

International Conference

Jointly organized by

The Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar
Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences, Baroda
&
The Forum on Contemporary Theory, Baroda

***Bakhtin in India:
Exploring the Dialogic Potential in Self, Culture and History***

19-21 August 2013

Venue: The Central University of Gujarat

The International Conference, jointly organized by The Central University of Gujarat, Balvant Parekh Centre for General Semantics and Other Human Sciences, and The Forum on Contemporary Theory will be held in Gandhinagar, Gujarat during **19-21 August 2013**.

Thematic Introduction

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) has been one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century, crossing cultural and disciplinary boundaries. His theory of dialogism has shaped new perspectives on society and thought adding insights and value to theoretical formulations to various schools of critical thinking from humanism to structuralism to post-structuralism. Given Bakhtin's emphasis on plurality of points of view and dialogue across cultures, the relevance of his ideas to our times cannot be over-emphasized. He has given us analytical tools to articulate and make sense of the nature of differences and diversity in the world. In this age of globalization, where close

encounters with other cultures is an immediate reality forcing individuals to negotiate differences, Bakhtin's ideas have even greater relevance.

Interestingly, if Bakhtin's works stand under the banner of plurality, open-endedness and diversity of language and social speech types, the cultural, philosophical and literary histories of India may well be brought under the same banner. As a multicultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society, India is the rare example of a country that has negotiated diversity at all levels. The idea of dialogue and diversity have central significance to the argumentative traditions that have developed in India over centuries and also in the study of literary and cultural texts that have originated in the confluence of cultures, both Indian and non-Indian. Even before Bakhtin's formulation of the idea of 'dialogics' something approximating it seems to have existed in India. However, only a systematic enquiry into the nature of the polyphonic traditions of India can reveal the problematic of the dialogues that marked the living traditions of culture, religion and philosophy in the Indian subcontinent. Did classical Hindu traditions and Buddhist systems of thought share a dialogic space of interaction? Bhartrhari and Nagarjuna are important landmarks in Indian thought, but are there meeting points between them? What was the nature of relations between Sanskrit and other Indian languages? Were the various translation traditions dialogic in nature? How did Bhakti and Sufi traditions enter into a dialogue? We know King Akbar sponsored translations of Sanskrit, Turkish and Arabic texts into Persian and Prince Dara Shikoh translated major Sanskrit texts into Persian. What is the nature of the dialogue that marks these exchanges? What was the creative impulse that worked in the origin of Indian languages around the beginning of the last millennium, most of which used prominent Sanskrit texts in their separate ways? During the colonial phase, these argumentative traditions are apparently in decline. Is it because hegemonic structures of power resulted in the creation of monologic discourses? One may approach Orientalism or Indological texts from this point of view. We also need to explore how dissent and dialogue can be promoted in contemporary India through discussion and debate.

Though there have been scattered and sporadic attempts to use Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony, dialogue, heteroglossia and carnival in the study of literature and culture in India, this is the first time an entire conference will be devoted to the systematic exploration of Indian thought and culture from Bakhtin's points of view. The conference will explore the main ideas from Bakhtin's works such as architectonics, aesthetics, answerability, philosophy of act, ethical responsibility, dialogism in literary texts, cultural life and media (television, film, internet etc.), and in ancient and recent histories and more importantly the iconoclastic wisdom of carnival as they relate specifically to Indian ethos. These wide ranging topics will be explored across academic disciplines. Furthermore, the versatility of analytical categories like speech genres and chronotopes will be examined.

The overarching framework of the conference is to explore the dialogic potential in the culture and thought of India in the canonical, non-canonical and contemporary traditions. The conference will attempt to address broadly the following questions:

1. If classical Indian philosophy is inherently dialogic, has it been taken over by monologic impulses? What historical factors contributed to this change? How then do we reclaim the dialogicality?
2. The immediate reality of Indian culture is that it is multi-lingual and multi-religious, which necessitates a dialogue. What are the factors that enhance or inhibit dialogue in such complex environment?
3. What does a Bakhtinian reading of the literary canon from various regions reveal?
4. Do we gain new insights in the philosophy of living language by setting up a dialogue between Bakhtin and the Sanskrit grammarian Bhartrhari or Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna?
5. How do various traditions of *tika* or *tarjuma* or *anuvad* reflect the dialogic nature of Indian culture?
6. How far have the various literary genres contributed toward opening up of Indian society by interrogating dominant structures of power?

7. What do we learn about aesthetics as a category from a comparative study of Bakhtin and Abhinavagupta?
8. What are the philosophical dimensions of laughter and grotesque body images? How do performance traditions in India contribute to the transgressive aesthetics of the carnivalesque and add new dimensions to Bakhtin's works on Rabelais?
9. What steps must academic institutions take to facilitate dialogue across disciplines? How do disciplines relate to each other and inform the production of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences? What are the strengths and limits of interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary works?
10. Dialogue is a dynamic process charged with temporalities in which all the parties involved get transformed by moving away from their assumptions. How do competing viewpoints find articulation in contemporary society? As educators, how do we promote intra-psychic dialogue of competing ideas to promote dialogic consciousness?
11. Has the emergence of the Indian nation-state created a centrifugal tendency in the culture inhibiting dialogue? How do we promote inter-religious and inter-regional and inter-lingual dialogue?
12. How do we look at social phenomena like caste and tribe from the standpoint of dialogism? Does the emergence of Dalit literature mark a phase of dialogism that is emancipatory?
13. How can Bakhtin's ideas be productive in the discussion of issues related to gender? Can we review the canons from the perspective of women using Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and carnival?
14. Can Bakhtin's views of language and culture contribute towards a critique of colonial history and its repressive regime by retrieving the subversive potential of marginalized culture and the contemporary rewritings of canonical texts of the colonial period?

These topics are only suggestive; one is free to ask similar questions regarding any aspect of life in the Indian subcontinent that has bearing on the ideas of dissent and dialogue and

will create new possibilities of dialogicality. We would appreciate if theoretical discussions are supported by close readings of texts-- literary, philosophical, cultural or political.

Keynote Speaker

Sunthar Visuvalingam is best known for formulating “transgressive sacrality” as a paradigm for comparative religion taking the ritual clown (*vidūṣaka*) of the Sanskrit drama, the brahmanicide god Bhairava, and the tantric praxis of the Hindu polymath Abhinavagupta (11th C) as his starting points. His 1984 PhD on “Abhinavagupta's Conception of Humor: Its Resonances in Sanskrit Drama, Poetry, Hindu Mythology, and Spiritual Praxis,” was recommended for a D.Litt. Degree and earned a special commendation from the Vice-Chancellor of the Banaras Hindu University. His seminal paper on “Transgressive Sacrality in the Hindu Tradition” (1985), first presented to an interreligious conference in New York, subsequently became the focus of an international pilot-conference (1986) at the annual South Asia conference at the University of Wisconsin (Madison). His theorizing in this area, which draws explicitly from the work of Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Laura Makarius, has been compared to Victor Turner (liminality) and Mikhail Bakhtin (carnival). A key application of this paradigm has been an acculturation model of ‘Hinduism’ and Indian religious history. He wrote the concluding essay reviewing all the other contributions to Alf Hiltebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees* (Albany: SUNY, 1989) from the perspective of transgressive sacrality. His other comprehensive and polemical overviews, including “Towards an Integral Appreciation of Abhinavagupta’s Aesthetics of Rasa” (2006) and “Hinduism: Aesthetics, Drama, Poetics” in Frank Burch Brown, ed., *Oxford Handbook of Religion and the Arts* (in press), explore aesthetic sensibility as a possible resolution of the ethical problem posed by the dialectic of interdiction and transgression. Since 2001, while working as an independent consultant, Sunthar has been hosting the multilingual www.svAbhinava.org website to facilitate international collaborative research on intercultural issues along these lines.

Plenary Speaker

Elizabeth Chalier-Visuvalingam has doctorates in Indology, philosophy, and anthropology from Banaras Hindu University and the University Paris X, France. She has also been a Senior Visiting Fellow pursuing post-doctoral research at the Sanskrit Dept. of Harvard University. Her specialization is the worship, both ancient and contemporary, and significance of the transgressor-god Bhairava in South Asian religions, including Buddhism, Jainism, Islam, pre-literate tribal communities, and syncretic settings. She has conducted extensive fieldwork in the Kathmandu Valley, Banaras, and other regions. Her French (postdoctoral) D.Litt. dissertation was published by Peter Lang in 2003. There is a strong comparative and metaphysical dimension that makes her approach relevant to the enigma of Dionysus in ancient Greece, crime and punishment, contemporary terrorism, etc. Her most complete essay on Bhairava in English is “Brahma and Bhairava: The Problem of the Mahabrahma” in Alf Hiltebeitel, ed., *Criminal Gods and Demon Devotees* (Albany: SUNY, 1989). Her extensive entry on Bhairava, jointly written with Sunthar Visuvalingam, will soon appear as a scholarly resource in the Hinduism section of the Oxford Bibliography Online. She has also published several articles, in both French and English, on the literature of minorities, particularly that of the Jewish communities in India, exploring such themes as the figure of the Other. She has taught at Boston University, Eötvös Loránd University at Budapest and is currently teaching at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (SAIC) and Western philosophy and French literature (including Rabelais) for the French Baccalaureate.

Conveners of the Conference

(a) Lakshmi Bandlamudi is a Professor of Psychology at LaGuardia Community College, City University of New York. She earned her MA from Columbia University and Ph.D. from The Graduate Center, City University of New York in Developmental Psychology. She has been engaged with Mikhail Bakhtin Studies for more than two decades and has published in several reputed journals and presented papers at various international conferences connecting myths, culture, history and consciousness. In reviewing her presentations at various International Bakhtin Conferences since 1991,

Clive Thomson noted in the journal *Dialogue, Carnival, Chronotope* that she was the 'lone voice' in bridging Eastern and Western philosophies and humanities and social sciences. Two of her publications were on comparative analysis between Mikhail Bakhtin and the Sanskrit grammarian Bhartrhari: "Crossing Time and Space: Bakhtin's Dialogic Encounter with the Sanskrit Philosopher-Grammarian Bhartrhari" (1998) in *Recherches Semiotiques / Semiotic Inquiry* (Vol.18); "Voices and Vibrations of Consciousness in Genres: A Dialogue between Bakhtin and Bhartrhari on Interpretation" (2011) in *Dialogue, Carnival Chronotope* (43-44), Moscow. She is best known for her recent book, *Dialogics of Self, The Mahabharata and Culture: The History of Understanding and Understanding of History* (Anthem Press, UK 2010). This interdisciplinary work explores the interrelationships between individual and cultural historical dynamics in interpreting the epic text, using key concepts from Bakhtin's theory of dialogism. Bandlamudi approaches the problem of interpreting a familiar historical text as a two-faced Janus, looking into the domain of culture in which the text permeates, and into the unique meaning that the text has in the lives of specific individuals. She argues and demonstrates that the interpretive act is at the intersection of several histories – that of the individual, individual's past relationship with the text, and the history of the text and the very history of understanding. Soon after this book was published she spent six months in India as a Fulbright-Nehru Senior Research Fellow and had the opportunity to present this work at various universities and research institutes across India. During this period she conducted further research on the evolution of *The Mahabharata* at the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute in Pune. Bandlamudi is also the author of a travelogue, *Movements with the Cosmic Dancer: On Pilgrimage to Kailash Manasarovar* (2006, Motilal Banarsidass), which includes a Foreword by H. H. The Dalai Lama, and an Introduction by Dr. Karan Singh. This work records the spiritual journey against the backdrop of the physical journey in the Himalayas, weaving Hindu and Buddhist tales with philosophies of Kashmir Saivism, Sri Aurobindo, Nietzsche and others.

(b) E. V. Ramakrishnan is a Professor of Comparative Literature and Dean of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies, The Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar, India. His areas of specialization are Comparative Literature, Translation Studies and Culture Studies. As a bilingual writer he has published poetry and criticism

in Malayalam and English. He has also translated extensively from Indian languages into English, mostly poetry. Among his works in Malayalam are *Aksharavum Adhunikatayum* (1994), *Vakkile Samooham* (1997) and *Desheeyatakalum Sahityavum*. In English his prominent works are *Making It New: Modernism in Malayalam, Marathi and Hindi Poetry* (Shimla, 1995), *Narrating India: The Novel in Search of the Nation* (edited, New Delhi, 2000), *Tree of Tongues: An Anthology of Indian Poetry* (edited, Shimla 1999), *Terms of Seeing: New and Collected Poems* (New Delhi, 2006) and *Locating Indian Literature: Texts, Traditions and Translations* (New Delhi, 2011). He is a recipient of the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for Literary Criticism (1995), K. K. Birla Foundation Fellowship for Comparative Literature (1997-1999), Indian Institute of Advanced Study Fellowship (1992-3), Fulbright Fellowship (2001) and Faculty Enrichment Award of Canadian Government (2012). He has been part of an Indian delegation of writers to Moscow in 2010.

Submission Deadline

500-word abstract or proposal is due by **Feb 15, 2013**. The abstract should have a title for the presentation along with the name and institutional affiliation of the presenter and should be mailed as an email attachment to Lakshmi Bandlamudi (lakbandlamudi@gmail.com), E. V. Ramakrishnan (evrama51@gmail.com), and Prafulla C. Kar (prafullakar@gmail.com). The last date for receiving the full paper from the selected participants is **15 July 2013**. The papers should be limited to 12 pages (approximately 20 minutes of reading time). A longer version may be submitted for possible publication in the *Journal of Contemporary Thought*, published by the Forum on Contemporary Theory or in the conference volume.

Registration

The last date for receiving the registration fee is **30 June 2013**. The fee may be sent through a bank draft drawn in favor of Forum on Contemporary Theory payable in Baroda to the following address: Centre for Contemporary Theory, C-304 Siddhi Vinayak Complex, Farmaji Road, Behind Baroda Railway Station, Baroda 390 007, India. Overseas participants may pay through checks drawn in favor of Forum on

Contemporary Theory. The registration fee from the outstation participant will take care of their board and lodging during the conference. We encourage the participants to register early so that their accommodation in the hotel is secured. The fee from the local participants will take care of their lunch and tea during the conference. All participants need to be pre-registered. The registration fee is non-refundable. Each participant will share the room with another participant. The following are the details of the registration fee:

1. Participant from India	Rs.4000/
2. Overseas Participant	US \$200/
3. Local Participant	Rs.2000/
4. M. A. Student (from the Central University of Gujarat)	Rs.1000/

For further information any of the following may be contacted:

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