

Introduction

SAYANTAN DASGUPTA¹, JON COOK²,
SUCHORITA CHATTOPADHYAY³, DANIEL J
RYCROFT⁴ and ARISTOTELES BARCELOS
NETO⁵

This special issue of *Sahitya*, the journal of the Comparative Literature Association of India, emerges from the SPARC project on ‘Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities in India: Researching, Archiving and Translating Indigenous and Marginalised Languages of West Bengal’ (P2661) granted to Jadavpur

¹ Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, India.

² Professor Emeritus of Literature, University of East Anglia, UK.

³ Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, India.

⁴ Associate Professor in the Arts and Cultures of Asia, University of East Anglia, UK.

⁵ Associate Professor at Sainsbury Research Unit for the Arts of Africa, Oceania and the Americas, University of East Anglia, UK.

University and the University of East Anglia, UK, by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, as part of its Scheme for Promotion of Academic and Research Collaboration (SPARC) scheme. The scheme was carried out from 2023 to 2026 by a team comprising Sayantan Dasgupta and Suchorita Chattopadhyay (Jadavpur University), and Jon Cook, Daniel J Rycroft and Aristoteles Barcelos Neto (University of East Anglia).

The project derives from earlier work in the area carried out by members of the team in the area of Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities. In a way, it consolidated the previous work done, and also eked out new trajectories for the future of this collaboration. The SPARC grant allowed the researchers to take on a specific area to fill a research gap within the ASR and Humanities in India rubric. It also facilitated academic exchanges, documentation field trips, and a

number of translation and dissemination workshops in line with the agenda of the project.

The multilingual Indian context demands an espousal of the values of inclusion within the Indian national imaginary, and an expansion of the reach of our curricular imagination. Both are related to the philosophy and practice of Comparative Literature, particularly in the way it has developed in India, and which is also the institutional space within which this project is housed at Jadavpur University.

The first part of our work focused on developing the ideas of Academic Social Responsibility and University Social Responsibility, and relating them to possible trajectories of pedagogy and curriculum development in the Humanities in India. This entailed theoretical and historicised readings of educational imperatives related to the Humanities, as well as explorations in understanding the scope of collaborative

translation for an expansion of the Humanities. This, again, traces its roots back to the trajectory of Comparative Literature in India as well as beyond it. It resonates with the Levin, Greene and Bernheimer reports of the American Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) as well as with Buddhadeva Bose's pioneering essay, "Comparative Literature in India", published in the *Yearbook of Comparative and General Literature* all the way back in 1959. Each of these texts discuss the role of translation in and for the holistic study of literature, though the first two are reticent about the prospect of reading in translation, while the latter two champion the cause of translations, and reading literature in translation.

Our SPARC project attempted to disseminate the idea of ASR by (a) organizing courses, (b) organizing seminars and lectures, (c) engaging with the larger scholarly community across the Humanities in India and the UK, and (d) engaging with marginalized language

communities in West Bengal, and focusing on partnership and participation in the process of documenting and creating an archive of core texts in translation, which could hypothetically result in curricular expansion in the future as well as expand the national imaginary in India.

It was our endeavor to build partnerships with four language communities of West Bengal. Of course, it may be misleading to identify any one language community with a state in India, given the way languages seep over political boundaries in India, and in fact, much of South Asia. The languages featured included two Scheduled languages—Nepali and Bodo, and two languages which are not yet enlisted in the Eighth Schedule—Lepcha and Kudmali. Nepali and Lepcha are also languages that are used, among other places, in the state of Sikkim, while Bodo is spoken in Assam, and Kudmali in Jharkand, Odisha and West Bengal. There are also some Kudmali speakers in the tea

gardens of Assam. However, our work focused on these language communities solely in the context of West Bengal.

The project also sought to partner with leaders, practitioners and scholars from the four language communities it worked with in documenting and researching different folk varieties of cultural expression in these languages. The linguistic cartography of India, and the current state of translation training in the country means that it is very difficult to identify trained translators who can translate from and into Indian languages, and more so between Indian languages. This is an issue we tried to address by resorting to, and building, a model of collaborative translation workshopping. By treating translation not as a solitary, individual speech act, but as a collaborative and consensual method, the research team sought to both understand collaborative translation as a *process*, as well as focus on the *product* emerging from such interactions.

The collaborative translation workshop model provided the occasion for discussions not just on the texts and traditions we were engaging with, but also on the dynamics of collaborative translation as an exercise itself, as well as its contribution to creating a community representing the texts, a community not restricted to speakers of that language only. This volume, then, is the first of the outputs emerging from the project. We expect that the other two outputs will see the light of day soon—one, a book on Academic Social Responsibility, and the other, an annotated anthology of texts from Nepali, Lepcha, Kudmali and Bodo in translation.

The current volume brings together experts who were involved to various degrees and in different capacities with the SPARC project. Much of the writing in this issue of *Sahitya* is either informed by, or has direct resonance to, the arguments the team was exploring vis-à-vis the concept, development and implementation of ASR. A number of them focus on

marginalized areas of study within the Humanities, and on ways in which our outlook on the Humanities may become more inclusive and complete. Rabindranath Tagore's dream of encapsulating the global within one's understanding of the local, as encapsulated in his excursus on *visvasahitya* seems to find a direct reflection in a number of the essays in this volume. We consciously collected articles from experts in diverse fields and the essays reflect their expertise within the larger context of Academic Social Responsibility and the Humanities. Each essay has situated and interpreted ASR in diverse contexts, all crucial and relevant to a holistic approach to the understanding of Humanities.