

Editorial

The literal meaning of the word location indicates the occupation or particularities of locale, site, place, position or situation. The word also indicates the process or act of locating, or the state of being located. Over the past few decades, the meaning of the word has expanded from connotations of space, geography and economy to include implications of identity, subject-positions and contexts—historical, cultural, ideological, sociological, theoretical, technological, etc. In today's milieu, all claims to universality stand seriously challenged and scholarship often involves acute self-reflexivity about its own location as well as that of its subject of study. Even while much scholarship is becoming more and more specifically located, the intersectionalities of location have also assumed more multiply-constituted dimensions. If one may venture to outline, the early to mid-20th century experienced anxieties in conceptions of location vis-à-vis relativity and inequality; the latter half of the century saw the delineation of several locations through the contours of race, gender, sexuality, environment, migration, caste, theory, etc.; and the past few decades have witnessed the emergence of multiple intersectionalities in conceptions of postcoloniality, globalization, culture, etc.

In this issue of *Summerhill: IAS Review* we have five papers from or about different locations: the city in cinema, the globality of mountains, Indian communities in colonial/postcolonial East Africa located somewhere in between the colonizer and the colonized, an Australian appraisal of Indian-English poetry, and conceptions of gender-caste-tribe-nation by a 'lower' caste woman leader in colonial Assam. The articles vary significantly in approach—two engage in historical overviews, one is focussed on a single novel, one deals with a wide contemporary survey, and one is about a single speech of a historical figure; yet, together they reflect not just different methodologies, but also the challenges of seeking both universalities as well as particularities in today's times. This issue of *Summerhill* does not seek to resolve the debates about location and is not a comprehensive account of the same either, but the limited aim of bringing together these disparate views on the theme is to indicate the contemporary terrain of location and locating.

Anil Zankar's paper examines cinema as essentially an urban phenomenon. 'Chronicle City Through Cinema', delivered at the Tagore Centre for the Study of Culture and Civilization at IAS, recalls Tagore's visionary conception of cinema as a "distinct aesthetic experience", almost calling for the form to become "pure" and "independent". The paper examines early European filmmakers of the 1920s, based in different industrialized cities, who did in fact try to create "absolute film". Soon, however, the more syncretic "city symphony films" took over as did the more concrete depiction of life and action in the cities. Popular Hollywood genres like crime and slapstick comedy also found appropriate locales in cities. Discussing the evolution of Mumbai in Indian cinema, both fiction and documentary, from the 1930s to contemporary times, Prof. Zankar traces the evolution of the city as well as cinematic language over the 20th into the 21st centuries in dialogue with each other.

Jon Mathieu's paper, 'The globalisation of mountain perception: how much of a western imposition?', examines the historical evolution of the generally held view that mountains and mountain societies are fundamentally distinct and different from the lowlands and are comparable among themselves. Tracing the antecedents of such a 'global' view of mountains that conceived of a universality between different mountainous regions located across multiple continents to the 16th century, Prof. Mathieu discusses three "historical steps" in the construction of this "globality" – the work and writings of Hans Rudolf Rebmann, a Swiss humanist pastor around the 1600s; the writings of Alexander von Humboldt, a German naturalist around the 1800s; and the 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Through this appraisal he draws a distinction between Western constructions of "globality" which increasingly tended towards the "secular" and the non-Western conception of a "spiritual/sacred" universality of the mountains.

As different from the above two papers, which involve wide historical overviews, Gaurav Desai's paper, "'Ye Zindagi Usiki Hai": Illicit Desire and (Post)colonial Romance in M.G. Vassanji's *The Book of Secrets*,' examines just one novel of M. G. Vassanji. However, based on this examination, Prof. Desai draws wider conclusions

about postcoloniality – that the radical rupture sought by nationalism with colonialism, in fact, did not take place. The romance and sexual desires of both the colonial and postcolonial world depicted within this novel, he argues, reflect the ambiguities and endurance of “maps of Englishness” (Simon Gikandi). The paper discusses Vassanji’s focus on the unique location of Indian communities in colonized East Africa, who are conceived neither as part of the monolith of the black colonized nor of the monolithic white colonizer. The “half-lives” of the Indian communities with their continuing affinities with colonial culture, in his view, provide cause for re-interpreting the past as well as postcoloniality.

If Mathieu’s paper reflects the anxieties in/with the West in conceptions of globality, and Desai’s paper indicates the continuing legacies of colonialism in postcoloniality, Rob Harle from Australia examines twenty contemporary Indian poets in English as characteristic of an India which has moved on from colonialism to cast an inward glance at its own problems and issues. His paper, ‘Contemporary Indian-English Poetry: An Australian Perspective,’ evaluates the differently located poets from an intensely personal/national perspective, as different from a theoretical view. He identifies the “activist element” as the chief characteristic of Indian-English poets along with their engagement with the singular issue of caste. Though debatable, he demarcates the limitations of writing in a second language and argues that the varying mystical, magical, religious, social, national and global themes and imageries in Indian-English poetry exemplify that Indian-English poets today have not only carved out a distinct niche for themselves in the world, but are also the

true inheritors of the legacy of poets as “legislators of the world” with their deep commitment to issues of justice and injustice.

In her paper, ‘Tribe, Caste, Nation, Gender: Chandraprabha Saikiani’s Presidential Address to the First Assam Kachari Mahila Sanmilian (1930),’ Hemjyoti Medhi presents a translation of the 1930 Presidential Address of a leading freedom fighter and women’s movement figure of colonial Assam—Chandraprabha Saikiani. Made at the occasion of a Bodo women’s conference by a ‘lower’ caste Asamiya woman, the address reveals the different ways in which women could engage with the understanding and construction of caste, tribe and nation in colonial Assam. Dr. Medhi locates the address within the broader context of Saikiani’s known writings and works, her brief exchanges with Gandhi with reference to Ambedkar as well as contemporary scholarship on caste and tribe in India. The paper underscores the radical potential of Saikiani’s understanding of identities as a “process” rather than something fixed. Discussing the contemporary scenario in Assam, which has experienced the intensification of fissures between the Asamiya, Bodo and other indigenous communities, the paper proposes that revisiting colonial women’s engagement with caste-tribe-gender-nation may hold clues to rebuilding solidarities.

Apart from these papers, this issue of *Summerhill* also carries book reviews that touch upon the theme of location. We hope that the readers of this volume will find the pieces stimulating.

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Besides seminars by National Fellows, Tagore Fellows and Fellows at the Institute, in the course of this year, IAS has been involved in organizing the following in the first half of 2014: International Seminar on ‘Locating Gender in the New Middle Class in India’ (11-13 March 2014); National Seminar on ‘Recent Perspectives of Himalayan Buddhism’ (27-28 May 2014); International Seminar on ‘100 Years After the Shimla Conference 1913-14’ (7 June 2014); National Seminar on ‘Right to Land and its Potential for Social Transformation’ (11-13 June 2014).