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on

UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS IN OUR TIMES

MARCH 18-20, 2021

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Contact: iaclals.2021conference@gmail.com

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BOOK OF ABSTRACTS

Day 1: Wednesday, 17 March 2021

KEYNOTE ADDRESS: “Fragmented Utopias and Dystopias”

5:30 PM - 7:30 PM, IST

Speaker:

SUMAN GUPTA

Professor of Literature and Cultural History
The Open University, UK

Chair:

HARISH TRIVEDI

Department of English
University of Delhi

Abstract

This presentation will try to flesh out the following argument. In general, utopias have been conceived as ideal systems of social organization and government, however unrealizable they might seem, which build logically upon first principles that enjoy some level of consensus. Dystopias are often imagined or perceived in terms of disillusioning lived experiences within given social and political orders – frequently, dystopias appear as failed utopias. Ideas of both rest predominantly in extending arguments and describing experiences, so elaborative texts are the mainstay for exploring the area. In the main, these appear as texts of political philosophy and literature and are studied as such. Understood thus, utopias and dystopias are constantly produced and contemplated. With those preconceptions, this presentation then suggests that utopias and dystopias are also conceived, arguably more effectively and continuously, in fragmented forms – in the midst of everyday life and political practice. Conceptions of desirable systems, and of disillusionment predicated on idealistic expectations, are constantly at play, but these are not grounded in elaborative texts and therefore apt to be overlooked in studies of utopias and dystopias. Arguably, however, these are grounded in and can be analysed through texts. The latter part of the presentation will consider some of the sources that could inform such a broader understanding of the area.

Bio-Note of Speaker

Suman Gupta is Professor of Literature and Cultural History at The Open University. He has coordinated several international collaborative projects with partners in China, India, Iran, Nigeria, Morocco, South Africa, Bulgaria, Romania, and the USA. He has held visiting positions at Wolfson College, University of Oxford, UK; CRASSH, University of Cambridge, UK; Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas at Austin, USA; Institute of World Literature, Peking University, China; English Department, University of Delhi, India; State University of

Campinas, Brazil. His recent books include: *The Theory and Reality of Democracy: A Case Study in Iraq* (London and New York: Continuum, 2006); *Social Constructionist Identity Politics and Literary Studies* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2007); *Globalization and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009); *Re-Reading Harry Potter, Second Edition* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *Imagining Iraq: English Literature and the Invasion of Iraq* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011); *Contemporary Literature: The Basics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). His most recent books include: *Digital India and the Poor: Policy, Technology and Society* (Routledge 2020); co-authored with Peter Tu, *What is Artificial Intelligence?: Conversation between an AI Engineer and a Humanities Researcher* (World Scientific 2020); and with 8 co-authors, *Social Analysis and the Covid-19 Crisis: A Collective Journal* (Routledge 2020).

Bio-note of Chair

Harish Trivedi was Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Delhi. He is an eminent international scholar of post-colonialism and translation studies. He served as the chairperson of IACLALS from 2005 to 2014, and has contributed immensely to the organization. He has been a part of several academic organizations of international repute, including CLAI. Professor Trivedi was Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago and the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. He has also delivered lectures at various prestigious universities such as the University of California at Berkeley, the University of Georgia at Athens, the University of Oklahoma, the University of Alberta at Edmonton, Murdoch University, Curtin University, the University of Melbourne, University of Wollongong, University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, Ghent University and the University of Palermo. He has authored several books, book chapters, journal articles, essays and encyclopaedia articles, popular articles and book reviews. Some of his representative publications are *Interdisciplinary Alter-natives in Comparative Literature*, *The Nation across the World: Postcolonial Literary Representations*, *Literature and Nation: Britain and India 1800-1990*, *Post-Colonial Translation: Theory and Practice*, *Colonial Transactions: English Literature and India*, and *Interrogating Post-colonialism: Theory, Text and Context*.

Day 2: Thursday, 18 March 2021

SESSION 1: THE SPECTRE OF POST- AND TRANS-HUMANISM

9:10 AM - 11:00 AM, IST

Chair: Sachin C. Ketkar

Bio-Note of Chair

Sachin C. Ketkar is a bilingual writer, translator, editor, blogger and researcher based in Baroda, Gujarat. His collections of Marathi poetry are *Jarasandhachya Blogvarche Kahi Ansh* (2010) and *Bhintishivaicya Khidkitun Dokavtana*, (2004). His poems have been translated into Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam and Telugu. *Changlya Kavitevarchi Statutory Warning: Samkaleen Marathi Kavita, Jagatikikaran ani Bhashantar* (Sept 2016) is a collection of Marathi articles on contemporary Marathi poetry, globalization and translation. His books in English include *Skin, Spam and Other Fake Encounters: Selected Marathi Poems in translation*, (2011), *(Trans) Migrating Words: Refractions on Indian Translation Studies*

(2010) and *A Dirge for the Dead Dog and Other Incantations* (2003). He has extensively translated present-day Marathi poetry, most of which is collected in the anthology *Live Update: An Anthology of Recent Marathi Poetry*, 2005 edited by him. He won ‘Indian Literature Poetry Translation Prize’, given by Indian Literature Journal, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi for translation of modern Gujarati poetry in 2000. He has translated fiction by Jorge Luis Borges, Ted Hughes and Adam Thopre into Marathi. He works as Professor in English, Faculty of Arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara. Currently, he is working on *A Critical History of Marathi Literature*.

Manish Solanki, “Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*: Science Fiction and Speculative Discourse”

Abstract

The paper proposes to read Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel *Never Let Me Go* (2005) as a representative of science fiction. The attempt is made to read the novel as employing the generic mode of science fiction for the purpose of offering speculative discourse on the issue of ‘what it means to be human in the era of unprecedented technological invention. Ishiguro envisions a human society where human cloning has become a reality where clones are ‘harvested’ for the purpose of organ donations for their human counterparts. The story of the novel provides the occasion to the author to play upon this dichotomy of humans/non-humans to analyse the fate of humans in such an advanced society and the potential of the scientifically cloned non-humans. Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* is related to its literary predecessors of science fiction texts like Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World* (1932) and Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985). Huxley takes a speculative look at the issue of scientific cloning and the social repercussions of such a eugenics programme in *Brave New World*, whereas Atwood examines the fate of a woman in a world where biological reproduction is completely monitored by a totalitarian state. Similarly Kazuo Ishiguro’s novel depicts the growing up of three genetically engineered clones in the fictional boarding school of Hailsham who are ‘harvested’ as future organ donors for the humans. The novel problematises the binary opposition of humans/clones (non-humans) by imagining a scenario where the supposedly non-human clones end up evincing the human traits and emotions, while the very project of ‘harvesting’ clones for the benefits of humans casts a shadow on the very human-ity of the so-called humans. The paper seeks to contextualise this novel as an example of Ishiguro’s speculative fiction which creates ample space within its discursive realm to play out the ethical quandaries raised by the possibility of artificial biological life in human society.

Bio-Note

Manish Solanki is an Assistant Professor at Department of English, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar (Gujarat). He has done his doctoral research on Postcolonial Indian English Fiction of the post-1970s. His areas of interest include Contemporary Indian English Literature, Arabic and Middle Eastern Literature, Postcolonial Theory, Gender Studies and Cinematic Adaptations of Literatures.

Monica Zutshi, “Through a Mirror Darkly: Dystopia as Contemporary Critique of the Economies of Power in Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*”

Abstract

Kazuo Ishiguro's 2005 novel *Never Let Me Go* exemplifies the "[B]endiness of terminology, literary gene-swapping, and inter-genre visiting has been going on in the SF world". (Atwood, "Road to Utopia") Told from the perspective of the 34-year-old clone Kathy who looks back on her life as she readies for her first donation, the human aspect of the clones is emphasized. Nevertheless, despite having feelings and talents their existential purpose is to serve as their "originals" as organ donors is firmly established. Though the tale suggests a "technical transformation" (Raymond Williams, "Utopia and Science Fiction") the first person narrative conspicuously avoids all talk of the scientific progress that makes this reality possible. Furthermore, by setting this novel in England in the 1990s, Ishiguro posits a reality that questions the very bases of a possible utopia, even as it emphasizes its "human" cost.

While critics have examined ideas of dystopia and posthumanism in the novel, its potential for questioning the theoretical categories of the utopic has not been explored fully. Must the concept of the utopia either create or underscore hierarchies necessary to the formulation of the materialities of the utopic? Through my paper, I would like to examine how this novel may be read as an attempt to reformulate theoretical conceptions of the utopia, to challenge simplistic notions of the binaries of the utopic/ dystopic, and in doing so contest current conceptualizations of larger structures and economies of power in a deeply inequitable world.

Bio-Note

Monica Zutshi is Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Kalindi College, University of Delhi. Her research interests include Postcolonial Studies, Trauma Literature, Gender Studies and ELT.

Indrani Das Gupta, "Reading Memory and Charting the Horizons of Possibility in Dystopian World of Priya Sarukkai Chabria's Novel *Clone*"

Abstract

Borne out of deep-seated inequalities and socio-political divide typical of our contemporary historical imagination, dystopia's spatio-temporal imaginary is actually a dialogue, an ongoing conversation of an alternative space that folds back into the consciousness of our present. The knowledge of dystopia augmenting our "lived experiences" is disconcerting, and an awareness of a monstrosity that marks our historical present. Yet, this dystopic spectacle of nightmarish proportions contains the gateway to the horizon of possibilities. Michael D. Gordin, Helen Tilley and Gyan Prakash asserted that every utopia contains within itself its "implied dystopias" (2). This paper at once seeks to unpack this assertion in its theorization of the possibilities inherent in this dialectical relationship between utopia and dystopia. This space of contestation and critical opposition that secures in a dystopic imagination is explored through the contemplation of memory as represented in Priya Sarukkai Chabria's novel, *Clone* (2019). Ewan Kirkland and Aybige Yilmaz claim that focus on memory has emerged as a primary concern in speculative narratives. The digitalized world has not only expanded our memory but also, rendered it "increasingly removable, retrievable, and storable, digital" (Kirkland and Yilmaz 319). It is in this highly volatile and shifting domains of memory that this paper seeks to uncover the horizons of possibility within a dystopic imaginary of "Global Community" built upon the criterion where human life is understood by its utilitarian potentiality. The paper in its reading of Chabria's novel attempts to engage with a world altogether transformed by scientific breakthroughs and inhabited by clones of persons who all function as no more than

archival knowledge. In this sterile urban landscape, memory emerges as the flicker of light to redesign our human future, a portal to break through the prison of global capitalistic networks.

Bio-Note

Indrani Das Gupta is presently working as Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Maharaja Agrasen College, University of Delhi. Currently pursuing her Ph.D. from Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia in the area of Indian Science Fiction, she is engaged in the examination of the interface of science fictionality, paradigms of nation-state inflected with postmodernist and postcolonialist approaches, and the social variables that constitute the ontological human existence. She has published prolifically in international journals and books.

Shrutarsi Das, “Becoming Animals in Post-Ethical Utopia: Resistant Animals and the City in Nabarun Bhattacharya’s *Lubdhak*”

Abstract

Post-Ethical hierarchized urban utopias are the sad realities of our postcolonial times where anthropocentric biocontrol remains coexistent with fear and brutal sovereign extermination, incarceration of non-human animal lives, elimination in the name of vermin, pests, health hazards for the sake of perfect order and welfare. One of the most provocative novels of Nabarun Bhattacharya-‘*Lubdhak*’ engages with the questions of animal suffering and resistance in the exclusive neo-colonial urban space of Calcutta through a bleak magic realist narrative where the bodies of dogs are acted upon, mutilated, disfigured and are left to rot at the margins for the sake of a sanitized urban utopia which in turn becomes a veritable dystopic death camp, a necropolis for the dogs, the inferior life forms. However, the dogs are not mere mute survivors in the novel. They actualize their agency, their will to resist through a strange act of exodus guided by historical, mythical and nebulous creatures subverting the anthropocentric control regimes.

In this paper I intend to engage with the formative structures of anthropocentric, urban, exclusionary space of Calcutta and Nabarun’s idea of politics of non-human animals as urban outliers, dogs particularly in this novel and their subversion of urban space of Calcutta making the intended, sanitized utopia an absolute impossibility. Remaining indebted to Deleuzian theoretical paradigm the paper will also tease out the potential of the minoritarian positionality of the dogs and the discourse of ‘becoming, from ‘being’ animals and the logic of dystopic annihilation as code resistance to the illusory post-ethical utopias of our times in Nabarun’s novel.

Bio-Note

Shrutarsi Das is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Netaji Nagar College affiliated to Calcutta University. He was previously associated with the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences IIT KGP and CSSS Cal as a research scholar. His research interests include Postcolonial and World Literatures, Urban Studies and Cultural Studies.

SESSION 2: ECOCIDE VERSUS ECOTOPIA

11:00 AM - 12:30 PM, IST

Chair: Mohd. Asim Siddiqui

Bio-note of Chair

Mohammad Asim Siddiqui is Professor of English at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India. He worked on American novelist Mark Twain for his doctoral thesis. He is very passionate about his teaching and loves to interact with his students in and outside the classroom. He also lectures regularly in Refresher and Orientation Courses for University and College teachers. His areas of interests and publications include Literary Theory, 19th and 20th Century English and American Fiction, South Asian Literature, Film Studies and Research Methods in the Humanities. His most recent book is a monograph on Shahryar (2021), published by Sahitya Akademi in the Makers of Indian Literature Series. He was a Fulbright Fellow at New York University in 2007. Mohammad Asim Siddiqui regularly contributes research articles and book reviews to journals and books. He has been writing prolifically on arts and culture for different newspapers, magazines and news portals. They include The Guardian, the Hindu, Hindustan Times, The Statesman, Rediff.com, Scroll.in, NDTV, Frontline, India Today Magazine, The Book Review, Biblio and many others.

Mohua Ahiri, “The Contesting Claims for the Disappearing Land in Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*”

Abstract

One of the unique features of the novel *The Hungry Tide* by Amitav Ghosh is a vivid depiction of the world’s one of the largest archipelago, the Sunderban. Interestingly, this is a place that is under the threat of extinction because of the climate change. Along with the story of a set of characters whose lives are part of this archipelago, Ghosh lays bare the intricate conflict between this perishable land and the human race. In this paper I would like to focus on the imminent fear of total annihilation of a habitat and its species at one level while at another level the contesting claims for land among not only nature and man but also between the powerful and the impoverished. This paper will try to understand how Ghosh has navigated this fear of existence among the dispossessed and those species whose land has been encroached and hence become endangered.

Bio-Note

Mohua Ahiri is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English in Adamas University, Barasat, West Bengal. His research areas are Partition literature, Indian writing in English, Migration literature and Environmental Humanities.

Pushpa R. Menon, “Eco(dys)topia in the Sundarbans Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*, a case in point”

Abstract

The best narratives of Amitav Ghosh employ multiple storytelling techniques and encompass a variety of themes like historicism, multiculturalism, migration, displacement, gender consciousness and climate change. His novels broaden the spectrum of human experiences from struggle to survival. Ghosh is internationally acclaimed as a social anthropologist, novelist and an eco-critic. He is best known for his work in English fiction and is the recipient of the Jnanpith Award. The Bengali culture that he was born into and has imbibed is reflected in the use of folklore and locales, especially in novels like *The Hungry Tide* and *Gun Island*. Ghosh is acutely concerned about the indiscriminate destruction of nature and the reckless and ruthless abuse of the 'sacred feminine'. With his deft use of folklore, he is able to convince and statistically prove that nature, with its infinite feminine power, will retaliate if treated improperly. He prophesizes a state of dystopia where human beings will be utterly alone, subjugated and devastated. *The Hungry Tide*, set in the Sundarbans, is a work of fiction on climate change. Sundarbans is desolate and mysterious. Tigers, dolphins, crocodiles abound the place, and it is home for mangrove forests, lunar rainbows and sweeping tides. Through the Sundarbans landscape, the author is able to address the large-scale effects of climate change and migration making them tangible and conceivable. The plot moves from the local to the regional to the global. Ghosh's fictional narrative turns into a bizarre contemporary reality reflecting the pandemic driven society where families and nations have been jolted out of routine complacency. This article will focus on the process of industrialisation and globalisation and its impact on the pristine ecotopic landscape of the Sundarbans rich in myth and folklore and vice versa.

Bio-Note

Pushpa R. Menon is a Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Humanities, IGNOU. She is also The Principal of VSSC Central School, Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre, Trivandrum, India.

Neenu Kumar, "Ecological Utopia and the World of Future in *Ecotopia* and *The Oryx and the Crake*"

Abstract

Considering the deterioration of the environment and climate change as a result of human activities, the principles of sustainable development are becoming highly important. This concept includes aspects of social policy, economics and ecology. The concept of sustainable development envisages ensuring quality living conditions for people and minimizing the negative impact on the environment to preserve and improve the environment in the future. Creating a society that ensures social and economic equality of citizens is an integral attribute of utopian concepts. As of today, there are a significant number of different types of utopian consciousness, the youngest of which is considered to be ecological. For their part, works that contain descriptions of ideal states, where everyone lives in appropriate and equal conditions and, at the same time, pays considerable attention to ecology and the state of nature are called ecotopias. Ecotopia is an ecologically ideal region or form of society, generally viewed as imaginary. One of the well-known ecological utopias which was influential on the counterculture and the green movement in the 1970s and thereafter, is the Ecotopian society, described in the book Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. *The Oryx and the Crake* provides an alternative utopian perspective on what is generally considered to be a dystopian text. By

reading this text ‘against the grain,’ we are able to confront and analyse the central beliefs, assertions and anxieties it vocalises regarding the future of humanity, nature and technology.

Bio-Note

Neenu Kumar works as Associate Professor of English at Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi. She has co-edited a book *Prawasi Sahitya Prasang*. She has presented several papers at International and National Conferences. She has published many articles in books and journals. She is also a creative writer and has published many poems and short stories in books.

Numana Ibrahim Bhat, “Ecotopia – The Modern Prophecy: Reflections on Select Environmental Narratives”

Abstract

Environmental degradation implicates the whole planet without prejudice. As the world is undergoing a major environmental shift, the human element needs a moral recalibration to better familiarise ourselves with its consequences. Corresponding to this dangerous ecological movement, imaginary rhythms are following suit as the narratives which capture this change are finding a formidable space in the collective social consciousness. In light of the ecological disharmony of the Anthropocene era, I argue, that the tragic trope of ancient Greek tragedy can be augmented to implicate the human species. Moreover, ecotopian narratives both dystopian and utopian not only reflect the current indifferent human attitude towards the environment but are prophetic in their visions of the future. Dystopia opens our imagination as a species to the consequences of our excessive actions whereas utopia enables us to envision an alternate way forward towards sustainability. Therefore, ecotopia paves the way for ecological action moderated via the medium of imagination by preparing the ideological and social ground for the participation of individual stakeholders. The paper therefore aims to establish a connection between the pattern Greek tragedy with the human element of the current ecological crises. It is directed towards identifying the prophetic visions of select novels, short stories and documentaries which inform our understanding of the planetary systems at present. It wishes to highlight the binaries of utopic/dystopic thought where what is dystopia for one species might be utopia for another. Additionally, it wishes to characterise what Arne Leonard calls “the persuasive role” of these narratives for ideological reformation on a large scale. Some of the texts that have been selected for this study include *Clade* by James Bradley, *Greenwood* by Michael Christie, “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” by Ursula Le Guin, “He-y Come On Ou-t!” by Shinichi Hoshi, *An Inconvenient Truth* by Davis Guggenheim, *2040* by Damon Gameau.

Bio-Note

Numana Ibrahim Bhat is a Ph.D. scholar presently enrolled at the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi. She has received her bachelor’s degree in Philosophy, Psychology and English Literature from the University of Jammu and her master’s degree in English Language and Literature from Central University of Kashmir. Her current research interests include Ecocritical Theory, Nature Writing and Popular Culture.

SESSION 3: UTOPIAS AND ANTI-UTOPIAS

2:25 PM - 4:15 PM, IST

Chair: Vibha S. Chauhan

Bio-Note of Chair

Vibha S. Chauhan is Principal, Kirori Mal College, University of Delhi. A writer, editor and translator, Chauhan has to her credit more than eight books covering diverse areas like music, cultures and literary traditions. Chauhan is proficient in English, Hindi and Bhojpuri and has published widely in these languages. Deeply interested in the evolution, impact and dissemination of popular cultures, Chauhan's major research interest has been non-urban cultures and literatures.

Kritika Chettri, "Ernst Bloch and the Utopias of Conflict: A reading of the utopias from the Nepalese Civil War"

Abstract

In this paper, I will use Ernst Bloch's notion of utopia as an entry point to examine the novels produced by the conflict in Nepal between the Maoists and the state- the Nepalese civil war (1996-2006). Bloch rejects fictionalized utopias as depicted in Thomas More's *Utopia*, which desires for a manifestation of a complete and totalized vision of the world. Instead, he brings forth the idea of a utopic spirit that is the struggle of an "inner world" to find manifestation in the world outside, thereby creating not complete worlds, but a "world in process." If the idea of conflict is central to Bloch's notion of utopia, then it becomes a useful tool for reading the representation of the conflict in Nepal, in popular works like Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Café* (2004) and Yug Pathak's *Urgen ko Ghoda* (2009). These novels provide resolutions to the conflict in the present, by invoking past utopias- colonial Shangri-La in case of Wagle and glorious ethnic past before Hinduization of Nepal, in case of Pathak. What does it mean for these texts to glorify past utopias that are problematic in themselves, when a Maoist future looms large over Nepal? Do the texts themselves embody the propagated future neatly, or do they reveal a conflict integral to the foundation of Nepal into a Hindu kingdom, which in turn hints at a rejection of all totalities? Caught between the past and future, this paper will argue that the formulation of utopias as a state of conflict, demands a sharper focus on the present, asking what it means to inhabit the present everyday world of the conflict.

Bio-Note

Kritika Chettri works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, University of North Bengal. She has completed her B.A., M.A., M.Phil. in English Literature from the Department of English, University of Delhi. Her M.Phil. dissertation was titled, *Utopias and their Conflicts: A Literary Study of the Maoist Movement from Nepal*. Her research interests lie in literary historiography, South Asian fiction, Himalayan Studies, Translation Studies. She has presented on these topics at various conferences in India and abroad.

Muhammed Afzal P., “Of “Failed” Heroes and ‘Refusal to be Realistic’: Melancholy and Utopia in Leftwing Culture in the 1970s”

Abstract

Primarily through a discussion of two Malayalam texts from “the long 1970s”—the film *Kabani Nadi Chuvannappol* (When the River Kabani Turned Red, dir. P.A. Backer, 1975) and the screenplay of the film *Iniyum Marichittillatha Nammal* (We Who Aren’t as Yet Dead, dir. Ravindran, 1980)—this paper offers an analysis of how the melancholic vision of left-wing cultural productions in the 1970s sustained a utopian imagination. While popular writings on the 1970s see the period as one that of “misguided adventurism”, and defeat, academic writings on the 1970s treat the nostalgia for the 1970s as a paralyzing, backward looking attitude. Drawing on contemporary scholarship on nostalgia, melancholy, and utopia, this paper looks back at the 1970s from a new perspective where melancholia is not a paralyzing attitude, but a stance which offers a critical vision of the past as well as the future. This paper argues that the “failed heroes” in left-wing cultural production in the 1970s refused to “resign themselves to ... the inevitable and ‘natural’ character of the most monstrous inequalities” (Badiou 2010). This “refusal to be realistic” has been very central to the sustaining of a utopian vision and this acquires more significance in the context of the perceived reactivation of “communist desire” in the contemporary times. The paper thus contributes to a rethinking of concepts such as “nostalgia”, “melancholy”, and “utopia” and their political valence.

Bio-Note

P. Muhammed Afzal teaches Cultural Studies in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Birla Institute of Science and Technology, Pilani, Rajasthan. He has a Ph.D. in Cultural Studies from the English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. He is currently working on a project titled “Nostalgia, Melancholy and Communist Desire: Left-wing Culture in Kerala”. His areas of research interests include Cultural Studies, Film Studies, Literary and Cultural Theory, Marxism, and Language Politics.

Kinshuk Majumdar, “Morichjhapi Massacre Revisited: Utopia turned into Dystopia in *The Hungry Tide*”

Abstract

Amitav Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide* focuses on Morichjhapi massacre of 1979. The erstwhile CPI (M) Government passed a law asking the illegal settlers to leave. The problem of migrants in Morichjhapi started a few years after independence. A large group of workers consisting of fishermen, weavers, tanners settled from rural West Bengal and Bangladesh. B.C. Roy, the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, allowed them to stay there. These poor people considered this place to be safe and thought that they would continue their stay for generations in a similar manner. For them, it was their ‘utopia’ a haven, an idyllic place undisturbed by apparent political turmoil affecting other areas of the state.

The situation took an ugly turn when the CPI (M) Government came to power in 1979 and declared the area reserved for tigers. The made no alternative arrangements for the original inhabitants to stay. Naturally, some common people protested and refused to leave. The CPI (M) Government mercilessly killed them and there was nobody to take up their cause. The Central Government led by Morarji Desai remained indifferent. The dream of utopia turned

into a nightmare. The present paper would attack the erstwhile CPI (M) Government as represented by Amitav Ghosh in *The Hungry Tide*.

Bio-Note

Kinshuk Majumdar is an Assistant Professor at Shyam Lal College in the English Department. He was awarded Ph.D. on “Subject to Rule: The Individual and the State in Amitav Ghosh’s Writings” under Prof. Shyamala A. Narayan in 2012 from Jamia Millia Islamia. He has eight publications to his credit including his thesis which is entitled *Amitav Ghosh: Champion of Human Rights* by Prestige Publications in 2014.

Kriti Kuthiala Kalia, “The Dystopic Capitalist ‘Dreamscape’ in Yan Lianke’s *The Day the Sun Died*”

Abstract

Yan Lianke’s *The Day the Sun Died* is a dystopic masterpiece that serves to be a scathing critique of the globalized obsession with commercial exploitation and the inevitable social decay that follows. The novel is a dark portrayal of a dreadful and unprecedented night of sleepwalking/dream-walking that “blotted out the sky and blanketed the earth, leaving everything in a state of chaos” in a Chinese village called Gaotian. The paper shall seek to explore how the metaphor of ‘the great somnambulism’ is representative of the dystopic abyss that the contemporary and modern capitalist economies are driving their citizens, the apparently dreary and confounded dream-walkers, into. In the words of the translator Carlos Rojas, the novel serves as a “critique of Chinese president Xi Jinping’s slogan of the Chinese dream.” The paper shall try to place this problematic and universal promise of a revitalized nation in a globalized context and expound how Gaotian becomes an appalling caricature of government and corporate franchises that are gradually siphoning the life out of the common people – a precarious and volatile reality that we are becoming dangerously complacent about and complicit in.

The paper shall also examine how this unending event of unexpected somnambulism, which is eerily reminiscent of some kind of a zombie apocalypse where people are unable to control their deepest and darkest desires from becoming their inescapable realities in a world beset with violence, chaos and madness, becomes symbolic of the repercussions of an alienating system of accelerated modernization and technological innovation on the human psyche. As we gradually descend into the chasm of a petrifyingly grim socio-political system that thrives on extreme individualism and apathy, our subjective conscience is as much at risk as our civic responsibility.

Bio-Note

Kriti Kuthiala Kalia is an Assistant Professor of English in the Post Graduate Department of English at D.A.V. College, Chandigarh. Her areas of interest are Mythology, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Cultural Studies.

Subhadeep Ray, “Utopia as the Advent of the New: Peasant Movement and Manik Bandyopadhyay’s *Conjugal Relations*”

Abstract

George Orwell comments in an article on the Hungarian Communist, turned a crusader against the Stalinist party, Arthur Koestler: “It is the dream of a just society which seems to haunt the human imagination ineradicably and in all ages, whether it is called the Kingdom of Heaven or the classless society, or whether it is thought of as a Golden Age which once existed in the past and from which we have degenerated” (1944). Koestler’s dystopian depiction of an autocratic Europe in “Darkness at Noon”, 1940, helped to shape Orwell’s imagination. Despite his antipathy to the Post-Wars Socialist state, Orwell, however, cannot do away with the spectre of human justice driving people’s liberation movement towards a future of social equality.

In the light of this observation, the present paper re-reads Manik Bandyopadhyay’s “*Sāthi*”, in translation “Conjugal Relations”, a short-story that tells of a couple who, led by the age-old proletarian utopia of taking possession of the harvest, break out of the patriarchal family relations to become each other’s ‘comrade’ during the anti-colonial peasant movement in Bengal of 1940s, called the *Tebhaga*. Created on the borderline of revolutionary romanticism and collective experience, Manik’s tale is also meant to get rid of the late colonial socio-ideological apocalypse suffered mainly by the middle class, with a futuristic vision which perhaps remains relevant in the recent struggle against the combined global force of pandemic and corporate capitalism.

Bio-Note

Subhadeep Ray is Associate Professor of English, Bidhan Chandra College, Kazi Nazrul University, West Bengal, works on English and Bengali modernism. His articles include “Fighting against multiple bodies! Translating ‘Nāri o Nāgini’ and ‘Tamoshā’ by Tarashankar Bandyopadhyay and ‘Bonjhi Gunjomālā’ by Jagadish Gupta” in *Disability in Translation: The Indian Experience*, ed. Someshwar Sati and G.J.V. Prasad (Routledge, 2020). His essays have been published by Columbia UP Joseph Conrad Project.

SESSION 4: UTOPIAS OF INDIAN MODERNITIES

4:15 PM - 6:20 PM, IST

Chair: Subhendu Mund

Bio-Note of Chair

Subhendu Mund is a well-known Odia poet, critic, lyricist, translator and lexicographer. He is also a scholar in the areas of Indian English literature and Odia literature and culture studies. He has published thirty-nine books in Odia, English and Kannada and seventy-two research papers including one in French translation. He has lectured and read his poems at several events organised by distinguished institutions in India and abroad. He has chaired/presented research papers at a number of national/international seminars/ colloquiums/conferences. Mund has been the Chief Editor of the *Indian Journal of World Literature and Culture*, and has been associated with several journals and periodicals. He was the Vice-President of the Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (2008-20), as well as Member-cum-Jury of the Sarala Award Committee (2017-20), Member of the Odia Advisory Board of Sahitya Akademi (2008-13). He has also acted as jury for several national/international academic and literary awards and prizes.

**Sachin C. Ketkar, “Precolonial Vernacular Utopia and the Muddle of ‘Early Modernity’:
A study of *Anandwanbhuwan*”**

Abstract

Scholars like Philip E. Wegner (2002) have indicated that the surge of interest in utopia in recent decades is because of recognition of deep relationship between utopia and the experience of modernity. While most of the historical accounts of modernity are Eurocentric, there is an increasing tendency among social and cultural historians like John Richards, Sheldon Pollock and Sanjay Subrahmanyam to question Eurocentric narrative of modernity in South Asia by proposing the term ‘early modernity’ to highlight continuities between the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries like the global interconnectedness, the rise of the large stable states and the increasing population and their parallels in the west. However, Dipesh Chakrabarty whose own intellectual project emphasizes the importance of ‘provincializing Europe’ in our historical research ironically has expressed scepticism towards the term (2011). He points out that the notion of modernity must be clearly articulated in thinking about early modernity, and insists upon making a distinction between the processes of modernization (the processes of building institutions) and modernity (reflexive, ideological discourses of political philosophy) and points out that most of the discussions of early modernity have emphasized the former and have not engaged sufficiently with the latter.

Nevertheless, reflexive discourses on statecraft and political philosophy did exist in Marathi in the seventeenth and eighteenth century like the treatise on statecraft titled *Adnya Patra* (early eighteenth century) apart from popularization of the term ‘*rajkarana*’ by the renowned Marathi *santa* Swami Ramdas (1608-1681). Obviously, these discourses were significantly different from their western counterparts. Historians like Prachi Deshpande has suggested that Ramdas recognized *rajakarana* as political in the wider, pragmatic sense and to that end, part of *niti* discourse and hence, it is more fruitful to explore how the ideas of *rajakaranawere* adapted within Maratha state practices as they evolved over the eighteenth century. The current paper examines a Marathi poem ‘Anandwanbhuwan’ (City in the Forest of Bliss) attributed to Swami Ramdas who is believed to have composed this poem after a dream at Kashi (van bhuwan) of ‘Ramrajya’-like order being reinstated on the earth, probably due to coronation of King Shivaji after the defeat of the Mlechhas like Aurangzebin the light of above mentioned deliberations.

Bio-Note

Sachin C. Ketkar is a bilingual writer, translator, editor, blogger and researcher. He has translated fiction by Jorge Luis Borges, Ted Hughes and Adam Thopre into Marathi. He works as Professor in English, Faculty of Arts, The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara. Currently, he is working on *A Critical History of Marathi Literature*.

Asmat Jahan, “The Utopian Impulse of the Modern Urdu Poets”

Abstract

The radical manifesto of the PWA released in 1936 and the famous presidential address of Premchand at the first PWA conference in Lucknow in the same year are two important historical undertakings marking the arrival of modernity, which have been very well-

documented in the literary mappings of the sub-continent. Both the historical events gave a clarion call for change in the established literary paradigm which was believed to be remote from life and they also registered a resistance to a Euro-centric model of modernity that Imperialism was trying to impose upon the colonies. The new progressive aesthetics was inspired by an emancipatory ideal of a utopian society which respected heterogeneity and liberal flow of ideas. This new utopian impulse was self-reflexive and self-critical and advocated a clear departure from a more regressive and unilateral model of literary discourse based on a blind conformity to meaningless beliefs and conventions. Though many contemporary writers across cultures and languages were inspired by the progressive template that expresses a utopian impulse for change, this utopian impulse found a more vociferous expression in the Urdu writing in the first half of the twentieth century. The proposed paper aims at a critical inquiry into progressive aesthetics of modern Urdu poets whose verses build a poetic utopia of a world which espouses the ideal of emancipation. The paper will problematise the notion of progress and modernity and the poetic vision of a utopian world with its emancipatory idealism. The paper proposes to offer a critique of the Utopian poetic vision of N M Rashid, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sahir Ludhyanvi, Kaifi Azmi, and Ali Sardar Jafri.

Bio-Note

Asmat Jahan is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Her areas of specialization are Victorian Literature, Indian Literature, and Translation Studies. She has published several research papers and translations in various books and journals.

Rajashree Bargohain, “Nostalgic Utopianism: Lila Gogoi’s *Noi Boi Jai*”

Abstract

In the etymological history of the term ‘utopia’, it is widely understood to refer to a ‘no place’ or ‘ideal place’ and is conceptualized as an imaginary world located in a hypothetical future. Since the end of the twentieth century however, authors and scholars have declared the demise of utopias, literary or otherwise, and have claimed that the human imagination at the turn of the millennium has been exhausted of its utopian capabilities and all visions of the human future can henceforth only be intrinsically dystopian in character. However, I would like to argue that in more recent times, the impossibility of envisioning dystopian futures for human societies have led to a nostalgic looking back to the past for ideal or idealized socio-political models. The concept of utopia, and its usage have their origin in preceding Western conceptions of the classical or mythical golden age, which have often served as the models for the utopian polities or societies visualized to be founded in the future. Late twentieth century Assam was a time marked by extreme socio-political turmoil in the Assamese society which led it into the throes of extreme pessimism regarding its cultural and political future and from which, it has still not quite recovered, as most of the problems that led to the socio-political crises of the Assamese people during the said period still remain unresolved. It is in such a climate of extreme anxiety that Assamese writers of the period are seen to be engaged in projects aimed at the retrieval of a seemingly ‘golden age’ of the Assamese socio-cultural history by producing narratives that display most of the features of an ideal utopian social order. The novel *Noi Boi Jai* (1983, Literally, The River Flows On) by Lila Gogoi is a novel which engages in an idealized portrayal of an idyllic rural Assamese society of the early twentieth century, which also carries a sense of nostalgic lament for its loss, manifested for example, in the very choice of the novel’s title. Gogoi’s book led to similar literary exercise by other Assamese writers of the period. This paper seeks to examine these narratives, usually set in a

romanticized idyllic rural past of early to mid-twentieth century Assam, as instances of the Assamese writerly imagination's need to locate a cultural utopia or rather, a cultural uchronia through a nostalgic evocation of rural Assamese society from the past.

Bio-Note

Rajashree Bargohain currently teaches the MA English Programme at Yonphula Centenary College of the Royal University of Bhutan, located at Yonphula, Trashigang, Eastern Bhutan. She has presented research papers at several conferences within India and abroad and her work has been published nationally and internationally. She is currently engaged in compiling an edited volume of scholarly essays, tentatively titled *Eastern Himalayas and Border Thinking in a Post-COVID 19 World*, to be published by Routledge, India as a part of the proposed Routledge book series – 'Academia, Politics and Society in a Post-Covid World'.

Dhurjjati Sarma, "A Failed Utopian Dream: Visions of a Commonwealth Desire in Ranju Hazarika's *Eta Dwip Satta Kabar*"

Abstract

Ranju Hazarika (1952-) is one of the most dynamic writers in Assamese literature who has dabbled in multiple genres of science fiction, adventure, fantasy, and utopian fiction. *Eta Dwip Satta Kabar* (One Island and Seven Graves) is one of his most popular novels where he presents an absorbing narrative of seven adults and a boy-prince stranded upon an island after a shipwreck. With no hope of ever returning home, all eight of them (belonging to eight different nationalities) prepare themselves to spend the rest of their lives on the island and, except one, even dig their respective graves where they are eventually laid to rest amidst intriguing circumstances. The paper attempts to critically analyse the trajectory of thoughts and events that take place in the novel as the characters visualise a new commonwealth among themselves upon the island. This is accompanied by a reappraisal of shared and conflicting aspirations and anxieties on the part of the characters who, in spite of their impending fates, still cling on to their utopian dream. This paper will also examine the critical position adopted by the novelist as he delineates the gradual fading of this dream as one character after another meets his end in death. Writing from a vernacular linguistic-literary space, Hazarika's novel also ventures into the zone of apocalyptic fiction as the island is finally devastated by a volcanic eruption at the end with the seventh character buried alive under the lava. No trace of the island remains but what is left behind is the lost vision of a failed utopian aspiration. The paper will undertake a discussion of the novel from the said perspectives.

Bio-Note

Dhurjjati Sarma works as an Assistant Professor, Department of Modern Indian Languages & Literary Studies, Gauhati University, Assam. He studied at the University of Delhi for his MA (English) and MPhil (Comparative Indian Literature) degrees. He earned his PhD degree in English Literature from the English and Foreign Languages University, Shillong Campus. He was a Production Editor at SAGE Publications, New Delhi, and, before that, a Research Fellow in North East India Studies at the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), New Delhi. He is presently engaged in teaching and research in literary history, comparative literature and cultural studies, with special emphasis on Indian Literature. His writings have been published under Palgrave Macmillan and in journals like *Space and Culture*, *India and Margins: A Journal of Literature and Culture*. He is presently working on a critical history of Assamese literature.

Kalyanee Rajan, “Interrogating Mind, Market and Madness in the Dystopic world of Gyan Chaturvedi's *Pagalkhana*”

Abstract

In *Seeds of Time* (1994), political theorist Fredric Jameson talks about Dystopian novels as illustrating a “critique of high modernism...as repressive, totalizing, hallocentric, authoritarian, and redolent of...sublime and inhuman hubris...” (Jameson, ST 53). Veteran Hindi satirical novelist Gyan Chaturvedi, in his fifth novel “*Pagalkhana*” (2018) explores the ravages of a world ruled by Market Culture, a future completely overrun, owned and dictated by the Market forces. One of its kind, the novel employs the genre of dystopic satirical fantasy and an experimental narrative structure replete with interweaving stories, unnamed character types, and fragments. *Pagalkhana* unveils a surprising concoction of the states of detached witness, despair, and inventive modes of resistance in the face of a complete collapse of governance and/or democracy. This paper seeks to interrogate the notions of mind, market and madness vis a vis the obvious state of terror, both psychological and political, in the dystopic world of *Pagalkhana*.

Bio-Note

Kalyanee Rajan works as an Assistant Professor in English, Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College, University of Delhi. Her areas of interest include reading and researching Indian Writing in English and translation, reviewing books of different genres, writing-reciting poetry in both Hindi and English and, following natural sciences and global politics. She is currently pursuing her doctoral degree from Jamia Millia Islamia.

Bharti Arora, “The Utopian Quest of Nehruvian Developmentalism Gone Wrong: A Reading of Alka Saraogi's *Jankidas Tejpal Mansion*”

Abstract

Reading Alka Saraogi's *Jankidas Tejpal Mansion* (2016), the paper proposes to illustrate how the utopian quest of Nehruvian developmentalism went awry after independence. The Nehruvian state betrayed its myopic perspectives by according an almost divine/ qiasi-mythic status to technology and progress as sole arbiters of its decolonised utopia. Alternatively, the novel illustrates, through its protagonist Jaigovind's failed ‘trysts with destiny,’ how this utopia could acquire horrific proportions for ordinary masses. His American dream and education also betray his inability to make sense of and negotiate the myriad and subtle hegemonies embedded in the decolonised reality around him. Likewise, modernising technologies of the post-independence state ironically resulted in the marginalisation of poor and vulnerable sections. The promises of social welfare and democratic socialism rang hollow as the state equally pandered to the interests of elite and propertied classes. By the late 1960s, the Mahalanobis Commission revealed that the Nehruvian state could not succeed in reducing inequalities of wealth, health, or consumption, entering a phase of deinstitutionalization. Thus, the discourses and practices of the nation state were strained by ascriptive inequalities. This affected citizens' access to redistributive remedies as not all subjects occupied the same unmarked terrain of citizenship. Saraogi's novel carefully captures each of these distortions of the state, highlighting how its welfare oriented vision for socialist utopia was mired in a zeal for administrative and national centralisation. Some of the questions that the paper proposes to engage with are: Can Saraogi's novel be read as an antiutopia? How does it challenge, what

Krishan Kumar (2010) has called in a different context, “modern forces of technology and state power” (554)? Does Saraogi present her own utopic vision of alternative social organisation? If so, then how does it counterpose Nehruvian developmentalism on the one hand and Communist abstractions of extreme violence, on the other? All this shall be explored in detail in the paper.

Bio-Note

Bharti Arora is a faculty at the Department of English, Tagore Government Arts and Science College, Pondicherry University. She has completed her Ph.D. in English from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. She has recently published a book titled *Writing Gender, Writing Nation: Women’s Fiction in Post-independence India*, Routledge (2019).

SESSION 5: DYSTOPIAS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

6:20 PM - 8:10 PM, IST

Chair: Angelie Multani

Bio-Note of Chair

Angelie Multani is Professor of Literature at the Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, where she is also the Head of the Department. She joined IIT Delhi in December 2003 after teaching in temporary positions at Gargi College, Delhi University and Jawaharlal Nehru University. She has studied Literature at St Xavier’s College (Bombay) and at JNU where she wrote her PhD thesis on the politics of performance and production of English language theatre in India in the 1990s. She has published extensively on the plays of Mahesh Dattani. Her research interests are in Indian literature in English, contemporary fiction and fantasy writing. She also teaches courses in these areas.

Sanam Khanna, “Slave Minds, the Kathputli Coalition, and Agrarian Revolt: The Everyday of Dystopian Delhi in *Almaru*”

Abstract

In 2007, Puffin India published *Shockwave and Other Cyber Stories*, a collection of short stories for young teens. The short story “Almaru” by Vandana Singh, is the subject of my focus, and I examine the construction of Delhi within this dystopian, SF story. Singh’s story presents to us the city-state of Delhi, under siege due to an agrarian revolt; the PM has attempted a mind-meld with citizens, failing which an army of ‘kathputlis’ are both mouthpieces of the leader, and servile house helps/spies. The young protagonist struggles to find voice and agency in a conformist society. The city is presented as both, a space of opportunity, as well as oppression. Thus, it provides a site for socio-political critique of existing conditions, as dystopian visions in speculative fiction often do. I read this story as a marker of a juvenile fiction’s postmodern engagement with “the impact of an unseen and unexamined social system on the everyday lives of everyday people” (Moylan, xiii) through the literary concepts of dystopia, in its exploration of a cityscape marked by surveillance and control, extreme repression, and processes of

‘othering’. I use the term ‘postmodern’ in the sense which Brian McHale hints at, when he writes that postmodern literature “foreground[s] the ontological themes and differences” of our world. I will also examine the story as an attempt to negotiate a space for resistance by young people and preparation for future citizenship, which is one of the avowed aims of writing for juveniles.

Bio-Note

Sanam Khanna teaches English Literature at Kamala Nehru College, Delhi University. She has an abiding interest in SF, in all its varied manifestations. Her other areas of interest are YA Fiction, Children’s Literature, Culture and Media Studies, Literary Theory, and Drama and Performance Studies. Apart from publications in these fields, she has also co-edited a reader of select, significant works in Indian Literature, titled, “Indian Literature: An Introduction” (Pearson, 2005).

Chaandreyi Mukherjee, “The Surveillance of Plush Toys: Technological Dystopia in Samanta Schweblin’s *Little Eyes*”

Abstract

In one of her interviews Samanta Schweblin states, "Literature for me is to go to the darkness, try to understand and come back to life uninjured with precious information." "Little Eyes" seems an exploration of that darkness intrinsic to every being, a journey leading to recognition or disillusionment. The title refers to the tiny beady eyes of seemingly ordinary plush toys (named kentukis), which, in fact, are cameras allowing a problematic dialogue between a "keeper" and a "dweller" - humans inhabiting the grotesque world of ever expanding technology. Gorman Beauchamp states, “The dystopian imagination posits as its minatory image of the future an advanced totalitarian state dependent upon a massive technological apparatus—in short, a technotopia.” It is the gaze (colonial/postcolonial) which manifests the domains of power, identity, space. It creates a binary (the one who watches versus the one who is being watched) and thereby, establishes an inalienable Other. Schweblin’s dystopia/technotopia reverses the inevitability of the “panopticon” in which the enforcement of power and self-disciplining are subverted. The paper wishes to interrogate the blurred lines of privacy, voyeurism, loneliness and intimacy and to acknowledge the incessant compulsion of personal documentation with the whole world as an audience. Given the popularity of vlogs, reels, stories on multiple social media platforms, the private/public debate should be re-imagined. Often there are horrifying depictions of humans decapitating kentukis. This is a shocking expose of the essential human condition - one that is capable of infinite tenderness as well as unimaginable violence. The paper also wishes to identify Schweblin’s depiction of seemingly random human acts of violence in her technological dystopia.

Bio-Note

Chaandreyi Mukherjee is working as an Assistant Professor (Ad-hoc) in the Department of English, Vivekananda College, University of Delhi. She has pursued her Ph.D. on “Womanhood in Haruki Murakami’s Fiction” from Jamia Millia Islamia and M.Phil. from The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad. She is an avid reader and reviewer of books.

Raj Gaurav Verma, “Dystopian Lives, Utopian Dreams: Tracing the Paradox of Existence in Indian Children’s Literature”

Abstract

The paper argues that “divide is dystopia and coexistence is utopia” and attempts to demonstrate this through a study of Indian children’s literature. Children’s literature is one overlapping genre that intersects with dystopian reality and utopian hopes. Progressing usually with the idea of transformation, children’s literature is built upon the trope “from rags to riches,” thus concluding in a happy ending, literally or metaphorically. Despite engaging with the harsh realities of social hierarchies, gender discrimination, ecological disasters, political upheavals, or problems of existence, children’s literature sums up a story in *bildungsroman*, partly out of the necessity of hopeful future and partly alleviating the anxiety in the young audience. The paradox of children’s literature lies in the fact that a child has to live in the dystopic world created by the adults, but the key to save this world lies with a child with his or her utopic dreams. The child in the narrative thus challenges the established norms with his/her alternate vision which paves way for the positive changes in the society. The writers of children’s literature in India thus have addressed the issues related to the sub genres of utopic/dystopic literature arising out of “political, statist, corporate, ecological (ecotopia), economic, scientific, nuclear, epidemiological, feminist, racial, religious, sexual, psychological, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic, indigenous, colonial, postcolonial, philosophical, global, extra-terrestrial and cosmological” concerns. In this light the paper attempts to look at some of the texts by writers like Salman Rushdie, Ruskin Bond, Anita Nair, Sigrun Srivastava, Vandana Singh, Devdutt Pattanaik and others.

Bio-Note

Raj Gaurav Verma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Previously he has worked as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Central University of Jammu. His areas of specialization include Children’s literature, Modern/Postmodern Literatures, Travel Writing, Indian Writing in English and Diasporic literature. His areas of interest are Travel Writing, Anthropocenic Literature, Plant Studies and Environment Studies.

Kalplata, “Semiotics of dystopia in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*”

Abstract

This paper is interested in a semiotic reading of a streaming television series from Netflix, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* which is based on Lemony Snicket’s children’s novel series of the same name. It tells the story of three Baudelaire children, Violet, Klaus, and Sunny whose happy and luxurious life suddenly takes a tragic turn when they receive the news of their parent’s death in a house fire. Thus, their *Utopic* world is abruptly interrupted and transformed to *Dystopia*. At the very beginning Lemony Snicket, the narrator, warns the audience that it is not a happy tale, rather they should be prepared for a “dreadful, melancholy and calamitous” story. This paper examines the translation of the melancholic content of the novel on screen with the help of specific signs, language, and grammar pertaining to the moving pictures in the first season of the above TV series released in 2017. Also, this paper studies the semiotic construction of “melancholia” on screen and endeavours to decode it.

Our semiotic analysis starts with the study of shots, which according to Christian Metz, a French film theorist, is an iconic unit rather than arbitrary. It continues with an attempt to reveal the semiotic tools used to portray the “melancholy” on screen with the help of the Metzian theoretical model known as the “Grande syntagmatic” (the great syntagmatic chain). This paper is also interested in examining the use of specific kinds of light, sound, and music to create melancholic and dreadful spatio-temporal dimensions.

Bio-Note

Kalplata is working as an Assistant Professor in The English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad in the Department of French and Francophone Studies since 2009. She completed her doctorate in French Literature in 2015. Her research interests are French and Francophone Literature, Film Studies and Literary Translation.

Zahra Rizvi, “The ‘Affinityscapes’ of Young Adult Dystopian Fiction: A Study of *The Hunger Games* Series’ Participatory Culture”

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to read the constitution and articulation of ‘affinityscapes’— both online and offline—or spaces that are formed out of the participatory culture of young adult audiences of dystopian fiction with specific interest directed towards *The Hunger Games* series and its cross-platform media manifestations; a series which talks of ‘killer children’ placed in survival games in a televised arena. Questions of YA dystopia genre formation in the context of age-specific considerations and ‘violent content’ ratings, depictions of violence, protest and trauma in YA dystopian fiction, and discourses around the figure of the ‘Child’ and the ‘Young Adult’ as categories of consumption of this fiction will be critically discussed through a study of the series, its filmic adaptations, online fandom activities, and real-life protests inspired by the series. One of the most popular discourses about *The Hunger Games* series is its depiction of violence and whether it is ‘appropriate’ for children of a specific age. This debate has, in turn, become one of the major arguments surrounding what it means to be a ‘young adult’, what can be the ages which can successfully cordon off the ‘young adult’ category and what is the nature of this audience that would emerge from such a categorisation. This paper seeks to critically inspect the tradition of articulating the ‘Child’ while examining how children and young adults articulate themselves in violent contemporary times and, simultaneously, rearticulate violence in their consumption of dystopian fiction through the production of and contribution in online affinity spaces which range from role-playing, virtual reality and augmented reality games to fan fiction and fan art to organizing protests against real-life dystopian problems as in the case of *The Hunger Games*-inspired protests against the militarist coup and subsequent government in Thailand in 2014. This paper addresses the contemporary phenomenon of young audiences rethinking violence through active articulation of affinity spaces which assist in reading the changing trends of philosophical considerations regarding both violence and the symbolic ‘Child’, moving towards an understanding of a contribution economy that is a multilogic examination of ‘violence’. The paper will, thus, provide an intervention into the existing debates regarding the same through its focus on reading *The Hunger Games* franchise and fandom to engage in these questions critically.

Bio-Note

Zahra Rizvi is a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, India. She

is an MHRD-SPARC Fellow at the Department of Linguistics and Germanic, Slavic, African and Asian Language Studies, Michigan State University, and works in the fields of digital humanities and cultural studies. Her research interests include utopia/dystopia studies, popular culture, and geopolitical issues in and of cross-platform media. She has previously taught at the University of Delhi, and presented guest lectures at Michigan State University.

Swatee Sinha and Anjali Gera Roy, “Salman Rushdie’s Dystopic Imaginary in *Shame*”

Abstract

The paper looks into the dark underbelly of unformulated passions in Salman Rushdie’s novel *Shame* (1983). Often propelled by “the raw materials of bodily compulsions” (Tynan, 2012:58) these passions trigger violent episodes that jolt the conventional orthodoxies of collective social formations such as the family and civil institutions to expose a chronic state of ailment. Latching onto the concepts of disease, ailment and morbidity the essay proposes to trace back these inchoate elements to the psychopathology of the drive located in the instinctual domain of the corporeal. The dystopian imaginary of the novelist which cradles such an analysis is suspended in a volatile zone where signs and concepts cease to function as navigational tools based on a symbolic order and events are inscribed through a cryptic text of flesh and blood. The abysmal depths of the body generate subterranean passions that exist as a double rupturing the civil veneer of social decorum. Drawing on Deleuze’s philosophy of literary symptomatology the essay looks into the state of malaise as productive of psychic dissonances and explores the restorative mechanism of health as an antidote that allays the turbulent gyrating passions. The article specifically focuses on female corporeality in terms of its constitutional fragility and its conditioning of a nervous pathology as indicative of a struggle against something too powerful to contain exemplified in the novel by the unsettling metaphor of the Beast. The transference of these affectual currents from the personal onto the plane of the socio-historical gives the novel its unique dystopic vision of a fractured social space which contains the seeds of its own destruction.

Bio-Note

Swatee Sinha is a Research Scholar at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences IIT, Kharagpur. She is also engaged as an Assistant Professor at an undergraduate college under Bankura University. Her research interests span culture and critical theory with particular focus on Deleuze and Guattari’s mobilization of desire as a concept and its critical agency in the reconstitution of the unconscious.

Anjali Gera Roy is Professor at the Department of HSS, IIT Kharagpur. Her research interests span postcolonial fiction and theory, media, cultural and performance studies, Punjab and Sikh Studies, diaspora, migration and mixed race. Her work is framed within the discourses of postcolonialism, postmodernism, nationalism, globalization, ethnicity, regionalism, transnationalism and cosmopolitanism using multidisciplinary approaches.

Day 3: Friday, 19 March 2021

SESSION 6: RETHINKING UTOPIAS AND DYSTOPIAS: PARADISE LOST, SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY?

9:00 AM - 11:05 AM, IST

Chair: Somdatta Mandal

Bio-Note of Chair

Somdatta Mandal is Former Professor of English at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, India. A recipient of several national and international fellowships and awards, she has been published widely. Her areas of interest include American Studies, Postcolonial literature, Diaspora Studies, Culture Studies and Translation. Apart from editing the first Indian English narrative published in 1835 entitled *A Journal of Forty-Eight Hours of the Year 1945* by Kylas Chunder Dutt, and the first Indian English drama published in 1831 entitled *The Persecuted* by Krishnamohan Banerjee, she has also translated and edited the first Bengali travel narrative by a woman entitled *A Bengali Lady in England* by Krishnabhabini Das (1885). Several other nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengali travel narratives and memoirs written by women and members of the Tagore family have also been translated by her. Her recent publications include *Kobi and Rani: Memoirs and Correspondences of Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis and Rabindranath Tagore* (2020) and *The Last Days of Rabindranath Tagore in Memoirs* (2021).

Ratna Raman, “Doris Lessing’s Dystopic Vision: Stretching the boundaries of Humanism and Utopia.”

Abstract

Feminist Dystopias draw attention to the short-sightedness of humanism in its construction of Utopias. In the history of the English language, the word ‘dystopia’ used as an antonym by John Stuart Mill succeeded the use of the term utopia by Sir Thomas More after two centuries. “Feminism too is a later coinage, coming long after the advent of humanism. Conceptualized as a philosophy dealing with women, for women and about women, feminism is a later entrant to the pantheon of ideas that have jostled for existence. Utopia and Humanism emerged as concepts while discussing the nature of the human world and the possibilities for the success of human ideals in their physical and metaphysical environment. A significant connection that the term feminism shares with dystopia is that both these terms draw attention to the dangers inherent in a slide from the attainment of such ideals. Feminisms evolved from the recognition that one half of the human race, i.e. women had less rights and liberties than the other half, namely men. So feminism attempted to analyse in its multiple avatars, aspects of inequity faced by women in political, personal, legal and geographical contexts. Dystopic narratives by women writers, parallel and highlight two kinds of journeys: the absence of an ideal world or ‘topia’ in which unequal humans live inequitable lives. This paper will examine Doris Lessing’s dystopias; *Briefing for a Descent into Hell* (1971) and *Memoirs of a Survivor* (1974) that draw attention to ecological disasters, warfare and the breakdown of civilization, and serve as prophecies for our times.

Bio- Note

Ratna Raman is Associate Professor of English at Sri Venkateswara College. She has a Doctoral dissertation on Doris Lessing and contributes regularly to newspapers and newsmagazines on significant contemporary social and cultural issues. Her weekly newspaper column *Mind Your Language* published in the Tribune from November 2014 to March 2018, discussed grammar and language in a topical context. She is passionate about teaching and travel and writes and blogs on food and travel.

Layla Mascarenhas, “Adam and Eve Before and After ‘The Fall’: Sexual Utopia to Dystopia”

Abstract

Eighteen years before Fr. Karol Wojtyla became Pope John Paul II, he published *Love and Responsibility* which discussed family, marriage and sexuality. Wojtyla stressed the dignity of the person and showed how important it is to live our sexuality in a way which upholds and affirms the other person. In his later work, *The Theology of the Body*, John Paul II explores the authentic beauty and truth about the human person from the beginning of creation but which is now corrupted by selfishness and utilitarianism. With his doctoral training in philosophy, he explains how corruption of the utopian natural plan devastates the human sexual drive, redirecting it from an impulse toward life-giving interpersonal union between covenantal partners to a desire to use and exploit others for personal satisfaction. The study of the ideal picture of unsullied human sexuality as envisioned in the biblical account of the first man and woman in Paradise is juxtaposed with the picture of the change in the attitude and behavior of the same couple after their rebellion against their true natures. This paper seeks to highlight key ideas in the literary works of John Paul II about the dignity of the human person, the beauty of human sexuality used with the right intentions, the amazing link between human love and the nature of The Divine, and the utopian vision of the possibility of true love in a fallen world.

Bio-Note

Layla Mascarenhas spent 19 years raising a family of four children while working lecture-basis at different institutions in Goa, and teaching Piano and Electronic Keyboard at home. She then worked full-time as Visiting Faculty at BITS Pilani, K. K. Birla Goa Campus, and later as Assistant Professor at V.M. Salgaocar College of Law, Miramar – Panjim, Goa. Her doctoral research was on Children’s Literature, and she continues researching and writing. She writes short fiction and poetry.

Neetha Prasad, “Why Satire?: The Story of Deathlessness”

Abstract

The disappearance of the “universal leveller”, Death from the human world is a perfect ground for both Utopia and Dystopia to be at play. The state of deathlessness throws open new avenues of thought and possibilities. The paper titled “Why Satire: the Story of Deathlessness” tries to explore the connection between the Utopian (or Dystopian) notion of “deathlessness” and the literary narrative of ‘satire’. The paper focuses on the Postmodern satirical novel *Death at Intervals* by Jose Saramago and the Thullal (the traditional art form belonging to Kerala) narrative titled “Kaalana Illatha Kaalam” (The Time Sans The God of Death) by the great poet

Kunchan Nambiar belonging to 18th Century. Though widely separated by time, place, and the form of narrative used, both the works deal with the theme of “deathlessness” and most striking is the use of satire as the narrative form to convey the situation. Hence, the attempt is to explore why deathlessness evokes satire and why such a connection matters.

Bio-Note

Neetha Prasad works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English S. D. College, Alappuzha, Kerala.

Yusuf Ayaz, “Worst Comes to Worst: Fateful Fears vis-à-vis Farfetched Fantasies”

Abstract

“Imagine there's no
countries It isn't hard to
do
Nothing to kill or
die for And no
religion too
Imagine all the people living life in
peace, you You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one.”
– John Lennon

Fear or inhibition and desire are universal human emotions and it's in these emotions that Dystopian and Utopian fiction is rooted. While both are instances of speculative literature, the former revolves around an imaginative fear and the latter builds upon a wishful fantasy; the fear of a Gilead and desire of a Shangri-La. The paper would examine how the two bodies of fiction have fared differently with the passage of time. As the wheels of time went on spinning and the future became the now, utopian ideals and anticipations remained wishful desires and farfetched yearnings while dystopian prognostications and fears came alive. The paper would look at fateful dystopias vis-à-vis non-viable utopias in context of the postmodern global world and its happenings. The paper would also examine why fears portrayed in dystopian texts are closer to reality and spring from the socio-cultural and political milieu of their time as compared to idealistic visions of utopian fiction rooted in laudable however unrealistic goals. During the course of the paper I would be analyzing dystopian texts like *1984* by George Orwell, *Stand on Zanzibar* by John Brunner, *Iron Heel* by Jack London and utopian novels such as *Walden Two* by B.F. Skinner and *Looking Backward* by Edward Bellamy.

Bio-Note

Yusuf Ayaz is a PhD student at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His areas of interest include interdisciplinary literary studies, fiction, criminology, disability studies, literary theory, etc.

Sachida Nand Jha, “Revisiting Brave New World: Rethinking dystopia”

Abstract

I wish to revisit Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* as the focal point to trace the trajectory which the idea of dystopia has charted in modern times. The purpose behind tracing such a trajectory is to rethink the theory and practice of dystopia in global postcolonial contexts. I seek to do so by exploring the ways in which not only Huxley in his *Brave New World* but also the inspirational figure of Gandhi in his *Hind Swaraj* has contributed to the making of an ideal, utopian human nature. Such an exploration is highly pertinent precisely because of the fact that there are fissures and contradictions in the current conceptualization of both dystopia and Gandhi as an idea that stands for an antithesis to the narratives which constitute the cosmos of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism.

Bio-Note

Sachida Nand Jha is an Assistant Professor in English at Rajdhani College, University of Delhi.

Amarjeet Nayak, "The past is a palimpsest: South Asian Science Fiction and Its Dialectic Engagement with the Past – A Close Reading of "Sultana's Dream" and "Reunion"

Abstract

Nostalgia for a past need not necessarily be seen only as an outcome of a sense of disappointment with the 'present' conditions, at the level of the individual or the collective, or both. Science Fiction's engagement with the 'present condition', often seen in the creation of a dystopic or utopian future, is sometimes a product of one's longing for a 'better' human condition in an ameliorated past. The envisioning of a feminist utopia "Ladyland" in the Indian subcontinent, in Rokheya Shekhawat Hossain's short story "Sultana's Dream" (1905) has historically been seen by critics as a response to patriarchy. However, while reversing the power hierarchy between the genders in a future utopia, the *contephilosophique* also harkens back to an Indian society of the past, where the 'subjects' often needed a benevolent king, and sometimes a queen, as a pre-requisite - an agent of their freedom and happiness. The fact that the utopia was all a dream, indicates both a desire and also a longing for the kind of political structure found in the often-glorified past instead of the then existing structure; the vilifying of the 'prime minister' and glorifying the 'queen' as a major plot point can be read in this light.

This paper, through a close reading of the story, would be interested in establishing the text's connection to the past as a dialectic one, and neither a rejection of the past nor a straight forward longing /nostalgia. The paper would juxtapose this story's take on the past with that of Vandana Singh's short story "Reunion" (2019). Unlike "Sultana's Dream", this story envisions an ecological dystopia /utopia and is set in the Indian subcontinent. But like the former, this too is not just a straight-forward response to the 'present condition' – the ongoing ecological destruction in the world, but also a longing for a distant past that valued a symbiotic relationship between humans and Nature. The paper intends to unpack how both the stories engage with the past in ways where "the past is a palimpsest" ("Reunion") and "history is not a straight line" ("Reunion"), and hence the engagement with a past, however ameliorated, needs to be a dialectic one if its wants to be productive.

Bio-Note

Amarjeet Nayak is a Reader at School of Humanities and Social Sciences, National Institute of Science Education and Research, Bhubaneswar. His primary areas of interest are Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies, Film Studies and Speculative Fiction. He has many publications in these areas in peer-reviewed journals and anthologies. He is a published short story writer in English and Odia, as well as a practicing translator.

SESSION 7: DYSTOPIAS IN FILMS AND TV SERIES**11:05 AM - 12:30 PM, IST****Chair: Meenakshi Bharat****Bio-Note of Chair**

Meenakshi Bharat, writer, translator, reviewer and cultural theorist, teaches at Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi. Her special interests include children's literature, women's fiction, and film, postcolonial, translation and cultural studies—areas which she has extensively researched. She has published *The Ultimate Colony: The Child in Postcolonial Fiction*, *Desert in Bloom: Indian Women Writers of Fiction in English*, *Filming the Line of Control: The Indo-Pak Relationship through the Cinematic Lens*, *Rushdie the Novelist*, four volumes of Indo-Australian short fiction entitled *Fear Factor: Terror Incognito* from Picador and *Alien Shores: Tales of Refugees and Asylum Seekers*, *Only Connect: Technology and Us* and the recent, *Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance* from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia, and VS Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas: Critical Perspectives*, and a children's book, *Little Elephant throws a Party*. Her wide and variegated writing, both creative and critical, is spurred by contemporary concerns. She has co-edited four Indo-Australian Short Fiction anthologies (*Fear Factor: Terror Incognito*, *Alien Shores: Asylum Seekers and Refugees*, *Only Connect: Technology and Us*, *Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance*), which have variously taken on the burning issues of terrorism, asylum seekers, technology and us and tolerance and intolerance. Her monographs-- *Troubled Testimonies: Terrorism and the English Novel in India* (2016) and *Shooting Terror: Terrorism and the Hindi Film* (2020) take on the impact of terrorism on contemporary Indian culture. She served as President of the International Federation of Modern Languages and Literatures (FILLM, UNESCO, 2014-2017) and continues to be a Bureau member. A former Treasurer of the Indian Association for the Study of Australia, she is still an active member of the Executive.

Vivek Sachdeva, “Dystopic Vision and Narrative Space”**Abstract**

Although events unfold in time and narratives have been conventionally understood as a temporal art form, the study of space in narrative has become an important component of narratology. Narratologists have theorized time, space and even time-space in their respective theories. Since the Spatial Turn, Spaces have been theorized and understood in different ways. Despite much theorization of sociological or ideological underpinnings of spaces, the theorization of space from a narratological perspective still invites more attention. Speculative

fiction constructs such ‘spaces’ that cannot be comprehended within the frame of mimesis in its conventional understanding. In speculative fiction, space is as important as time is. Space, as constructed in a narrative, majorly contributes towards the meaning-making process in a narrative. Space in speculative narratives is not mimetic, but metaphoric. Thus, the study of spaces in such narratives stands justified. Using Gabriel Zoran’s model of spatial analysis, the present paper shall make an attempt to understand the representation of spaces in *Elysium*, an American film made by Neill Blomkamp in 2013. Set in 2154, the film presents a dystopian vision in which the poor inhabit the earth and the rich live in Elysium, a gigantic space for the privileged. The film allows one to read the issues of class, discrimination, justice and the politics of hygiene. Studying topographical spaces and fields of vision, as theorized by Zoran, this paper studies construction of space in the narrative to understand the dystopic vision in the film.

Bio-Note

Vivek Sachdeva works as a Professor, University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GGSIP University, New Delhi. He has authored books like *Fiction to Film: Ruth Praver Jhabvala's The Householder and Heat and Dust*. Orient Blackswan, 2017, *Shyam Benegal's India: Alternative Images*, Routledge, 2020 and edited the book *Identities in South Asia: Assertions and Conflicts*, Ed. Vivek Sachdeva, Queeny Pradhan, Anu Venugopalan, Routledge, 2019.

Maaz Bin Bilal, “Ghoul Who? Whither? Occult Symbolism in Patrick Graham’s Netflix Series”

Abstract

Patrick Graham’s near-future Indian dystopian Netflix miniseries, *Ghoul*, shows us a police state that has completely othered different identity groups of Indian society. It is not just the figure of the terrorist who is the bogeyman, but any and all learning outside of the state-given syllabi is banned. The figure of the independently thinking intellectual appears to be an enemy of the state. Nida Rahim, who believes the state’s propaganda, goes so far as to give up her own father, Shahnawaz Raheem, an intellectual, to the police, for owning and disseminating illicit literature, only to discover that she herself as a Muslim is a *persona non grata* to her colleagues. As the narrative develops into Lovecraftian horror, we discover by the end that the occult magic used to unleash the ghoul was conjured by the intellectual Raheem at the cost of his own life and soul. I closely analyse Graham’s Netflix series in this paper to argue that the ghoul conjured through the occult or magic symbolizes the figure of the suicide bomber from modern society. It is he who brings together the othered Muslim and forbidden knowledge in a place without any options or future for the othered self to seek revenge on the state using the only thing he is allowed to possess, his soul.

Bio-Note

Maaz Bin Bilal is a poet, translator, and cultural critic. He has published widely in journals, magazines and newspapers across genres. Maaz is the author of *Ghazalnama: Poems from Delhi, Belfast, and Urdu* and the translator of Fikr Tausvi’s Urdu diary into English *The Sixth River: A Journal from the Partition of India*. His work has been widely reviewed in India, the UK and the US. Excerpts from his translation of *The Sixth River* are also prescribed in the University of Delhi BA English (Hons.) syllabus. His poems have been translated into Irish, Gaelic and Bangla.

Violina Borah, “*Mad Max: Fury Road to Furiosa: Feminist Road*”

Abstract

George Miller’s *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015) sparked a lot of insecurities amidst men’s right activists that the film sidelined the titular character of Max, which deprived them of enjoying more devastation caused by mankind’s collective masochism which has brought the world to its state in the film. Opposing the utopias of plenty, dystopic films reveal the desperate savagery of nothingness stripping the world of ecological balance. While most utopic films present to us a world which is more than abundant for the sources of survival, that alternative too comes from the similar idea of outdoing the natural course of life. In utopias dystopic elements can seep in, or a utopia is promised as a post-dystopic world. While utopic films can be seen as reassurances that everything will be/is alright, they fail to address the most alarming issues that dystopic films pick up. However, it can be noticed that most dystopic films too tend to end with providing a solution to overcome the damage. This is where *Fury Road* differs. Dystopia is supposed to transfer the filmmakers’ contention with the modern world into meaningful discussions among the audiences, or contribute to ongoing discussions.

This paper is going to look at Miller’s attempt to reveal the unbothered attitude of great nations of the world towards burning issues like global warming, drying the earth of its natural resources like fossil fuel is packaged in a fun filled way with a deep subtext which definitely have sparked the intended debates a dystopic film is supposed to start. While very often we hear the lack of female superhero films, one needs to take into consideration films like *Mad Max: Fury Road*, where the character of Furiosa is not given superpowers, she is a driver with one hand. She is not given expert martial arts training or is not even trained for battle the Immortan Joe’s warboys. She is a driver, she is resourceful, she just has a faint idea of the ‘green place’ where she was born. She is determined to bring the wives, (used as commodity to make perfect babies by Immortan Joe) to the ‘green place’ which holds the possibility of rebooting the world. *Fury Road* is important in the genre of dystopia as it appears that the Green Place has long turned into desert, it is not the magical solution that tend to appear in dystopic films. Instead, it ends with the ray of possibility as the female collective Vulvani hands over their treasure to the young wives- a little box containing seeds.

Bio-Note

Violina Borah has completed her Master’s Degree, M Phil and PhD in English literature from Jawaharlal Nehru University. Her areas of interest include Popular Culture, Modernism African Literature, African American Literature, and Indian Writing in English. She is currently teaching at Daulat Ram College, Delhi University as an assistant professor.

Ved Prakash, “Dystopia, Death, and the Question of Survival”

Abstract

The present ongoing pandemic has exposed the human civilisation and made the divide all the more apparent that exists in between the ones who are privileged and all those who remain at the margin. However, if one is to flip the location of the underprivileged with the ones who

exist in a privileged socio-economic arena then does it act as a learning lesson? Or one could propose that the human race has come so far in its greed that individuals/people refuse to see the world beyond their comfort zones? To answer some of these questions, this paper will look at *The Platform* (2019), a Spanish ‘social science fiction’ film by Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia. The genre of social science fiction is less concerned with technology and more with observations related to human behaviour, interactions, and society at large. *The Platform* has a futuristic backdrop as it deals with a structure that is made of hundreds of floors. It is a prison that accommodates two people on each floor. Every day, a huge platform with food descends through a large hole located in the middle of the building for a fixed time frame. People have to eat whatever they can in the stipulated time before the platform moves to the next floor/level. Stealing food is not an option as it may result in severe retribution. On floor one, people get to have access to a feast, however, the ones who stay on the last floor get nothing. There are supposed to be three hundred and thirty-three floors and the survival key is, if everyone eats a small portion of food, then it could make to the bottom with something for each prisoner but it never does and this leads to things and developments that are both horrific as well as dystopic. Moreover, people are reassigned to a new floor/level every month. Galder Gaztelu-Urrutia in one of his interviews remarks that if we are to exist as a human race then there has to be a fair distribution of resources, wealth, and avenues.

While discussing several deaths that happen in the name of food in *The Platform*, this paper will discuss how the genre of ‘social science fiction’ may help in showing a mirror to the dystopic divided society in which we all continue to exist. Moreover, the paper will analyse how dystopic cinema can be an effective tool to address some of the issues that the present world does not want to acknowledge.

Bio-Note

Ved Prakash teaches literature at the Department of English, Central University of Rajasthan. He completed his Ph.D. from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. His areas of research interest are Dalit Studies, African American Literature, Life Writing, and Film Studies.

SESSION 8: THE ‘TOPIA’ IN UTOPIA AND HETEROTOPIA

2:10 PM - 4:00 PM, IST

Chair: Priyanka Tripathi

Bio-Note of Chair

Priyanka Tripathi is an Associate Professor of English, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Patna. She has published extensively with *Indian Literature*, *English: Journal of the English Association*, *Journal of Graphic Novel and Comics*, *Feminist Theory*, *Journal of Gender Studies*, *Economic and Political Weekly* amongst others. She is also the Book Reviews Editor for *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. Recently, she has also been awarded an ICSSR funded project entitled, “Mapping Domestic Violence in the times of Covid-19: A Study from Bihar”. She works in the area of South Asian Fiction, Gender Studies, Place and Literature and Graphic Narratives.

Natasa Thoudam, ‘From India’s Northeast: Utopia in Dystopia in Mutum Devala’s “The Wrong Person”’

Abstract

Margaret Atwood’s concept of “ustopia” speaks of a complex comprising utopia and dystopia, wherein “each contains a latent version of the other” (‘the road to Ustopia,’ *The Guardian*). In this paper, I use this Atwoodian concept to theorize upon “utopia in dystopia” from India’s Northeast and illustrate this formulation in Mutum Devala’s (b. 1968) short story “The Wrong Person” (2007). In this paper, I argue that this concept of “utopia in dystopia” is also ‘postcolonial’ (in Bill Ashcroft’s sense of “post-invasion”) and invites a reading beyond the scope of the nation. Set in the context of a dystopic Manipur in India’s Northeast, it is the story of a utopian dream of a dead/dying person. Still, like the narration in the story, such a world can exist only in dreams and as an aspiration yet to be fulfilled.

Bio-Note

Natasa Thoudam is Assistant Professor at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences in the Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Sagar Taranga Mandal, “Dystopia at Palestine + 100: Speculations about a dissident future”

Abstract

What is the specific relation of time with the idea of dystopia? My question here is made in particular regard to an underlying notion of dissident epistemology which marks all political dystopias. How long one must suffer before the past, the present, and the future coalesce into a viscerally felt inhabitation of a dystopia? How do ones that have suffered at the hands of their necropolitical masters execute a shared political understanding of the threshold beyond which dystopia begins? I ask these questions in respect to the first science fiction anthology that has addressed the Palestinian predicament of homelessness. *Palestine + 100* is a collection of 12 short stories by Palestinian authors that reimagine their homeland in the year 2048, 100 years after 1948, the year of the Nakba (or “catastrophe”) when Israel declared itself a new-born state and expelled 700,000 Arabs.

My paper looks to question as to why such speculation about the future in terms of a literary production was so belatedly conceived and whether the reason could be found by exposing the stories to a definition of dystopia as a “contested or undecided space between militancy and resignation” (Moylan 2000: 181). I go on to argue that the perambulating imaginary of these stories ranging from mental health to a high-tech virus invading every Israeli VR console mark a new chapter in moral and political obduracy for the Palestinian—when he or she is no longer fearful of engaging with the image of the Israeli tormentor.

Bio-Note

Sagar Taranga Mandal works as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, University of Kalyani. He is also enrolled as a Ph.D. scholar at Jadavpur University, researching on how tropes of architecture and urban design impact and intertwine with story-worlds in select graphic narratives from the Middle East.

Shimi Moni Doley, “Luz in *The Eye of The Heron* and Aunt Lydia in *The Testaments*: A Quest Towards a Feminist Ideal”

Abstract

Utopia implies the quest or desire for an idealized world and Utopian thinking and writing is the articulation of creative and critical ideas about existing society or a society of the future. But, the vision of an ideal world varies from people to people as there is so much variation in what people consider a perfect world. Sometimes, the quest to create a Utopia by some leads to the abrogation of rights of others which manifests into an irony of Utopian appearances but dystopic realities. The female-authored Utopia/Dystopia fiction has often been a way of articulating the unspeakable and of imagining a powerful female protagonist in opposition to the phallic law.

This paper examines how Ursula K. Le Guin’s *The Eye of the Heron* and Margaret Atwood’s *The Testaments* employ the generic conventions of Utopic/Dystopic fiction to interrogate sexual and gender politics in society and provoke the readers to question and value their own freedoms. *The Eye of the Heron* published in 1978 represents Le Guin’s anarcho-pacifist ideals and is set in a penal colony on the planet Victoria inhabited by the descendants of violent criminals exiled from earth and another group called People of the Peace, exiled following a massive nonviolent march from Moscow to Lisbon. A faceoff erupts between the two groups and Lev is the heroic ideal leading the people of the peace but ultimately, he is shot dead. It is Luz Marina Falco, the female protagonist and daughter of the leader of the rival faction who ultimately leads them to a new Eden, who had revolted against her father and her culture’s treatment of her as an object for the service of a man. In the end, Luz Snatches freedom on her own terms. Atwood’s *The Testaments* published four decades later and as a sequel to the *The Handmaid’s Tale* attributes the authorial voice to a supposedly female oppressive figure – Aunt Lydia. Atwood blurs the distinction between stark villain and victim. Atwood gives this authorial figure a chance to prove and testify that she was not an amenable colluder but a subversive agent provocateur who while abetting the brutal patriarchs had also been secretly plotting Gilead’s downfall. Lydia’s story elliptically refers to her guilt but it also focuses on the suffering that coerced her into the oppressor’s role and the subversion she wreaks on the patriarchal order as an insider.

Bio-Note

Shimi Moni Doley is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia.

Diksha Beniwal, “*Untouchables* and the Urban Utopia of a Colonial City”

Abstract

This paper analyzes the multiplicity of narratives and voices in shaping up and describing the utopian and dystopian spaces of colonial India. A strand of Indian Nationalism founded its “Discourse of Elsewhere” upon the Indian village as a utopia, as opposed to the dystopian evils of the city. On the other hand, there emerged certain voices from the marginalized communities of India, who toppled this distinction and found their respite, and respect in what would become their utopia of a colonial city. Narendra Jadhav’s *Untouchables: My Family’s Triumphant*

Journey Out of the Caste System in Modern India narrates the story of Jadhavs' parents Damu and Soni as they attempt to break away from the demeaning professions, practices and rituals of the caste system reserved for dalits back in their village Ozar. This journey of theirs "out of" the caste system overlaps with and is symbolized in their physical journey away from the village to the city of Mumbai. As their life's journey is narrated between both their accounts alternating one after the other, we see how the city life offers Damu and Soni the opportunities to look for new professions, experience of egalitarian community living, and to seek education for their children. The village then becomes the dystopian repository of archaic structures of caste discrimination which is left behind for the concept of a 'casteless' modern utopia.

Bio-Note

Diksha Beniwal is a PhD scholar at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, India. Her research interest areas include postcolonial literature, Dalit studies, and Dalit literature. She is currently working on the rise of the Dalit middle class and the study of the ways in which it differs from, and is similar to, the Indian middle class that emerged under the British rule.

Sayan Mukherjee, "Echoes of the Future: Dystopias in the Works of Appupen' Graphic"

Abstract

Dystopia is defined as the "opposite of utopia" (Baldick 100), and works of fiction that "represent a very unpleasant imaginary world in which ominous tendencies of our present social, political, and technological order are projected into a disastrous future culmination" (Abrams 378). Appupen is an Indian graphic novelist whose work, both in print and online on Instagram and Brainded.in, has been made imagining a world that is slowly slipping into a dystopia. In *Legends of Halahala*, Appupen pens two stories "The Saga of Ghostgirl Part 2: Legacy" and "16917P's Masterpiece" where concepts of isolation, hero-worship, loss of identity, etc. are explored. *The Snake and the Lotus* tells the tale of the White City, where everyone is fed a steady flow of propaganda. Interestingly, the visual elements of Appupen's graphical works defy a neat identifiable graphical style. Appupen experiments as heavily with his visual language as he does with his narratives. Sometimes, utopias seem to emerge out of his meticulously constructed dystopias. The occurrence of the opposite of apparent dystopia creates, to borrow Atwood's term, "ustopia". Does the excess of Appupen's visual style aid or undercut the spatial pervasiveness of dystopia? Are these aberrations in the depictions of dystopia deliberate? These are some of the issues that the proposed paper seeks to examine. In addition to delving into Appupen's works and taking a closer look at his art and his commentary on events of current social and political significance, the paper aims to deconstruct Appupen's visual depictions of dystopia.

Bio-Note

Sayan Mukherjee is a PhD student in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, at Dhirubhai Ambani Institute of Information and Communication Technology. His research interests include graphic narratives, cultural studies, and gender studies. His thesis is based on the importance of space and cityscapes in Indian graphic narratives.

SESSION 9: WOMEN'S IWE AND UTOPIAS

4:00 PM to 5:50 PM, IST

Chair: Ranu Uniya

Bio-Note of Chair

Ranu Uniya is Professor and Head, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. An author of six books, her articles, and book reviews have been published widely. Her poetry has appeared in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Mascara Literary Review* (Australia), *Jaggery*, *Medulla Review*, *Sketch Book*, *Twenty 20*, *Whispers*, *Setu* (USA), *Littlewood Press* (UK), *Bengal Lights* (Bangladesh), *Asia Literary Review*, *Cha* (Hong Kong), *The Bombay Review*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Dhauri Review*, *Muse India*, *Kavya Bharati*, *Femina*, *Manushi*, *Indian Literature*, *ETHOS literary journal*, *Madras Courier*, and several anthologies both in India and abroad. She has published three poetry collections: *Across the Divide* (2006), *December Poems* (2012), and *The Day We Went Strawberry Picking in Scarborough* (2018). Her poems have been translated into Hindi, Oriya, Malayalam, Spanish, Urdu, and Uzbek languages. She also writes poetry in Hindi. She has read her poems at several International Poetry Festivals. She was a Commonwealth Scholar at the University of Hull, UK. She was also a Writer in Residence in Uzbekistan in Jan 2019. She is a founding member of a daycare centre for children with special needs in Lucknow.

Priyanka Tripathi, “Gender Politics, Menstruating Women and Utopian form of Cultural Resistance: Sucharita Dutta Asane’s “Cast Out””

Abstract

Usually considered to be a taboo subject, menstruation is a ‘biological truth’ which has found its rhetorical narrative primarily because of the subjective readings of socio-cultural and religious practices. Transforming itself into a gendered phenomenon, it has become a set of ideological construct, a singular and dominant narrative which reinforces its position despite genuine medico-legal interventions. In its sheer pompousness, medical science had also defined menstruation as a ‘disability’, ‘physical ‘illness’ and a threat to emotional stability. Menstruating women, across generations and geographies find themselves in a vulnerable situation with seclusion and ritual impurity forced upon them. Aligning its strictures around reformative measures, Indian constitution has tried to deconstruct the hegemonic framework for validating and asserting individual’s claims and rights. Sabarimala verdict in 2018 is one such example, which allowed entry to girls and women of all ages to Ayyappa temple stating that according to the Constitution of India, discrimination on physiological grounds is a violation of the fundamental rights (Article 15). Amidst these conflicting dynamics, literature becomes an ideal tool of cultural resistance. One comes across several narratives in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries wherein a kind of sensitization process towards otherwise this natural phenomenon is woven. Within the critical framework of medical humanities, this paper is an attempt to analyse Sucharita Dutta Asane’s short story “Cast Out” (2018) and the process in which it acts as a catalyst to the construction of holistically utopian society in the Indian context

Bio-Note

Priyanka Tripathi is an Associate Professor of English, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Patna. She has published extensively with *Indian Literature, English: Journal of the English Association, Journal of Graphic Novel and Comics, Feminist Theory, Journal of Gender Studies, Economic and Political Weekly* amongst others. She is also the Book Reviews Editor for *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*. Recently, she has also been awarded an ICSSR funded project entitled, “Mapping Domestic Violence in the times of Covid-19: A Study from Bihar”. She works in the area of South Asian Fiction, Gender Studies, Place and Literature and Graphic Narratives.

Brati Biswas, “Sultana's Dream: Towards a Feminist Utopia”

Abstract

The paper would attempt to negotiate the interstices between theory and pedagogical practice in dissemination of feminist thought and the everyday performance of gender roles through the short story *Sultana's Dream*. The contents of this story open up discussions on Utopian visions and their plausibility along with discourses on dystopias. The search for or dream of an Utopia reflect about a dystopian reality. The imagined Utopia for women possibly creates an alternate reality in the realm of fantasy which then is open to critique in the classroom. The text is discussed with in the context of a Generic Elective course Contemporary India Women and Empowerment taught to non-English Honours students who are from diverse disciplines. The challenge is to take them through the textual play with Ideas and discourses on gender equality, normative behaviour and the feasibility of the Utopian vision.

Bio-Note

Brati Biswas is an Associate Professor of English at Dyal Singh Evening College University of Delhi. She has a PhD on Dalit literature of Bengal from Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi. She has published and presented articles on a wide range of topics from feminism to Dalit literature. She translates from Bangla to English and Hindi. She is also a practicing poet.

Anavisha Banerjee, “Colonialism: Feminist Utopia in Rokeya Hossain’s *Sultana’s Dream and Beyond*”

Abstract

My paper will focus on the imaginative utopia created in Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain’s (1880-1932) short story *Sultana’s Dream* (1905) and the gender constructs it seeks to challenge. Written in the nineteenth century during the wake of reform movement, it concerns itself with the emancipation of women during the colonial period. Although the reformers challenged religious and social customs that subordinated women, Hossain creates a feminist utopia by questioning the basis of gender construct in terms of public and private spaces such as “zenana” or “ghar” and “bahir,” as Partha Chatterjee terms it. These become contested spaces as the role reversal of men and women become the essence of the utopian fantasy in *Sultana’s Dream*. Her challenge of Purdah system through “murdana,” where men are confined within the inner quarters of the house and the creation of “Ladyland,” try to prove that women are superior to men and occupy important positions in education and research. Being an educated Muslim

woman and an activist, Hossain's *Sultana's Dream* underlines a vision where women's control could create a better future. This questions the basis of patriarchy and reflects a feminist utopia.

Although written during the pre-Independent era and in the early twentieth century, the reversal of gender roles becomes a possible glaring contrast (a kind of dystopia) in today's age with the onset of the Covid-19 Pandemic, where many of the ideas have taken another dimension. With reference to the public and private space, both men and women are confined within the house. The concepts of self-isolation and work from home, have prevented men, especially the bread winners of the family from venturing out for the prospect of job. In many cases, the shutting down of industries have led to mass unemployment. The sharing of household chores by both men and women becomes a necessity in order to protect one's family from outsiders like the domestic help. In terms of gender constructs, does this lead to a possibility of gender equality or a gender clash due to adverse circumstances? Is it a possible dystopian reality that we are moving towards during the Pandemic? Can this situation be seen in contrast to the utopian vision of *Sultana's Dream* that is inverting certain gender roles? or Is 2020 oppressed/possessed by another invasion like the British colonial era, which has its own positive and negative aspects? These are some of the areas/questions that my paper will try to explore.

Bio-Note

Anavisha Banerjee is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Bharati College, University of Delhi. Her area of interest includes gender studies and plays of Shakespeare. She has presented papers in national and international conferences and has many publications related to these fields.

Antara Chatterjee, "An Alternative Vision of Science: Intersections of Science, Sustainability and Feminism in Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain's *Sultana's Dream*"

Abstract

This paper attempts to read the utopian novella *Sultana's Dream* (1905) by the feminist thinker and writer Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain to uncover the vision of a gendered and sustainable science, through the convergences of science, sustainability and feminism, offered in the text. Hossain's feminist utopian narrative presents an alternative vision of science, development, and gender roles and norms, through her delineation of the imagined country of Ladyland, ruled by women's scientific innovation and technological excellence. A multi-layered narrative from colonial Bengal, *Sultana's Dream* converges a speculative with a deeply political literary imagination, raising a range of significant questions about gender, patriarchy, empire, capitalism and modernity. It posits an alternative vision of modernity founded upon a sustainable, gender-sensitive and non-violent ideology of science and the world, departing from the violence of patriarchal and capitalist modernity. Such a modernity, hinging on capitalist, imperialist and patriarchal aggrandizement, predicated upon an exploitative and violent 'modern' science, traces its origins back to Western ideas of the scientific and rational 'modern' man. This deeply unequal, uneven idea of modernity and development is contested in Hossain's dream world of Ladyland, governed entirely by women and based instead on sustainable science and development. Ladyland promotes sustainable science, equitability, women's empowerment, and non-violence towards humans and nature. In promoting these aims, Rokeya's futuristic work posits a deep challenge to ideologies of empire and Western modernity.

My paper argues that *Sultana's Dream* uses science to question patriarchy, and imperialist and capitalist acquisition, which oppress and marginalise women, colonised peoples, and their natural and cultural resources. Through the sustainable, equitable, gendered and non-violent science practised in Ladyland, Hossain presents an alternative vision of science, which is a strong indictment of the consumerist, violent, unsustainable use of technology in the interests of capitalist and colonial modernity.

Bio-Note

Antara Chatterjee is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences at IISER, Bhopal. She studied English literature at Jadavpur University, and the University of Leeds, U.K. Her research interests include Indian writing in English, South Asian diasporic literatures, trauma, violence and memory, cultural production from Kashmir, medical and environmental humanities. She has received grants and fellowships from the UGC, IAS Shimla, the Charles Wallace India Trust, and the ICHR. She has publications in *South Asian Review*, *Humanities*, and in an edited collection of essays by Palgrave Macmillan.

Shruti Singh, "Utopia Dystopia and Feminism in *Tamarind Mem* and *My Feudal Lord*"

Abstract

In Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), the text that coined the term which may mean both eutopia (the good place) and outopia (no place). Although the term is impractical in terms of application but it talks about the goal of true utopia: to form a better society in comparison to the existing one. According to Ernst Bloch 'Utopianism is fundamental to human consciousness because humans are always striving forward, anticipating, desiring'. John Stuart Mill coined 'Dystopia', meaning 'bad place' in 1868. Definition of dystopia according to the *Oxford English Dictionary* is "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible".

Author always creates his or her own world which can be called utopian world as he is never satisfied with the present world, same way a woman creates her own utopian world as real world is dominated by men and have patriarchal setup. She cannot do things according to her own . Utopian world of 'Tehmina Durrani' changed into dystopian world when she got to know the reality of her second husband, Badami's *Tamarind Mem* could never get her utopian world in the arms of her husband rather suffered, it also shows dichotomy of how two people may have conflicting recollections about the same past, same past was utopia for one and dystopia for another. .My paper will talk about concept of utopia dystopia and feminism in the novel *Tamarind Mem* and *My Feudal Lord*.

Bio-Note

Shruti Singh has worked at BBD National institute of technology for 7 years. She has published papers and a book. Her area of research interest is Indian poetry in English, Feminist theory and Criticism, Professional communication and English language teaching. She has worked under the supervision of Prof. Ranu Uniyal.

Day 4: Saturday, 20 March 2021**SESSION 10: CRITICAL POSTCOLONIAL DYSTOPIAS****9:15 AM to 11:05 AM, IST****Chair: Sukrita Paul Kumar****Bio-Note of Chair**

Sukrita Paul Kumar, a well-known poet and critic in English was born and brought up in Kenya and is at present living in Delhi. She held the Aruna Asaf Ali Chair at the University of Delhi, till recently. An Honorary Fellow of International Writing Programme, University of Iowa (USA) and a former Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, she was also an invited poet in residence at Hong Kong Baptist University. She has published several collections of poems in English including, *Folds of Silence*, *Without Margins*, *Rowing Together* and *Apurna*. Her poems selected and translated by the eminent lyricist Gulzar has been published by HarperCollins as a bilingual book, *Poems Come Home*. Sukrita's major critical works include *Narrating Partition*, *Conversations on Modernism*, *The New Story and Man*, *Woman and Androgyny*. Some of her co-edited books are *Speaking for Herself: An Anthology of Asian Women's Writings*, *Ismat*, *Her Life, Her Times*, *Interpreting Homes in South Asian Literature and Women's Studies in India: Contours of Change*. As Director of a UNESCO project on "The Culture of Peace", she edited *Mapping Memories*, a volume of Urdu short stories from India and Pakistan. She has two books of translations, *Stories of Joginder Paul* and the novel *Sleepwalkers*. She is the chief editor of the book on *Cultural Diversity in India* published by Macmillan India and prescribed by the University of Delhi. A recipient of many prestigious fellowships and residencies, Sukrita has lectured at many universities in India and abroad. A solo exhibition of her paintings was held at AIFACS, Delhi. A number of Sukrita's poems have emerged from her experience of working with homeless people.

Shruti Sareen, 'Dystopias of Power and Marginality: Monica Mody's *Kala Pani* and Suniti Namjoshi's *Conversations of Cow*'

Abstract

I plan to examine two dystopias, Monica Mody's *Kala Pani* and Suniti Namjoshi's *Conversations of Cow*, in order to bring out parallels and similarities between them. Both dystopias prominently showcase issues of gender, sexuality, and of non-human beings such as animals and trees/plants. They both also showcase the workings of power. I also show parallels between them, not only in content, but also in the forms of these texts, which privilege voices and conversations over a narrative voice. Whereas Mody depicts what Foucault would call a totalising and authoritarian power in the form of the new world government, Namjoshi shows what, in Foucauldian terms, would be discursive and distributed power embodied by all individuals in terms of class, race gender sex related discrimination, rather than a single authoritarian gaze of power. Both narratives emphasise on the power of stories by marginalised voices to break the regimes of power. Michel Certeau has argued that abstractions of space can be broken down by lived experiential and embodied stories of spatiality. I find that these individual stories can also facilitate in breaking down power equations. In my paper, I intend to first discuss the issues of gender, sexuality, and animals/trees which are utilised by both texts

to showcase power relations. Then I would like to see how both these dystopic texts emphasise on the power of stories of the marginalised to create a chink in the workings of power.

Bio-Note

Shruti Sareen studied in Rajghat Besant School KFI, Varanasi and went on to study English literature from Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi. With a keen interest in Indian Poetry in English, her MPhil looks at the depiction of urban spaces and her PhD on twenty first century feminist poetry at the University of Delhi. She has worked at several Delhi University colleges as Assistant Professor. She has presented several papers in reputed institutions. She has had over a hundred poems accepted by Indian and South Asian journals and anthologies, and a handful of short stories. *A Witch Like You* is her debut poetry collection forthcoming from Girls on Key Poetry (Australia) in April 2021.

Piyush Raval, “Dystopian Vision of Indian Society in Prayaag Akbar’s *Leila*”

Abstract

As there are few dystopian novels about India, I propose to explore in the present paper the dystopic vision of India in *Leila* (2017), a contemporary dystopian fiction in English by the journalist Prayaag Akbar (1982-). By setting its narrative in an unidentified, unnamed near Indian future city in late 2040s, *Leila* presents a picture of future Indian society which is polarized greatly along the lines of caste, class, community and religion, and is governed with a new set of laws for order, peace and safety according to ancient custom by the Council from the panopticon of the Purity Pyramid (Towers) with a motto ‘Purity for All’. Though *Leila*’s mystical imaginary city resembles a contemporary urban dwelling with modern infrastructure like flyroads, shopping malls and the Skydomes, its forceful division of communities into sectors or purity walls prohibits any human relationship, either in the form of love or marriage, beyond the laws of his/her community. Class inequalities in this city become visible in the novel’s representation of the privileged class living in secure, comfortable private enclaves, and the scavenger community facing frequent problem of landfill fires in garbage mountains in East Slum. Their inevitable entry for menial works is restricted through checkpoints at city gates. The protagonist Shalini (and women specifically) is punished for marrying with Riz against the law and imprisoned for purity exercises in the Purity Camp. Focussing on the text, the paper seeks to examine this dystopian vision of India which unfolds with the episode of Shalini’s separation from her daughter Leila, due to her brother in law Naz’s report to the Repeaters who insisted on raising her according to the Muslim culture, and sets Shalini on a long lonely sixteen years journey of quest for her daughter Leila that encounters her with the rigid laws of the Council and abusive treatment of violators through the Repeaters.

Bio-Note

Piyush Raval teaches as Assistant Professor in Department of English, Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar, Gujarat (India). He has written and edited two books - *Translation Studies: Contemporary Perspectives on Postcolonial and Subaltern Translations* (New Delhi: Viva Books, 2012) and *Negotiating Identities: Globalisation, Culture and History* (Vidyanagar: Sardar Patel University Press, 2012). He pursued his doctoral research on continental philosophy of aesthetics after Auschwitz. He was awarded Junior Research Fellowship in 2005 and Translation Fellowship in 2008 by Centre for Contemporary Theory, Forum on Contemporary Theory, Baroda. He visited The International Lincoln Center for American Studies, Louisiana State University in Shreveport, USA under its Exchange Visitor

Program in 2019 and as a short term scholar, delivered lectures at Washington DC and Shreveport.

Shibangi Dash, “Dalit Subjectivity in the Dystopic Indian Society: A Study of Few Selected Stories by Urmila Pawar and Baburao Bagul”

Abstract

The commonly encountered dystopic societies of science fiction and political fiction are vastly different from the dystopic lives led by the dalits and the social realism that surrounds them. Indian society can be categorically stated as the dystopia of a status quo. The formulated division of labour gave way to subsequent division of labourer marking social fragmentation. The totalitarian authority of this dystopic Indian society is helmed by Brahminical Hinduism and its concomitant ideology. The abolition of untouchability is nothing but a ‘legal fiction’. This paper looks into the dystopic space of a dalit settlement known by different names like maharwada, chandalsahi or a pariah street. This spatial arrangement is marked by curbing of aspirational lives as well as sexual desires. But these spaces are not imaginary spaces as seen in science fictions. They are exclusive space meant for people who carry out ‘polluting’ activities. The dystopic Indian society with its entrenched caste system sees itself as a different kind of normality which further strips the Dalits of their dignity. As modernity begins to reconstitute the spatial configuration of Indian society, carving out new and secularized public spaces in urban areas, the Dalit ghettos and all the lines of casteness that define it undergo a peculiar transformation. The transition from rural to urban settlements also alters the role played by women, a prime stakeholder in this dystopic society. This paper also explores the crucial role played by women as individual entities to revise the societal dystopic structures. This process in turn subverts the ascribed identity of women as mother, wife or daughter.

While utopia takes us to a future, dystopia drags us into an abyss of dark reality. The dialectic between the two imaginaries, the dream and the nightmare, also beg for inclusion together. By focusing on few selected stories by Urmila Pawar and Baburao Bagul, this paper further analyzes how far inclusivity has been achieved in the society or if it is still a distant reality to be countered by Dalit subjectivity through education, aspiration and critical consciousness. Finally, this paper interrogates who/what challenges this brahminical Hinduism that has resulted in this dystopia. What would be a society without caste? Will it be a utopic society, a *begumpura* as envisioned by Ravidas or brahminical hegemony will continue to strive towards achieving a *ramrajya*?

Bio-Note

Shibangi Dash is a research scholar in the Department of English, University of Delhi. Her primary research interest lies in the intersectional study of caste in India, Indian literature, food studies, gender studies and folk culture of Odisha. She has presented papers in various national and international conferences.

Shayari Dutta, “Post-Imperial Utopia: Naipaul’s Romance of Ruins”

Abstract

V.S. Naipaul’s 1987 post imperial picturesque, *The Enigma of Arrival*, exemplifies the tension between the Trinidadian-Indian British writer’s “raw colonial nerves” and his quest for an elusive “metropolitan material” by foregrounding the idyllic English landscape of Wiltshire as

the utopic site of his “becoming”. Here the process of recovery of the “colonial” self-riven by anxieties of racial diminution necessitates the casting of his “Third World” subjects in static representations of cultural nullity. Interestingly, Naipaul is able to reclaim a “literary” England only in terms of its post-war ruins, although his deployment of the tropes of decay, change and “belatedness” allows him an enigmatic moment of historical reckoning with a diminished England which had earlier caused him such agony. This Wiltshire utopia grants flexibility to the writer’s sense of scale, whereby a play of diminution and expansion assists in the “scaling down” of Empire to the dimensions of his ambitions. Here Naipaul’s intimate sharing in the melancholic assessment of the imbrications of glory and decline undertaken by traditions of nostalgia in English literature strengthens his sense of belonging.

Significantly, his Wiltshire nostalgia does not perceive England’s diminished glory as regression; distinct from the dystopic nullity of his Caribbean background, the ruins of Wiltshire in fact affords the “colonial” writer a disrupted sense of rootedness in its antiquity and history, thereby consolidating his status as successor to an English heritage. This manageable construct of the “post imperial picturesque” is based on a knowing disregard for the myth of “Englishness”- the basis for a range of immigration legislations promulgated in the Thatcherite era- and a consequent translation of this vital knowledge into nostalgia for a “time of empire” which cannot be recovered. At the same time, the utopic possibilities of Wiltshire are predicated on the denial of futurity to a time of rapid modernization of farmlands and the “infiltration” by farm workers from the city, which in turn conjures up an older Naipaulian terror of “foreigners” from the Commonwealth swamping the English metropolis from the 1950s onwards. Here the pestilence of migration from the West Indies, Asia and Africa threatens to “colonize” Naipaul’s utopia of belated “arrival”. Thus the intended paper would seek to interrogate the nature and limits of this utopia as an extension of Naipaul’s poetics and politics.

Bio-Note

Shayeari Dutta is a PhD research scholar at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Her research pertains to the fields of Postcolonial Theory, Indian English Literature, Diasporic Literature and Migration Studies. She is looking at the works of the authors V.S. Naipaul and Salman Rushdie in the context of their interactions with the several communities they inhabit. She is also interested in the broad domain of Cultural Studies. She works as an Assistant Professor at the Department of English, Surendranath College, University of Calcutta.

C. D. NARASIMHAIAH PRIZE SESSION (SHORTLISTED PAPERS)

11:05 AM - 1:00 PM, IST

Chairs: T. Vijaykumar & Fatima Rizvi

Bio-Note of Chairs

Vijay Kumar Tadakamalla is a former Professor of English and Dean, Faculty of Arts, Osmania University, Hyderabad. His publications include critical studies: *English and Other International Languages* (PLSI Vol 37), *Globalisation: Australian-Asian Perspectives*, *Focus India: Postcolonial Narratives of the Nation*; and translations from Telugu: *The Liberation of Sita* by Volga and *Kanyasulkam*, an early 20th century classic by

Gurajada Venkata Appa Rao. He is a TEDx speaker, Director of the annual Hyderabad Literary Festival, and one of the Founder Editors of *Muse India: the Literary e-Journal*.

Fatima Rizvi is Associate Professor in the Department of English and Modern European Languages at the University of Lucknow. She specializes in Urdu literature in translation. Her research papers have been published in journals of national and international repute and in anthologies of criticism. She translates Urdu and Hindi. *Shadows on the Wall: Pen Portraits* a collection of Javed Siddiqi's translated essays is due to be published this year by Om Books International. She is currently translating Qurratulain Hyder's *Sitaron se Aage* for Women Unlimited and co-editing a collection of interdisciplinary, critical essays on Disability Studies. She was awarded the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize by IACLALS in 2018 and the Jawad Memorial Prize for Urdu-English translation in 2019.

Moinak Banerjee, "Dissent and Death of the Stateless, Homeless and Lawless – Dystopias of Migration in the Oral Narratives of Marichjhapi Massacre."

Abstract

The historiographies of the Indian nation-state are rooted in a continuum of violence where human rights are not 'inalienable' because they cease to be extra-political and extra-territorial. The state identifies homeless, stateless and rightless human beings who are stripped of any legal status and reduced to 'bare life' while their bodies become the very site of heinous atrocities. The execution of Dalit minorities from Bangladesh in Marichjhapi by the communist government of West Bengal is a paradigmatic instance in the ideas and techniques of biopolitics, necropolitics and manhunting as employed by the state which remain always already dystopic in formulation and does not wait for the future. The primary text in consideration is Deep Halder's *Blood Island* which includes oral narratives of Marichjhapi by victims, survivors, witnesses, journalists, lawyers and writers. There are similar horrific accounts in Bengali which elude public attention due to ideological suppression and apathy of the 'bhadrolok' reading culture. Can a journalist's attempt to redress a suppressed historical event by translating fragmented memories into major language, creating new readership and allowing room for public discussion be considered as acts of creative resistance? What could be the most ethical methodology of restructuring history based on oral recollections?

A human rights intervention for expanding the scope of literary studies to address the questions of social justice is an imperative step towards the 'planetary' turn. The artefacts of human rights violation in invisibilized spaces fail to be a part of the national, continental, global or wordly but can they succeed in reclaiming the planetary? Can the oral reimagination of statelessness act as modal points of 'artificiality' by redressing the unrealizable impossibilities in alternate historiographies of exterminated imagined communities under the modern militarized project of sovereignty?

Bio-Note

Moinak Banerjee is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English, McGill University at Montreal. He aims to engage critically with radical aesthetics and politics of dissident literature and culture in order to question the conceptual superstructures of understanding the Global South in general and India in particular. His research interest lies in studying the intellectual histories, archival politics, translational modalities and problems of representation in non-canonical literary and print forms emerging from heterogeneous postcolonial cultures.

Ishita Sareen, “The Self in Disharmony: E(a)ffective Political Dystopias in Hari Kunzru’s *Red Pill*”

Abstract

This paper will analyse the incognito political dystopias in Hari Kunzru’s *Red Pill* (2020) through Arjun Appadurai’s disjunctive “-scapes” outlined by various global flows, and Sara Ahmad’s affective politics of emotion. Originally embodying freedom from ignorance, “Red Pill” now coincides with far-right delusions. Reading Kunzru’s novel as an allegory of international politics torn between Enlightenment liberalism and anti-Enlightenment alt-right, the paper will expose the historical foundations beneath these hostilities, suggesting that the lone self is insufficient for such battles. It will also articulate the methodologies by which Kunzru revalidates shared cultural spaces in the narrative struggle for space, identity, and visibility. The narrative shifts among arid political landscapes, each as sterile as the last. The unnamed narrator is haunted by a crisis of belief as he enters the closely monitored Deuter Centre in Wannsee as a fellow, a setting retrospectively reminding the reader of the Final Jewish Solution (Wannsee is the site of the 1942 Wannsee Conference where Nazis decreed the Final Solution.). A liberal in a Fascist setting, he re-examines his democratic principles when attacked by Alt-right Anton. Incorporating a tale of 1950s East Berlin, Kunzru implies that a socialist future is equally grim. The narrator’s patriotic wife is antithetically aligned with blue flowers. In the pill’s rabbit hole, the ivory-tower narrator ineffectually examines his beliefs while his sanity crumbles. Bubbling with astringent dystopias, *Red Pill* exposes the accretion of alt-right realities from virtual darkrooms into broadly-lit parliaments. Appadurai’s globalisation spawns a utopia for the isolationist alt-right, ruled by, as Ahmad infers, an affective politics of violence. Concluding with the 2016 US election, Kunzru manifests Appadurai’s utopia-dystopia through a world where people are electoral tools for a mass exit from democracy. Theorising *Red Pill* is necessary to establish that Enlightenment liberalism is an unrealised good space (eu-topos) and a no place (ou-topos), a utopia that is still to be yearned into existence.

Bio-Note

Ishita Sareen is Senior Research Fellow, Ph.D. at the Department of English, Panjab University, Chandigarh. Her research reads Chandigarh as a modern spatial experiment through its literary perceptions and lived experience. She has done her B.A.(H) from Lady Shri Ram and M.A. from the Department of English, University of Delhi. Between 2019-20, she presented her research at conferences organized by IACLALS, MELUS-MELOW, SWAPCA (Southwest Popular/American Culture Association) and the London Centre for Interdisciplinary Research.

Jaya Yadav, “The ‘Everyday’ of Dystopia: An Analysis of *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*”

Abstract

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has blurred the lines between lived reality and representations of dystopia, science fiction, and fantasy. The need to introspect and interrogate paradigms of systemic inequality that has widened during the crisis finds a space in literature, especially in readings of dystopian fiction emerging from South Asia. The evolution of dystopian fiction, namely through graphic novels of the region can be read through Malik Sajad’s *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and Sarnath Banerjee’s *All Quiet in Vikaspuri*. On the

surface the two texts may seem to vary in terms of location, they both chronicle the developments of muted violence in Kashmir and Delhi respectively. It may appear that the Indian State is the perpetrator of violence in the former, but a close reading of the latter delves deeper into the everyday and cites the struggles of the working class within the city, based on the failure of governmental institutions. I argue that ‘dystopia’ in both texts is not an alternative reality, but rather the everyday for the citizens of Kashmir and Delhi. Moreover, the implications of the State on the natural environment in both novels is also a concern highlighted throughout the depiction of the endangered *hangul* in Munnu, and in the near extinction of water in *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* which today in terms of climate change, pollution levels and frequent water crises, seems more ‘real’. The altering landscape of the homes of Kashmiris, now altered with the arrival of the army is noticeable through this act of creating textual evidence in the form of the graphic novel, capturing the human violence committed upon natural resources as well as human relations. The inflections of the anthropocene, intertwined with capitalism weave the narrative highlighting various themes that recur in these texts. Dystopia becomes the ‘everyday’ reality, expressed through the medium, combined through the ‘reading’ and ‘seeing’ of the visual as well as textual.

Bio-Note

Jaya Yadav is a PhD scholar of the University of Delhi, working on contemporary South Asian Literature. Her M.Phil Thesis was on fiction focusing on Amitav Ghosh's *The Calcutta Chromosome* and the *Ibis* Trilogy. She has done her Bachelor's from Lady Shri Ram College for Women, and Master's as well as M.Phil from the University of Delhi. She possesses a deep interest in the interdisciplinary aspect of literature and its role in questions of identity, history and politics. Her work also focuses on issues of class, race and gender, especially in conflict zones. She is currently teaching at Janki Devi Memorial College in New Delhi.

Swasti Sharma, “Dystopian Futurescape: Ecocentric Counterculture in Jayant Narlikar’s Oeuvre”

Abstract

Man may claim to be the master of the earth but the best of his technology is no match to the scale on which nature can operate – Narlikar (42)

Science fiction is characterised by the pervasiveness of cognitive estrangement. According to Darko Suvin, a science fiction story or novel encompasses ‘novum’, a device whose presence compels us to imagine a different way of perceiving our world. Jayant Vishnu Narlikar’s oeuvre integrates the function of cosmic epoch and quantum theorisation with totalitarian or post-apocalyptic weltanschauung. His “Ice Age Cometh” is a ‘fantastic’ cautionary tale, narrating a radical departure from the world of complacent experience. The ominous viewpoint of our contemporary order vis-à-vis environmental degradation has been projected into disastrous prognostications about the future. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the anticipated ramifications of climate change from an ecocentric standpoint. The paper will primarily scrutinize the positioning of existential anxiety in science fiction. In addition, the research paper shall attempt to analyze fictional Dr. Chitnis’s apprehensions on equilibrium disruption in the light of IPCC’s (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) warnings. The paper will furnish a genealogical study of the tropes of Indian science fiction writing, commencing from “The Runaway Cyclone” (1896) by Jagadish Chandra Bose, which is widely considered the first example of Indian sci-fi literature.

Through comparative analysis, the contrast between Indian and western sci-fi will be brought to the fore.

Bio-Note

Swasti Sharma is currently working as Assistant Professor (ad-hoc) at the Department of English, Satyawati College, University of Delhi. She has presented research papers at multiple national and international seminars/conferences.

SESSION 11: FEMINIST USTOPIAS AND UTOPIAS

2:00 PM - 4:10 PM, IST

Chair: Rukmini Bhaya Nair

Bio-Note of Chair

Rukmini Bhaya Nair is Professor of Linguistics and English, Emerita, at IIT Delhi. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge and has since taught at universities ranging from Singapore to Stanford and delivered plenaries worldwide from Aarhus to Xinjiang. Awarded another honorary doctorate by the University of Antwerp for her contributions to narrative theory, Nair has authored 10 books and about 150 articles. Her books include *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch*; *Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture and Poetry in a Time of Terror* (Oxford University Press, 2002, 2003, 2009), as well as the wide-ranging reference volume co-edited by Peter deSouza titled *Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 20th Century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). Nair was, among other things, Head of Department, Humanities and Social Sciences, IITD, from 2006 to 2009, CRASSH Fellow at Cambridge, Senior Professorial Fellow at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library (NMML), Teen Murti, 2010-12, followed by a Professorial Fellowship at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) in 2016. In 2019, she was Distinguished Visiting Professor, Hunan University. Nair serves on the boards of international journals like *Language and Dialogue*, *Literary Semantics*, *Text Matters* as well as on the Consultative Boards of the International Pragmatics Association (IPRA) and *Biblio*. Her latest major grants have been from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to conduct basic research in cognition on 'Language, Emotion and Culture' (2009-12) and the Indian Council of Cultural Relations (ICSSR) on 'Cognitive Capabilities in Education' (2013-16). Starting in 2017, she is Indian Team Leader for the ninecountry project on the 'Geography of Philosophy' headquartered at Pittsburgh University. In addition, she has won the All India Poetry Society/ British Council First Prize and published three volumes of poetry with Penguin. The *Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry* (2014), that contains iconic names like T.S. Eliot and Pablo Neruda for the century 1910-2010, says of her work that it is "widely admired by other poets and critics for its postmodern approach to lyrical meaning and feminine identity." Nair writes on social issues for several papers and TV channels and her writings, both creative and critical, have been included on the syllabi of Chicago, Delhi, Harvard, Kent, Toronto and other universities. Nair says she does research in linguistics for the same reason that she writes poetry – to discover the limits and possibilities of language.

Srinjoyee Dutta, “Remembering/Dismembering: Tenuous Utopic formulations in Nur Nasreen Ibrahim and Mimi Mondal’s short stories”

Abstract

Robyn Wiegman, in the essay, ‘The Desire for Gender’, opines that no politics, theoretical or pragmatic, is possible without fantastic conceptualisations. While she claims so specifically in the context of the contemporary tenuous debates around gender and queer identity, the logic of the argument can be transposed onto the fundamental need for political utopias in the multifarious and intersectional claims for social justice. It is, after all, only with the necessary visualisation of the ‘perfect’ society that the reigning political, socio-cultural, historical status quo can be challenged. Using this as a theoretical springboard, the paper will explore the literary formulation of utopias in Nur Nasreen Ibrahim’s ‘We Were Never Here’ and Mimi Mondal’s ‘The Sea Sings at Night’. While Ibrahim’s story reveals the many fault lines of the Feminist utopic model(s), Mondal’s piece foregrounds the impossibility of such existence, especially through the trappings of historically burdened identities such as caste and gender. Through the fictive and speculative lens provided by these stories, the paper will attempt to critically examine the teleological, and thus, necessarily violent thrust in the formulation of the utopic. Further, it will problematise the futural, messianic impetus of utopic/dystopic possibilities, especially in the light of everyday dystopic struggles that plague marginalised identities. Both Ibrahim and Mondal’s fiction locates within the utopic possibility, the homogenisation of identity within a single overarching paradigm, and the subsequent social stratification/hierarchisation as an immutable repercussion. The paper will, thus, analyse the significance of ‘utopia/dystopia/ustopia’ as a theoretical concept, which, while a necessary formulation, needs to be continually deterritorialised and reterritorialised in order for it to function as a viable goal in socio-political praxis.

Bio-Note

Srinjoyee Dutta is a doctoral scholar at the Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. She is currently teaching in the capacity of Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi. Located at the intersection of Continental Philosophy, Queer Theory, and Affect Studies, her thesis focuses on the writings of H  l  ne Cixous. She has been the winner of the C.D. Narasimhaiah Memorial Prize, awarded by the IACLALS for the best paper in a conference, for two consecutive years. She is also the co-editor of *What makes it Pop? An Introduction to Studies in Popular Fiction*.

Shraddha A. Singh, “Capitalocene and Dystopia in Margaret Atwood’s *The Heart Goes Last*”

Abstract

In the era of augmented human-machine interactions, the potential of fashioning monumental changes via genetic engineering and biotechnology is significant. Literature has been the medium of documenting not just the long narrative of evolution but also, via fantasy or speculation, often anticipating the future of humanity. This paper seeks to examine how Margaret Atwood presents us with various probabilities of altering humankind and nature in a future of post-apocalyptic dystopic narrative with the use of biotechnology in her web-serialised novel *The Heart Goes Last*. Power, and the desire for more, fuels most of the research conducted today; and the deeper structures of technological projects need to be analysed to

decode the difference between purposeful research, materialism and fetish. Humans and their environment govern, operate, and benefit from new research; and are the subjects, objects and sometimes the end products of it; but as there is no homogenous category of the 'human', the impact of these developments on the individual and society are conditional and manifold. Thus, questions of ownership, agency, power and control will be raised with respect to the human and the various others in *The Heart Goes Last*, especially with respect to contemporary debates in the field of bioethics, within the discourse of the Capitalocene. The paper will also attempt to establish that by challenging anthropocentrism, posthumanism critically engages with literature; and emerges as a tool to problematise the narrative route of the posthuman, particularly depicted in Atwood's narrative.

Bio-Note

Shraddha A. Singh is a Ph.D. scholar at the Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Shraddha teaches Literature in English at Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi. Shraddha has several publications; and has presented papers at national and international seminars and conferences, most recently at the Posthumanism 20/20 international conference organised by Aarhus University, Denmark. Her research areas include speculative fiction, genre fiction, posthumanism and literary theory.

Paromita Bose, "Gendered Dystopias: Reading Naomi Alderman's *The Power* alongside Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*"

Abstract

A world, wherein the women, acquire the power and the ability to overpower, hurt and kill men. This is the setting for Naomi Alderman's *The Power*. The novel tries to engage with the dynamics of a matriarchal world. Contrast this with a world (Gilead, in this case), wherein, a women identity is constructed/determined wholly on bodily functions, in this case reproduction (*The Handmaid's Tale*). Alderman and Atwood literally represent the two ends of the spectrum, wherein they talk about the short-sightedness of gender roles, and the corrupting nature of power. The novels, belonging to the genre of speculative fiction, talk about power as embedded in human relations and societal structures; these novels are about women and their imagined positions in society. While *Handmaid's Tale*, focusses on an individual, *The Power* is a societal/global narrative, while Atwood puts forth a future that is doomed for women, wherein they are forced into servitude through the bodily function of procreation, Alderman, locates women as the dominant gender, and explores the complexities of a female dominated world. This paper will then, attempt to read these novels alongside each other, thereby trying to locate a possible conversation/engagement between them (in terms of *The Power* being a response to *Handmaid's Tale*), within the purview of power, that manifests itself at the physical/biological level of gender. It will also try to answer questions like, "What does it mean to be powerful/powerless", "Does physical power translate into political power", and "Is an egalitarian society a possibility?"

Bio-Note

Paromita Bose is an Associate Professor in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, at Mahindra University, Hyderabad, India. For her Doctoral Thesis, she worked on the Social History of Dance in India. Her areas of research and interest are Gender Studies, Indian Writing in English and Translation, Cultural and Urban Studies and Children's Literature.

Amina Hussain, “The Republic of Gilead and the “two legged wombs”: Feminist Dystopia in Margret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*”

Abstract

In her dystopian novel *The Handmaid’s Tale*, Canadian writer Margret Atwood portrays an oppressive world, where the religious fundamentalism has captured women into controlled objects. The Republic of Gilead is a patriarchal culture that values and defines a woman based solely on her sexual and reproductive abilities, the women are divided into four categories, women with viable ovaries became “two-legged wombs,” called the Handmaids, without whom the Gilead cannot survive in the face of rising infertility. The post-menopausal or unmarried sterile women called Aunts, who trained and indoctrinated Handmaids to serve the Gilead; the servant-class, coloured women are called Marthas and the women who could not be used for any purpose were labelled as “criminals” and were forced to clear the toxic waste. Any resistance by women would involve a surgical process to turn them into ‘unwoman’. Drawing on the Foucault’s concept of power, surveillance and panopticon, the paper will explore the formation of a systemic feminist dystopia based on perpetual discipline, surveillance and institutionalised “othering”. In the heart of the creation of a utopic nation of Gilead by the religious revivalism lies a brutal and grotesque dystopia for women. The paper attempts to ironically trace the process of dystopia (“two legged wombs”) with its complex and elaborate system of ideological and repressive state apparatus (Althusser) in an apparent utopia of Gilead thereby challenging the very notion/existence of utopia

Bio-Note

Amina Hussain is working as an Assistant Professor at Khwaja Moinuddin Language University with the Department of English and Modern European and Asian Languages, Lucknow. She has also taught as an Assistant Professor at Amity University, School of Languages, and Lucknow. Recipient of a Medal and Certificate of Merit for securing first position in Sri Venkateswara College, Delhi University in M.A (English Hons). She has presented papers in numerous national and international seminars and conferences. She was invited to speak on “Global South Workshop” in Hong Kong organised by Max Weber Foundation. Her areas of interest includes: diaspora, gender studies, culture studies, third world feminism and Islamic feminism. She has co-edited a book entitled, “*The Dynamics of Gender: New Approaches in Feminism*”. She is also guest editing a special issue on *Gendering Pandemic: Covid 19 and its Impact on Women* for the Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetic also known as JCLA. She also occasionally writes for feminist news portals.

Payal Jain, “Doing Things with Words: Acts of Subversion in *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Vox*”

Abstract

Most commonplace yet most insidious, words and narratives, both oral and written play an integral role in sustaining or dismantling any power structure. Feminist dystopian novels that deal with the disempowerment of women in a regimented patriarchal capitalist system often take recourse to the motif of control of access to and use of speech and script as a means of repression. This paper reads Margaret Atwood’s cult fiction *Handmaid’s Tale* (1985) depicting

autocratic theocratic Gilead where women get reduced to only womb and a recent debut novel *Vox* (2018) by Christina Dalcher that created sensation and also invited criticism for its ‘banal’ reference of control over women’s speech. The present pandemic that has exposed the intricate relationship between power politics, speech control and gendered identities in a way not experienced in recent times, makes the concern in hand quite pertinent. This paper reads instances of women reading and writing and speaking and listening in a world where they are not allowed to do so. Right from uttering a word to reading and writing a phrase to spinning narratives out of bare minimum, by indulging in the censored, women characters of these futuristic narratives underline the subversive power of words that hold the key to freedom from regimentation and oppression. The paper reads some specific instances where words, scripts and narratives do not actually refer to or signify anything directly associated with power or rebellion, but by virtue of being words and enacted by women, become subversive.

Bio-Note

Payal Jain teaches in the Department of English, Cotton University, Guwahati, Assam. Her areas of interest include women’s studies, Narrative theory, animal studies and Indian literatures. She has presented and published several papers on women’s writings, female body and sexuality, communities of women and animals in literature to name a few.

Roopa Philip, “Regulated Bodies: An Analysis of Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps*, Maggie Shen King’s *An Excess Male* and Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Escape* as ‘ustopias’”

Abstract

Margaret Atwood coined the term “ustopia” to denote a development within feminist literature – narratives that seem to depict an apparently utopic society but in actuality present a futuristic society that caricatures the gender hierarchies and practices of contemporary society. Bina Shah’s *Before She Sleeps*, Maggie Shen King’s *An Excess Male* and Manjula Padmanabhan’s *Escape* fall within this sub-genre. In these three novels, the writers present futuristic worlds where ‘woman’ has become a rare and precious commodity. They present a world where the commodification of the female body has led to institutionalised practices of violence – both physical and emotional against women and the control and policing of the female body manifest through the reduction of women into ‘reproducers.’

The female body is site of patriarchal power and control – many writings have used the female body as a metaphor to articulate this. Feminist writers, while narrativizing the ‘docile female bodies’ of power and control have also used it to articulate resistance. This paper will analyse how these texts articulate the power relations underlying the process of gendering – both in these fictional worlds and by extension, the experience within the societies that the writers write in. The paper will also analyse how these texts use the features of ‘ustopia’ to do so.

Bio-Note

Roopa Philip works as an Assistant Professor, Department of English, Jyoti Nivas College, Bangalore. Her areas of interest include Gender Studies and Women’s Writing. She has 8 research paper publications in international/national journals and 7 paper presentations at national/international conferences to her name. She is also a Board of Studies member for MA English at Mount Carmel College (2017-2020).

SESSION 12: PANDEMIC WOES

4:10 PM – 6:15 PM, IST

Chair: Meenakshi Pawha

Bio-Note of Chair

Meenakshi Pawha is an Associate Professor at the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. She has published two books and several research papers. Her areas of research interests are Folk, Contemporary Drama and Theatre, Cinema, Ecocriticism, Translation and ELT. She is a recipient of Fulbright Fellowship -New York University, Mellon Fellow at Harvard University and British Council's Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow at Cambridge.

Indrajit Mukherjee, “The Storm is over”: Negotiating Darwinism and Post-Apocalyptic Milieu in Jack London’s *The Scarlet Plague*’

Abstract

Presently, the COVID 19 crisis gives birth to several questions in our minds about the post-apocalyptic scenario: Will the catastrophe be a catalyst for a crucial social change? Will there be anarchy and the politics of extremism, or will there be a rise of dictatorship? Will we, as part of the Post-Corona world, be driven by scientific-rational thinking and ethics, or will we move on to another catastrophe by relying on the destiny of blind faith and religious hypocrisy? Will we emphasize more on our moral grounds, or will we become more courageous in sympathetic mobilization in the face of future disasters? Will we encourage the free flow of information so that our democratic institutions can be more efficient and humane? Will we increase the distance between the state and the people? Should we continue to live a self-centred life, or should we be careful in our social responsibilities and sympathetic to the needs and problems of ‘others’? The representation of pandemic in literature reflects our fears and despairs about illness and societal crumbling while simultaneously representing us that it is not only necessary but also unavoidable to reinvent ourselves into something new. Jack London’s *The Scarlet Plague* (1912) brings out the novelist’s delineation in his notions of human and social atavism on the brink of destruction by a fast-acting and untreatable plague. After discussing how people’s attitudes towards these kinds of pandemic alter from time to time, this paper seeks to address these aforesaid questions engaging Darwinism and Post-Apocalyptic world in this almost-forgotten short fiction.

Bio-Note

Indrajit Mukherjee (M.A., Gold Medalist) is currently teaching as an Assistant Professor, Department of English, Nistarini Women’s College, and also pursuing his doctoral research at Vidyasagar University. He has presented papers in IACLALS, JU, BHU, HCU, IIT Madras, and AU and his articles have been published in several UGC Care listed journals. His areas of interest include Postcolonial Literature, Modern Literary Theory, and Avant-Garde Theatre.

Sindhu J., “Chernobyl Prayer as Lived Dystopia: A Signifier for Covid Times?”

Abstract

My paper attempts to view Svetlana Alexievich's *Chernobyl Prayer* as a work that testifies to a dystopian nightmare that was unimaginable, unimagined and yet experienced. The survivors who are interviewed in her work voice the unspeakable and the unanticipated individual aspects of the Chernobyl nuclear explosion disaster of 1986. These experiences range from individual personal tragedy to collective experience which surpassed even the wildest possibilities offered by science fiction or dystopian envisioning. Alexievich's work is an illustration of many familiar features of dystopia, but cannot be said to belong to the genre of dystopian fiction, although it has argued by scholars that her work reflects the hybrid genre of fictional testimony. Constructed like a Greek tragedy, it contains a series of monologues by individuals who survived Chernobyl to tell their own stories, as well as of those who were rendered voiceless in the immediate aftermath and following years of the catastrophe. Disease, suffering and death being the three most prominent recurring motifs of the lived experience recorded in this work prompt a reading of it that finds parallels within the deeply differentiated experiences of the Covid pandemic. The impulse to refer back to this 'past' catastrophe in order to comprehend the present crisis is not new, and gains significance in terms of there being no closure to the questions that have been raised. The paper attempts to draw out these specifics of comparison, while also contextualising the selected text in the frames of witness literature.

Bio-Note

Sindhu J. is Associate Professor in the Department of English, Bangalore University, Bangalore, where she has been teaching since 2007. Her major areas of research interest include Central Asian Studies (with a focus on travel writing), Gender Studies and Ecocriticism, with focus on urban ecology and ecofeminism.

Jeyakirthana J., "Reading *Blindness* in a Pandemic"

Abstract

This paper examines Saramago's novel *Blindness* (1997) in the wake of the pandemic to study how dystopian narratives are implicitly utopian and betray a longing for an "other" mode of being. Saramago paints this utopian longing in dark pessimistic tones, yet his novel is more than an allegorical tale of an ophthalmologist who contracts a disease of white blindness from a patient and infects all except his wife. The blindness in the novel serves as a metaphor for both social and individual ignorance. In the nameless dystopian city ridden by an epidemic of the "white blindness" people have eyes and cannot see; the first set of the infected individuals are initially quarantined—tellingly in an asylum—but it eventually integrates into the insane urbanity beyond, when a fire burns down the asylum walls. This is read as a commentary on the pandemic of capitalism and globalization that Saramago vehemently opposed.

How does the line between fiction and lived experiences blur in the performative space of a novel that both reflects and informs the reader of the dystopian real? The doctor's wife, and her companion dog help a few "blind" individuals navigate the squalid city. The two unlikely protagonists offer an eco-feminist critique into capitalist ideology and cultural ecology to subvert the narrative of a masculine figure who claims control and power over (and through) simulated blind ignorance. The paper also examines individual agency and its role in a dehumanizing system and the role of the writer and reader(s) as agents of critical intervention and change.

Bio-Note

Jeyakirthana is Assistant Professor, Department of English at Gargi College. She has recently submitted her thesis on the Utopian narratives of Ayn Rand & José Saramago.

Moumita Roy, “The Dystopian ‘Normal’: Altered Reality and Traces of Pandemic in Margaret Atwood”

Abstract

The pandemic as an altered reality has usurped human consciousness. In these extraordinary times, spatial and linear understanding of reality, identity, history, and the thin line between modernism, and post-modernism has faltered. One is forced to rethink and articulate a paradoxical turn at understanding dystopia. Margaret Atwood embraces quite peculiarly, the ambivalence and paradox of ‘dystopia’ and succeeds in decentering reality and the familiar. The word ‘normal’ has been problematized by our contemporary catastrophic world and my paper aims at exploring the many dimensions of Atwood’s altered worlds. The paper explores traces of a dystopic, neo- pandemic and post-pandemic imagination in works of Margaret Atwood, and what she calls as “epidemic of panic”. The “emergency” situation and post-apocalyptic thrust in Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* (2003) and *The Year of the Flood* (2009) critically examines questions of anthropocentrism and ecocriticism along with disaster management. Whether the pandemic is actually a dystopia, by which Atwood means something “unsettling”, something bad and causing discomfort or is it an “ustopia” where one has rearticulated and adapted humanitarian traits through disaster.

Bio-Note

Moumita ‘Megh’ Roy is a PhD scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia in the Department of English. She is an alumna of the University of Delhi, Lady Shri Ram College for Women. She takes interest in contemporary critical thoughts, post-colonial literature, Indian literature, Postmodern literature, and her working thesis explores “Cosmopolitanism” in Post-Partition literature.

Azhar Uddin Sahaji, Antihumanism and Experiencing Dystopia in the Time of COVID-19 Pandemic in the Films *Jallikattu* (2019) and *The Platform* (2019)

Abstract

At the time when the COVID-19 was in the process of taking the shape of a pandemic at the end of 2019, Lijo Jose’s Malayalam film *Jallikattu* and Galder Gaztelu Urrutia’s Spanish film *The Platform* were released. Interestingly there is a striking similarity between the present (ongoing) pandemic and the two movies. The worlds depicted in the films although are fictional and impossible soon turn into a reality with surging Covid-19 cases, increasing human paranoia, xenophobia, communal hatred, and more ethnocentric nationalism. The ultimate *selfishness* in man which makes him cruel depicted in the two movies became a living reality for all of us who survived (and still surviving) the pandemic affected the year 2020. By taking into consideration the thematic similarities of the two movies the paper will argue by using the theoretical framework of antihumanism (an offshoot theoretical development to posthumanism), how the films expose a prehistoric nature in man---the raw and wild which was always there in a state of dormancy. Thus, the paper will go on to argue that Civilization has collapsed and man has returned to the prehistoric form of existence where survival by any

means is the only mantra. Moreover, the paper proposes to explore the ‘experience’ of the ‘impossibility’ that penetrates real life and how we, the spectators at online platforms can, make out of the dystopia offered in the two films. The paper shall be divided into three parts; whereas the first part will focus on exploring the dystopia in the two movies and how can it be correlated with the present pandemic; the second part will focus on antihumanism and explore how can it define the dystopian nature in the selected films; and finally, the third part will try to explore the praxis of experience of watching dystopian films at the time of a pandemic.

Bio-Note

Azhar Uddin Sahaji is working as an Assistant Professor (ad hoc) in the Department of English, Zakir Husain Delhi College, University of Delhi.

Neeru Jaiswal, “Covid-19 Pandemic: A Dystopian Crisis from the lens of the movie *Wall E*”

Abstract

Pandemic has become the most talked and searched word of 2020. It has changed the way of living. Social distancing and desertification have become a new normal. In the beginning the scare of torturous death and death from the unknown took over. Desertification and Loneliness during lockdown created a sense of dystopia. The normal interaction got restricted to virtual reality. Machine became the mediator of human to human emotional and financial survival. In the movie *Wall E*, that robot is the last one responsible for collecting garbage. He is the only one left on Planet Earth. He is victim of acute Loneliness, living in desolation in the huge garbage dump left by Human beings. Human race had exploited the natural resources and destroyed the environment. They brought in man-made crisis. In this paper I will explore the possibility of dystopia in case human beings won't change their ways of living and working. Love between *Wall E* and *Eve* and the newly grown seedling on Earth have shown the way forward. Sensitivity in every form is a win-win situation. Isolation and need for empathy. Love can even touch and make the machine fight for Mother Nature and save the world. Man-made crisis afflicting Human race and Planet Earth. Technology becoming the friend and foe. These themes would be explored in this paper in the context of Dystopia.

Bio-Note

Neeru Jaiswal is working as an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Lakshmi Bai College.

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS:

“REAL LIFE FICTION: GENRE AND TRUTH CLAIMS IN POPULAR CALL CENTRE NARRATIVES”

6.30 PM – 7.45 PM IST

Speaker:

Anna Guttman

Chair, Association for Commonwealth Literature & Language Studies (ACLALS)
Professor of English
Lakehead University, Canada

Chair:

Supriya Chaudhuri

Department of English
Jadavpur University

Abstract

Chetan Bhagat’s blockbuster *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2005) was the first popular novel about business process outsourcing work – but not the last. Since 2007, several new authors, including Vikrant Shukla, Shruti Saxena, Anish Trivedi, Brinda Narayan and Makhudar Yadav have all launched careers in fiction writing by employing call centre narratives, and drawing specifically on their corporate work experience. Much like popular compilations of ‘true’ stories by Sudhindra Mokhasi, these texts perform a variety of functions: instructing prospective call centre employees on the industry, breaking down dystopic imaginings of call centre work as simplistically exploitative, and entertaining the reader with tales of youthful hijinks. Perhaps most importantly, however, popular texts interpolate a growing Indian middle class whose utopic wish is to consume the products of the west without either leaving South Asia or conceding any cultural loss, absence or inferiority. In so doing, popular call centre texts reconfigure narratives of globalization for domestic use, which may be why these novels and anthologies have gained far more popularity than the prevalence of business process outsourcing work alone would suggest.

Bio-Note of Speaker

Anna Guttman is a full professor in the department of English at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. She is the Chair of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies, the oldest and largest international organization dedicated to the study of postcolonial literature. She is the author of *Writing Indians and Jews: Metaphorics of Jewishness in South Asian Literature* (2013) and *The Nation of India in Contemporary Indian Literature* (2007) and co-editor of *The Global Literary Field* (2006). She publishes in a variety of areas, including gender and sexuality studies, Jewish studies, globalization studies, and popular culture.

Bio-Note of Chair

Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor Emerita in the Department of English, Jadavpur University, India. She has held visiting appointments at the University of Cambridge and the University of Paris-Sorbonne, and lectured at many universities in India and abroad. Her areas of scholarly

interest are Renaissance studies, philosophy and critical theory, Indian cultural history, urban studies, sport, travel, translation and modernism. Recent publications include *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World* (2018); *Reconsidering English Studies in Indian Higher Education* (2015); *Sport, Literature, Society: Cultural Historical Studies* (2013); and chapters in *A Companion to Virginia Woolf* (2016), *Celebrating Shakespeare: Commemoration and Cultural Memory* (2015), and *A History of the English Novel in India* (2015). She has led on many internationally funded research projects, continues to advise on research and higher education policy, and is active in debates on the humanities, gender and intellectual liberty in India.

Designed and Compiled by
Amitendu Bhattacharya
Kalyanee Rajan
Shaifta Ayoub