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## Editorial Note

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Resistance is life. These words hang as a part of *Snow*, Sohrab Hura's series of photographs taken in Kashmir. The words are not his, the camera is. Hung on a gallery wall situated within the Alipore Museum in Kolkata, the frame finds a singular resonance with the setting. It breaks through the surface calm and order of a museum which was originally a jail for political prisoners. It converges the turbulent past of the site, particularly during India's freedom struggle, with the history of the nation state that was born at the time of independence. Hura's frame merging the visual and the verbal, confronts the viewers with a powerful reminder of the "will to power" which steels even the most oppressed to resist erasure. Words, images, music are mediums through which the 'little voices of history' defy silence.

In a world which seems to be caving in to the injustices of unequal power structures resistance is not restricted to political struggles only. The wide range of topics covered by the articles in *Interlocutor Vol. IV* reveal triumphalist and homogenising discourses being challenged across experiences of class, caste, gender, sexuality and ideology.

According to Barbara Harlow (*Resistance Literature*) Ghassan Kanafani first used the term 'resistance' in connection with Palestinian literature in a piece translated as *Literature of Resistance in Occupied Palestine: 1948-1966* (Harlow 2) Assassinated in 1972, he was remembered as 'a commando who never fired a gun' (*Lebanese Star*). Since the mid-twentieth century developments in theory and critical practices have created bridges between academia and activism. Like the blue whistling thrush which sings in many notes, numerous movements in literature, arts and media have reflected the constant tussle between what is existing and what desires to come into existence, or what refuses to have its existence obliterated.

The central theme of the volume is captured by Dr. Sandali Thakur's special lecture which is being reproduced here. Titled "Imag(in)ing Resistance: Dalit Art in Mithila's Visual Canon", her deliberations on Dalit visual politics reveals the resistance to invisibilisation, institutional tokenism and Brahminical aesthetics. In proposing a counter-canon she sees Dalit art practices not as a site of lack but an insidious means of radical creativity which perpetuates memory and the will to survive.

### **Beyond Nation States**

The reality of the postcolonial Indian state is undeniably marked by fractured identities. The centralising pull of the nation state is repeatedly undermined by the memories of lost lands, languages and histories. Two of the essays in this volume deliberate on how literature embodies the multiple loyalties of individuals living under the disciplining power of the state. Pritam Moni, in "Countering the Spectacle: The Sundarban Tiger beyond Binaries in Soharab Hossen's *Gang Baghini*", goes beyond the dominant representational lenses of ecological and cultural discourses in which the tiger is either the embodiment of wildness or held up as a symbol of conservation. Designating both as anthropocentric, Moni analyses the character in Soharab Hossen's novel to reveal how literature from the Sunderbans have the potential to challenge dominant narratives at various levels. The tiger which knows no borders becomes a metonymic representation not of national identity or belonging as stated by Helen Tiffin, but of the longing within the displaced Adhar for such a transnational identity. Memory, ecology, and cross-species identification converge in this reimagination of the tiger as a marker of submerged histories which enables empathy across species. The tiger's violent end becomes a metaphor for the violence encountered in partitioned lands. Hossen's narrative however, is too nuanced for a single layered interpretation. In Kajla, the object of Adhar's desire, the



novel also resists simplified conservationist narratives by foregrounding her dual identification with *Bonbibli* and the tigress.

“Nationalisms in Context: Somnath Batabyal’s *Red River*”, by Abantika Dev Ray discusses the way in which nostalgia for a home that resides more in the heart than in reality, informs Batabyal’s novel. Dev Ray’s reading of it prises open the instability of the idea of the nation in a novel which examines the fraught relations between the nation state and regional identities formed on its geographical margins. The destinies of three friends from diverse backgrounds are mostly recounted by the one who has no real roots to call home. Dev Ray’s analysis of this novel which is set against the background of the Assam movement in the eighties, lays bare the fragile allegiances of people when faced with choices between overarching narratives of identity and individual histories.

### **Defying Discipline and Punishment**

Power demands obedience. But what if the mind distances itself from the body that suffers? In “Looking against the Phenomenology of Being: Analysing Ben Jelloun’s *This Blinding Absence of Light* as a Tale of Resistance”, Sudesna Roy asks, what happens to the body under conditions of extreme torture? How does the body become a site of resistance in the in-betweenness of incarceration? Roy raises these questions to challenge the capacity of traditional Phenomenological approaches to provide answers to the question of being.

### **Laughter and Indignation**

The triumphalist march of authoritarian powers appears relentless through the machinery of propaganda. Ironically, the US, self-proclaimed defender of democracy, and the repressive regime in North Korea with no pretence to democratic values, both lend themselves to accusations of unleashing violence and repression at home and abroad.

In “Unlocking the Power of Humour: Re-defining Resistance in Select Diaries and Weblogs of Iraqi Women”, Dr. Somedutta Mukherjee quotes extensively from Iraqi women’s diaries and weblogs. It exposes how a people whose land has been taken over and whose dignity has been violated take recourse to dark humour. Their laughter rings with bathos and signals that even the mightiest axis of power can be diminished and lampooned. Humour here becomes a coded language of rebellion.

Dipanwita Sen’s “With a Pure Indignation”: Fiction, Fictionalisation and the Subtle Resistance of *The Accusation*”, dwells on the persistence of resistance under the authoritarian regime of North Korea where the fiction of well-being propagated by the state under its surveillance is sabotaged by a collection of short stories *The Accusation* written under the pseudonym Bandi.

### **Resisting Erasure through Performance**

The advent of colonialism transformed the cultural landscape of India. Victorian assumptions of moral and cultural superiority expressed itself in a deep unease with the performing female body and unregulated arenas of performance. The resultant marginalisation of traditional cultural labour and performing traditions endangered both the refined culture of the erstwhile aristocrats as well as the vernacular performance practices amongst non-urban communities.

Women’s Studies departments have repeatedly resurrected the histories of women performers. In “Recording Resistance: Gauhar Jaan, Gramophone, and Gendered Cultural Labour in Colonial India”, Puja Saha draws on critical biography, discourse analysis, and feminist cultural theory to argue that Gauhar Jaan’s



recording on the gramophone was more than a way of adjusting to changes in forms of patronage and performance spaces. It was a means of resisting the socio-cultural erasure of her *tawaif* community. Her signature declaration after each recording, “My name is Gauhar Jaan”, was an attempt to reclaim the dignity of her labour, identity and historical presence at a time when her refined body and exuberant public presence caused deep moral unease among both the Bengali middle classes and the colonial ruling classes.

In “Reinterpreting Myth and Memory in Alternative Theatre Spaces: A Tale of Heisnam Sabitri and Teejan Bai”, two female actors from tribal communities, with distinct performance styles are linked in the essay by Divyangana Mondal. Each brings the imprint of her particular ethnic roots to the enactment of Draupadi. The feminist projection of Draupadi as the embodiment of resistance to patriarchy is further complicated by this insistence on a vernacular idiom. Their performances are no longer confined to resisting patriarchy but also demand recognition of the plurality of traditions existing in a country such as India. In this respect they push back against homogenising cultural practices.

### **Religion and Resistance**

Sometimes the silent mutiny of the masses goes unrecorded because they lack the written word. Dr. Ambedkar’s embrace of Buddhism and his indictment of the caste-ridden Hindu society provided a language of resistance to the marginalised tribal populations and *antaja* or low-caste populations in India. Dalit politics may be a modern political phenomenon, but way back in history the *antaja* classes in Bengal had registered their resistance to the Brahminical order by converting Buddhism, a doctrine which promised dignity to all and denied caste distinctions. Their early embrace of the egalitarian Buddhist doctrine eventually morphed into the worship of folk deities like Dharma Thakur. By dispensing with the offices of any Brahmin priest the *antaja* people in Bengal displayed their defiance of the diktats of Hinduism. In the essay “Buddhists in Bengal and Folk Gods Who Became Buddhas: An Overview of *Antaja* Conversion in Pre-colonial Bengal from an Ambedkarite Perspective”, Titas Choudhury discusses the influence of Buddhism in Bengal, an outlying region of Aryavarta.

### **Speculative Fiction: Imagining Dystopic Futures**

Theories about the force of spectacle and hyperreality in the construction of a late capitalist society underlines the articles which deal with texts involving the modern metropolis as a space invaded with consumerism leading to catastrophic consequences in a dystopic future.

“Resisting the Spectacle: Masked Realities and Rebellious Future in the Speculative Worlds of Samit Basu”, by Srishti Khare is an examination of Samit Basu’s speculative fiction through the lens of Guy Debord, Michel Foucault, and Judith Butler. She expounds how Basu’s fiction grapples with the question of the intersections of power technology and myth in the twenty first century. Debord is considered to be at the centre of Basu’s reimagination of resistance as an act that insinuates itself through the cracks of spectacle in a late capitalist society.

The reality of climate change in an urban dystopia is the subject of “Water Wars and Eco-dystopia: Re-reading Sarnath Banerjee’s *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*”. In this essay, Sayan Chatterjee explores how Banerjee’s unique blend of image and text helps our understanding of water wars and point towards the uncertain dystopic future resulting from it. Chatterjee’s essay analyses how Banerjee’s achievement as a graphic novelist lies in his creative use of visuality and spatiality. In its break with narrative linearity, a visually dystopic unreal space becomes a signifier of real space. It invites the reader to imagine the reality of the climate crisis which is otherwise denied by those with vested interests in perpetuating the status quo.



“Urban Space, Dystopia, Consumerism and Hyperreality: Reading Satire as Resistance in Appupen’s *Aspyrus*”, by Srijani Dutta considers the portrayal of the postmodern city as a space infected with consumerist dreams which serve capitalism. In its choice of subject and genre, Dutta considers Appupen’s novel to be essentially subversive. It rejects the binaries between high and popular art while critiquing the values of contemporary India through his imaginary world Halahala.

The graphic artists’ ability to display and withhold also informs Srijita Banerjee’s exploration of the aesthetic of refusal in “Manga in Women, Children, and Machines: State Power, Resistance, and Gender in Japanese Mangas”. Moving from state power to family dynamics Banerjee maps the modes in which Manga comics reflect the intersectionality of power and resistance.

### **Resisting Gender and Sexual Normativity**

In spite of its commercial compulsions, cinema has long given space to narratives that challenge gender normativity and heteronormative relationships. The essays in this volume which deal with cinema all testify to this fact.

The clash between the individual and society is never more acute than in the apparently personal choices regarding love, marriage and sexuality. Jude Fernandes’ review essay “Cinematic Resistance: *The First Wedding* as a Protest Narrative Against Heteronormativity”, discusses how the inversion of societal norms in the short film by the Goan Filmmaker Akshay Parvatkar, sensitises us to the long struggle of the LGBTQIA+ community. The main protagonists in this short film are heterosexuals striving to assert their right to love within a homosexual society. The inside out approach of the film and the mockumentary format become a powerful critique of sexual normativity as it argues for the individual’s right to personal choices.

The power of a queer counterculture thriving on queer temporality to subvert heteronormativity is ideated in Ashmita Biswas’ essay, “A ‘New Way of Living’: Exploring the Complex Dynamics of Queer Counterculture in Vijay Dan Detha’s “A Double Life””. The essay portrays a lesbian utopia through the same-sex union of Beeja and Teeja in Detha’s short story “Dowari Joon” which resists heterosexual bliss by critiquing the normative temporality of chrononormativity and procreative futurism. The counter discourse thus generated, successfully destabilises the dominant patriarchal normativity by foregrounding queerness in a heterotopic supernatural, geographical and ideological space inhabited by the lesbian couple.

““Imagination, Life is Your Creation””: The Politics and Aesthetics of Representations in Greta Gerwig’s *Barbie* (2023)”: The film critiques the consumerist appropriation of the feminist narrative. Signifying the film as a popular culture text, Aditya Mukherjee’s essay maps the metamorphosis of its protagonist, the Stereotypical Barbie from plasticity to an acquired womanhood. The essay initiates divergent discourses on film’s satirical representation of patriarchy, lifestyle and tokenistic feminism(s). It advocates a global feminist sisterhood by thoroughly examining the script of interpersonal relationships. The delineation of multifarious identities along with subversion and reification of normativities in the visual text is achieved through anthropomorphisation of the cultural artefact, Barbie.

### **Narrative Warfare in Indian Cinema and OTT**

Rubaiya Nasrin’s essay “Cinematic Battlegrounds: Hermeneutics, 5GW, and Interpretive Pluralism in Contemporary Indian Film and Media” situates select films and OTT series as contested sites of fifth generation warfare (5GW) that weaponise historical perspectives. The essay highlights resistance of creative productions in foregrounding the plurality and instability of decoded meaning of the visual and cultural texts. Drawing from hermeneutics and media studies, the essay underscores ideological wars over narration, nation



and theology, generated through contested reception of memes, hashtags and viral controversies in the digital public sphere.

Poised on the nebulous limen demarcating academia and politico-intellectual praxis, the current volume of *Interlocutor* intends to function as testimonial to the ever-fluxional modes of human resistance emerging in the face of oppressive, totalitarian and homogenising discourses. Besides foregrounding heterogeneity as a keystone of the ontology of humanity and the human condition, the current volume also underlines the significance of subjecting diverse categories of resistance to juxtapositional assessment. This, in turn, fosters affective and theoretical understandings of intersectionality, thus establishing essential commonalities among dissenting voices. The Editorial Board stands beholden to every contributor for having presented unique sonatas of resistance intercepted from that singular harmonious urge emanating from the *spiritus mundi* – that for freedom – *eleutheria*.

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