

**SHARMISTHA MOHANTY**

## Editorial Sutras

In February of this year, several Chinese and Indian writers came together in New Delhi for a dialogue, the first unofficial dialogue of its kind between the two countries. The Chinese writers were Xi Chuan, Bei Dao, Ge Fei, Ouyang Jianghe, Zhai Yongming, and the critic Li Tuo. They were accompanied by their interpreter Shuang Shen. The Indian writers were Joy Goswami, Sharmistha Mohanty, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Kunwar Narain, Vivek Narayanan, K. Satchidanandan, Irwin Allan Sealy, and Vinod Kumar Shukla. They were joined by Ashis Nandy. This dialogue will be continued next year in Beijing. The first one this year was only a beginning. What follows below is the editor's experience of the dialogues. Lines in italics are direct quotes from participating writers.

He has a peasant's face, built by everything the earth has thrown up and the sky sent down. He sits in his thatch-roofed hut and watches. His mouth is open, his teeth are rotting. He sits on the edge of the hut, on the edge of the ravine.

*But our civilisations have existed for much longer. Our pasts consist of several thousand years of time, space, language and everyday practice—much richer than the history and culture of nation states.*

*There is a nation-state of the novel, the English language novel.*

*We always meet in America or Europe, never directly, never.*

What actually rises and falls—a conversation.

To make space, enough so that question and answer do not have to be related.

The young man who records is truly a recorder. Nothing breaks his vigilant silence.

The interpreter is exactly his opposite. Every word passes through her.

*It seems difficult to have a conversation as writers or even to know what that means. So we talk in the language of social theory. Only when the writer's loneliness came up did I feel a spark of something.*

Trying to move near what is originary in a civilisation, what rises, like hands or wings or mountains.

There *were* mountains and rivers, paper and ink, brushstrokes. There *were* caves with painted narratives. There *are* offices of glass, innumerable highways, the metro moving silently on its tracks. In between, an enormous ravine that our bodies cross at will, back and forth. In the ravine, no river, no stream, nothing moving. The fish that rest on the bottom are carved from dark silver.

The lightness of red sandstone in ruins and tombs. Its heaviness in poems that emerge from them.

*Poetry is dying. It's on its way to death. Our imaginations are getting more and more pale. Something problematic must have happened to our poetry. In a way poets in different nations form a weird imaginary community—in the sense that they share the same commonality, of our imaginations having become more and more pale.*

*There is a disjunction in this conversation. On the one hand we are talking about social realities, on the other hand Indian writers have been concerned with infinity. This has brought me to a difficult moment, as to in what context our conversations are to take place. Infinity or contemporary reality?*

Our pasts unending but not unchanging. What will be new? Not that which is not old.

On the blackened iron scales in the marketplace, a thousand years equals today.

*We are more nation state than Europe. I think this is pathetic. We should define how to build the nation state of the future. These are civilisations that have lasted four thousand years. But we think we are senile and decrepit, that Europe and North America are youthful and vibrant.*

Trying to understand one another. Trying to understand our understanding of one another.

Is there too much past, or too little?

Following the ridge of regrets, fate, thoughts that came too late, a future appears, even of the past.

*From Japan to Iran boundaries between religions have never been very important.*

*The discourse of modernity and revolution have gotten entangled with each other.*

*The discourse of colonialism and modernity are intertwined.*

Untamed, animate, time becomes many, and landscapes continue to be formed, not naming themselves yet, not conscious of being a continent.

*When my mother died her eyes were open. We didn't realise that sight leaves the eyes little by little. I haven't expressed this memory in twenty-seven years. But in last evening's Chinese poems this memory returned. I grew up in a small Bengal town, near a river called Churni. In winter, a moon advanced over the river, the cold grew, as did the fog. I myself became fog. With his words, he touches the silence of my memories, no philosophy needed, no history.*

## Editor's Note

The editor would like to deeply thank Shuang Shen, who was the sole interpreter for these very complex dialogues. But for her, this rich conversation between the Indian and Chinese writers would not have been possible. Moreover, she has patiently helped us to put together the Chinese contributions to this issue.

Shuang Shen teaches global Anglophone and Sinophone literatures in Penn State University in the U.S. She writes cultural commentary for Chinese newspapers and magazines, and she has also published a study of Anglophone periodicals in semi-colonial Shanghai.