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## Editorial Note

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“What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself.” (Camus, *The Rebel*).

The Bi-centennial of an iconic cultural figure like Michael Madhusudan Dutt offers us an opportunity to reflect on the larger implications of what he represented. Renegade, prodigal, profligate, poet – he was the romantic rebel, led forever by hope, but betrayed repeatedly by his weaknesses. His life, led against the grain of orthodoxy both Indian and Western, provides a springboard to reflect on the question posed by Camus. A colonial subject and an intellectual prodigy, his restless and ultimately futile search for a new identity was accompanied by personal tragedies which destroyed the man, though nothing could destroy his creative output.

The nihilism of the rebel which Nietzsche proclaimed in *Will to Power*, may be described as an ‘act’ – in effect as well as in performance- with which the silenced and marginalised people of the world defy erasure. The desire to assert their existence, to force a place within cultural and political formations which would otherwise consign them into irrelevance is common to all categories of rebels. Thus, in seeking to demolish existing structures of power and systems of thought, rebels, across time and continents are one: they strive to annihilate but in order to create. The terror of the rebels infused with the promise of the optimist make them pathfinders who cut through the morass of entrenched custom.

The third volume of *Interlocutor* commemorates the spirit of rebellion manifested in its various forms in culture, criticism and activism across the span of time and geographies. From the latter part of the twentieth century, we are seeing a turn towards theory which often originates from the perspectives of groups whose histories had not been acknowledged in the wisdom of mainstream intellectual discourse. The ever-broadening circles of critical lenses, women’s studies to gender and sexuality studies, postcolonial studies to identity politics, the finessing of subaltern studies to more and more sub-groups, disability studies, may all be seen as the various manifestations of the same desire: to be counted as individuals or groups who have rights and aspirations even if they are not readily included into the normative moulds of society.

Since *Interlocutor* began its journey just a couple of years ago, the Advisory Board and the Editorial Committee felt that it would be a good idea to organise special lectures addressing the theme of the volumes henceforth so as to encourage scholars and academicians to contribute to the journal as well as to set the tone of the volume with an expert’s view on the area. With this vision, a special lecture commemorating the bicentenary of Michael Madhusudan Dutt was delivered by Professor (Dr.) Niladri Ranjan Chatterjee on 3rd July 2024. In his lecture, Professor Chatterjee addressed some lesser-known areas of the life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt, locating it within what Professor Chatterjee terms “The Floating Signifier of Friendship”. The same was later transcribed and has been included as the first article in this volume of *Interlocutor*.

The next article entitled “Who loves me not, tho’ I do love him well”: Situational Eros in Select Poems and Letters of Michael Madhusudan Dutt to Gour Das Bysac”, by Soumyajit Chandra, taking cue



from Sunil Gangopadhyay's *Sei Somoye*, explores the intricate layers of friendship between Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac. The article traces this depiction of friendship through the critical lenses of homosociality and situational homosexuality. It also maps the idea of situational eros through the letters and poems exchanged between Dutt and Bysac, enabling us to look into the life of Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Gour Das Bysac from different perspectives.

Suchismita Karmakar's article "Unsexing the Bourgeois: The Lesbian Resistance of Inez in *No Exit*" reads the complexities of a lesbian character, Inez's resistance against patriarchal, bourgeois hegemony and her quest for a lesbian-proletariat liberation from the subaltern object-state. Karmakar deals with Inez as a central character in Sartre's narrative and her being instrumental in breaking the hegemonic, heterosexual-bourgeois continuum which is a structure that Garcin is imprisoned by again and again. Heteronormativity is stressed and critically looked at – the bourgeois becomes associated with the heteronormative, while the proletariat becomes the subversive character. She further explores how the proletariat and bourgeois as markers of social and cultural classes, become critically opposed to each other and are used metaphorically in the struggles and relationships of Inez.

In the fourth article titled "Re-visiting George Egerton: Reclaiming the Subdued Voice of Fin de Siècle New Woman Fiction", Semanti Nandi traces the literary contributions of Mary Chavelita Dunne, known by her pseudonym George Egerton, whose non-traditional and experimental approach attracted both fandom and notoriety. As one of the most prominent authors of New Woman fiction of the fin de siècle, Egerton explored the ideas of feminine subjectivity and sexual emancipation. Her provocative style, as reflected in *Keynotes* and *Discords*, sets a precedence for several female writers whose creative aspirations and potentials suffered immense compromise in the hands of the patriarchal codes of writing and publishing. As a feminist icon of the nineteenth century, Nandi argues how Egerton initiated an alternative feminist tradition thereby rescuing the lives of women, as writers and subjects of exploration, from obscurity and insignificance.

Draupadi, a legendary figure of *The Mahabharata* remains one of the most striking women characters in Indian literature, and is recognised as one of the earliest assertive female voices to have echoed in the realms of literature- resilient and questioning. She is iconic in her resistance for not accepting her humiliation passively on facing an attempt at being disrobed in a royal assembly. Neetisha Jha's "Deciphering Draupadi: Representations and Recontextualisations", the fifth article in the volume, foregrounds Iravati Karve's *Yuganta*, Pratibha Ray's *Yajnaseni*, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* and Mahasweta Devi's short story "Draupadi". It examines the representations of the character which builds on the germ of rebellion inherent in her character, positing her sustained relevance to be re (presented) in the modern-day discourse. Jha also traces the idea of Draupadi becoming a metaphor in her ability to transcend a mere theoretical analysis.

Emily Gerard's *Transylvanian Superstitions* (1885), refers to Transylvania as a fertile breeding ground for creatures opposed to Western science and rationality, including vampires and werewolves. But with Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, the vampire took a different literary turn, open to multiple readings and interpretations. The vampire, as a literary and cultural trope, continues to adapt to the ever-changing sociopolitical concerns. With the emergence of countercultural discourses in the twenty-first century, there has been a resurgence of the vampire iconography in cinema that caters to the evolving sensibilities of a globalised audience.



As a metaphor, the vampire highlights gendered cultural representations and the societal discomfort surrounding it. Contemporary female filmmakers seek to reinterpret this vampire iconography as an alternate expression of resistance. Drawing on Laura Mulvey's theory of the male gaze and Hamid Naficy's Islamicate Gaze Theory, Ria Banerjee's article "Aesthetics of Dissent: A Critique of the 'Averted Look' in Ana Lily Amirpour's *A Girl Walks Home Alone at Night*" examines Ana Lily Amirpour's film as a critique of the 'averted look', in the context of Iran, and highlights the desexualised representation of Iranian women on screen. Banerjee also explores the role of inter-generic hybridity in fostering a sense of solidarity that challenges gendered cultural norms and suggests alternative modes of representation.

The seventh article in the volume continues to explore how Popular Culture manifests the voices of resistance through counter-cultural positions against the hegemonic ideologies and societal frameworks. Purbali Sengupta's "The Shifting Paradigms of Humanism on Celluloid: Exploring the Analogous Cinematic Visions in the Works of Abbas Kiarostami and Amit Masurkar" maps the discursive analysis of two pioneering filmmakers' visual texts known for their subversive cinema voicing the subaltern. She investigates Amit Masurkar's *Newton* (2017) and *Sherni* (2021) along with Abbas Kiarostami's *Taste of Cherry* (1997) and *The Wind Will Carry Us* (1999). Masurkar and Kiarostami's films foreground the invisible native voices by representing and de-familiarising the quotidian struggles of the masses against systemic and systematic marginalisation of the subaltern. The article reflects the urban/rural alienation, severity of communication and ambivalence of knowledge against the backdrop of emerging propagandist films.

The next article titled "Representation of Intimate Partner Violence and its Traumatic Impact in *Thappad*" by Srilekha B.P., examines the representation of intimate partner violence and its traumatic impact on women across different social classes in the movie *Thappad* directed by Anubhav Sinha. The study critically analyses different stages of trauma recovery experienced by the women characters in Sinha's movie. Drawing upon trauma theories, data from governmental health surveys and critical articles on Bollywood movies, Srilekha B.P traces the psychological journey of the women characters from victimhood to resilience. The article also offers a nuanced reading of the process of healing that can be actualised through the evocation of a range of coping mechanisms accessible to women in a given class context.

Moving away from celluloid, the volume turns to literary representations, once again, with Ritu Bhabna and Soham Debsarkar's article "The Deified, Defiled Mother: Damodar Mauzo's *Karmelin* as a Critique of the Phallogocentric Ethics of Sexuality and Motherhood" which critiques the patriarchal machinery and the deified symbol of motherhood as portrayed in Damodar Mauzo's 1981 novel *Karmelin*. Considering a fruitful milieu of women's emancipation in the twentieth century, the mother-icon as supplanted within the nation had little to offer in terms of identity beyond patriarchal structures. They reinforced the orthodox strictures keeping the mother-icon in a confined heteronormative space. This article explores the idea of the mother-icon in Konkani Literature which is often overlooked in the mainstream. The contextualization of Kristeva's ideology associated with 'Abjection' as theorized in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* finds expression through the justification of the undefined sexual encounters of the protagonist. The consideration of *Karmelin* through the ideas of body as a site of violence and self-expression, and the contradiction of care and conflict towards the subject of relevance is well discussed throughout the article.



The tenth article in the volume “From *Panchanamas to Dalits: A Literary Journey of Resilience*” by Anushka Sejal focuses on the experiences, struggles, pain, exploitation, prohibitions, resistance, and injustices perpetrated on the Dalit community. The situation of the Dalit woman as a crude victim of patriarchy and multiple forms of oppression have also been highlighted. Sejal explores the historical trajectory of the untouchables, a journey marked by immense hardship and sacrifice. Literature produced by the Dalit writers has empowered them enormously while also offering a first-hand depiction of the suffering and torment they have endured. She also examines how as literature of resistance, their autobiographies emphasise on the transformative effects of artistic creation and literature’s ability to initiate positive changes in society.

As part of the Progressive Writers’ Movement, the poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi offers a staunch critique of society during the Partition and its aftermath. The sufferings and woes of the disenfranchised have often found poetic expressions in his writing. His honest interrogation into the position of women, the exploitation of the marginalised class, the effects of political miscalculations among others have enriched his critical outlook. He understood that the responsibility of a poet was not only to show the flaws of society but also to suggest ways to remedy them. The final article in the volume by Bhavna Jagnani titled “Poetry as Mirror: A Reading of Select Poems of Sahir Ludhianvi” offers an analysis of select poems of Ludhianvi through the postcolonial and feminist lenses, and brings the volume back to its fundamental theme of exploring rebellious selves and their resistance to the hegemony of dominant cultural practices.

In *The Rebel*, Camus asserts, “Become so free that your whole existence is an act of rebellion”. Michael Madhusudan Dutt and Wilkie Collins have voiced this idea through their lives, choices and works. In the present era of generalised submission to dominant ideologies, it is important that these lost rebellious selves are brought back to the academic arena to trace a continuity in the counter-discursive traditions that link the past with the present. The third volume of *Interlocutor* makes an attempt to do so.

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