

Editorial

Bharatiya Pragna: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Indian Studies has been started with the main objective of critically engaging with various visible and invisible issues found in Indian culture, history and its rich spiritual heritage. We did not intend it to be one more journal devoted exclusively to the study of Indian literature/s and the approach we chose is interdisciplinary. Various Indian cultural traditions, narrative traditions, visual traditions, performing traditions, musical traditions, and historical traditions have been identified as the thrust areas. The inaugural issue of the journal testifies to this fact. The current issue carries a broad spectrum of articles on literature, music, religion and spirituality, painting, historiography, social anthropology, theatre and education.

Swami Vivekananda in one of his lectures in America emphasized upon the spiritual character and the otherworldliness of a typical Indian. He contends that even an unlettered farmer in India speaks philosophy in this land of 'karma', Karma Bhoomi. Surely, there is no exaggeration in what the Swami said. Religion is so inseparably entwined with an Indian's day today life that seldom they are seen apart. The history of India is more a history of its Saints and sages than merely the history of the kings and queens and royal dynasties. It is the history of the Dharma that passed through various vicissitudes in the course of endless and inexorable time picturesquely captured in the *Puranas* and *Itihasas*. Instead of looking at several battles that took place between various kingdoms and kings as merely political, they were construed as the battle between *Dharma* and *Adharma*, between good and evil. Perhaps that is the reason for the popularity of Puranic form in the narrations of history. The four *Purusarthas*, namely *Dharma*, *Artha*, *Kama* and *Moksha* governed the lives of the people of the sub-continent and guided them towards the ultimate goal of human life, *Moksha*. As such these four *Purusarthas* pervaded all aspects of life in India and all mundane activities governed by these principles were ultimately turned in the direction of *Moksha*. Arts like music and dance were also used as means to reach the Ultimate. The source of their origin and their merger was perceived to be divine.

The first article in this issue "Nadayoga and the Seven Steps to Liberation: A Reading of Vemana and Tyagaraja" is an attempt to focus on one of the most ancient spiritual practices called Nada Yoga and how it was used by the medieval Telugu poet popularly known as Yogi Vemana and the doyen of the South Indian music, popularly known as Carnatic music, the Saint Composer Sri Tyagaraja. According to some scholars of music Nada Yoga is a part of *Hatha Yoga*. Yogis like Vemana practiced *Hathayoga*, which consists of two "Upa Yogas", namely *Mantra yoga* and *Laya yoga*. *Laya yoga* is also known as *Nada yoga* as it deals with sound. While in the former the *Sadhaka* (spiritual practitioner) chants the mantra both outwardly and inwardly, so deeply and so intensely that he/she gets absorbed in it, in the latter the body and soul are cleansed by *Pranayama* (breath-control) and meditation (*dhyana*) respectively, and consequently the *nada*, the sound is constantly heard from inside. The goal of *Nada Yoga* is to merge one's self into the *Nada* and attain liberation. The author of this article tries to illustrate how this philosophy is embedded in the verses of Vemana and the keertans of Tyagaraja by offering a brief theoretical framework and analyses of a few poems and keertans.

The Indian society is a complex matrix of richly diverse social or cultural and political elements. Due to the stratification of the society on the basis of the social, economic and cultural factors the society appears as an amalgam of apparently contradictory factors. Rudolph and Rudolph name them as "The Great Tradition and The Little Traditions", which otherwise are known as *Margi*

and *Desi* traditions. As AK Ramanujan contends in his brilliant introduction to *Speaking of Siva* (1973) these two traditions which are apparently contradictory are reciprocal and have a symbiotic relationship between them. Many tales and stories have made their way from folk into the Great Tradition and vice-versa.

The matriarchal tradition of the Indian society still survives in the folk tradition, where the goddess, that is Shakti, is worshipped in myriad forms with different names depending on the region. In the main stream Hinduism the goddess is worshipped in the Tantric tradition as the all-pervasive force (*Yadevi sarva bhuteshu Shakti rupena samsthitah/ Namahstbathai namahstbathai, namamahstbatai namaha*-- Adi Shankara. "Hey Mother salutations to Thee who pervades all the Creation as Shakti".) and the *Devipurana* extols her as the Supreme Mother, the Creator, while she is conceived both as a benign mother and a punisher of the disobedient in the folk religions. The retributive aspect gains prominence in the folk religion and as such an effort is made to appease her through animal sacrifice etc. This religion is more devotional than ritualistic. In their paper Manjula and others present that "In the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh, India, we see her [goddess mother] as an enigmatic all pervasive omnipotent power who is appeased with humble offerings of neem leaves and porridge." In their own words, the paper deals with the collective representation of the manifestations of the Divine Feminine in the coastal districts of Andhra Pradesh and the charming stories behind the 'ammās' threaded together from oral tradition of narrations".

Surrogacy has become a contentious issue in the modern times for the social and ethical values it involves. Besides this it has economic implications too as the wombs are available on rent. In her brilliant exposition of the issue of surrogacy in "May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons": The Social and Ethical Impact of Surrogacy presented in Ancient Indian Myths" Rolla Guha Niyogi traces its roots in the ancient Indian myths and how we negotiate today with the values they cherished. She illustrates that surrogacy was not an unethical practice in the ancient times as it was consensual and was done for the perpetuation of the family line, that is *niyoga* system, though it reduced the woman to an instrument and overlooked her "emotional turmoil" and "physical trauma". She refers to various myths from the Mahabharata to show how Madhavi, Satyavati, Kunti and Draupadi were surrogate mothers who were "exceptionally virtuous with the singular capacity of retaining their 'virginity' or purity of spirit". She concludes, "In a society where the ability to 'be the mother of a hundred sons' was considered a blessing and a privilege, the popularity and social acceptance of surrogacy and the *niyoga* system would have been inevitable and a matter of necessity".

Songs have played a very important role in bringing about social and cultural transformations in the Indian society despite being religious. We have a very rich repertoire of Bhakti literatures comprising of *Keertans, Vachanas, Dohas, Abhangs, Bhajans* etc. which played a key role spreading across the message of change in society. Most of this literature was protestant and reformist in character and questioned the age old beliefs and caste hierarchy. It threw challenge at the mainstream narratives and contested their assumptions. Sujay Thakur in his article "The Kirtan of Resistance and a Divided Bengal: A Study of the Matuya Community" focuses on the contribution of Harichand Thakur (1811-1877) in bringing together Namasudras under one umbrella of Matuya community and giving them a new social identity with his devotion and *namgans* of Lord Hari. He established Matua Mahasangha. He was considered an incarnation of the Lord Vishnu by his devotees, so he was called Thakur. He propagated his social message through his kirtans. He gave the voiceless a new voice of dissent in the late 19th century Bengal. With the division of Bengal and the rise of Islam in Bangladesh many of the Matuya community moved to West Bengal. Thakur's paper illuminates those dark corners of history which are beyond the pale of mainstream narratives.

Visak's paper "The Sahrdaya's Space in Kavalam's *Kallurutti*" discusses the space of Sahrdaya in Kavalam Narayana Panikkar's famous production *Kallurutti*. In the process he focuses upon theatrical techniques employed by Sopanam a theatre founded by Kavalam Narayana Panikkar, a prominent Malayalam playwright. The author of the paper tries to establish that the popular concepts in Sanskrit literary criticism such as Rasa theory, Sahrdaya etc. can still be applied to modern plays with benefit. He seems to answer the charge, by analyzing the Kavalam's play, that the theatrical principles of the ancient past are irrelevant to the modern theatre.

He examines the relation between the written text and the performance text and the changes the written text undergoes in the production of the play and the argument whether the written text is more important or the performance text. In Sopanam (Kavalam's theatre) the written text undergoes continuous improvisations and changes. During the rehearsals the author and the director frequently revise the text in order to make it more appealing to the spectator. The paper also analyses the results of these productions and the effect they have on the audience after such improvisations.

Like in many other states of India theatre in Tripura flourished under the royal patronage. What started out as private entertainment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries subsequently expanded into a source of public entertainment with many new art forms forming a part of it. With the influx of the migrants after independence new styles and themes have been added and the theatre has emerged as a cultural movement argues Somdev Banik in his paper "The Origin of Theatre in the Princely State of Tripura". He traces the evolution of the Tripura theatre from its origins in the eighteenth century to the present day.

In her paper "Female Playwrights and The Theatre in India: Challenges and Perspectives", Indu Pandey traces briefly the history of Women's theatre in India and tries to establish how it was used as means to protest against the patriarchy and oppression of women in the Indian society. She opines that the Indian women's theatre was more inspired and influenced by the Women's liberation movement in the West than any indigenous sources.

The history of protest against the social evils began in 1870's. Post-Independent India witnessed the rise of Street Theatre which powerfully projected women's issues. Safdar Hashmi's Jana Natya Manch championed the cause of women. Theatre, which was like any other art form a male bastion, gradually began paving way for women playwrights and feminist issues. The emergence of Street Theatre offered woman's perspective on many social and other issues, in other words theatre became women-centric and the victims became the "speaking subjects". This paradigm shift led to the rise of feminist theatre groups such as AKKA, Pirthvi Theatre, Poorva, Rangkarma etc. Thus the feminist theatre became a means to achieve a new identity and empowerment of women. Playwrights like Deena Mehta, Manjula Padmanabhan, Polie Sengupta interrogated the man-woman relations in a highly oppressive patriarchal society. They questioned the woman's objectification and victimization and sensuality, subjugation, alienation, migration, identity crisis etc. and free sex became the subjects of the feminist plays.

"In the Name of Religion: Sexuality and Taboo in Salman Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown*" by Marcel Eblylu Nyan chi is an attempt to examine the socio-cultural and political interpretations of rape, love and sex in *Shalimar the Clown* to assess whether taboos on these practices in Kashmir are based on cultural and religious laws or are they merely an attempt by the fundamentalists to re-colonize existing cultural and religious jurisprudence. He questions the orchestration of sexual violence through extremist Islamic doctrines like 'Sharia,' 'Hudood' and 'Zina' Ordinances, and 'Honour Killing' arguing that religious criminality transcends geopolitical and philosophical spaces.

Through taboos on rape, love and sex, Rushdie satirizes the “byzantine passion” governing the quest for ecstasy in men, and its resultant effects of frigidity in women. Furthermore, the novel valorizes female sexual prowess, because fundamentalist superstructures ironically groom sexually weak men, thereby impeding social conviviality, feels the author. By satirizing taboos on domestic and social metamorphoses, Rushdie interrogates the place of fundamentalist ideology within contemporary world geopolitics. His valorization of love and sex, suggest that they constitute immutable foundations on which societies are founded.

The female anatomy has been one of the most alluring subjects for the artists of different genres like poetry, painting, photography etc. since times immemorial. It is the beautiful and enticing aspects of female body which formed the staple of these art forms. It is not only men who depicted the women in nude but also some women drew their nude self-portraits. In modern Indian painting, Amrita Sher-Gill is probably the first Indian female artist, who contributed some significant themes in respect of womanhood during the late 19th and the early 20th century. Later, many prominent artists portrayed woman in various forms but Francis Newton Souza, the founder of Progressive Artists Group, represented them in “a strange but powerful manner”. He received wide attention and recognition in the West for his work. Mandakini, Ila Gupta and PN Jha in their paper “Significance of Female Encounters in the Paintings of F. N. Souza” examine and analyze various aspects of Souza’s nude paintings. Souza has done innumerable sketches and paintings of women in nude, but his singular approach to his subjects sets him apart from the rest. He does not represent the beauty and noble attitude of woman; instead he depicts the vicious and distorted figures. They contend, “The female paintings of Souza are representatives of the erotic and sensual manifestation with their stark nudity”, but at the same time they are “possessed with the ironical statements and satire on the society”. They analyze a few paintings to illustrate their point.

“Microaggression and Diversity: Tracing Indonesian University Students’ Attitudes toward Pluralism through Metaphorical Creative Expressions” by Andreas Akun and Wiwik Andreani is a “library study of university students’ instant poems about their attitudes toward pluralism in Indonesia”. Based on the belief that “indirect and spontaneous expressions” will help in a significant way in revealing one’s attitude to Pluralism lying beneath the apparent diversity, the authors chose poetry written on the spot by 111 students from three Indonesian universities for analysis. The diversity discussed in this study as the authors say covers “race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and social class”. The issues are explored through “the negative and pessimistic responses depicted in the students’ poems” as it is assumed that these responses may provide a more comprehensive picture of diversity and its implications in a multicultural society. Microaggression operates in subtle ways through the negative attitude of people. According to Sue (2010) these negative attitudes are characterized by “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual-orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group”. It is through microaggressive attitudes the “subtle racism and chauvinism” manifests and challenges the diversity in the modern world.

The paper “Multiculturalism and the Indian Tradition” by Rajagopala Chary and Damodar Rao assumes topical interest in the wake of the raging debate in the country on intolerance and the means to counter it. The essay is divided into three parts each one dealing with certain phase in the evolution of multiculturalism in Indian society. The authors argue that the history of pluralism in the Indian society is very old and can be traced back to the Vedic times. It starts from the Vedic times and continues to the times of the Emperor Asoka, who is known for his compassion and respect for all other religions, and further down to Emperor Akbar, who is said to have promoted religious

harmony and equality of all cultures during his rule and ends with Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru who emphasized unity in diversity in our culture. The bhakti poets of the medieval times are also mentioned to underscore the unity and integrity of the Indian society during that period. The reactions of the intellectuals like Amartya Sen and other litterateurs to pluralism of the Indian society are also referred to prove the point. Adverting to the challenge posed by the marginalized communities to the hegemonic, the paper concludes, that asserting their identity they are moving away from the margins seeking an egalitarian society. The authors conclude that the threat to the multicultural character of the Indian society is posed by the politicians with a myopic vision influenced by their personal or party agendas.

There are different notions about childhood prevalent in the society and the present paper “Being Chhota Bheem in School: Implication for Education” by Sonia Ghalian explores the two notions of childhood, one that pervades school pedagogy and curriculum, and the other which we encounter in the larger popular media. Certain notion of childhood is constructed in the context of school education and the structure and the curriculum in the school impact a child’s learning. Similarly, we have popular media comprising of Cartoons, videos, children films etc. which projects a different concept of childhood. These works not only entertain children but also construct new identities. These two notions of childhood, “... being constructed and represented in the school curriculum and the larger popular media for children seems to be sometimes contradictory”. The author of the paper stresses upon the need to create a bridge between the two contradictory notions of childhood.

“Selfing the Home: Quest for Indegenous Entity, Metaphors of the Self and the Other in A.K. Ramanujan’s poetry” by Kankana Bhowmick makes an attempt “to represent the Self and the Other from a multidimensional point of view”. By analyzing a few poems of Ramanujan she tries to establish that Ramanujan looks at Indian milieu from an expatriate’s perspective. Yet, in spite of being in America for many years he has his roots still firmly rooted in the Indian soil. Family in his poetry becomes a metaphor to connect him to Indian ethos and milieu. In other words, “the achieved sense of the Other as an expatriate and the inborn identity of the Self deeply rooted in the soil of his motherland inspire the poet to form refined expressions and a poetic vision which generate the idea how self and society can be related to each other through the networks of home and family”.

Thus the first issue of the journal covers a wide spectrum of topics and issues related to India marked by penetrating analysis.

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