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Editorial

“Is there an Indian way of thinking?” asked AK Ramanujan twenty years ago in an essay of the same name. The answers will vary, he says, depending on which word in that question is being emphasised—*Is there an Indian way of thinking? Is there an Indian way of thinking? Is there an Indian way of thinking? And so on.* Before going on to illuminatingly address the last of these formulations, Ramanujan promises us that “We have not heard the end of these questions—or these answers.”

This issue of *ArtConnect* reveals how persistent questions of national identity and character are—especially when talking about culture. N Kalyan Raman, in his review of Kirtana Kumar’s performance, *The Wedding Party*, describes the dissimulation around Indian weddings and the “marathon dance of deception” that they consequently are. Shumona Goel’s film installation, *Family Tree*, reveals the breakdown of the idea of ‘Indian’ in the context of migration—an experience which leads to a fractured present where “we are never really quite at home. Never in the US, never in India...” On the other hand, says Kaushik Bhaumik, this passage from being singularly Indian to a psychically troubled migrant leads to the possibility of “a family tree exorcised of superstition and the irrational”.

Leading off from the question about an Indian way of thinking are questions about a Punjabi, Malayali or Kannada way of thinking. MK Raghavendra looks at what violence in Kannada films says about perceptions of Kannada identity, while Anindya Roy uses the graphic narrative form to explore the Bengali love for the game of football. And in our lead essay, Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant show how the literatures of several different language communities in Mumbai have worked with and through each other to contribute to Mumbai’s famed (though increasingly besieged) cosmopolitanism.

Ramanujan writes that one hallmark of the Indian way of thinking could be that we have little use for the all-encompassing, universal moral or social rule—“In cultures like India’s, the context-sensitive kind of rule is the preferred formulation.” By arguing in favour of a more nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism, Sardesai and Pant point us in the same direction. The idea of cosmopolitanism as a kind of all-inclusive bonhomie is unproductive—what we need to acknowledge in the context of Mumbai (and by extension all of India) are “challenges beyond the question of openness and tolerance; challenges to do with the acts of making a living, sharing space, coming to terms with anonymity, learning a new language, communicating with people who [think] in a fundamentally different way...”

Anjum Hasan
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Contributors

Abhay Sardesai is the editor of *Art India* and Visiting Lecturer in Aesthetics at the Department of English, University of Mumbai. Sardesai translates from Marathi, Konkani and Gujarati into English. He was principal investigator of an IFA-funded project led by the Mumbai-based research centre, PUKAR, to research and document the literatures of Mumbai's various languages.

Aditya Pant is a graduate in history from Jawaharlal Nehru University and has worked with PUKAR in various capacities for over three years. Presently an independent researcher based in Boston, he maintains his connection with PUKAR by creating a global network of partners and extending his research interests to encompass youth, urban planning and development.

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Anindya Roy runs the comics publishing house, Phantomville, with Sarnath Banerjee. He writes for both comics and films, and is currently working on a collection of short stories. He can be contacted at anindyaroy100@gmail.com.

Harsho Mohan Chatteraj is Kolkata-based artist and designer. He has worked, variously, as a columnist, cartoonist, illustrator, comic strip artist and visualiser. His main field of interest and expertise is that of comics and graphic novels.

Emma Corkhill is a graphic designer. She works in Sweden as co-editor of the journal, *Art Monitor*, when she is not working with issues of climate change or hanging out in Delhi with Phantomville.

N Kalyan Raman is a critic and translator of Tamil fiction and poetry into English. He has translated three novels by Ashokamitran: *The Colours of Evil* (1998), *Sand and Other Stories* (2002) and *Mole!* (2005); as well as a novel by Vaasanthi called *At the Cusp of Ages* (2008). His translations of contemporary Tamil poetry have been published widely in journals and anthologies.

Kirtana Kumar is a theatre director, actor and filmmaker. Her solo work in theatre includes Dario Fo's *Medea* and *Orgasmo Adulto*. Her films include *My Children Who Should be Running Through Vast Open Spaces* (1993) and *Guhya* (2001). In 2007 she received an IFA grant to develop and direct *The Wedding Party*—an exploration of the urban, middle-class Indian wedding.

Debasish Sarkar is a fiction writer and painter. His first book of short stories in Bengali will be out shortly. An alumnus of Jadavpur University and IIT, Mumbai, he currently teaches chemical engineering at the University College of Science and Technology, Kolkata. Between 2002 and 2005 he was part of an IFA-funded digital imaging project involving a group of painters and photographers.

Madhuban Mitra has a background in English Literature and has performed and taught Bharatanatyam for many years. She is the author of a doctoral thesis which examines the interventionist role of contemporary cultural practices in India, especially the kind of work that seeks to negotiate and reinterpret institutional and public spaces. Madhuban was Programme Executive at IFA from 2000 to 2008. She currently lives and works in Kolkata

Kaushik Bhaumik is Vice President, Osian's—Connoisseurs of Art. He has co-edited *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* with Elizabeth Edwards (Oxford: Berg, 2009). His forthcoming books include a history of early Bombay cinema, 1896-1936, to be published by Clarendon Press, Oxford in 2009.

MK Raghavendra is a Bangalore-based film critic who received the National Award for Best Film Critic (the Swarna Kamal) in 1996. His book *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema* was published by Oxford University Press in 2008.

Writing Across the City: The Many Faces of Cosmopolitanism

Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant

Those who celebrate Mumbai's cosmopolitanism tend to do so in an abstract way, say Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant. In response, the authors outline the specific history of the multilingual encounters that have shaped the city's cosmopolitanism. They follow the intersecting trajectories of Mumbai's many tongues—Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Sindhi, Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Konkani, Marathi and English—as these developed into literatures. The city's ethic of social tolerance was hard won—developed over a century of trial and error, say the authors. Cosmopolitanism today might therefore be "a desperately needed political statement but it cannot be reduced to a slogan." [Subscribe to read/view more](#)



Anindya Roy was part of an IFA-funded project started in 2001 to create a graphic novel on Kolkata. The following story is one of several that he wrote during the course of that project. Roy's stories explore the quirks of Calcuttans and their special loves—buying hilsa (with instructions to the fishmonger along the lines of “make curry pieces, not too large, but large enough so that one does not ask for two”), creating impromptu street-corner addas, worrying about nuclear attacks and, of course, football. In the following piece, Roy rewinds to when “the tiger first tasted blood” and shows us what followed in the history of Kolkata's football mania. [Subscribe to read/view more](#)



EXAGGGGERATED BACK HEEL ...

Story: Anindya Roy, Art: Harsho Mohan Chatteraj, Color: Emma Corkhill

Rajesh Weds Menaka aka The Wedding Party: Two Perspectives

Kirtana Kumar and N Kalyan Raman

The Wedding Party—directed by Kirtana Kumar and funded by IFA—is a play that invites its audience to both witness and participate in a middle-class Bangalore wedding. It is an attempt—inspired by Indian folk theatre—to break the fourth wall—that invisible barrier between a performance and its audience in proscenium theatre. *The Wedding Party* received enthusiastic reviews when it premiered in Bangalore in January 2008. Here Kirtana Kumar shares excerpts from the diary she maintained while creating the play, while critic N Kalyan Raman describes how admirably well *The Wedding Party* captures the artifice and drama of Indian weddings. [Subscribe to read/view more](#)



Anxious Cities: *The Scheduled Collapse of Yesterday's Cakes**

Stories and Paintings
by Debasish Sarkar



This assemblage of paintings and short stories represents thematic as well as formal parallels across the two media that interest Debasish Sarkar. According to Sarkar, “Both the stories and the paintings embody the fracture of signs and although they do not illustrate each other, they cohabit like two prisoners in adjacent cells. The piece has been conceived in such a way that it begins with images and only a surreptitious presence of text.” Eventually, the text “eats up the page and images on it.” The monochrome images in this piece are made using analog methods on canvas and paper, while the colour images are digital collages created as part of an IFA-funded collaborative digital imaging project.

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*The phrase in the title is from *Meteoric Flowers* by Elizabeth Willis.



In August 2008, artist Shumona Goel exhibited *Family Tree* in a recently-vacated apartment in Mumbai. *Family Tree* is a site-specific installation of film, video, photographs and sound, and was the result of an IFA grant Ms Goel received in order to explore the emotional turbulence caused by migration. In this essay, critic Kaushik Bhaumik describes how the work creates a sensory awareness of a divided and fragmented self seen against seemingly familiar domestic spaces, which sometimes merge with the outdoors “to the point where we do not know whether we are walking in nature... or are inside a home.” It is dichotomies like these that *Family Tree* plays with—the feel of a pageant contrasting with the ‘stark individuated autonomy’ of each space; the suggestion of human warmth as well terror and alienation; and the migrant’s dream of the new “brought to heel by older historical contradictions”.

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Kaushik Bhaumik

*The Long Nights of Restless Travels:
Responding to Shumona Goel’s Family Tree*



Bangalore Against its Hinterland: Interpreting Violence in Recent Kannada Cinema

MK Raghavendra

Kannada films of the last few years have grown increasingly violent. MK Raghavendra studies this phenomenon with reference to four recent films and in relation to how Bangalore features as the site for violence and lawlessness in these films. In the process, he explores the connection between film-related violence in the city and violence in films; the depiction of the police in these films; and the question of how their protagonists, who are usually migrants to the city, view their adopted home.

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