



Caesurae Newsletter



July 2022



Editorial

On Belonging

Do we belong where we have lived all along? Or do we belong to a space which we do not even grasp as what it is? It is not enough to be born in a country to be identified as an insider. We may live our entire life as a third-class citizen and as a complete alien to our country's culture just caving in, to the processes of globalization, and to the processes of Western 'isms' with a Western rhetoric. It might be argued that for someone who has traveled much and for someone who moves between different spaces, the sense of belonging is a controversial one. Actually, it is not, if one is conscious of one's heritage which he or she can grasp intellectually, emotionally and intuitively. Spaces can connect, spaces can relate the outer with the inner to a realization beyond material space(s) for a deeper understanding of one's belonging and non-belonging.

The concepts of "double consciousness" or diasporic identity are Western idioms which we have readily accepted, adopted and swallowed whole and digested



into our intellectual systems. But this was always a part of our philosophical consciousness from antiquity, in the age-old concepts of Dvaita and Advaita. We just failed to grasp the same as we considered our mother language to be a dead one, as we could only grasp the language as the language of the oppressing class. We have in our anguish of marginalization wanted to vanquish it altogether. But to blow ashes of our fury over the mother language is also to negate our belonging, negate the rich treasury of our spiritual knowledge system, negate the processes of cultural translation and syncreticism, negate the processes of anthropological and linguistic formations in South and South-East Asia. The true process of decolonization is to grasp the language and the culture and the rich philosophy it contains as one's own, intellectually, freed from caste/ class/ political perceptual restrictions. Time has also come for a serious re-thinking and for de-politicizing the culture from the intellectual hounds who have pushed us forward on to the path of living as third-class citizens, hammering on the *politics* of marginalization for their personal gain and importance. The task lies with the few who can perceive the awakening of a cultural consciousness happening in pockets in India and abroad in the recent times. This is not limited to Indian intellectuals in the country and those settled in Global North, chiefly, America, Europe and elsewhere. Possibly there are people as there always have been in the past, who were born elsewhere but connected with the Indian consciousness more intensely than those born in the country. This wave



which has just begun has an enormous possibility for integrating the ideas Eastern or Western, which connect with our consciousness resulting in a very interesting cultural translation through conscious and unconscious cultural syncreticism. In one of my conversations with Professor Lipi Ghosh (Head, Dept. of South & South-East Asian studies, and the former Dean of Calcutta University), she pointed out how Thai language was influenced by the Sanskrit vocabulary and the Sanskrit language system. She writes in her monograph:

The Thai language as spoken by the people of Thailand is, in its original structure, to a certain extent comparable with Sanskrit, the mother and Bengali, the sister language ... The original Sanskrit alphabets had been remodelled and juggled around several times both for Thai and Bengali languages ... It is evident that Sanskrit alphabets might have had influence on Thai scripts ... There are in modern Thai 44 consonants. Of these 16 are redundant, which are used chiefly in transliteration of Sanskrit and Pali words. The arrangement of alphabets too follow the Sanskrit scheme (*The Thai Language: A First Handbook*, University of Calcutta Publication, 2009, p. 49).

Elsewhere in her monograph she also points out how “Thai Literature is the result of an impact of Hindu literature and Buddhist culture on Thai indigenous fund of folk tales ... Hinduism and Buddhism both opened up for the Thai a new world of experiences” (44). Much in the same way the iconography that is yet preserved in Tibetan Thangkas are a resonance of the obliterated art and architecture of the Gauda Desh of yore. Ideas have travelled with the movement of people across



history. So much for those who are academically inclined, for those who look forward to a research in history and archaeology and to an intellectual discourse. But from my own understanding, a spiritual philosophy contained in art, architecture, and in the texts of Hindu antiquity can be perceived only intuitively through inner vision or in the absence of an appropriate word in English vocabulary, simply as “darshan”. Therein lies the true panacea for the age of dystopia that we are braving through.

The dystopia we live in aggravated by the covid years have prompted us to pause, to validate our lives and what living stands for. There is every reason for revisiting our past, welcome cultural revival, through “accents of memory” (to use prof. Venkat Rao’s term in *Cultures of Memory*, Springer, 2016) now. Covid no matter how disastrous it has been for all of us, amidst losses and amid isolation and alienation from direct social interaction, has provided the space to each of us for introspection. We have finally arrived at the closing of the post-colonial era and moved into an era of self-appraisal and understanding from our own cultural parameters shaped by our own understanding of things as we see it. This is particularly true in India, in certain pockets which have been able to avoid being labelled as supporters of the ‘Left’ or ‘Right’. It is not difficult to perceive that among the youth today, there is in a section, handful yet, an earnest endeavour to fathom what it means to belong to a space. That space could be the nation, it could be the space of a region, it could be the international space too, perceived from a very



subjective point of view, but connecting the individual with a society in new formations. This cultural turn has led many young intellectuals to revive the traditional art forms through the power of imagination and understanding of the iconography and philosophy that goes with it. A scholar pursuing her doctoral degree pointed out sharply that we need to validate the customs and codes of our culture, from our own philosophical understanding, instead of aping Western theoretical models for every analysis. She cited how the saint Ramakrishna's relationship with the mother goddess Kali has been interpreted on the Freudian model by Western scholars and by Sudhir Kakar. It is this lens which needs to be questioned, for the same could be grasped differently and richly indeed with the understanding of our own philosophical perception. Caesurae column has a few months back published a report on the festival celebrating the revival of the Gauda art and architecture in Kolkata. Revival of Sanskrit which has begun once again in pockets should not be confused with the history of the Brahmanical oppression and with the right wing's political agenda in the country. Alongside with the revival of the mother language and culture, there is also the revival of indigenous art forms and knowledge systems. The actual process of decolonization is possible when we critique a culture or a language system as an insider. It so happens that most of the time we spend our lives as a colonized subject viewing our culture from the borrowed lenses, making that our own, and refusing to integrate that knowledge system with



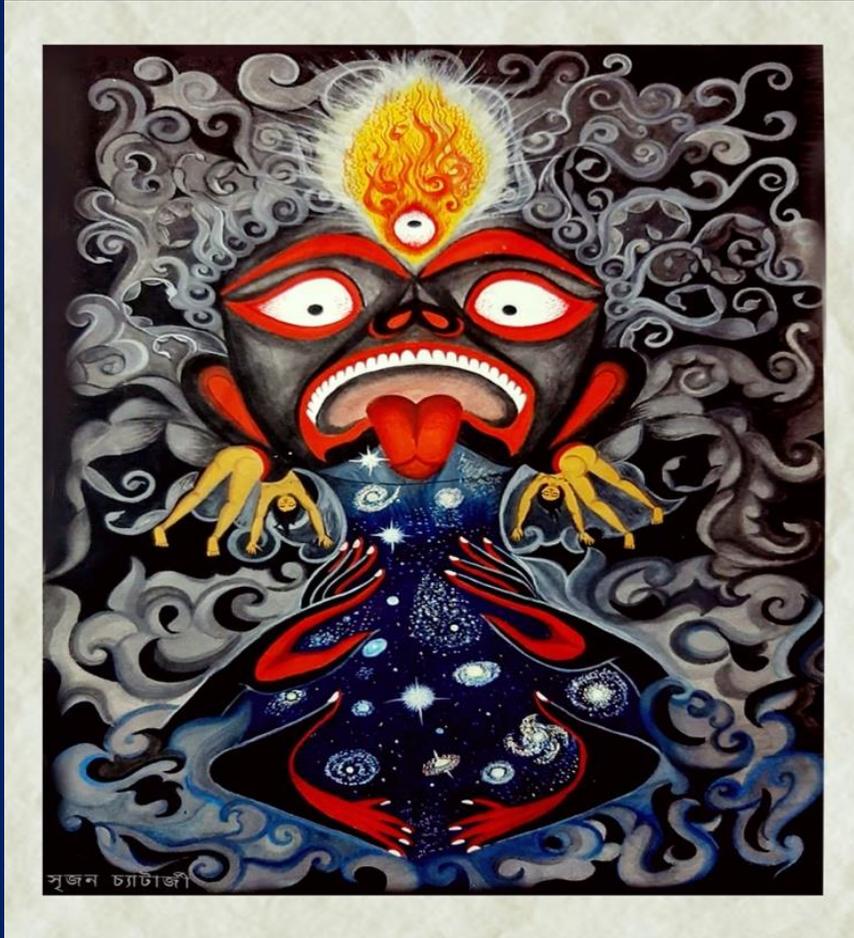
what our heritage has to offer to us.

The Newsletter includes some vignettes of my observation. There is a painting by a very talented young artist visualizing “corona virus” just as there is a very different, subjective vision of the corona times by a French poet. There is a report by a young scholar on the scroll painting fair too in this issue of the Newsletter. Covid times have delayed the process of publishing the journal, yet once again we are back with our offerings to our readers. Wish all readers, a new beginning in the post-covid era. We will soon announce the dates and the theme of the Caesurae Annual International Conference, 2022. Please check www.caesurae.org in the coming weeks.

Jayita Sengupta

*Chief Editor
of the Caesurae E- Journal
& Secretary, Caesurae Collective.*

Some Reflections on Corona



“Mrittyuutsav”: a painting by Srijan Chatterjee

*“Vyāptaṃ tvaitat sakalaṃ
Brahmānandaṃ manjūṣeśvara.
Mahākālyā-mahākāle
mahāmārīśvarūpāya.”*

(From Sri Sri Chandi)



“To me the pandemic is another form of the mother goddess Kali in her deconstructive madness. In times of great turmoil, Mahakali takes this form to swallow or gobble up the universe itself. In times of the recent pandemic when we were overwhelmed with losses of our close ones, this is how the mother goddess had appeared in my mind’s eye. Here in this image, there is no *bormudra* or *abhoymudra*, to offer us security and strength, there is no sword that would slash at ignorance or freshly severed head symbolizing the concept of *bodh*. All her four hands seem to crush the universe.”

Srijan Chatterjee (*Singer, sculptor, painter and Sanskrit scholar based in Kolkata*)

Promise to the absent

For S and T, so far and yet so close

I

Noon stands still
at the back of yesterday’s garden
piano notes spell out
the great loneliness of trees
the soft dark lows of the double bass
rise in search of the echo
deep in a grieving land
will the saxophone sing
the boundless ocean
no ship can cross
absence as vast as clouds
and palms in waiting
open to the sky
like the wings of a bird



II

Midnight is shaking next to the windowpane
the city-lights are hanging so high
and no one will soothe the night
too many distraught voices and footsteps down below
on the asphalt of the terrified street
don't even consider setting a foot outside
doors cannot be trusted
any more than windows
will stop the wailing sirens
or disperse the sadness in the park
turned into a hospital
we huddle deep in our dreams
wrapped up in our bedsheets
you are so far away and only my thoughts
can help me cope with your absence

III

Tomorrow
like the hope of coming dawn
shall we catch up with yesterday
what remains of rains blithely pattering
and brooks singing
as children call each other
with intertwined fingers
we shall weave



new sails for boats
and cross the seas anew
the vast sky will light up
words that were never said
and colors we did not know

Cécile Oumhani (*From France, a poet & writer*)

Rural Art and Craft fair- A Showcase of Art and Culture

A Report by Soutik Chakraborty (*Research Scholar working on Patachitras*)



Odisha Chitrakar Balaram

The Suresh Amiya Memorial Trust had organised a folk art and craft fair named as “Nabanna” from 12th March to 21st March 2022, in Gitanjali Cultural Complex, Bolpur, West Bengal. In the season of Holi, the fair had presented the art lovers a conglomeration of different folk artists and crafters from all the districts of Bengal as well as from other states like Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The fairground had



a centre stage for different cultural programmes by folk artistes and talk shows by dignitaries.

The government had provided stalls to the crafters and accommodation too. Rural art in India is mostly a family occupation rather than the individual skill of an artist. The

fair reflects the same family engagement when it comes to selling the product. Most of the artists had arrived with their families including kids and had been making the paintings or doing different craft works exhibiting a demonstration of their work where all the members put in their effort in the finished product. (In the photo above, I am with the painter D. Thirupalu, from Andhra Pradesh).



Patachitra artist Suman Chitrakar had come to the fair with his family from Pingla village of Paschim Medinipur district of WB. His son Farhan Chitrakar has nothing to contribute to their art and craft as of now. But as in any other humble Indian rural family, the kid is not left behind at home while all the

elders will be in the city. While the father and the son were roaming around, the older generation was found at work. The head craftsman, Suman Chitrakar's mother Ruma Chitrakar was painting patachitra motifs on a kurta. Their stall had painted coasters, painted copper glasses, various apparels, wall hangings, Pingla *patachitras* and Kalighat style *patachitras*. All of these things are done by the family members.

On another lane, D. Thirupalu from Andhra Pradesh had put up his stall showcasing his exquisite leather puppets and leather paintings. Tholu Bommalu or Thoru Bommalata is a puppet show tradition in Andhra Pradesh where the puppets are drawn on sheets of leather and stitched in a way so that the hands



and legs would move when the performer will put on the show. Thirupalu is a stalwart in his craft who has received Andhra Pradesh State Award in 2014. In his stall he had lampshades and door-hangings, all made of leather and beautifully painted too. In another stall the artist from Medinipur, WB had put up kitchen tools, combs and show pieces crafted from buffalo horns.



Odisha *Pattachitra* artist Balaram Prusty had set up his stall and he was demonstrating to his onlookers the process of *pattachitra* making in Odisha by gluing cotton cloths. He demonstrated how the colours are made and how they are put up for sale. He had various

pattachitra paintings for sale along with tussar paintings, coconut shell paintings and straw crafts. Carpenters from Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh had put up their stall and exhibited minutely crafted wooden furniture. The aesthetics of these designs are awe-inspiring.



Another *pattachitra* family from Pingla had put up their stall and had been singing the *pattachitra* songs. These *pattachitras* are known as scroll paintings which the artist shows to the viewer and sings songs with the story painted in the scroll cloth. Jamela

Chitrakar showed her scroll and recited the song depicting the mythological story regarding the commencement of Basanti Puja (another form of goddess Durga) on earth. Her daughter Latika Chitrakar was painting on apparels on the other side and Jamela's granddaughter was busy with Holi colours in her hand. The fair had a stall with women using traditional tools for grinding crops and the message of organic farming was conveyed. (In the photo I am with two generations of Chitrakars).

In the evening time, the centre stage was occupied by a folk artiste and the crowd gathered to watch the performance. As the evening approached the fair got more visitors and the smiling faces of these humble folk artists and crafters were always ready to welcome them.



Leather painting by D. Thirupalu
