INDIC STUDIES

CAESURAE: POETICS OF CULTURAL TRANSLATION

Volume 6:2

(ISSN 2454 -9495)

July 2025

Editorial Note

The Indic Studies Section of the Caesurae Journal, introduced from this issue, aims at promoting an academic interest and active engagement in the diverse religious cultures of the Indian subcontinent spread across the world. It intends to explore the multiple zones of cultural exchanges and negotiations that have contributed in the building of a rich and layered tapestry of religious doctrines, philosophical schools and spiritual disciplines that cover both the canonical textual tradition and also oral and cross cultural exchanges between Indian cultures and other cultures of the world. We welcome research articles and translation projects both by eminent researchers and also newly budding scholars in this area. The Indic Studies Section will contain two segments:

1. ***Translations from the Indian Archive : English Translations of religious and literary texts from different Indian languages.***

2. ***Critical Essays on Indic Studies***

In this issue (Vol 6:2) of the Caesurae Journal we include two such translated works from the Indian archive. *Sampadananda Mishra's translation of Vashishtha Ganapati Muni's 'Indrāṇī Saptaśatī'* is furnished with a brief introduction to Ganapati Muni, an illustrious disciple of Sri Ramana Maharshi. It is a poem in seven hundred verses invoking the power of the goddess Indrāṇī, the consort of the Vedic

god Indra, who here becomes synonymous with Śiva or Maheśvara in the Tantras. The Vedic goddess thereby gets equated with the Tantric Vajravairocanī. She is invoked to protect the land of India, to bless the afflicted country with peace, prosperity, knowledge, strength and power. Significantly, unlike as in the Purāṇas, Indrāṇī here is not the passive consort of a god constantly tormented, dethroned and imprisoned by the *asura*s, but the Supreme Mahāśakti herself who descends to the worlds to deliver all creatures. Like Durgā, Indrāṇī has been here described as having three eyes representing the three worlds. This illustrates Ganapati Muni's attempt to redefine Hinduism though the revival of the Vedic religion. The poem by its tone and poetic flavour immediately reminds one of Sri Aurobindo's *Bhavānī Bhāratī*.

Ashok Kumar Mohapatra has translated excerpts from the Act III of Ūrvashi by Ramdhari Singh Dinkar. Inspired by Kalidāsa's Sanskrit play titled *Vikramorvaśīyam*, Dinkar's *Ūrvashī* narrates the love tale of the heavenly nymph *Ūrvashī* and her mortal lover Purūravā. The conversation between the two lovers pronounces the indomitable power of love and that of the human soul. The Kṣatriya king refuses to beg his love from Indra. He however is hopeful that the power of love is such that it can break all barriers. The text is provided with a translator's note that explains how the play embodies a dramatic tension between desire and duty. While the king Purūravā embodies social obligations, the nymph symbolizes sensuality. The dialectic sustains itself through a tragic irresolution of the story as Indra claims back Ūrvashī.

The Critical Essays segment of the Indic Studies includes five critical essays on varied areas of research interest. *Diego Gonzalez-Rodriguez* in his *'From Neurocognitive and Computational Models to Śāstra and Paramparā: Exploring Categorical Translations Between Indic Darśanas and Cognitive Science'* begins his discussion on the nature of Consciousness by distinguishing between mind and consciousness, focussing on how disciplines such as cognitive neuroscience, evolutionary biology, and complexity science have left out of their scope a variety of non-physicalist ontologies by diminishing traditional knowledge systems alongside their phenomenological dimension. When it comes to issues pertaining to mental health, even though cognitive-behavioural therapy has gradually adopted certain non-Western practices, cognitive science as a whole has remained largely ignorant of the large body of Indic philosophies, overlooking their sophisticated accounts of consciousness, cognition, and identity. The primary focus has been the maintenance of the ego-self, whereas Indic systems aim at transcending the finite self and identifying with the expansive universal self. In Tantric systems particularly, this is achieved through ritual practices like the visualization of mantras and deities within the body. Tantric practices may lead to the deconstruction of self-referential cognitive constructs through active imagination, but also through embodied practices like *puja*, intended to reorient the individual's experience towards a more expansive, non-dual understanding of consciousness. Each particular stream of Indic philosophy achieves non-duality though its own exclusive approach. However, Western

theories inclined towards these concepts fail to grasp their subtle nuances and yield to over-simplification. A proper cultural translation goes beyond randomly borrowing exotic concepts from non-Western traditions.

Prakash Joshi's article titled *'Becoming Esemplastic: Being and the Oneness of Consciousness(es) in the Early Upaniṣads'* explores the epistemological dimensions of Consciousness as in the philosophy of the Upaniṣads. He begins by distinguishing the subjective approach of the Upaniṣads from the objective one of psychoanalytical studies by highlighting the difference between consciousness on the one hand, and the mind-brain complex on the other. Following Advaita Vedānta, he arrives at the concept of '*cinmātra*' or 'pure consciousness' which is self-illuminating or '*sva-prakāśa*'. This verily is the Self which is the same as Brahman or the Absolute. The article highlights the esemplastic nature of all creation as everything emerges from oneness and merges back into it. The worldview that proceeds from the Upaniṣadic theory of Creation gets its ultimate base in the esemplastic notion and concept of the oneness of the manifest and the unmanifest cosmic phenomena. The author then proceeds forth to explain the triadic nature of the Mantra Aum embodying the three states of consciousness: waking, dreaming and deep sleep. Beyond this triad is the transcendental 'Fourth' or the 'Turīya' state where the Self rests within the Self.

Bhushita Vasistha's 'Must We Imagine Sītā Unhappy?' re-addresses the contemporary readings of Sītā as a victim of patriarchy. Moving aside from canonical versions of the narrative of Sītā, Vasistha highlights folk accounts that depict her as growing up amongst Vedic scholars. She is exposed to the two-fold ethics of the Truth – one seeking renunciation and the other a life of a wise-householder. Sītā chooses the latter; since she comes to recognize that the sophisticated philosophical discussions within the palace rests upon the unseen labour of farmers who cultivate food and women who transform it into nourishment. Her own life can be read as a reconciliation of this ethical binary. The author then explores Sītā's ethically enlightened humane character, and even juxtaposes her ethical stands against Rāma's mindlessly aggressive nature. She ultimately turns into an "elite outcast", who once posited at the nucleus of the power structure is eventually banished for being vocal about the critique of the regime.

Subhrajit Samanta's essay 'Studying Yoga Sūtras through Naruto' is on the commodification of Indian philosophy in the technological era. It focuses on the Japanese animated series - *Naruto,* written and illustrated by Masashi Kishimoto. He connects the key concepts of the *Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali* with Kishimoto's Narutoverse. Samanta's essay undertakes the content as well as context analysis of the series to unravel how the Narutoverse incorporates the "Astanga Yoga" approach. He points out that such cultural translation not only commodifies the ancient philosophy through its seductive narrative but such repackaging of classical cultural information is part of a new pop culture

narrative. While such yogic principles span the spiritual wisdom of the Asian countries, the age of technology uses the anime to familiarize the younger generation with the same.

Deep Saha's article '*The Gamira Mask Dance Performance and the Spiritual Aesthetics of Consciousness'* explores the transporting potential of this mask dance in North Bengal, particularly South Dinajpur, through which the performers connect with the Divine or the spirits to whom they dedicate their masks. Saha explores through the theory of Rasas, how the performance induces a state of trance in which the individual self of the performer merges with the divinity represented through the mask. He also points out how the shared experience of the performance transcends the individual psychic spaces of the performers and the audiences. Within the zone of ecstasy, one's body is not solely one's own, but an interdependent sharing with all other bodies and therefore, a common collective participation in God's body. In this process, such a contemplative performance could be described as a semantic journey through which God's body is realized by encompassing the performer's body.

The essays address various issues related to Indic studies from various perspectives. The first three essays, together analyse various concepts, texts and contexts and their contemporary relevance . The last essay writes about a folk dance performance where masks play a significant role to play as a trope to self-realization. In sum, all the essays discuss the idea of 'consciousness' differently and we sincerely hope, together the essays and the translations from the Indian Archive would offer a thought provoking readership.

Editors for this issue (Vol 6:1)

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