

Editor's Note

This is the second volume of *Summerhill: IAS Review* I am editing that is going for publication long after its due date of Summer 2017 (May 2022). Incidentally, I was a Fellow at the Institute at that time. The eventual publication of this volume is the kind of thing that has made the Institute a special place for most of its history: its persistence in making sure that all that is due gets done eventually, the trust that exists between the Fellows and the administration in making sure that the processes of the system are completed, and finally, as you will see, the range of scholarship that is encouraged and undertaken here.

Appropriately then, this volume does not have one theme but brings together diverse scholarly works ranging from one that explores meaningful ways of reading an ancient text within the post-colonial predicament, to one that revisits the political and cultural ferment of 1929 Lahore where the Congress gave the call for *Purna Swaraj*. The worry that I had in not being able to provide a focus to the volume faded away as the contributors sent in a variety of rich, thoughtful pieces. Most of those who have written for this collection are either young scholars starting out on exciting new intellectual journeys, or mid-career academics whose research has come to acquire the poise of reflection.

But this edition of *Summerhill* opens with two important interviews I had the good fortune of doing. The first is with Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, recently retired from a distinguished tenure at Emory University, and one of the most dedicated and path-breaking ethnographers of South Asian religions and cultures. In this conversation, Flueckiger explores the challenges and possibilities of studying religion in general, and especially of a part of the world – South Asia – with critical salience for this field. Flueckiger's remarkable body of work, including *Material Acts in Everyday Hindu Worlds* (2020), *Everyday Hinduism* (2015), *When the World Becomes Female: Guise of a South Indian Goddess* (2013), *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India* (2006), and *Gender and*

Genre in the Folklore of Middle India (1996), comprises a much needed nuance, and timely word of caution, in the study of religion in India, a subject at the heart of the most important debates of our times. Having conducted deep ethnography in Chhattisgarh, Andhra and Uttarakhand, she talks about her journey as a scholar, her projects, her methods and her understanding of religious beliefs and practices in India, in the process suggesting deeply insightful approaches to the study of the themes involved.

The second conversation is with Chetan Singh, one of the leading historians of late medieval/early modern South Asian history and the Himalayan uplands, who taught at the Himachal Pradesh University for a long time and has also been the Director of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (2013-16). His scholarship spans a range of themes, beginning with *Region and Empire: Punjab in the 17th Century* (New York: OUP, 1991), which was one of the few early works that shifted focus away from the Mughal center to see critical regions of the subcontinent as composed by their own dynamics, to his later explorations, in books like *Himalayan Histories* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2019), where he has virtually created the template for histories of upland societies that are sensitive to political and socio-cultural diversity and dynamism, and ecological rhythms. In this conversation with me, Singh talks about his understanding of what the questions in the history of Himachal have been, and could be, so that a meaningful past, and present, can be brought into view. Those of us who had the good fortune of being Fellows at the Institute during Singh's tenure as Director of IAS cannot forget the gentle collegial guidance and genuine engagement with each of our bewildering array of subjects that marked his interaction with us.

While these interviews seek to engage with important scholarly voices of our times whose oeuvres serve as examples of academic rigour and sagacity at a time when the scholarly vocation is undergoing a deep churning in many different ways, the essays following offer hope that

sound learning will always have a place. The essay by Neeru Anand evocatively pulls us into the exciting times of study and struggle in the 1920s colonial Lahore where young people sought out books and teachers, ideas and destinies that changed our world for good. Nida Arshi's detailed portrait tracks the career of Ameer Khan, a warlord in north India in the early colonial period, whose life reflected not just the rapid political and social change of the time but also the purchase of personal enterprise and resilience in that precarious world. Aditya Pratap Deo's essay carefully unpacks a scandal involving royal ladies in the princely state of Kanker in central India in the early 20th century, exploring human desire and its transgressions against the strictures of status, caste and patriarchy.

In the following article, Dias Mario Antony reads a late 16th century Portuguese text against its constitutive sentiment to describe the attempts by the colonial church to Latinize the St Thomas Christians living in the foothills of the Western Ghats in Kerala, and their resistance to that attempt, showing the historical complexity of the religious landscape of the region. In the next piece, Budhaditya Das' perceptive ethnography among the adivasi communities of the Satpura Hills asks us to look beyond our neo-archaic understanding of adivasis as forest-centric indigenes to attend to the historically changing and complex relationship between peoples and their lands. In the final essay, on understanding the *Yogasūtra*, the canonical early first millennium Sanskrit text, in the present day, Tarinee Awasthi undertakes a masterly analytical manoeuvre to not only show up the

inadequacy of even de-colonial acts of reading texts with other ontological centres, but also suggests a way out of this impasse by going across and outside postcolonial strategies of translation.

In the first of the three book reviews in this issue, Devika Sethi tells us why Chitranshul Sinha's *The Great Repression* (2019), a history of sedition in India from the origin of the concept in Britain to its chilling deployment in our society in the present day, combining perspectives from Law and History, is an important study of our times which should have a wide appeal. Ratnakar Tripathy's review of Sandeep Bhushan's *The Indian Newsroom* (2019) comments on that book's attempt to delineate the economy, politics and morality of television news and the people who run the show. Finally, in her reading of Claudia Lang's *Depression in India* (2018), K. P. Girija critically analyses the problems in understanding the phenomenon of Depression and its treatment in the local context in Kerala with a general and Western perspective.

This volume owes a lot to my understanding of the IAS as an open and vibrant space for scholarly work from my time as a Fellow there, reflected in the variety of research that is done in its precincts, to which this compilation can only be a hint. And gratitude is due to Mr. Prem Chand, Librarian, Publication Officer and often-times trouble-shooting Secretary, who makes sure that work goes on as usual and nothing of the tasks of the Institute, not even a long-pending back issue, are forgotten; and to Mrs. Sangeeta in the Publication Office, who was infinitely patient with my delays.

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