

## The Singular Lens



**Chitra Venkataramani: The Story of the Three Strangers :  
A Sub-Urban Graphic Novel  
[Arts:Visual/Aural/conceptual, Environment]**



**(2007)**

*Chitra Venkataramani has a degree in visual communication from the Industrial Design Centre at Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai. She has just finished work on a short film commissioned by the Public Service Broadcasting Trust. Presently she is working on her graphic book. clinicalexam@gmail.com*

Chitra's study focuses on Mumbai and the various ways in which the city can be mapped. Over the past few years, Mumbai has seen a huge transformation where the old is torn down and replaced with a new landscape. These new housing blocks or shopping malls stand at the edge of the old cramped spaces and are generated from an ideal of what is good-looking and clean. In her project, Chitra looks at this notion of hygiene as it operates in the city. After the monsoon floods take over the city every year, there is a new need to intensify the act of cleaning up the city, especially to clean the drains and protect the citizen from diseases. A new sense of hygiene overtakes the city.

Chitra's project has three primary parts with their own narratives described in a set of drawings and maps. The first part looks at the slum rehabilitation schemes that are being put in place, their building typology and drawings that cut through these buildings. A set of drawings is made to cut simultaneously through the rehabilitation buildings, the unorganised settlements and the new townships. The second part is the story of people travelling in tightly-packed trains during rush hour, having constant physical contact with hundreds of other perspiring commuters. The third part is the story of the nala (drain) that snakes across the breadth of the city. As it flows, it traverses different landscapes, old and new. This section is narrated via cross sections across the nala at various parts of the city. The nala takes on the appearance of what is around it: it can become turbid or clean, when passing through the Aarey milk colony or even a drain. Within all these three parts, are different characters who tell stories and draw these maps. In the beginning of the novel, Chitra visualises a doctor and a commuter who talk of blood and sweat, and also the larger network they inhabit. Connecting all three sections is the story of the biology of the city: bacteria, mosquitoes, organisms that breed in drains and our ideas of all that are contagious and the precautions we seem to take. Chitra does not visualise the end of her project as just a compilation of stories. She hopes the distinction between maps, pictures and stories become ambiguous and indistinct in her graphic novel.



## **Ayisha Abraham: Deteriorating Memories: Working with Home Movies**

**[Cinema History, Oral History/Autobiography, Arts]**

**(2003)**

*Ayisha Abraham is a Bangalore-based visual artist who does installation art and makes short digital films. Her short film One Way, one of six in a series of short films titled State of the World, was screened at the Cannes Film Festival in May 2007. ayishaa@gmail.com*

After collecting a small amount of footage (home movies, found footage etc) and selected interviews of filmmakers, Ayisha edited a series of sketches or what she calls film poems, roughly put together with very fine threads of thought. Her attempt is to work through the footage, observe it carefully and decide where to make interventions. In the project, Ayisha toys with the possibility of reframing or re-showing this personal collection of amateur films dug up like broken fragments of a bygone past, films that can evoke in the viewer an all too familiar past. Slowing down the speed of the film, creating fictitious characters by juxtaposing them together two of the tools Ayisha uses for re-looking. She uses footage of family and royal functions, of sport, of travel abroad. Most of the footage is delicate and cannot be played without the blemishes of projecting coming to the foreground. Yet, at a formal level, there are interesting textures to observe.



## **Inder Salim: Towards a Maha-Performance: A Practitioner Reflects on Performance Art**

**[Theatre/Performance, Arts: Visual/Aural/Conceptual]**

**(2007)**

*Inder Salim is a visual artist, poet and performer who is part of MESSART, an organisation that promotes unconventional genres of art practices with registered members from Kashmir, Delhi and Kolkata. indersalim@gmail.com*



Inder Salim's project is to organise a festival of Maha Performance Art in 2009-10 that will bring performance artists from all over the world. Inder believes that the genesis of performance art is feminism and that it has a history of defiance embedded within itself. The genre of performance art, although as old as history, is a recent phenomenon in India in a contemporary sense. Inder's project is to travel through India in search of artists who will explore the performance character of their arts. His travels will open new worlds and hidden art practices. Documenting interviews, locations, moods, studios, Inder will con-

stantly explore the possibility of doing collaborative work. That will be the beginnings of Maha-Performance.

### Performance

I was standing in the middle of a river near Pahalgam, Kashmir.

I was wearing my trade-mark pant (tom from behind).

I was inserting the black marker s back into my hole called ass-hole.

I was hoping that its tip touches the surface tension of the flow.

I was holding in my hand, written already, few words in mother tongue.

I was letting each word flow with the flow of water.

I was looking at the words receding away from me.

I was listening to my eyes:

And I almost touched the words : chock, kath, vaith, latiya, kah gov, baran tair, Dazith, chakravith, gatshn, shihij, zani, baih, phirth, vaglith, hoon, korum, chani,

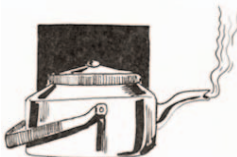
(wound, story, river Jhelum, sound for beloved, sad that happened, doors locked, after fire, scattered, will happen to me, soothing, will know, reverse, melted, dog, I did, yours.)

*Inder Salim*



### **Sarnath Banerjee: Corridor: A Graphic Novel of Urban Life** [Arts: Visual/Aural/Conceptual, Creative Writing] (2002)

*Sarnath Banerjee is a graphic artist based in Delhi. His two graphic novels are Corridor (Penguin) and The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers that came out in 2007.*  
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Samath's project is to find a discourse of the city through words and images that will make us look at the familiar in a new way. He was initially hesitant about the form of the graphic novel, since it would be a new genre with very few readers but as he researched and put together stories of the city he began to feel more ready to tell his story with confidence. He called the novel *Corridor* and used multiple characters who roamed the city streets and found adventure or forgetfulness in its nooks and crannies. Their haunts and dreams fill up the pages of the novel, giving a disquieting colour to our familiar city.

### The True Graphic Novel

In a recent interview I was asked the following question.

Western readers are now waking up to Indian kitsch. Are your books catering to them by using it? Don't you think it's at the end of its innings in India? Is it because you think Indian readers won't appreciate a true graphic novel?

I felt that, with a single sweep, the interviewer summarised the existing notion of culture in contemporary India. For her, popular forms that have existed since generations can essentially be reduced to two sub-categories: Bollywood and cricket. As seen in her use of the word 'innings'. Any other form of sub-culture didn't exist and anything that can be found in the popular realm is basically kitsch.

One can't blame her because she has noticed how cultural commentators, theorists and artists have used images from popular culture as superficial tools, as ornamental devices, as amusing objects to garnish their otherwise serious work and, worst of all, as nostalgia. There has been a wide divide between high and low art and between the two there was an unbridgeable void. Our generation had rarely witnessed any sub-culture until we started manufacturing them.

She also seemed to have a fairly strong grip on the taste of the Indian reader. What seemed to me a complex group of people was for her a simple monolithic group. This reminded me of the time when I was starting out. How most people seemed to know what these Indian readers needed and an indigenously made comic-strip that depicted local concerns was not one of them.

My reply: I don't know what a true graphic novel is. Would it be one that is canonised by the Western world? And by striving to mimic one of them, can one create the true graphic novel? I wonder. What you consider kitsch is fish and rice for me, staple diet of a coastal inhabitant. All the kitsch adds up to the world that I once engendered and am still living in. Contemporary urban mythology is constantly producing an ever-growing amount of it and I will continue recording it. Objects of kitsch

are for me urban artifacts upon which I base my work. The kitsch in Owl existed during Victorian Calcutta. It is a lopsided way to look at history. And history does exist outside text books. One may even say that it is often locked in popular culture.

I am currently sitting in the middle of avant-garde Europe. Here, Mathematics is the language of God, Physics is the most masculine of all sciences, Opera is the purest of musical forms, and a great many novels are written around the grand piano. Thomas Mann is God here. In short, this is high culture as the white man understands it.

But I have grown up on pulp, Bengali detective stories, radio plays and Campa Cola ads. I look at it fondly and try to talk of a society that created these artifacts (kitsch), dissect it forensically, frame it. I rarely pick up an obscure fact from the 70s, crunch it through the cultural studies machinery and publish it in *Dazed and Confused*, California.

One of the things that came out of my year-long fellowship with Sarai and subsequent completion of *Corridor* was a certain class confidence, the ability to articulate my concerns without needing to appropriate them in the current cultural context. Blurring the lines between high and low, not resorting to established rules or the need to adhere to any camp. The fellowship with Sarai helped me to see things from being inside the crowd rather than looking it from a balcony.

When I started off, no one knew what I was doing. The term graphic novel seemed preposterous. Not much has changed; it is still an un-co-opted subculture that lives in the fringes of art and literature, but at least people know that they exist and a small group even reads them. Sarai was the only place one could have a reasonable discussion in.

When I started, discourse around the city had already begun and people were employing different tools to examine it. Many of these initiatives were started by Sarai. I wanted to make my own butcher's cut to get into the heart of urban existence - examining ordinary stories of day to day life using text and picture. Sarai understood that vision.

Result *Corridor*.

*Sarnath Banerjee*

**Parismita Singh: Six o'Clock: A Comic Book**  
**[Arts: Visual/Aural/Conceptual]**  
**(2006)**

*Parismita Singh is a graphic artist based in New Delhi. She is presently working on her first graphic novel.*  
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Parismita, a graphic artist, attempts to explore through the comic book medium of image and text, the migrant's experience in the city. Parismita visualises the urban experiences through a chain of stories, the lives and experience of students, young professionals, the job seekers, that are centred around a modern-day Tower of Babel located on the periphery of the city, in the heart of a clustered village that awaits and watches for the arrival of the ever encroaching gigantic metropolis. The comic book format explores the stories that emerge from a multiplicity of idioms. Trapped in the tower, between their past histories and present identities, the protagonists seek to negotiate not just the intimidating cityscape but also come to terms with a sense of self that seems too complex to be articulated, too fluid to be pinned down, too controversial to be flaunted, and too fragile to resist the onslaught of mocking, unsympathetic and cruel interrogation. Parismita uses the comic book medium to point to this element of fluidity and fragility, context and conflict within stories that move like their characters, hesitantly, noiselessly, sometimes intrepidly between the myths and cultures of their separate worlds. She attempts a weaving together of text and image that unravels the worlds hidden in the chinks of this city's facade. Parismita's images have been influenced by her acquaintance with tribal folklore, rural landscapes and cityscapes, Mughal architecture, the social and political milieu of North-Eastern and Eastern India and her stay in Delhi. While these images capture a certain physical reality of existence on the fringes of a modern city, the text does not seek to explain this existence. Rather, it seeks to take the readers back to their own experiences, to dredge their memories of a fractured cityscape, to reopen questions that they had dismissed summarily. The Tower of Babel bears encoded within it as many meanings as there are protagonists in the stories and interlocutors who get a glimpse of all this through a perusal of these meanings. The project attempts to delineate in rough strokes processes of erasure, assimilation, conflicts, struggle, stereotyping, acceptance, denial and rejection that underpin the birth and growth of a city in contemporary India. Parismita hopes her book will serve as a visual archive that can enrich other explorations in the study of urban history, the ethos of modern citizenship and civic sense and questions of identity.



## बीती विभावरी जागरी : दिल्ली के लैंडस्केप में दिक् व काल

विजेन्द्र चौहान

(2003-04)

शहर को छूकर कैसे महसूस किया जाए, क्या शहर को सूँघा जा सकता है, क्या इसे पकड़ा जा सकता है, क्या इसे एक ज़िन्दा जीव की तरह महसूस किया जा सकता है? विजेन्द्र चौहान अपने इस ऑडियो(विजुअल) प्रॉजेक्ट में यही करने की कोशिश करते हैं, लोकोक्तियों, लैम्प पोस्टों, ट्रैफ़िक सिग्नलों, चौकीदारों और साहित्यिक संदर्भों की मार्फ़त से। शहर को सूँघने के लिए वो बड़े से बड़े कूड़ेदानों तक सफ़र करते हैं और कृष्ण बलदेव वैद की रचना 'विमल उर्फ़ जाँ तो जाँ कहाँ' को सुनते हैं, जहाँ शहर '(वि)मल' यानी मल की महक देता है। शहर को सुनने के लिए वो लक्ष्मीनगर के हाई टेंशन तारों का सहारा लेते हैं जो हुनहुनाते हैं और एक मौहूम से साज़ में थिरकते हैं, एक ऐसी आवाज़ में जो दिन के शोरगुल में दब जाती है। शहर को देखने के लिए वो अँधियारे में घूमते हैं और निष्कर्ष निकालते हैं कि यह उजाला ही है जो हमें अँधेरे को देखने और दर्शाने का मौक़ा देता है। जो परिचित है वो अपरिचित बन जाता है, कैम्पस के पास छात्र मार्ग पर स्थित बावली, खड़क सिंह मार्ग के कॉफ़्री हाउस में बदल जाती है, जहाँ सुबह के पहले सोते हुए जिस्मों की लम्बी क्रतार यह आभास देती है जैसे वे नीचे किसी खाई में डूबते जा रहे हों। शहर को छोड़ने के लिए वो अपनी हथेली छज्जों, रेलिंगों, पुलों और दीवारों पर टिकाते हैं और शहर के सपनों को महसूस करते हैं। शहर में यह किस चीज़ का स्पंदन है। इस स्पंदन को जाँचने के लिए वो अपनी खुद की परेशानी और नर्वस मानसिकता की पड़ताल करते हैं। जब वो दूसरे फ़ेलो के साथ मिलते-बैठते हैं तो उनकी धाराप्रवाह अंग्रेज़ी के सामने वो खुद को सिमटता-सिकुड़ता महसूस करते हैं, एक ऐसी यात्रा जो वो स्वीकारते हैं, उन्होंने खुद पर डाली है। उनकी पंसदीदा जगहें शहर का ग्रास बनती जा रही हैं, मोहन सिंह प्लेस के कॉफ़्री हाउस को अपने घेरे में लेता मैकडॉनल के बड़े गुब्बारे जैसा। अपने काव्यात्मक और साहित्यिक पोस्टिंग के ज़रिए विजेन्द्र दिखाते हैं कि शहर चलता है, बोलता है, शहर का एक स्पर्श है, एक गंध है, एक थिरकता हुआ, साँस लेता हुआ जीव ख़ास तौर पर जब हर तरफ़ ख़ामोशी है, जब शहर ज़िन्दा नहीं हुआ है, जब वो पूरी तरह जागा नहीं है। बीती विभावरी जागरी...

### बीती विभावरी जागरी: दिल्ली के सिटीस्केप में दिक् व काल

यह देखो यादों का एक चौराहा  
लेकिन रुको इस रास्ते से उस पर न दौड़ो  
किसी और याद से जा टकराओगे  
और याद का याद से टकराना दुर्घटना भर नहीं है  
यह बिग-बैंग है।

यहीं से शुरू हुआ ब्रह्मांड और समय  
माफ़ करना आइंस्टीन तुम्हें कविता में घसीटना अच्छा तो नहीं लगता/  
पर मुझे तुम ही सबसे विश्वसनीय गवाह दीख पड़ते हो  
बताओ इन्हें कि तुम 'याद' भर हो और हर सत्य 'याद' भर है  
और यह शहर है यादों का ज़खीरा।

#### शहर की घ्राण-निर्मिति:

शहर की कोई एक गंध होती है इसे सहसा स्वीकार करना कठिन है। यह इसलिए भी है कि शहर किसी संदर्भ में एक (माँनोलिथीक) संरचना नहीं है अतः उसकी एक गंध (या अवाज़, या दृश्य...) की अपेक्षा करना सार्थक नहीं है। तथापि ज़िद ही सही, पर मुझे लगता है कि शहर की कोई गंध तो है जो इसी शहर की है। यदि साहित्यिक संदर्भ से खोजें तो अपनी दिल्ली के साथ अपनी पहचान जोड़ने वाले लेखों में से एक कृष्ण बलदेव वैद अपने चर्चित और विवादित उपन्यास 'विमल उर्फ़ जाएँ तो जाएँ कहाँ' में जिस गंध को इस शहर की गंध कहते हैं वह है मल की गंध। बायपास के कचरे की गंध शहर भर के कचरे की गंध का निचोड़ है पर मैं स्वीकार नहीं कर पाया कि शहर केवल यह कचरा है या फिर पुष्प, इत्र वगैरह... अपने प्रयोग में मैंने बायपास के अलावा जीटीके इंडस्ट्रियल एरिया, रीलैन्डस्केप जवाहार गुलाब बटिका ऐट डीयू, ईदगाह रोड (प्लीज़ नोट, स्लौटर हाउस इज. लोकेटेड हियर...) को अब तक लिया है। स्वाभिक है कि इतने स्थल पर्याप्त नहीं है पर हम सभी की सीमाएँ हैं। तय यह भी किया है कि इनके वर्णन के लिए कुछ और करना संभव नहीं है अतः पाठ यानी टेक्स्ट के माध्यम से ही वर्णन किया जाएगा।

## **Vijender Singh Chauhan: Let the Passing Night Awaken - Time and Space in Delhi's Nocturnal Landscape**

**[Arts, Creative Writing]**

**(2004)**

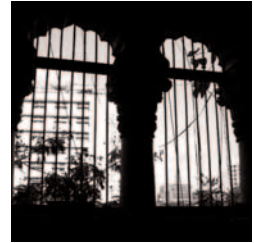
*Vijender Singh Chauhan is a writer, educationist, and blogger. He was trained as an engineer, has a doctorate in Hindi Literature, and is currently teaching at Zakir Husain College, Delhi University. His other areas of interest are communications history, literary historiography and the blogosphere. His blog can be accessed at: <http://masijeevi.blogspot.com> [chauhan.vijender@gmail.com](mailto:chauhan.vijender@gmail.com)*

How does one measure the city in a tactile manner? Can the city be smelled, can it be touched, can one apprehend it as an organic presence? Vijendra Chauhan seeks to do just that in this audio visual project that ropes in literature, popular sayings, lamp posts, traffic signals and watchmen to map out the pre-dawn landscape of the city. In order to smell the city, he travels to huge garbage dumps and listens to Krishna Baldev Vaid's novella *Vimal Urf Jaayen To Jaayen Kahan*, where the city smells of (vi)Mal meaning excretion. To hear the city, he listens to the high-tension wires at Lakshminagar that emit a positive humming and pulsating song, a sound that is drowned out in the daytime. To see the city, he peers into its darkness and concludes that it is the lights that allow us to see the darkness. The familiar becomes deeply unfamiliar, the bawli on Chhatra Marg near the campus mutates into the subway outside the Coffee House on Kharak Singh Marg where, just before dawn, you can see a cascading row of sleeping bodies descending into the cavernous folds of the stairs. In order to feel the city, he spreads his palms along railings, bridges and walls and finds it to be full of *spandan*, which could be translated as vibration. What is the city buzzing with? He delves into the anxiety that pervades the city by describing his own unease when interacting with other fellows who are flowing in English but where he himself fears an imaginary censure. The city is looming over his favourite haunts as in the McDonald's parabolas which dominate the horizon at the terrace of the old Coffee House at Mohan Singh Palace. The city lives, and breathes and talks, especially when the world around it is at its quietest, just before it wakes up and drowns out the city, *beeti vibhavari jaag ri*.



**Sheba Tejani: The Space Between: Two Queer Women Explore Mumbai**  
**[Gender Studies and Sexuality, Arts]**  
**(2006)**

*Sheba Tejani has an MA in Economics from the New School for Social Research, New York. She lives in Mumbai and works at the Economic and Political Weekly.*  
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Sheba Tejani has created two short films called *Rush* and *Reverie* to explore Mumbai's cityscape through the eyes of two queer women. The first is an exploration of the suburban train Mumbai is famous for, and the meaning of this space in the lives of the two women protagonists. As they talk of catching the 8:10 fast express, they also explore what it means to them, the quotidian experience of travelling locked into the crowd, bodies finding their own niches. They also wonder how many in the crowd are dykes and, if they do meet other queer women, the way the crowd reacts to them. They also tell each other of encounters they have had in trains and the fact they have to look a part to ride in the ladies compartment or else ambiguities come at your own risk. The film ends with the image of a cop beating up a queer girl they knew, for travelling in the ladies compartment.

The second short film is a discourse on what it means to be gay in a conservative, close and structured society. The two protagonists talk of the meaning of communities and one of them asks, What is it that connects us to other people? Am I connected to other queer people because I am gay? Is that what makes a community? The issues of identity, community, isolation and belonging are explored through the very fragmented images of the film that see the city as an integral part of a fragmented and disordered life.

*What is it that connects us to other people?*  
*Is it the anger I feel when I see cops beat hijras at the traffic light?*  
*Is it the despair that grips me when I read of another suicide, in another small town, of two young girls who could not imagine a life together?*  
*Is it the fire of passion or the taste of freedom?*

Sheba says, My project is a visual essay of the city of Bombay, structured around the conversations of two queer women. I've been trying to work on different parts of my project simultaneously. Since I am writing a (fictional) script of conversations between two queer women about living in the city, I am also conducting interviews with queer women who live in Bombay. The idea is not only to document those experiences but to inform the creative process itself.

## Gyaltzen Lama: Shamans in Gangtok : A Graphic Novel

[Arts:Visual/Aural/Conceptual, Creative Writing, Social History]

(2007)



*Gyaltzen Lama works as a Fine Arts teacher in Gangtok, Sikkim. He has a bachelor's degree from JJ School of Art, Mumbai and has worked on a number of art installations. He has participated in group shows and in workshops.*

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This project documents the shamans from Sikkim in a comic book format, records their normal activities, their places of work, their native homes, their families and friends. Shamans are known by many names as Bijwa , Jhakri and Dhami and they work as medicine men, sooth-sayers, protectors of clans, and as people who ward off evil spirits and protect others from harmful magic. They were once an integral part of the everyday life of Gangtok but with the advent of modern medicine and technology, shamans are facing a slow but certain extinction. They are still around in the city of Gangtok, working as labourers or working at odd jobs. They survive much disguised, yet proud of the heritage they carry.

Over the centuries the steep slopes of Himalayas have been populated by a variety of tribes and ethnic groups. Their lifestyles and cultures uniquely reflect their geographical environment. But over the last fifty years, major changes have occurred in these remote areas. Political determination to modernise the region and open it to the outside world has altered social structures and demographic distribution as well as eroded traditional values. Placed within the context of changing society, Lama hopes to document and interpret the contemporary Sikkimese society while keeping the figure of the Shaman as a central leitmotif. Works of anthropologists who have studied the cultures and traditions of the shamans will also form part of the framework of this comic book exploration.



## **Ram Ganesh Kamatham: Vikram and Vetā: A Contemporary Urban Play**

**[Theatre/Performance, Creative Writing]**

**(2007)**

*Ram Ganesh Kamatham is a playwright and director based in Bangalore. He has produced, written and directed a number of plays notably, We are Water, Snakes and Ladders, and Square Root of Minus One which has also been published.*

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Kamatham is a professional playwright who makes a theatrically viable performance out of the folktale of Vikramaditya and Vetā, in a dialogic relation to a study of contemporary urban India. The research is located partly in Ujjain and the primary thrust of this project is to determine the multiple points where the historical and the contemporary overlap. Issues of gender and governance also come in at this point of the evolution of the play. This dark tale of King Vikramaditya and the wily ghoul Vetā is an eleventh century tale. The king has to carry Vetā, a living corpse, to an ascetic; but while perched on the King's back, the ghoul narrates a story and then poses a question to the King. If he answers incorrectly, the King will die; if the answer is correct, the ghoul will escape and return to where he came from. The King remains trapped in this cycle, constantly solving the moral dilemmas presented in the stories and constantly returning to retrieve the ghoul. From his childhood days, Kamatham was fascinated and terror-struck by this tale and over time he began to see how the several compelling philosophical questions of the tales actually contained dramaturgical possibilities. The cyclic nature of the moral tales presents an intricately constructed narrative that rushes along to a central problem, yet remaining framed within a larger story. Each story's moral crisis becomes a character obstacle for the King. As one problem is solved, the loop creates another. Rather than becoming repetitive and redundant, the paradoxical self-confrontations begin to spiral downwards into primal rage. The King is taken into the darkest recesses of his soul by the ghoul who plays mind games, deceptions and uses cold logic in an eternal battle of wills. Dramatically, this creates exciting possibilities.

The output of the research is a theatrical text and performance that embed the contents of the research into an aesthetic construct. The story, with its brooding mediaeval undertones and haunting nameless fear, grapples with fundamental dramatic concepts such as choice and truth. Through this project, Kamatham wants to re-contextualise this tale for a contemporary audience.



## **Surojit Sen: The Displacement of Prostitutes: A Tale of Two Cities in Two Centuries**

**Migration/Displacement, Gender/ Sexuality, Literary Studies] (2007)**

*Surojit Sen is a freelance writer and researcher who has worked on a number of documentary films as well as in NGOs. He has written scripts for tele-films and has contributed as an editor to various publications.*

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Prostitutes have always been a marginalised section of society and social attitudes towards them are dictated both by patriarchy and class relations. The meta-narrative of the nineteenth century social history conceals many tales of dispossession and displacement of the marginalised, sometimes with the active agency of the colonial power. One such incident was the exodus of prostitutes from Calcutta to Chandannagar and the problems that came with it. In this project, Surojit tries to go beneath the meta-narrative, looking for new subtexts. He looks at a forgotten text, *Bodmaish Jobdo* (The Wicked One Punished) by Prankrishna Dutta, a nineteenth century text that talks of the flesh trade flourishing along Chitpur Road where the sprawling redlight area came to be known as Sonagatchi, extending from Nutanbazar to Fauzdari Balakhana. This study also looks at the colonial intervention in the flesh trade informed by a new sense of hygiene and health. In 1868, the Contagious Diseases Act 14 came into being to initiate health check ups for prostitutes and their clients, forcibly sending them to hospitals if they were ill. The colonial government's anxiety about the British soldiers who frequented Sonagatchi was also informed in part by the upheaval of the 1857 mutiny that had shaken the foundations of the empire and made a new look at the health and efficiency of soldiers an urgent necessity. This regulation created panic among the prostitutes who were not a homogenised community but rather a fragmented one. As a consequence, they began to flee the city and began flocking to Chandannagar, 30 km upstream from Calcutta. It was a French enclave and British laws could not be enacted there. Surojit's study however does not stop here. The story of the dispossession of the marginalised continues in different form and with a different rationale in Chandannagar in the post colonial period. In the mid 80s, the prostitutes were evicted by the ruling political party and some civic organisations in collusion with realtors. The kothis were pulled down to make way for apartment blocks. This study draws a parallel between the colonial and postcolonial situations regarding the prostitutes, draws up a historical outline of brothels in Calcutta and Chandannagar and looks at present laws on prostitutions and their probable implications as they reflect state regimentation. An interesting outcome of this project is a translation of Prankrishna Dutta's text into English as well as a photo documentation of redlight areas in Calcutta and Chandannagar.

## नई सेक्सी दिल्ली यानी फुटपाथ कर कामसूत्र

अभय कुमार दुबे

(2002-03)

आज दिल्ली के हर एक अखबार में हर रोज़ असंख्य क्लासीफ़ाइड कॉलम ऐसे होते हैं जहाँ 'डेटिंग क्लब', 'फ़्रेन्डशिप क्लब', 'एस्कोर्ट सर्विस' और सेक्स संबन्धी सुझाव मश्वरे भरे होते हैं। फुटपाथ पर कामसूत्र के अलग संस्करण खरीदे जा सकते हैं, और दूसरे क्रिस्म की पोर्नोग्राफ़िक और इरॉटिक साहित्य भी बहुत आसानी से उपलब्ध है। रेडियो पर यौन-संबन्धी विमर्श के कई प्रोग्राम हैं। दरअसल मोबाइल, इन्टरनेट और ऑटोमोबाइल क्रान्ति ने लोगों को एक-दूसरे के साथ जुड़ने के नए साधन और नए संदर्भ मुहैया कराए हैं और इन्हीं तारों से जुड़ा है पिछले पंद्रह सालों से फलता- फूलता राजधानी का 'सेक्शुअल रेवोलूशन'। अभय कुमार दुबे इस नई सेक्सी दिल्ली की पड़ताल करते हैं और इसके निर्माण और संरचना में मीडिया की भूमिका पे रोशनी डालते हुए बढ़ती सेक्स संबन्धी आकांक्षाओं की रंग-बिरंगी दुनिया की सैर कराते हैं।

दिल्ली के सेक्स कैपिटल बनने के पीछे एक राज़ यह भी है कि इस शहर की 40 फ़ीसद आबादी घुमंतू है, यानी इसे फ़्लोटिंग आबादी कह सकते हैं। ऊँचे और निचले दोनों ही तबकों में इस आबादी का तनासुब काफ़ी ज़्यादा है और इस आबादी को चाहिए अपनी यौन संबन्धी इच्छाओं की पूर्ति के नए स्रोत। गे बार, गे डिस्को और गे पार्टियाँ इस शहर में कोई नई बात नहीं, शहर के ऐसे कई हिस्से हैं जो कूज़िंग यानी वहाँ अन्दर लुत्फ़ उठाने के लिए निहायत मौजू हैं, दिल्ली वालों के सामने खुले सेक्शुअल रास्ते अब केवल बेडरूम की चार दीवारों या जीबी रोड तक महदूद नहीं। साथ-साथ औरतों की सेक्शुअलिटी के मापदंड और रूपक भी बदल गए हैं। इस नई सेक्शुअलिटी के दुबे के अनुसार तीन समीकरण हैं। पहला समीकरण सेक्स, सेक्शुअलिटी, सिटी और आधुनिकीकरण का है जो इस नई सेक्शुअलिटी को भारतीय पूंजीवाद के विकास के ताज़ा चरण से जोड़ता है। दूसरा समीकरण परिवार, प्रेम और रिश्तों की नई संरचना दर्शा रहा है। तीसरा समीकरण एक ख़ास तरह की सेक्शुअल इंजीनियरिंग की तरफ़ इशारा कर रहा है।

शहर में सेक्स हमें हर तरफ़ से घेर रहा है, हमारे परिवार और चार दीवारी के सुरक्षाचक्रों को भेद चुका है। अखबारों में, टीवी और रेडियो पर, बिलबोर्डों पर और टीवी के पर्दों पर, पत्रिकाओं और विशेषज्ञों के सरक्षणों से, एनजीओ के शोध कार्यों से, और ख़ास गिरोहों की पैरवियों से वो हमारे चारों ओर चर्चा का विषय बन चुका है।

दुबे कामनाओं, आदर्शों और मापदंडों के इन सारे पैमानों का आकलन कर हमें इस नई पृष्ठभूमि से अवगत कराते हैं। औरतों की नई मुखर छवि से प्रेम संबन्धी आदर्शों, परिवार के तानों और सामाजिक संबन्धों पर क्या असर पड़ता है, यह भी उनकी पड़ताल का विषय है। इस नई बदलती दुनिया का पूंजीवाद से क्या रिश्ता है और क्या पूंजीवाद को इससे किसी भी तरह का खतरा पैदा हो सकता है, दुबे अपने शोध का अंत बिना इस सवाल का जवाब दिये करते हैं।

### फुटपाथ पर कामसूत्र – नई सेक्सी दिल्ली

‘इन परिस्थितियों ने दिल्ली में दैहिक कामनाओं का भूगोल मुखर कर दिया। यह दिल्ली में ही सबसे ज़्यादा क्यों हुआ, इसकी वजह दिल्ली की तवायफ़ों, उनके ग्राहकों, दिल्ली के समलैंगिकों और दिल्ली के हिज़ड़ों के महानगरीय (कॉस्मोपॉलिटन) चरित्र में ही नहीं है, बल्कि इस हकीकत में भी है कि दिल्ली की तक्ररीबन आधी आबादी फ़्लोर्टिंग है। इसे हम उखड़े हुए लोगों का शहर कह सकते हैं। इस मामले में दिल्ली मुंबई, कोलकाता, बंगलूर और चेन्नई जैसे महानगरों से बहुत आगे है। नब्बे के दशक की शुरुआत में दिल्ली की ऐसी आबादी करीब 42 फ़ीसदी थी जो केवल चौदह साल में बढ़ कर 50 फ़ीसदी हो गई है। तेज़ी से विकसित होती हुई सार्वदेशिकता के कारण दिल्ली की आबादी को एक छोटे भारत की संज्ञा दी जा सकती है। आईटी प्रोफ़ेशन से लेकर अर्थव्यवस्था के तीसरे क्षेत्र, जिसे हम सर्विस सेक्टर कहते हैं, ने फ़ैशन और विज्ञापन उद्योग के साथ मिल कर इस उखड़ी हुई आबादी के सेक्शुअल अभिजन का निर्माण किया है। उखड़े हुए लोग सेक्शुअल एडवेंचर की संभावनाओं से लैस होते हैं, क्योंकि भूगोल-परिवर्तन उनकी कामनाओं पर उन नैतिकाताओं वर्जनाओं की जकड़ ढीला कर देता है जो उन्होंने अपने जन्म स्थान पर परिवार और कुटुम्ब की छाया में हुए लालन-पालन के दौरान आत्मसात की थीं।

दिल्ली के रेडलाइट एरिया जीबी रोड के 82 चकलाघरों में धंधा करने वाली करीब तीन हज़ार तवायफ़ों में ज़्यादातर आंध्र प्रदेश, कर्नाटक, तमिलनाडु, उत्तर प्रदेश, राजस्थान, पंजाब, गुजरात और यहाँ तक कि नेपाल के हैं। इन तवायफ़ों में से कई दिल्ली में एक सीक्रेट लाइफ़ गुज़ारती है। वे साल में एक बार अपने बच्चों और परिवार के साथ रहने जाती हैं। वे लोग उनके चकलाघर वाले जीवन को नहीं जानते। इसी तरह कनाॅट प्लेस के सेंट्रल पार्क में या अशोक होटल के पास नेहरू पार्क में या फिर धौला कुआँ के बस स्टैंड पर या फिर लालकिले से कश्मीरी गेट के बीच रोज़ शाम को सेक्स पार्टनरों की तलाश करते हज़ारों समलैंगिकों और हिज़ड़ों के बीच किसी एक

क्षेत्र की इजारेदारी नहीं मिलेगी। समलैंगिकता के प्रवक्ताओं का दावा है कि दिल्ली देश की 'गे राजधानी' बन चुकी है। सिर्फ दिल्ली में बिकने वाले अखबारों में छपने वाले हैटरोसेक्शुअल डेटिंग कॉलमों में भी दिल्ली की एक बेहद तेज़ी से बढ़ती हुई सेक्शुअल सार्वदेशिकता का नमूना मिल सकता है। इंटरनेट पर सेक्शुऑलिटी के हिसाब से अलग-अलग चैट रूम प्रचलित हैं। उनमें घुसपैठ करने पर पता लगता है कि दिल्ली की सेक्शुऑलिटी कितनी सर्वभारतीय क्रिस्म की है। सार्वदेशिकता और उखड़ी हुई आबादी के साथ-साथ बीसवीं सदी के आखिरी दस सालों में दिल्ली को अपने आधुनिक इतिहास में पहली बार पाँच नए स्पेस मिले जिनके कारण अंतरंग रिश्तों में तब्दीली आने की गुंजाइश बनी। पहला स्पेस ऑटोमोबाइल क्रांति ने मुहैया कराया जो अस्सी के दशक के मध्य में शुरू हुई थी और नब्बे के दशक में चरम पर पहुँची। दूसरा स्पेस सेलुलर फ़ोन ने दिया। तीसरा स्पेस ऑडियो-विजुअल क्रांति और इंटरनेट के ज़रिए मिला। चौथा स्पेस डिस्कोथीक और पब संस्कृति के साथ-साथ नये उत्तर-आधुनिक कहवाघरों और मल्टीप्लेक्सों ने तैयार किया। और पाँचवां स्पेस बाज़ार और उपभोक्ता क्रांति ने दिया।

**Abhay Kumar Dube - New Sexy Delhi, Kamasutra on the Footpath  
[Gender and Sexuality]  
(2003)**

*Abhay K. Dube is a prolific writer, translator, columnist, and editor with the Bharatiya Bhasha Karyakram, CSDS, Delhi.*

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The newspapers of Delhi are today replete with classified ads for friendship clubs, dating clubs, escort services and columns of sexual advice and counselling. Footpath bookstalls sell many different versions of the Kamasutra and also erotic and pornographic literature of many different kinds. The mobile, internet and automobile revolution provide new media and new spaces for people to meet and interact. A sexual revolution has been afoot in the capital for the last fifteen years. Abhay Kumar Dube investigates the landscape of the city's expanding sexual desires and the role of media in turning Delhi into the sexual capital of the country.

Delhi is a peculiar city, particularly because some forty percent of its population is a floating one. Belonging both to the upper crust and to the working classes, this floating population has access to new modes of sexual gratification. There are gay bars, gay discos and gay parties, there are zones of the city that are particularly amenable for cruising - the Delhiite's sexual choices are no longer restricted to either the bedroom or to the sex workers of G. B. Road. Alongside this, women's sex-

uality is being recast. How has this revolution come about? What role has the media played in it? How does this sexual revolution tally in with that in the West? What relationship does this new sexual politics have with capitalism and with globalisation? Dubey unravels all these threads using examples from everyday encounters in the media.

Sex in the city stares at us from the most domesticated spaces. It begins with newspapers, it is beamed across the airwaves and it flashes at us on television screens. Surveys by academics and magazines, findings of NGOs and analyses by special rights groups - Dubey relies on a wide variety of media to reconstruct the contours of this new loosening of desires. How this affects notions of family, of love and relationships, especially the new assertive role adopted by women, is also a part of the study. He concludes by questioning whether and how much this new visibility of sex is affecting older paradigms of family and sex geared towards productivity and remains unsure that this new revolution is threatening to the basic structure of the capitalistic organisation of society and family.



**A.R. Basu: Mediation of a Marginal Science: Reading Psychiatry in Colonial Bengali Periodicals**  
**[Health/Hygiene/Medicine, Social History]**  
**(2003)**

*A. R. Basu is an independent researcher and has a PhD on the topic From Lunacy To Mental Health: Formation of Psychiatric Knowledge in Colonial India. He has edited the writings of Girindrasekhar Basu that was published in 2001. amitbasu55@yahoo.com*

Psychiatry in India, as a practice of Western medical science, started in the mid-eighteenth century with the establishment of a lunatic asylum in Bombay. The growth of a metropolis culture in colonial India soon saw a rapid increase in such asylums during the nineteenth century. Psychiatry in colonial India started the way it had in Europe but colonialism and tensions arising from interventions in a different plural culture gave a special character to the psychiatry practised here. This project is a look at how this new science mediated itself at the popular level, especially in Bengal, and how it is viewed in relation to a new urban culture. Bengali writings on mental health began appearing from the nineteenth century and there is a rupture in this discourse around early twentieth century. In their efforts to popularise psychiatry, Bengali writers presented narratives that spoke of this new science in relation to a new metropolitan culture that arrived and grew with colonial modernity. These

writings are wide-ranging and heterogeneous. Starting from translations of articles published in reputed English journals to original pieces and commentaries in Bangla, these narratives are rich with contents that refracted and changed the received science. From them also emerge a collage of a city filled with its new institutions of mental health, although many descriptions are oblique and inferential. In *Hutom Pyanchar Naksha*, a mid-nineteenth century text by Kaliprasanna Singha, we get thick descriptions of contemporary city life that also include critical comments on practices that can be assigned to mental health. In early twentieth century, a genre of new writings emerged that was theoretically informed, analytical and judges the received knowledge with a critical understanding. This rupture, as the researcher surmises, was influenced by the formation of a disciplinary site with the first postgraduate course in Psychology and a movement to formulate a more sophisticated Bangla to translate science. Dr Girindrasekhar Bose could be taken as a unique symbol of this new movement. He was not only the first psychoanalyst outside the Western world, he was also the first Indian to be so. A.R. Basu's engaged, close readings of Bengali texts on mental health gives us an insight into the growth of psychiatry in colonial India that was intrinsically related to a new urban space. It also links us to a range of ways to look at the contemporary culture of mental health and the never complete project of modernity.



### **Arnab Chatterjee: Beyond Private and Public: New Perspectives on the Personal and Personalist in Social Work.**

**[Theory, Social History /History]**

**(2007)**

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This study argues that in contemporary Social Work, the distinction between the personal and the public/private is collapsed where the personal is often equated with the private. The slogan that the personal is the political has been deployed by feminist social work but in this research paper, the paradigm of the personal is not collided with the private. The paper urges us to go beyond the private/public binaries and concludes that Personalist Social Work reckons better with this corrective to aid feminist social work in the latter's emancipatory journey.

In this study, the researcher tries to recuperate the personal as a kind of repressed narrative for the annals of Western political discourses examining the repressed personal in Roman law, Kant, Hegel, Locke, Bentham and Habermas. An extensive review of Feminist literature also highlights a failure of sustaining this concept theoretically. Arnab tries to

show that while the private/public dichotomy has been inextricably linked to Western liberal political discourse, in India, the genealogical-colonial concordance retains and reproduces upon the received distinctions the way a western feminist would like to have them. In contrast to this, to give a meta-cultural critique and distinction, Amab tries to historically ground it in an authentic cultural canon. Amab takes pages from our cultural history to endorse the view that there never was a personal in the privatist sense; rather a life-communal (samajik) sense prevailed. He also shows how social work emerged from its pastoral communal mode to the mode of personalist secular rational care. The study proposes to correct and contribute to a long overdue lack in feminism and feminist social work to discover alternative privacies or feminist counter publics. The personal emerges in this study, for the first time perhaps, as a distinct third neither incorporated nor assimilable in either the private or the public.



**Vikas Singh: The Children of Bhopal Railway Station  
[Urban Space and Planning, Theory]  
(2004)**

*Vikas Singh is a writer and philosopher who was, until recently, based in Bhopal. | [vikas\\_singh74@rediffmail.com](mailto:vikas_singh74@rediffmail.com)*

A railway station is a point of intersection where the city opens to the outside world; it acts as a portal complex as well as an inn – the first and last inn with all the medieval echoes of the word. The railway platform and its immediate precincts become a sanctuary to the apprehensive, the deserted and the driven out. Vikas Singh looks at the space of the railway station in one of India's contemporary cities, Bhopal, and considers the children living on the edge and beyond the platforms. For the children, the platform is not only an inn and a site of work but also a site of continuous, inescapable surveillance. Surveillance and escape play together in the space of the railway station: a continuous game played at the very margins from where the only escape would be to another site of surveillance, an identical site, another railway station.

Vikas's sources of the stories of children living and working around the station are the children themselves and the people whom they share their lives with. Fragments of these stories are also unearthed in the records of the institutions that they are in relation/confrontation with: the social work agencies, the railway workers, the police, their employers, the neighbourhood. Other fragments, historical and structural, are picked from a variety of documents: the secondary materials, reviews, readings of sociological and cultural sources. The project is not about the plurality of possible meanings; it is about listening and learning from these stories (maybe the same story at different moments).

*The site: Bhopal Railway Station*

*The characters: Some children living there*

Vikas says, I m not interested in writing about the story of the children on a railway station; about the railway station; about the station in the lives of the children. The major conception of the railway station in this account is as a refuge, a refuge at the borders, at the gates of the city (at a certain kind of extreme) and of the children as refugees, seeking shelter not just from the railway station as such, but from the station as a representative of the city, of a society; the becoming seeking shelter from life itself.



**Udaykumar M.: An Incident In Thiruvananthapuram  
[Media Studies, Theory]  
(2006)**

*Udaykumar's training was in Political Science and he has completed a Master's degree in the discipline from Kerala University in 2001. Soon after, he started working as a researcher at the Folklore Society of South Indian Languages. | uk\_ps@yahoo.co.uk*

In the city of Thiruvananthapuram, a temple of great antiquity was the site of a real life incident that happened on 6 February 2000. This tragedy sets off a series of questions that Udaykumar takes up in this study. The temple, with a large pond outside its courtyard, is situated on the outskirts of the city and is visited by thousands of devotees. On a particular day, a young man entered the pond and began bathing an activity that had been banned for sometime due to reasons of security. The temple guard rushed to dissuade him and both got into a fight as a crowd of onlookers gathered on the bank. During the brawl, the guard drowned in front of the crowd. That very moment, a popular Malayalam TV channel was shooting nearby and hearing about the brawl rushed to the scene and recorded the death that was telecast at prime time the same evening.

In the background to these facts, Udaykumar finds a number of singular issues relating to it and he wonders if he can arrive at certain generalisations about society in large. He studies the incident in detail by collecting empirical evidences and hinting at demonstrative reasons. He also asks some pertinent questions regarding the city. Since the incident happened five years ago, has it acquired the stature of an urban myth? Would the incident be remembered at all if the media had not intervened?

Udaykumar also asks, if the media culture has affected the moral indignation of people to such an extent that to remain a mute spectator is in itself a moral position that is not condemned. His study has implications for our understanding of urban space, media, spectacle and spectator and, of course, underlies an imminent condition, a latent potential, for the



### तीस हज़ारी की हज़ार दुनियाएं

चंद्रा निगम

( 2003-04)

तीस हज़ारी भारत की सबसे बड़ी अदालतों में से एक है। उत्तरी दिल्ली में स्थित इस विशाल अदालत परिसर का गठन पचास साल पहले हुआ था। चंद्रा निगम इस सजीव, हिलकोरे मारती दुनिया और उसकी विडंबना का लेखा-जोखा अपने इस शोध में प्रस्तुत करती हैं, जो उनके खुद के ज्ञाती तजुबों, मुद्दों और वकीलों के साथ किए गए साक्षात्कारों पर आधारित है। यह एक ऐसी दुनिया है जहाँ वकील और दलाल में अक्सर कोई फ़र्क नहीं रहता, जहाँ कई बार महिला जूनियर्स अपने सीनियर्स के चेम्बरों की शोभा बढ़ाने के लिए भी रखी जाती हैं, और जहाँ क़ानूनी दाव-पेंच से लोग जूझते हैं। वकील तीन तरह के होते हैं: सीनियर, जूनियर और दलाल-ऐडवोकेट। जूनियर्स इस पूरी प्रणाली के बंधुआ मज़दूर हैं जिनके शोषण पर टिकी है सीनियर की शान। लोकतंत्र के इस तीसरे स्तंभ की जाँच करने पर चंद्रा उसे भी उतना ही भ्रष्टाचार में लिप्त पाती हैं, जितना कि उसके दूसरे स्तंभों को।

तीस हज़ारी का कैरियर शुरू हुआ था सन् 1954 में और शुरुआत से ही कोर्ट परिसर में अनधिकृत निर्माण की प्रक्रिया शुरू हो गई थी। इमरजेन्सी के दौरान संजय गांधी द्वारा भेजे गये बुलडोज़रों ने कुछ तोड़-फोड़ मचाई थी, लेकिन फिर सब कुछ ज्यों का त्यों हो गया। कच्ची दीवार से घिरी एक कुर्सी-मेज़ रातों-रात वातानुकूलित चेम्बर में बदल जाती है और फिर शुरू होती है दिल्ली बार एसोसिएशन से मान्यता प्राप्त करने की जद्दोज़हद। आज तीस हज़ारी में कोई 3000 चेम्बर हैं और एक अत्यंत जीवंत बाज़ार जिसमें फ़ोटोकॉपियर, किताबों, स्टेशनरी, और खाने-पीने की कच्ची-पक्की दुकानें हैं, और साथ-साथ घूमते देह के व्यापारी और ख़रीदार। दिल्ली बार एसोसिएशन ने अपने सौ साल पूरे कर लिए हैं पर उसके पास न तो अपने इतिहास पर कोई सामग्री है और न कोई दस्तावेज़। उसके एक सौ दस साल के इतिहास में कोई महिला अध्यक्ष नहीं रही।

possibility of such an incident happening again, at any moment.

**Chander Nigam - The World of Tees Hazari Courts, Delhi**  
**[Law, Oral History, Gender]**

**(2004)**

*Chander Nigam is a practising lawyer at the Tees Hazari Courts, Delhi. | chandarnigam@rediffmail.com*

Tees Hazari is one of the largest assemblages of courts in India. Situated in North Delhi, the court complex acquired its present shape some fifty years ago. Chander Nigam studies the pulsating world of Tees Hazari where lawyers double up as touts, women juniors add colour to a senior's chamber and policemen rebuff supplications from the families of the accused. There are three kinds of lawyers: seniors, juniors and tout-advocates. Juniors are the serfs of this injudicious third wing of democracy which Chander finds as debased and as corrupt as the other wings.

Tees Hazari began its career in 1954 and saw encroachments within the court campus from the very beginning. During the emergency bulldozers sent by Sanjay Gandhi demolished lawyers' chambers but illegal growths continue. A chair and table surrounded by a brick wall can soon, and easily, get converted into plush air conditioned chambers and recognition by the Delhi Bar Association legalises illegal chambers. Today there are some 3000 chambers within Tees Hazari amidst a bustling bazaar of permanent and shifting shops plying their wares such as photocopiers, food stalls, books, black coats, stationery and even solicitors for sex. The Delhi Bar Association completed hundred years in 1993 but has no documentation or archives about itself. In its 110 years, no woman has ever made it to the post of President, Vice President or Secretary.

Till June 2004, there were some 30000 pending divorce cases showing increasing instances of women filing for divorce. In the year 2004, of the 2496 cases filed, some half had been filed by women.



**Aman Sethi- Building Buildings: Dispatches from Delhi's Construction Labour Mandis**

**[Media Studies, Creative Writing, Oral History, Labour]**

**(2006)**

*Aman Sethi is a graduate of Asian College of Journalism, Chennai, and currently works as a reporter with the fortnightly newsmagazine Frontline in Delhi. aman.am@gmail.com*

In this project, Aman Sethi focuses on the labour mandis in Delhi to study its informal networks and institutions and gives a possible template for representing its inhabitants as other than abject, helpless and desperate. To obtain a deeper understanding of the functioning of the labour mandis, he provides a multi-layered narrative that does not rob the subjects of their agency or humanity. The interest of this study is to look

at the kind of people who work in mandis, the villages they come from and their work experience. Mandis are also centres of elaborate informal networks. The tea stalls and the dhabas function as banks, safe deposit boxes and are crucial to the continued survival of the workers. Media discourses are created and amplified in a certain way when reporting migrancy, poverty of the workers of the mandis and other related issues. While they urge the state to intervene, they also create a distance between the subject of the story and the reader, placing the subject in a different universe, far removed from the reader. Aman is careful to reject such reportages of situations that are represented through the reporter's internal governing logic. His study attempts to enter into a different frame of reference that of the human agent and this is the basis of Aman's text and the insights he gains. Given that such discourses prepare the foundation for state intervention and policy, alternative discourses that highlight the tactility and efficacy of informal networks are useful in enhancing the bargaining power of the nameless subjects of poverty stories, should they require it. Through detailed interviews, Aman believes it is possible to obtain a deeper understanding of the functioning of the mandis and the elements that combine at a particular place to create a successful mandi. Aman is also interested in the concept of the Vox Pop. The vox pop is epitomised in the succinct one liner in a journalistic piece that brings to the reader the voice of the people – a deeply problematic media tool, instantly reducing a person into an object. Aman uses the vox pop instead to chronicle the strategies by which labour at the mandi negotiates the everyday experiences of illegality, migrancy, police and the MCD.

### **Khullam Khulla**

In order to maintain the illusion of normalcy, the constable insists that things not be done khullam-khulla i.e. in the open.

It appears that with the introduction of the roadside surveillance camera, the khullam-khulla and the chhup ke (hidden) principles are reversed. Now the negotiation is not with the local constable but the abstract gaze of the camera, where a distant set of eyes (at the police station) watch for illegal activity. The camera, on its part, can only detect furtiveness which translates into suspicion and instructions to the constable to make appropriate inquiries.

Everything is now done in the open. Alcohol is drunk in steel glasses, mixed with Pepsi, cards hidden in sleeves, coins kept out of sight, people sit at a slight distance from each other to break the huddle of a group. The presumption being that if something is not hidden, it must be alright.

*Aman Sethi*

## **Samit Basu: The Trousers of Time: Indian Speculative Fiction in English**

**[Creative Writing, Literary Studies]**

**(2006)**

*Samit Basu has completed a course in broadcasting and documentary film-making from the University of Westminster, London. He is the author of The Simoquin Prophecies, and The Manticore's Secret, the first two parts of The Gameworld Trilogy, a fantasy trilogy. He has presented a series of articles and interviews on Indian speculative fiction called The Trousers of Time. | [samit.basu@gmail.com](mailto:samit.basu@gmail.com)*

In his project, Samit Basu looks at Indian speculative fiction and the issues concerning such fiction in India. The origins of speculative fiction in India are twofold: the wealth of mythological, historical and folklore tradition and the incredibly popular genres of science fiction and fantasy in both literature and film in the West. Thousands of years ago, Indian epic writers captured flying saucers, death rays, hideous alien monsters and incredible machines in tales of wonder and imagination, epics that still enthral their readers. Indian folktales and myths are crawling with mysteries, horrors and strange effects that should have rendered the people culturally ready for fantasy and science fiction. Samit finds it surprising that despite being a nation so culturally predisposed to the fantastic, India has produced only a marginal amount of speculative fiction especially when the speculative works of Salman Rushdie and Amitav Ghosh are excluded from the genre. Market conditions and literary prejudices are largely responsible for the lack of a strong tradition in the field, especially in English, but Samit thinks the future is bright.

The project discusses future roads down which Indian writers seeking to produce successful speculative fiction might do well to tread if we are to have a body of work in the field that matches Western SF and fantasy in quality and richness while simultaneously possessing a strong and distinct Indian/South Asian identity.

As part of this project, Samit talks to speculative fiction writers, publishers and critics. He interviews Anil Meno, Cheryl Morgan, Gotham Chopra, Jai Arjun Singh, Jaya Bhattacharji, Jeff Vander Meer, Manjula Padmanabhan, Mary Ann Mohanraj, Matthew Cheney, Payal Dhar, Rana Dasgupta, Samath Banerjee, Thomas Abraham, Vandana Singh and Zoran Zivkovic to get a sense of where speculative fiction is at present situated in India and its future. The term speculative fiction is another puzzler. Samit writes, 'The term speculative fiction is known by many names weird fiction, SFF, literature of the imagination literature that in some way transcends the real, though it's nearly always a mirror image of the real, with certain upgrades.'

Speculative fiction, spec-fic to friends, is essentially an umbrella, a bar where a number of disgruntled genres come to hang out, its leading patrons being fantasy, science fiction, horror and alternative history. It's claimed by the bartenders that magic realism is also a customer,

though one suspects magic realism, a frequent invitee at literary wine-and-cheese soirees, would deny this if asked. The term is often attributed to Robert A. Heinlein, who used it as a synonym for science fiction in an essay in 1948. Whatever the genre includes, the reason for the term's existence is simply that books within the genre are difficult to classify, and terms like spec-fic sound vaguely impressive, are easier to explain than more bizarre concoctions like magic realism. These terms convey that these books aren't literature. Samit contends that all fiction is inherently speculative, all fiction involves imagination, and escapism in literature depends on content, not classification or theme.



**Sayandeb Mukherjee: Corridors - An Exploration of Space through Audio Recording and Sound**  
**[Arts:Visual/Aural/Conceptual, Technology]**  
**(2007)**

*Sayandeb Mukherjee has graduated from the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute, Kolkata specialising in sound. He has worked as an intern for the Gramophone Company of India and as a sound recordist for a Bangla TV channel. sayandebmukherjee@yahoo.co.in*

This innovative project explores the contemporary symbiotic relationship between the urban individual and the various kinds of corridor spaces one encounters in his/her daily movements. This relationship is explored through different media like image, sound and text to question the development/change of space-consciousness that is affected by corridors upon the shared fragment of collective psyche of an urban individual. Generally, we experience corridor spaces unmindfully, as a necessary appendix in our spatial existence. In large apartment blocks, an important aspect of our urban cityscapes, corridors are essential to the structures, as a passage common to an array of flats, running with diminishing perspective, interspersed with similar-looking doors. As one passes through the corridor, audio leakages seeping through the doors of the flats often causes multiple acoustic reflections and create unusual acoustic environments depending upon the time. In the late hours of night, the soundscape drastically changes and individual sound elements become diminished or eliminated. During different times of the day, the researcher takes audio snapshots of corridors he comes to inhabit and tries to discern their intrinsic characters.

Sayandeb explores corridors as spaces of hesitance, as spaces of continuous exploration and revelation. These spaces rob the sense of directionality due to visual homogeneity, similitude and geometric maze. The historical corridors of Bhulbhulaiya in Lucknow or the mythical corridors of

Labyrinth where Minotaur hides - all these provide fuel for the imagination of the collective consciousness. Corridors and stairs are used in Indian Puranic tales as a framework of some kind of puzzle. In modern myths of thriller narratives (in films specially) the psychological aspect of corridors are identified with precision. In crime fiction or horror films, the vulnerability of a character walking down a lonely corridor always evokes a sense of dread. In literature, too, corridors are used as important spaces not only of spatial travel but time travel as well, especially in Rushdie's novel *Shame*. In this project, all these references from texts and films are borrowed and collated to discern the emotional energy that is transmitted from the eerie uncertain look of corridor-like spaces.



**Dwaipayan Banerjee: Towards A Postcolonial Code: A History of Programming in India [Technology, Theory] (2007)**

*Dwaipayan Banerjee is currently pursuing an MPhil degree in Sociology from Delhi School of Economics. He has worked as a freelance technology journalist with Digital Media Europe. dwaipayanbanerjee@yahoo.co.in*

The interface between the local and the global in the context of science and technology is now a fertile academic field of studies. Around the years between the 60s and 70s, the need to study science through the lens of the social became important and a new field of interdisciplinary research was possible with the rise of what is now called postcolonial techno-science. Feminist science studies opened up a movement away from the concepts of universal rationality, androcentricism and the nature conquest motifs of modern civilisation towards work that was local, acknowledged standpoint and proposed alternative constructions of rationality. If science and technology are socially constructed, it is perhaps time to acknowledge multiple and marginal constructions. Dwaipayan hopes to locate his work in this area by taking the help of insights arising from post-colonial techno-science and developing these in the context of India.

This project looks at the computing practices in India and sees how those practices relate to the emerging discipline of postcolonial science and technology. More specifically, it looks at the computer as a fetishised artifact in Indian modernity and asks what is unique about our local and its social construction of technology. The research is, to a large extent, about computer programming in India. It asks how programmers in a local context construct technology, what the features of the local that impinge upon such a construction are, and how the notion of programming negotiates an environment that is so immediately global. In this

context, Dwaipayan looks at two emergent subfields within Indian programming – he looks at those programme-developers who use the internet to market their skill and sell code over internet marketplaces and also those programmers who work in global firms where their work is hierarchised between the global and the local. Sarai's own open source software project is also one of the principle areas of Dwaipayan's focus.

