



# CAESURAE NEWSLETTER, 1 JANUARY 2018



*Painting by Tarkovsky*



## Editorial

*It was a musical adda where Caesurae took its first inception. Two budding musicians, one of them a software engineer, and another just enrolled to be an engineer were discussing how to keep their dreams alive. Then there interceded a poet. The academic among them was a silent party to their conversation. Yet, colours mingled and tossed in her vision; colours resplendent with musical overtones and rhyme. "Caesurae", so it was to be. So, they all agreed. And that is how it began.*

*Sadly enough, the existing education system in India, does not offer any space to young brains who have passion for computers along with music and literary skills. It straight-jackets one and all to become aspiring engineers, doctors or academics, and effectively kills the poet, the painter, the writer, the musician in the daily grind of strife and struggle for success. Caesurae is meant to offer a relief from this daily grind. As ideas were exchanged, friends who related to this quest for creative space(s) joined in. Slowly, Caesurae, became a common dream for like-minded academics, musicians, painters, film-makers, writers, translators. While some were established in their passion and profession, some weren't, Caesurae, unlocked those secret gates of creativity in them, to bring out the artist( e ) in them. The organization now in two years has crossed the borders of its home country to France, United States,*

Taiwan, Japan. The multi-media E-journal, associated with the organization is the first of its kind to ensemble fine arts and academic discursiveness together. And, as readers tell us, it has a special appeal of its own through its presentation. "Caesurae: Poetics of Cultural Translation" (Issn 2454-9495), is UGC recognized, and we are aiming for Scopus affiliation. However, we do not want our contributors to write in this journal, merely for scoring some points for their career advancement. Just as we look for academics who are interested in serious academic exchanges, we also look for creative thinkers and artistes.

There have been some queries about relating "caesurae" – the phrase, meaning "creative pause" with "cultural translation", by some established academicians. While there would always be hard-core theoreticians, attempting to define "cultural translation" through linguistic translation, or inter-semiotic translation, or anthropologists' ideas on cultural translation, "caesurae" as the word suggests, attempts to bridge the gap between theory and praxis in the academia, through its creative space connecting poetry with prose. It attempts to point out even when it engages in academic and creative discursiveness that there could be no fixed definition about "cultural translation". There is actually no "fixed" text to lead to a Derridean territory of slippery "variables", for the "fixed" text too is riddled with intertextualities. So "cultural translation" is as elusive as civilization itself in the process of its becoming, and is full of eternal variables and contaminations. It has





*anthropological bearings and linguistic and surely inter-semiotic too and is inter-disciplinary. As Professor Fakrul Alam, points out in his essay on the subject in the current issue of the journal (Volume 2: Issue 2), there is a "utopian" dimension to it, as well. With my due respect and reverence for theoreticians, who have spoken much, written much on this area of debate, let's take a creative pause, a deep breath and listen to that melody, or look at that unforgettable painting, once again, which churns our emotions, which offers the enchantment of the heart, or disturbs us to tears, or fills us with a nameless undefinable understanding or the joy of liberation for a moment. Neither the painter, nor the musician, nor the writer know, from where, which strata of the sub-conscious or supra-conscious overflows the divine energy and what mysteries of intertextualities form the "text" of their creation. So long friends, do feel free to write for our newsletter of the caesurae collective, from now on. This is your space too for presenting your views, ideas and experiences. We welcome, academics, musicians, painters, photographers- one and all as Caesurae members, who burn with the hard-gemlike flame of creativity to share their thoughts with us and connect with us, through the organization, through our journal and this newsletter. Let the divinity of creativity and scholarship bless you all!*

*Jayita S.  
Secretary,  
Caesurae Collective Society*

## Report of the First Annual International Conference of the Caesurae Collective

“Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation”

Jointly organized with Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Coimbatore

21 – 23 August 2017



*All the Governing Body members of Caesurae Collective*

The question of ‘culture’ comes up in the context of discussions on translation, whenever translators speak of what is difficult to translate, if not entirely untranslatable, in the course of their translating literary texts. For example, in a recent article published online in *Scroll.in* by Bhargava (2017), that compiles the views of different translators translating from different Indian languages into English, ‘culture’ is said to be the ‘backstory’ that translators find difficult to take across; culture is used as a shorthand for all the wealth and richness of connotations, of all the specificities of the source language (linguistic and otherwise) that do not have easy, or only have unsatisfactory



equivalents in the target language. This is also the sense in which Harish Trivedi (2005) uses the term ‘translating culture’ for the labour carried out by translators – as not one of just linguistic substitution, “but rather a more complex negotiation between two cultures” (no pagination). The understanding of translation here is as a bridge between two cultures, conceptualized for the most part, as static (or at least existing in some pre-given form or state), discrete and self-contained. This continues to be a dominant understanding of the relation between translation and culture.

Even while Trivedi in the same article mentioned above, cautions about the way in which Homi Bhabha and other postmodernists use ‘cultural translation’ metaphorically to describe the state of in-betweenness of the migrant, the aim of the International Conference on “Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation” was to look at how/whether the metaphor of cultural translation could be used to study/understand, not just migrancy, but a wide range of textual transformations and metamorphoses happening across different domains of art and literature, different forms of media, and across various regions – between nations or within. The Conference Note drew our attention to how the term ‘cultural translation’ “is gaining currency to flag different kinds of transformation within a culture, or in cultural encounters where not necessarily just two languages/two texts are involved” (no pagination). The Conference was also meant to look at the efficacy of the concept of ‘cultural translation’ vis-à-vis other concepts available such as ‘inter-semiotic translation’ to understand verbal, visual and multimodal texts and their transformation processes.

The Conference that started off on Monday, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2017 in the majestic Amriteswari Hall of the Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham in Coimbatore with the wonderfully anecdotal Keynote Address (the method was one of getting to a certain consistent theory of culture, translation, cultural translation through these vignettes) by Prof. G.J.V. Prasad from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi set the tone for what was to follow in the forthcoming sessions and days. If there is nothing essential, pre-given, or unchanging about culture, and if it is constantly in flux, then what is taken across in translation? Is translation then a way of constituting cultures, as distinct, discrete entities? If culture does not precede translation, does constituting cultures happen in process, or even after translation? For example, what does it really mean to say translating ‘Tamil culture’, when translating say a Tamil text, when there is little that is so fixed or firm to take across in/through



translation? – The Keynote address provoked such questions. The other important aspect of the Keynote from the point of view of the Conference was that it shook the moorings of discussing translation in the literary realm to a whole host of everyday practices (such as dress culture), and other forms of media.

The Conference had four plenary talks by senior and eminent scholars/translators, a panel discussion by members of the Caesurae Collective and paper presentations by a host of young research scholars and faculty members on the three days. Besides these there was music, poetry and a dance drama based on Sangam period poetry.

The Plenary speaker on the afternoon of the first day was Prof. Fakrul Alam from Dhaka University, where using a corpus of Rabindranath Tagore's translations - his own works from Bangla to English, English to Bangla, other's works from English to Bangla and the letters written in the course of his travel to Indonesia -, the concept of cultural translation across borders and national boundaries was explored; the way in which Tagore envisioned cultural transfer through travel and translation was elucidated in the talk.

There were two plenary speakers on the second day, Prof. Ashok Mohapatra from Sambalpur University and Prof. Murali Sivaramakrishnan, formerly at Pondicherry University. Prof. Mohapatra explored the visual-verbal relation through ekphrasis, the narrating and verbalizing of the visual. Taking the paintings of Edward Hopper, he looked at the way in which the poems inspired by these paintings, and thereby how one medium of art relates to another medium by defining its form and essence. Prof. S. Murali's plenary talk in the afternoon touched upon a wide variety of instances of cultural translation – from transmediation, that is transformations happening across different media forms, to films engendering merchandise, to Raja Ravi Varma paintings shaping the visual aesthetic of early silent cinema. He also looked at the different phases of translations in the Malayalam context.

The plenary speaker on the third day was Prof. Swarnavel Eswaran, from Michigan State University. He looked at film adaptations and remakes as forms of cultural translation. His presentation had three parts, the first where he looked at the adaptation of Shakespeare's play King Lear by Akira Kurosawa; the second part where he looked at the Hindi remakes of the Tamil films



made in the Madras Studios in 1950s and 60s; and the last part where he looked at the B-movies of Tamil and their aesthetics as they remade the Hollywood westerns.

A Panel discussion on Cultural Translation on the morning of the second day saw the panellists enter the discussion from different points. While Dr. Jayita Sengupta, independent researcher, entered the discussion as a practitioner, rendering to musical cadence her own writing, Prof. Vijaykumar, from Osmania University, Hyderabad shared his experiences as a translator from Telugu who has translated among others a 19<sup>th</sup> century play *Kanyashulkam* by Gurzada Appa Rao and the short stories of the contemporary feminist writer, Volga; Prof. Harini Jayaraman looked at the translation of *Ponniyin Selvan*, a Tamil historical novel written by Kalki Krishnamurthy and Dr. Nikhila H. from The EFL University, Hyderabad looked at the novel and film versions (Kannada and Tamil) of a Kannada novella called *Parasangada Gendethimma* by Srikrishna Alanahally; Dr. Tharakeshwar V.B. from The EFL University, Hyderabad with his experience of teaching and researching in Translation Studies for nearly 20 years now, gave an overview of how various forms of textual and media transformations have come within the ambit of study in Translation Studies today.

In all, 44 papers were presented at the Conference by a host of scholars from all over India and other countries in those three days. The paper presenters got an opportunity to not only present their work before eminent scholars, but also a way to think through and take their research forward. The Conference was particularly noteworthy for the way in which senior scholars engaged with the fledgling efforts of those starting out in the field of Translation Studies and Literary Studies. Although there were several good presentations, the presentations that stood out for the novelty of their topic and for their academic rigour were those by Raghavi Ravi, Sweetha Saji and Anu Mary Peter on Graphic Medicine, and the way in which verbo-visual aspects play out in graphic narratives; by Kathyayini on the translations by D.V. Gundappa in the early twentieth century and the paper by Nikita Rai on the Nepali Music industry.

The International Conference on Cultural Translation at Amrita was not only about academic events. An art exhibition was organized on the ground floor of the Auditorium complex, and every evening there was a wonderful fare that kept us entertained. On the first day, there was a Lecture-





Demonstration on Music and Poetry by Dr. R. Murali Rangarajan, from Amrita University, a scientist by profession, and a trained vocalist and part of Melattur Bhagavata Mela Natya Vidya Sangam (Melattur Mali Troupe). Following his Lec-Dem was the poetry Lec-Dem by Rochelle Potkar, an internationally renowned poet from Mumbai. The second day had an even larger fare, first with a host of poets reading out their poems, followed by a flute performance by a faculty member from Amrita University rendering the songs of A.R. Rahman and Ilaiyaraja, musician Supratik Chatterjee's solo Tabla performance, for which he travelled all the way from Hyderabad, a wonderful dance drama performed by the students of Amrita University that brought alive the Sangam period on stage, Rabindrasangeet sung by a senior faculty member of Amrita University accompanied on the violin by Surjo Sengupta and Supratik Chatterjee on the Tabla, and translated into English by Prof. Fakrul Alam. This was followed by a musical rendering by Rochelle Potkar of her own poems, again accompanied by Surjo Sengupta on violin and Supratik Chatterjee on tabla. There was also a very evocative visual collage prepared by the scholars and participants of the Conference.

On the afternoon of the last day, in what turned out to be a fitting Valedictory to the whole event, Vidushi Kala Ramanath, noted violinist of the Mewati Gharana and Rashtriya Kumar Gandharva Sanman awardee in 2008 was in conversation with Dr. R. Murali, a sparkling, conversation full of music and insights into the world of music. On all three days, Surjo Sengupta besides his musical prowess, along with Rahul Dasgupta, took complete charge of visually documenting the event.

For Caesurae Collective, a cultural-academic organization that is less than a year old, to make its presence felt through a packed three-day schedule speaks volumes of the abilities of its members, particularly the Secretary of the Collective, Jayita Sengupta who marshalled together personnel and resources to realize this event. That Caesurae Collective managed to collaborate for its first International Conference with one of the leading private Universities in India, Amrita University for this event, was indeed a first accomplishment. But that, under the able leadership provided by Prof. Harini Jayaraman, Professor and Chair of the Department of English, Amrita University could give us such a rich and rewarding Conference has to be acknowledged and appreciated. Whether in terms of the arrangements at their comfortable guest house or the warmth of their students and research scholars such as Arpana, Devika, Karthika, Keerthana and others, and faculty



members, or the picturesque campus visited by peacocks, Amrita University had indeed ensured that this was not simply yet another academic Conference.

Bhargava, Shashank (2017). “What is untranslatable? Ten Translators from Indian Languages list their Candidates”. <https://scroll.in/article/855625/what-is-untranslatable-ten-translators-from-indian-languages-list-their-candidates>. Date of Access 29/10/2017

Conference Note and Call for Papers. International Conference on “Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation”. [https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cc0cb5\\_cf72fca20c51402c941054bc8025981a.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/cc0cb5_cf72fca20c51402c941054bc8025981a.pdf). Date of Access 29/10/2017

Trivedi, Harish (2005). “Translating Culture Vs. Cultural Translation”. *91<sup>st</sup> Meridian*. Spring 2005. <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/91st/vol4-num1/translating-culture-vs-cultural-translation>. Date of Access 29/10/2017

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## Some Glimpses from the Conference



Image 1. Lighting the Lamp at the Inauguration, the President Prof. T. Vijaykumar, Secretary, Jayita Sengupta, Vice President, Prof. Harini Jayaraman, who was also the Local Organizer at Amrita University and the Dean of Amrita University



Image 2. At the inauguration, the dignitaries on the dias



Image 3. The Keynote Address by Prof. GJV Prasad, JNU, New Delhi



Image 4. First plenary speaker Prof. Fakrul Alam, Dhaka University





Image 5. In the course of the Panel Discussion on Cultural Translation, Dr. Tharakeshwar V.B. and Dr. Nikhila H., both from The EFL University, Hyderabad, Dr. Swarnavel Eswaran, who chaired the Panel, Prof. T. Vijaykumar from Osmania University, Dr. Jayita Sengupta, independent researcher and Prof. Harini Jayaraman from Amrita University



Image 6. The plenary speaker on the second morning, Prof. Ashok Mohapatra from Sambalpur University



Image 7. The second plenary speaker on Day 2 Prof. S. Murali



Image 8. A flautist performs





Image 9. Supratik Chatterjee's solo Tabla performance



Image 10. A scene from the Play performed by the students of Amrita University



Image 11. A Rabindrasangeet performance



Image 12. Rochelle Potkar's poetry with musical accompaniment by Supratik Chatterjee and Surjo Sengupta





Image 14. The fourth plenary on the morning of Day 3 by Dr. Swarnavel Eswaran of Michigan State University



Image 15. Vidushi Kala Ramanath in conversation with Dr. R. Murali at the Valedictory



## PAST EVENTS

2016 July- 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2017





1. 11<sup>th</sup> February 2017 - Caesurae collaborated with “Cinema for a cause”, for a cultural Programme in Kolkata.
2. A Cultural programme of Poetry, Dance, Music in collaboration with Calcutta School of Music, October 2016.
3. Caesurae organized 2 lectures with Rachna Bookstore on Gender by Professor Niladri Chatterjee, in Gangtok, September 2016.
4. Caesurae in collaboration with the Film Studies Department, EFL University, Hyderabad, organized lecture series on Film Studies by Professor S.Shankar, from University of Hawai’i at Manoa, in August 2016.
5. Caesurae collaborated with SILA, for the Dzongu relief fund, in Sikkim, August 2016.
6. A music workshop cum presentation was organized by Caesurae with Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, Kolkata, July 2016.
7. Release of the Caesurae CD, “Megh-balika: A Musical Presentation”, July 2016.

We also organized

8. A Haikun and Haibun workshop, by Rochelle Potkar, in collaboration with English Department, Sikkim University, in May 2016.
9. A violin workshop with Indradeep Ghosh in collaboration with Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, Kolkata, in January 2016
10. A Creative Reading at Bharatiya Bhasha Parishad, in January 2016
11. A kathak workshop with Namrata Mali, in Gangtok, October 2015
12. A Music workshop by Bhabanishankar Dasgupta, in Gangtok, October 2015.
13. A Cultural Programme organized by Caesurae in collaboration with Sikkim Manipal Medical Sciences, in October 2015.

## **FUTURE EVENTS**

Caesurae International Conference, 2018





**CAESURAE COLLECTIVE SOCIETY'S GOVERNING BODY  
RESOLUTION AT THE G.B MEETING HELD ON 21.08.2017, AT  
AMRITA UNIVERSITY, COIMBATORE**

*The following resolutions were adopted in the Caesurae Collective Society's Governing Body Meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> August 2017, at Amrita University, Coimbatore*

1. Resignations by Venkateshwar Ramaswamy as Treasurer, Dr. Sunrit Mullick, Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta and Dr. Ramkumar Mukherjee as Vice President were accepted.
2. Members of the Society's GB are required to have a valid membership.
3. Subscription Fees will be in two categories:
  - Life Membership – Rs 5000/- (15 years)
  - Annual Membership- Rs 500/-(renewable on 1<sup>st</sup> of April)
4. Appointment of new Treasurer and vacancies in GB Body to be filled up.
5. As required by the constitution of the society (7 Office Bearers), two new posts were created:
  - Joint Secretary
  - Assistant Secretary
6. The Society's GB resolved to appoint Ms. Nandini Dutta as the Auditor for the Society and it is further resolved to accept the recommendations of the Auditor.
7. Annual Conference of the Society will be held anytime between the months of August and October.

Sd/-

Prof. T.Vijay Kumar (President)  
Dr. Jayita Sengupta (Secretary)  
Dr. Nikhila H (GB Member)  
Dr. Tharakeshwar VB (GB Member)  
Mr. Surjo Sengupta (GB Member)

**Minutes of the First AGM held on 21.08. 2017 at Amrita University,  
Coimbatore**

1. *Ratification of the Governing Body Resolution in the Governing Body Meeting held on 21.08.2017.*
2. *Professor Harini Jayraman was nominated as the Vice-President of the Society against Dr. Ramkumar Mukherjee's resignation to the post.*





3. *Dr. Nikhila H was nominated as the Joint Secretary against the creation of a new post.*
4. *Mr. Rahul Dasgupta was nominated as the Assistant Secretary against the creation of a new post.*
5. *Mr. Surjo Sengupta was nominated as the Treasurer against Mr. Ramaswamy's resignation*
6. *Two posts vacated against the resignation of Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta and Dr. Sunrit Mullick in the governing body were filled up by Professor Ashok Mohapatra and Ms. Rochelle Potkar.*
7. *The signatories for handling the SBI Bank Account, (37094189163) it was decided would be either Secretary and Treasurer or President and Joint Secretary*

Sd/-

T.Vijay Kumar (President)

Jayita Sengupta (Secretary)

The Newly Elected Executive Body of the Caesurae Collective at the AGM held on 21.08.2017 for the next three years include:

#### OFFICE BEARERS

##### PRESIDENT

T.Vijay Kumar  
Professor of English  
Osmania University  
Hyderabad

##### VICE PRESIDENT

Professor Harini Jayraman  
Professor of English  
Amrita University  
Coimbatore



SECRETARY

Jayita Sengupta  
Professor of English  
Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University  
West Bengal

JOINT SECRETARY

Nikhila H  
Associate Professor of Film Studies  
EFL University, Hyderabad

ASSISTANT SECRETARY

Rahul Dasgupta  
Branch Manager  
SBI, Kharagpur  
West Bengal

TREASURER

Surjo Sengupta  
Director, Wisekart  
Noida,  
Uttar Pradesh

GOVERNING BODY MEMBERS

GJV Prasad  
Professor of English  
Jawaharlal Nehru University  
New Delhi

Ananda Lal  
Professor of English  
Jadavpur University  
Kolkata

Tharakeshwar, V.  
Associate Professor & Head  
Translation Studies  
EFL University  
Hyderabad

Rochelle Potkar  
Poet, Creative Thinker  
Mumbai

Ashok Mohapatra  
Professor of English  
Sambalpur university



## MUSICIANS / ARTISTES AS ASSOCIATE OR REGISTERED CAESURAE MEMBERS

Supratik Chatterjee (percussionist and software Engineer), Hyderabad – Registered member  
Indradeep Ghosh (violinist), California– Registered member  
Sounak Chattopadhyay (Vocalist), Kolkata.  
Anirban Dasgupta (Sarodiya), New York.  
Bhabanishankar Dasgupta (sarodiya), Kolkata  
Kala Ramnath (violinist), USA  
Subhasish Dey, Western Classical violinist, Kolkata  
Anjan Chattopadhyay, sitarist, Kolkata, India  
Michael Braudy, violinist, New York.  
T.M. Hoffman, Indian classical musician on Japanese Koto and Shakuhachi, musicologist, USA & Japan.  
Nishaant Singh, Pakhawaj player, Kalimpong and Kolkata.  
Nanda Kishore Das, violinist, Kolkata  
Snehshree Thapa, vocalist, Darjeeling.

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. We are looking for academic institutions to host our next Annual General Meeting and International Conference in 2018. Those interested please contact us at [mail@caesurae.org](mailto:mail@caesurae.org)
2. Contributions to the next Newsletter in the form of Reports, Reviews, Perspectives, excerpts from the members new publications (2017-2018), should be sent to the above e mail by 30 March 2018.
3. We are planning a volume on the theme of the last conference: Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation. This is also the theme of our Special Issue, in April-May 2018, for the Interventions section of the journal. Those interested to contribute please get in touch with us at [mail@ caesurae.org](mailto:mail@caesurae.org). Deadline: 30 March 2018.

### *The Proposal for* **Interrogating Cultural Translation: Literature and Fine Arts in Translation**

The concept of Cultural Translation has been in vogue for the past few decades both in Translation studies as well as in Post-colonial studies. If one were to trace the emergence of this concept, it goes back to British Social anthropology. Talal Asad (1986) raising the issue of understanding other cultures in Anthropology, writes of it as an act of Translation, and explores the role of cultural difference and power relations in the course of Translation. In that sense, Talal Asad's essay shares



certain common concerns with post-colonial discourse/analysis, which also emerged in the 1980s. But it was not Asad's article which triggered the extensive use of the word Cultural Translation in our academic discourse; it was rather an essay by Homi Bhabha (1994) in which he talks about the subjectivity of postcolonial writers/academics as a translated one. Harish Trivedi (2005) in his essay "Translating Culture Vs. Cultural Translation" expresses dissonance with the term cultural translation as defined by Homi Bhabha and argues against its use in our academic discourse. In spite of this caution, we find the word gaining currency to flag different kinds of transformations within a culture, or in cultural encounters where not necessarily just two languages/two texts are involved.

This issue of the Interventions Section would include some selected presentations at the Caesurae International Conference in 2017 and would invite fresh contributions from scholars working not only in literature but also in different art forms/media (film, fine arts etc.) in which we find the interaction/coexistence of different media/languages. In a way, we are trying to see what happens when the two categories - one that Roman Jakobson (2000 (1959)) termed as 'inter-semiotic translation' and the other, which is in vogue today called 'cultural translation' - are brought together. Would this result in any fruitful forays into the vexed issue of movement of concepts embedded in a culture across cultures and media? We are certain that engaging with such cross-overs would force us to rethink the concept of text, culture and language itself.

We invite not only theoretical reflections on these issues but also empirical and application oriented studies to be presented on various facets of transformations within a cultural form; studies on subjectivity and on the way materiality gets conceptualized (coded) not only in language but also in various art forms; the ability/inability of the term cultural translation to help us to have a conceptual handle on the process of these transformations.

#### Call for papers

We invite abstracts and full papers on the above topic on the following themes:

1. Intercultural cross-overs in Literature, Music, Sculpture, Painting etc.
2. Inter-medial cross-overs of narratives
3. Intralingual and Interlingual movement of narratives
4. Subjectivities at translation zone
5. Cultural Translation
6. Translation of Culture
7. Internal dynamics and external influence in literary institutions
8. Comparative perspectives on literary and fine/performing arts movements
9. Interface between orality, literacy and digital media
10. Art forms during Colonial period and in the context of Globalization
11. Interdisciplinary perspectives on literature, fine arts and performing arts
12. Ethnography and literature
13. Problems of conceptualizing culture
14. Cultural Translation and Postcolonial Narrative



## When the Arcs of a Circle Meet

A Report of the Artistes' Residency, Mumbai, December 2017,  
by  
*\*Somrita Urni Ganguly*



I have been a part of a couple of experiments in the last two months of the year gone by. I was in Scotland in October/ November as part of the Cove Park/ Writers' Centre Norwich Translation Residencies where 12 translators, from Denmark, England, Ireland, India and Scotland, stayed together in a virginal, Edenic landscape, and worked (or wandered off) on their own through the day and discussed literary translation and other difficult things over wine at night. Rochelle Potkar, haibuneer and fictionalist, invited me to be a part of another residency in December, this time in Bombay – the second art experiment that I was fortunate enough to participate in, in 2017.

'Arcs of a Circle' (Arcs) was conceived of as an artistes' residency by Rochelle, in collaboration with the US Consulate, Mumbai, and Nandita Shah, co-director of Akshara Centre, a feminist/ women's rights organization that has been striving for a gender-just society for two decades now. After an open call in July, twelve creative artistes from India were chosen to spend twelve days (from December 7th to 18th, 2017) in Bombay, collaborating on projects that speak about women's empowerment through art.

A painter, three dancers, a stand-up comedian, a Dalit poet who likes to rap, a story-teller, a short-story writer, a documentary film-maker, a visual artist and a media installation artist, and a poet who also translates, came together under the salt smelling Bombay sky to shed their inhibitions and egos and integrate their various art forms to creatively talk about the desperate need of the hour: gender equality.

A workshop at the US Consulate on performance-poetry by Eloise Stevens, poet and Farrago slam champion, set the residency in motion. Dosti House became the site for new dostis, to house and explore fresh badmaash ideas to correct the badmaashi and imbalance in the world.



The artistes from Bangalore, Bombay, Calcutta, Chennai, Delhi, and Thiruvananthapuram performed at various venues in the vibrant melting-pot that Mumbai is, to talk about breaking free from recursive patterns of social injustice, hostility and hatred.

Anjali, Apeksha, Chandramohan, Deepika, Jayita, Kajol, Karthik, Prajakta, Sudipta, Vikram, Vishal and I read poems, danced, told stories, screened documentaries, showed visual installations and paintings,

and regaled people with comedy at Canvas Laugh Club, Essar House, Kitaab Khana, Bhau Daji Lad Museum, Novotel, and Independence Brewing company, to brew into the attending company some social sensitivity. Art and activism are usually considered to exist in their own exclusive, niche echelons, speaking to their select-elect audiences. With Arcs, the idea was to break this fine line of demarcation and show the warm people of Bombay, in particular, but also the country at large, what happens when art meets activism.

Lines cannot be broken, revolutions cannot be birthed, wars cannot be waged and won, and art cannot be created without submitting and surrendering to impulses that are sometimes silenced by the comfortably, conveniently placed voices of reason in every individual. Thus, while we attended workshops during the day (at the West End Hotel on New Marine Lines, where we were staying) by Paresht Tiwari, Lavanya Shanbhogue, Shobhna Kumar, Nandita Shah, Gita Chadha, and Utkarsh Patel, we ensured that our mornings started with crude breakfast jokes, spilling tea and steaming ideas from laughing cups, over plates full of eggs (in different shapes, sizes, makes and preparations), bread, puri, poha, idli, dosa, vada, upma, and sausages: early, healthy, delicious starts to long, healthy, delightful days. Rehearsals through the day that led to the aforementioned performances in the evenings drained us enough so that we made bee-lines outside Leopold Café or Café Mondegar to quench our thirst for stories and fluids. On some other nights we stretched our bodies and imagination out on Marine Drive, near Nariman Point, or Juhu Beach, and let our minds yawn and wander, while the raven waters of the midnight sea kissed our feet. Over bowls of lagan nu stew, dhansak, berry pulao and caramel custard my colleagues became my friends and we brainstormed on collaborations for the finale performance on December 17th. And through all this, we were held together and ably looked after by Rochelle's team of tireless volunteers, led by Madhu, Neha, Dishika, and Anish.

The finale at G5A Black Box was a mosaic of poetry, story-telling, dance, visual presentation and music. The twelve artistes, with the help of the alchemy of art director, Vinay Subramanian, turned their avant-garde work into a nearly three-hour long performance set, attended by dosto and deewanés from Bombay.

When the arcs of a circle meet, art and social activism come together to give birth to a whole. We returned to our cities after the twelve days of intense creative workout, but I know I have left a part of my life in the meandering ways of Mumbai. I know, when I go back to Colaba or Fort in the future, the walls will whisper to me voices of my fellow artistes with whom I had read shayaris under the waxing and waning moon. I know, every time I see injustice at home or the world, the voices of these comrades, with whom I had lived like family in the Arcs of a Circle Artistes' Residency, will scream loud and inspire me to register protest through my art. Through our shared meditations, mirth, and mead we have sparked magic within ourselves that will help us retain faith in the eternal truth that there will be songs when the times are good, and there will be songs when the times are bad, and the songs shall lead to our redemption and salvation.

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She is less officious and more accessible on Facebook @urni.g or Twitter @blessed\_damsel.\*

(\*unless lost in translation)

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## IN MEMORIAM



Caesurae mourns the loss of the eminent musician, Pt. Buddhadev Dasgupta on the 15<sup>th</sup> of January 2018. The Journal in *Volume 1: Issue 2* had recorded a conversation between the maestro's younger son, Shri Anirban Dasgupta and the musicologist Meena Banerjee, where Anirban talks about his sarode lessons from his father and Guru.

Pt. Buddhadev Dasgupta is no more, but he has left behind a legacy with his musical transcreations

from classical based Rabindrasangeet to bandishes on the instrumental music, as his ideations. He has actually created a new genre in Indian classical music, though hailing from the Shahjahanpur gharana himself. Whether it was tantrakari or gayaki ang of playing, he excelled in both holding his listeners spell-bound.



Besides being a musician par excellence and recipient of many national awards, including Padma Bhushan in 2012, he had researched extensively on music and taught at universities, home and abroad. (Please see his website: <http://www.buddhadevdasgupta.com/> for more details). The musician, teacher, scholar that he was, Pt. Dasgupta was also a man of sparkling wit and a sharp sense of humour. As a translator and lover of music I had not so long ago, approached him with my desire to translate his autobiography, *Bamoner Chandrosporsho Abhilash* (“The Moon-dazed Dwarf”- title suggested by Pt. Dasgupta’s senior disciple, Prattyush Banerjee). The two slim volumes are fascinating for his narratological skills, using satire and humour as his tools and for documenting the classical musical ethos of his life-time. The work on translation has been just touched upon, as he fell ill in 2015, December.

Here is an excerpt from the attempted translation, which I hope will give the readers a glimpse of the musician’s personality to some extent. His incisive humour was redeeming and unsparing for one and all, including his own self.

### ***Bamoner Chandrosporsho Abhilash***

(“The Moon-dazed Dwarf”)

#### **Chapter one**

When the parents of this three and half year old had taken him to the music conference, far back in 1937, they had hoped music may to some extent sink into his child mind. The conference was held in a town hall of sorts in the Dinajpur township of undivided Bengal. Sangeet Acharya Gyanendra Prasad Goswami was the star attraction of the conference. A wishful thought! A chance possibility of the maestro’s indelible rendition seeping through the child’s tender ears and planting the seeds of the basic notes, could not be ruled out.

But what actually happened was something very different! The kid suddenly stood up and started yelling. “Stop, will you? Why are you bellowing like that?”

His tender voice was too feeble to catch anybody’s attention for the first time. But the boy was adamant. He mounted his chair and shouted in a doubly stronger pitch: “Didn’t I say stop? Even then you create such a ruckus?”

This time he caught Gyanendra Prasad’s eye. He could soon sense what the kid was up to, and a smile flickered over his lips. But he went on singing. The mother of this child briskly snatched the boy away from the auditorium. Surely an ear-twist and a slap or two had followed soon after.

This was my first encounter with music! And my first introduction to the art. Most musicians trace their lineage for generations in their families. Music was supposedly in their blood. But in my case, there was no such story to brag about.

My grandpa would flare up at the very mention of music. He was a hard-boiled lawyer. And he strongly believed that music-love was the easiest route to hell and damnation. Cannot say how it was, possibly my father developed an ear for music, from my grandma’s family. Leave alone receiving lessons in singing, if my father went to any music recital, he





would be in for some real hard blows. Grandpa would do his best to dispel the poison of music from his body and soul! There was an old china rose plant at the corner of the verandah of our house in Kusthia. My grandpa would pick the innumerable branches of the plant one by one and break them on my father's back!

In later years, I had gone over to our house in Kusthia and seen the china rose plant. I had addressed it with deep veneration. "My Baba could not deter me from taking lessons in music possibly bearing in mind the pain he had borne through you. So, I offer you my respects."

Whatever it is, let me go back to the story of my musical lineage. The next phase of this story took place in the township of Barishal, about one and half years from the incident at the music auditorium. My father was in government service. So, he was constantly on the move. Wherever he went, he had the habit of hunting down the singers and instrumentalists of the place. True to this ritualistic habit, he tracked them down, soon enough in Barishal. So, we often had music recitals in the drawing room of our house. Here my mother developed a sudden desire for learning sitar playing. So, a sitarist, one of Ustad Enayat Khan's disciple or disciple's disciple started frequenting our house. And I recall two brothers, among others, who visited us. Their names will be disclosed later. The elder brother was a bansuri player, and the younger accompanied him on the tabla. Cannot say how much the melody of the bamboo flute actually initiated a love for music in me then. Yet a strong desire of a very different kind began to haunt my mind.

I had pleaded with my mother to buy me a flute in the *rathmela*, one day. As one had to put one's lips to it often to blow into it, my mother on grounds of unhealthiness associated with this act, never got me one. My disappointment intensified to a shriller pitch when I discovered that this "bansuri-player-uncle" possessed not just one, but some twelve or fourteen flutes! He actually had a boxful of them, and I? None whatsoever!

One day I couldn't bear this anymore! I went over to the gentleman and spelled it out. "You have so many flutes, could you spare one for me?"

My mother was deeply embarrassed at my insolent behaviour. Many abuses, insults rained over me then. But the gentleman gave me a bansuri.

"Please *boudi*, don't scold the kid so!" he had said.

I was too young to value the giver and his gift then. The gentleman was none other than Pannalal Ghosh. He later became the renowned bansuri player of the country, with whose talent, bansuri playing reached its greatest heights in the classical music tradition. And his younger brother was the tabla maestro, Sangeetacharya Nikhil Ghosh. Sadly enough, I never saw Pannalalbabu again when I grew up. My parents met him several times after and it seems that he had enquired about me every time. But I never again had the opportunity to pay my respects to him and touch his feet ...

This is just a temptation for those who haven't read the book. If this is just the beginning the reader can guess the richness of the narrative that the autobiography unfolds page after page.

Pt Dasgupta's last public concert was with his son Anirban in USA in 2015. He fell ill soon after. If age and illness had weakened his memory, his musical memory remained in tact till his last breath. Both his sons, - "Gora da" (Bhabanishankar Dasgupta) and Anirban Dasgupta and his senior disciple, Prattyush Banerjee, who is no less than a son along with others who received *talim* from him have now the responsibility to pass on the musical lineage to the younger generations of aspiring and budding musicians. This body of flesh and bones which acts as an instrument of God, for He acts through this frame, is not immortal. But the music which streamed through the same mortal frame is immortal and divine.



*His last concert with Anirban Dasgupta in July 2015, USA.*

May Pt. Dasgupta's soul rest in peace and his music flow on through his sons and disciples to the next generations of torch bearers of the "Bangla-ghar of Classical Music".

*Jayita Sengupta*

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## My Humble Attempt to pen some thoughts about Dadu (Pt. Buddhadeb Dasgupta)

The elderly gentleman had peered into my face and asked, "violin? Not sarode or sitar?"

I remember looking at him with a red eye stubbornly, "Yes, violin, and violin it is! And will you teach me music?"

He had laughed, "But I play sarode. How could I teach you violin?"

“In that case please find Sisirkana Dhar Chaudhury, for me. Take me to her, or bring her to me”, so I had demanded.

He was highly amused and winked at me, “I am no magician, lad, why don’t you learn sarode from me”



I had replied, firmly, “No. It is violin and only violin for me.”

He looked intently at me and demanded,

“Could you Sir, play something for me to hear now?”

Trust a ten-year old’s guts because he is ignorant, ignorant of who this man was, ignorant of the music he only attempted to play.

I played my Mozart followed by raga “Durga” which I tried to render from the bandish, I had then recently learnt, “Sakhi mori, ruma jhuma ...” The “mori” was a big issue, as I did the western fingering tricks I knew but it was far from satisfactory, and the feeling deep down wasn’t a happy feeling at all.

The gentleman had closed his eyes for a moment and then he observed me with keen interest.

I had played all that I could, and tears welled up in my eyes, for the desired music was amiss somewhere, for my fingers didn’t know how to go about producing them.

The gentleman did not say anything. I only felt his intent gaze on my face which somewhat made me uncomfortable. Then he reached for his phone and dialed a number.

By that time, I was feeling so depressed deep down that I might have rested my head on my knees drawing them close together.

But, I didn’t realize that he was actually calling Sishirkana Dhar Chaudhury, in USA for me.



As I listened to their conversation with a sinking heart, the elderly gentleman, was saying, “Sishir di, here’s a young man, only ten years, or so who feels doomed because he can’t find you and learn from you. What do you suppose we do with him? How could we parcel him over to you?”

I didn’t know what this was actually leading to.

My lessons on violin began with Indradeep dada, (Indradeep Ghosh), who is a disciple of Sishirkana Dhar Chaudhury. He was actually summoned by Dadu, via Sishirkana Dhar Chaudhury, to teach me. This meeting was so far back in time, when my *Jethima*, had actually fetched me from home, learning about my regular tantrums from my mother for not finding the “adequate” music-guru for me. She had taken me to Pt. Dasgupta, with the faith that he could resolve my heartache.

Yet, life is indeed strange and ironical. Indradeep dada after a few years, when I was preparing for my class XII exam, and quite sandwiched between painful tuitions and impending Joint Entrance Exams sent me over to Pt. Arun Bhaduri to learn the gayaki ang, for he thought I needed a vocalist, for fine tuning. And he was preparing to go abroad at that time too. After a few months Arun dadu, as I called him wanted me to appear for SRA (Sangeet Research Academy) auditions. So, there I was, after two preliminary auditions faced with the musical giant once again. This time, I wasn’t that heady kid anymore. I was sixteen and I was scared, actually scared, for now I knew who he was! I played my Behag as best I could, and felt other musicians in the room looked pleased enough and there were recommendations by the previous two musicians who took my earlier two auditions, to boost my self-confidence. Yet, when I looked up at Dadu, for that is what I had begun calling him after our first meeting, his gaze was quite distant, and he looked far from pleased. He just looked at me and said, “Well, you haven’t actually learnt the first syllables of music yet! I recommend strict training under me for a year, before we speak further.” Anger, or was it “abhimaan”, don’t know what, raged inside me and I had walked out of the room silently. And then there were the impending exams and pressure of getting into an engineering college. Looking back on these years, I could say that they were some of the most depressing years of my life. My bond with music was put to trial, and then began my life at KIIT. While music continued, in the form of fusion, with my friend Swapnil who received training in vocal music, my *talim* was interrupted. It is only when I came to Kolkata, Gora *Jethu*, (Shri Bhabanishankar Dasgupta) would teach me some *bandishes* composed by Dadu. Indradeep dada was in USA.

In between Prattyush Banerjee, one of Dadu’s senior disciples taught me for some time.

For those who have been close disciples of Dadu, there must be some very fond memories. I can relate to him, far from home that I am, through his music and that he wanted to teach me, just as another musician too, who loved me like my mother wanted to teach me too. Now that I understand how deeply frustrating our Education system is after four years of engineering, I also realize how that messes up our lives, our passions. Dadu was an engineer too, and he used that degree for his





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living for some time before he turned to music completely. How many people these days can risk that to make passion and profession into one?

Rest in peace Dadu. While I settle my career a bit, and pass a few more trials of life, I do wish to be back to learning music again, learning your compositions.

*Surjo Sengupta*