophical systems. To underscore the transmutations, the article takes as its point of departure Gītā 2.47, in particular, the saying, *karmany evā adhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana*, now generally reckoned as the quintessence of the Gītā.

The essay focuses on a multitude of English, Bengali (and also Hindi) translations of the celebrated dialogue between Krishna and Arjuna as well as on the profoundly influential modern commentaries on the Gītā, such as, those by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Gandhi and Sri Aurobindo. In order to ‘activate’ the archive thus construed, the essay contrasts the modern renderings of 2.47 with its pre-modern readings starting from the one offered by Śankara. The cartographic adjustments in the sphere of concepts initiated by the modern ideologues were by no means purely academic in nature. Certain exigencies mandated the ‘alterations’ and the new significations were politically mobilized. ‘Translating Gītā 2.47’ is thus a study in the politics of ‘translation’ and the ‘politics’ involved in profiling ‘Hinduism’ as a ‘system of thought’ always-already equipped with the capacity to absorb and assimilate any ‘progressive’ or ‘developmental’ discourse that emanates from the west. The wonder that so much could be done with so little material, Gītā 2.47, i.e., is what motivates this detailed and nuanced excursus.

Is non-violence endowed with an intrinsic validity existent only on its own set of conditions, or is it at the level of praxis perpetually dependent on its other – i.e., to whom it is directed? Is the source of its validity intrinsic or will it forever lie in a set of extraneous factors? In a bid to address such complex and recurrent issues, Gangeya Mukherji in his

contribution goes to what can well be regarded as the very crux of contemporary debates on ethics. His paper, "Gandhi: non-violence and pragmatism", tries to explore whether these questions can be elucidated in the 'workability' of Gandhi's advice to Jews to offer satyagraha against Nazi persecution. While speculating on plausible scenarios attendant on such non-violent resistance, the paper also takes on board the complexity of the Jewish response (in particular, Arendt) to Gandhi. Underlying Mukherji's arguments is a nuanced dialogue on the ethical and universal connotations of Gandhian philosophy, the eternal questions of human responsibility and the pragmatism of non-violence.

Autobiography as a genre is a rich space for studying constructions of identity, especially when its subjects are public figures. Periods of political turmoil and social change, such as the early 20th century in India, throw up several narratives of the self that explore these issues with greater urgency. Rahula Sankrityayan (1893-1963), a travel writer in Hindi and a nationalist, who became a Buddhist monk and eventually took to Marxism, is one such figure. Maya Joshi in her essay, "Rahula Sankrityayan's Journeys of the Self: Nation, Culture, Identity", discusses his voluminous autobiography, *Meri Jeevan Yatra* and shows how the work bears testimony to a life that negotiated an extraordinary range of identities. Divides between public/private, native/foreign, local/national are played out in ways that are surprisingly complex and nuanced in his life-long quest for self-discovery as a scholar, political activist and writer. Religion, language and region are some of the fractious terrains that he traverses in his life journey, combining a growing sense of universalistic humanistic affiliation with a stubbornly restrained sense of the local. His negotiation of these markers of identity – at once national, regional and global – is as illuminating about the emergent idea of India in his time as it is instructive for the India of today. Along with his somewhat eccentric treatise for travellers, *Ghumakhar*

Shastra, his autobiography frames his quest for identity in a constantly evolving worldview. Even though projected in terms of a teleological narrative of growth, Sankrityayan's texts hold multiple, often contesting, affiliations in an open-ended creative tension.

Kanchana Natarajan's paper continues with the biographical thrust but operates on a different register. At a broad level, it is an attempt to reconstruct a biography of the alchemist Pokar, a mysterious and compelling figure in the Tamil *siddha* tradition, based on a particular Tamil text, *Pokar Elayiram*, also known as *Pokar Saptakandam*. The immediate focus of the paper, however, is significantly different as it tries to grapple with the problems of unveiling a completely recalcitrant and frustratingly equivocal text. Hence, the paper is more of a hermeneutical exercise, an exploration of the difficulties in interpreting alchemical *siddha* texts like *Pokar Elayiram* with the aim of reconstructing the lives of *siddhas*.

The next two essays raise a number of philosophical issues. One concerns the relation of language to reality and the other of image to reality. For later Wittgenstein, language cannot be based on a pre-linguistic foundation. Following closely on the tracks of the philosopher, Enakshi Mitra argues that none of the proposed foundations that are claimed to relate language to reality – verbal definitions, ostensive techniques, mental images, intentional states – is able to sustain its assumed pre-interpretive character ("Wittgenstein On the Foundations of Language: A Non-Foundational Narration"). In a dense exegetical engagement with Wittgenstein, Mitra shows that the hallowed pre-interpretive reference taken to underlie the varying modes of interpretations or descriptions is actually a grammatical interplay, where what seems to be the pre-interpretive simple in one game turns out to be an elaborately complex construction in another. In the ultimate analysis, language and behaviour forge a non-foundational blend that

internalizes and does not represent a supposedly extra-linguistic reality.

Since the publication of Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* (1980), there has been a proliferation of philosophical perspectives on the question of the image. In his essay, "Towards a Philosophy of Image", Franson Manjali discusses how Barthes in this last work had convincingly detached the photographic image from the existential and psychological frame that Sartre attributed to it and thus led the way for philosophical probing into the historical, ontological and discursive contexts in which it was seen to be embedded. This approach has proved fertile not only in the study of the artistic image as such, but also on the more vexing questions of technically produced images, such as those in film, television and, more recently, the internet. In the last few years, the question of the relationship between image and violence has been the focus of serious philosophical attention, especially since the simultaneous media projections of the first Iraq war (1991), and the terrorist attack on and destruction of the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York (2001). The paper examines a variety of perspectives on image coming from contemporary philosophers, particularly Marie-José Mondzain and Jean-Luc Nancy.

The special essay of the collection, "On arriving the land of the past", is a highly imaginative memoir of Calcutta's turbulent 1960s and early 1970s (Nivedita Sen's translation of Sumanta Banerjee's *Elem Atith Deshe*, published in the 2006 Puja issue of *Anustup*, a prominent Bengali little magazine). The narrative is a long arcade of faces where the dead and the living have changed sites, yet everything remains exactly as it was in that violent patch of the city's history: dimly-lit streets in the depths of solemn nights, unkempt parks, decaying façades, political comrades, colleagues, pipe-smoking editors, reporters' rooms, the red roster lying on the long, unyielding table. The author

succeeds in giving time a tailspin and also retaining something preciously static about that era, making the city – now of the living dead – look more real than real, almost ghostly. Much to Banerjee's credit, the Calcutta of the memoir is ultimately a city of gaiety – corpse, hand bombs and tortures behind the bars regardless – reminding one of Hemingway's Paris, again a city of caffeine, alcohol, brawls and floating tar.

Remarkable also is the way the memoir ends. The narrator returns home taking the last train. He has spent the day in an underground gathering of his erstwhile comrades – long dead in police encounters or torture and subsequently returned. As he comes out of Howrah Station through the squatting, sleeping humanity, his attention is drawn to two blind beggars. The author soon realizes his mistake. The men are not beggars but Bhumaiya and Kesta Gaud, the legendary revolutionaries of Andhra Pradesh, who donated their eyes at the time of being hanged so that even though they didn't get to see the arrival of revolution, their eyes could. Today they are agitated; they thumb their sticks and want to know who robbed them of their eyesight.

Bengal – for that matter, India – will take up the question of blindness later.