

EDITORS' NOTE

2021 was not supposed to be like this. Most of us had probably hoped that after all the trauma of 2020, this year was going to be different. Vaccines were being made, people had become more aware, more and more medical options were becoming available to combat the effects of this dreaded COVID-19. But, to our utter dismay, especially in India, the new year brought only a more devastating second wave and friends, relatives and colleagues of all ages started succumbing to the apparently unstoppable disease. However, what traumatised people more than the aggressive mutations of the disease was the utterly unprepared response of the administrative apparatus as a result of which oxygen became scarce, hospital beds became unavailable and people started dying on the streets, gasping for breath in the arms of desperate near and dear ones who frantically ran helter-skelter for a cylinder of oxygen which either did not materialise or became available too late. Such was the extent of the crisis in India that even crematoriums became overwhelmed with corpses, leading to skirmishes over plots to cremate one's parents or spouse or children in an atmosphere that reeked of utter helplessness, indignity and anarchy. As the world watched on with agony, corpses of patients who had succumbed to this deadly contagion began to be dropped into the

Ganga by families who could not even reach hospitals or crematoriums. Hundreds of such bodies found their final refuge in shallow graves on the banks of the Ganga, to be intermittently exposed to the horrified gaze of the survivors by the ebb and flow of the tides. It rarely gets as grim and infernal as this.

The only ray of hope in these traumatic period was the spontaneous expressions of solidarity shown by citizens' organisations and their digital networks through which oxygen cylinders and other necessary equipments were made available, blood donors were arranged, ambulances were called, hospital beds were booked, sanitisation drives and food supplies were organised. This was done by a large number of young people in associations with medical professionals and charitable organisations which eventually saved hundreds of lives. Alongside such measures, various inexpensive canteens and food packet distribution networks were also initiated so that the impoverished and the unemployed could find a source of succour in these extensively exploitative times. It is our pleasure that certain members of this journal's editorial team as well as those associated with our extended network of friends and well-wishers actively participated in these humanitarian endeavours with intense passionate involvement and utmost selflessness. We begin this issue by acknowledging the contributions of these exemplary human beings and also by mourning the loss of all those who have left us during the last few months.

Quite naturally, proceeding with the activities associated with the journal has been quite difficult and we have even had to delay our publication by a fortnight or so. Yet the only reason that we have been able to finally deliver is because of the dedicated and stellar contributions of the editorial team and the understanding responses of our contributors. A specially note of thanks must be conveyed to Professor Emma Dawson Varughese whose analysis of gendered constructs and attendant reconfigurations through public wall art in Mumbai inaugurates this open issue. We are very grateful for receiving this essay which will surely enrich the readers.

This inaugural essay also foregrounds the quite exceptional focus on India which characterises this issue. Over the last six years we have not only received contributions from across the world, but the foci of those contributions have been geographically varied as well. Instead, for once, we have an issue in which much of the focus is on India. E. D. Varughese's featured article is followed by the Raktima Bhuyan's exploration of female characters in the literature of North-East India with principal focus on Mamang Dai's fiction and Sukanya Maity's analysis of biopolitical discourses of nationality and citizenship in the context of AIDS and COVID-19 in contemporary India. This is followed by two articles that look back at the colonial period, but through two very different and often diametrically opposed realms of existence - sports and cuisine. While Rituparna Sengup-

ta explores the culinary arts of colonial Bengal, Subhashish Guha investigates the colonial constructs associated with football and the postcolonial responses to those colonial discourses, particularly in Bengal. The final article marks a departure from the subcontinental plane and instead explores Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in light of a new generic entity which the author identifies as "intersectional magical realism".

This issue also contains two reviews - the first is of Anjuli Fatima Raza Kolb's extremely topical *Epidemic Empire* while the second one is of *Dastarkhwan: Muslim South Asia*, edited by Claire Chambers. Both of these reviews are remarkable in that they not only focus on the recycled circulation of imperial tropes across disciplinary boundaries but also articulate the possibilities of hope and resistance that reside within everyday experiences.

Let me conclude by once again thanking our contributors, readers and well-wishers in these troubled times. On behalf of the *Postcolonial Interventions* family we offer you our prayers for safety and well-being in the coming months and years. May our enclosed, virtual lives gradually find their way into the throbbing classrooms, cafes, public squares, cinema halls and teachers' lounges where we can resume our daily concourse with the scholarly, the mundane and the sublime once again!