



Editorial

The need to engage with what S. V. Srinivas qualifies as the “Business of English” needs some reflection on positioning and locating English departments and the nature of academic work they do today. At CHRIST, this question has appeared in its many visitations ever since the institution was granted autonomy, and subsequently, the Deemed-to-be-University status. With departments being given academic freedom to exercise their choices in the creation of curriculum, what constitutes the new English student began to be explored through the various courses designed as a part of many English programs at the University here.

Debates included questions about the importance to be given to Cultural Studies in English departments (“Why is there an insistence to be familiar with, and a ‘pressure’ to ‘use’ high theory to teach English courses?”); nomenclature of the department and the degrees conferred upon students (“English, or English Studies?”); the English literary canon (“Why should we teach students British Literature across two semesters, but questions of Indian literary and cultural traditions are relegated to only one semester?”), among many other charged debates. Ever since 2008, however, the manner in which English has been engaged with at the University here has seen a sea-change, especially with newer campuses evolving newer and more exciting modes of engagement with literary studies.

A symposium on ‘Rethinking English Studies in India: The Cultural Studies Turn and Its Possibilities’ jointly organised at the School of Business Studies and Social Sciences at CHRIST, and Sahitya Akademi, in February 2019, also helped locate many of these questions in a more pertinent manner. Among other concerns, an important idea that emerged from this symposium was the need to look at the idea of literary Studies in India a lot more closely. This issue of *Artha* is a result of ideas, anxieties, debates and differences that have characterised some of our teaching positions being part of English departments. These

debates, we are sure, also will resonate with many other academics affiliated to English departments in India elsewhere.

S V Srinivas positions the issue quite clearly when he asks, “What do we teach when we teach literary and cultural studies today?” Taking us through an explorative tour of his personal engagement with English, Cultural Studies and Literary Studies, Srinivas’ fundamental point of excursion is “what is the relevance of our discipline?” Observing how one does not demand to justify the relevance of English literature today, Srinivas astutely points out the manner in which the discipline has developed in India since the 1990s, going beyond the ‘literature’ question. He notes how the broadening literary canon also brought with it some challenges in terms of limiting the disciplinary boundaries, thus ushering in the need to reconceptualise the new sensibility that a student of new English departments now needed to possess. He characterises his ‘exit’ from the English departments with his interest in films, fueled by some seminal works on Indian cinema by prominent cultural critics, many among whom came similar disciplinary backgrounds as his. Drawing attention to the fact that students of English today cannot be equipped merely with a knowledge of interpreting ‘words on the page’ but need to be equipped with ‘skills and competencies’ that will help them sustain their ‘careers’ in the future, Srinivas’ article points towards the need of having to consider the possibility of taking literary tools to other contexts.

Concerning the question of what qualifies as Cultural Studies in the Indian context, Rashmi Sawhney’s *“Decolonising Cultural Studies”* informs us how the Cultural Studies narrative has always been one we have come to inherit from the Birmingham School’s British working-class project, without giving much thought to the possibilities of engagement with questions of culture in our own contexts. Illustrating her experience of having taught courses in Cultural Studies to Irish students who did not always become alert to their own Irish experience, Sawhney draws our attention to the manner in which the Cultural Studies project that crystallised in the Birmingham School, disseminated to other academic communities without once being realised that it was indeed an *English* project. Its ability to resuscitate questions of power, politics and culture in the context of a rather politically and culturally charged Scotland,

Ireland and Wales is often overseen. “If the discipline managed to migrate across far seas, travelling to distant lands like USA, Australia and India, then why was its impact on England’s immediate (and English speaking) peripheries so negligent?” she asks. By knitting various trajectories of Cultural Studies in India, Sawhney works through the different modes of negotiating with the political in the Indian context to highlight the complexities of these trajectories themselves. As a move towards problematising our immediate, contemporary cultural contexts for useful engagement and development of a Cultural Studies practice in India, especially in the context of a changing landscape of higher education in India, she believes that Cultural Studies as a discipline has the potential to provide more scope, and to take up the challenge that liberal arts and humanities is likely to face soon in our country.

Urmila G along with Nikhil Govind provide a voice to locate the changing landscape of Literary Studies in India today in the contexts of ‘doing’ English and the many themes that animate this exercise. While Urmila provides an autobiographical account of her experience of doing English from her secondary school up to her studies at the postgraduate and doctoral levels, Govind’s opening framing structure in the essay also puts into perspective the larger institutional questions that govern many of these choices. While Urmila argues that her engagement with a certain way of ‘doing English’ at her postgraduate level across an array of diverse courses helped frame some of her reading and writing practices, her faith in a changing landscape of English Studies is a useful illustration to understand the newer direction that Literary Studies is taking today.

Yadukrishnan P T and Nikhil Govind on the other hand, provide some crucial insights into the manner in which an interdisciplinary pedagogy in English departments needs to be evolved out of policy decisions. Yadukrishnan articulates the manner in which his formative English education training was radically different and unfulfilling when compared to the interdisciplinary approach to reading and writing he was introduced much later, that was generated by newer modes of thinking, reading and writing, thus contributing to his doctoral work. However, the larger structural,

narrative-frame that Govind provides to the article here makes this point far more significant. This is because questions of interdisciplinarity that result due to institutional policy decisions find true meaning when contextualised through voices that propel intellectual quests especially of students who find interdisciplinarity in English Studies far more rewarding when compared to more conventional modes of pedagogic engagement.

While all the authors in the issue have highlighted the need to re-think the manner in which academic work in literary studies departments is changing, Pramod Nayar's work on the cultural implications of reading the Illustrated version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights exemplifies many of these claims in a more persuasive manner. He argues that the verbal-visual discourse adopted in the Declaration functions as an instance of an 'expository discourse' which alerts us to the manner in which the 'human' question is increasingly becoming more significant and layered today. His reading of this verbal-visual discourse is, in turn, an illustration of the manner in which literary studies is moving towards establishing newer domains of engagement, yet keeping the central questions that have always concerned English departments at the heart of such projects - the question of what constitutes the 'human' and how do we understand this category. Considering that the central project of much of Humanities in general, and English departments in particular, has been to engage with the ways of understanding representations of the 'human', Nayar's essay makes some crucial interventions with regard to questions of representation of the 'human' in narratives. Drawing from emerging fields of enquiry within cultural studies, including Human Rights, Nayar investigates the potential of engaging with such 'texts' and investing in them the narrative potent to speak the 'human' in different ways.

We would like to thank the authors for their contributions and for opening some important questions and conversations about the business of English departments today. We hope that these questions also stir a new set of ideas and usher in newer modes of engaging with literary studies today in India.

Gaana J
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