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### ArtConnect

### An IFA Publication

Volume4, Number 1 January-June 2010

### **Contents**

Editorial

INCESSANT SEARCH FOR LANGUAGES: SOME THOUGHTS ON HINDI POETRY TODAY Teji Grover

IN SEARCH OF THE OTHER SONG: TRAVELS AMONG THE TAWAIFS OF BANARAS Saba Dewan

THE SCRAMBLE FOR SOUND Vibodh Parthasarathi

SOCIETY IN MINIATURE: DASARA DOLL DISPLAYS Annapurna Garimella

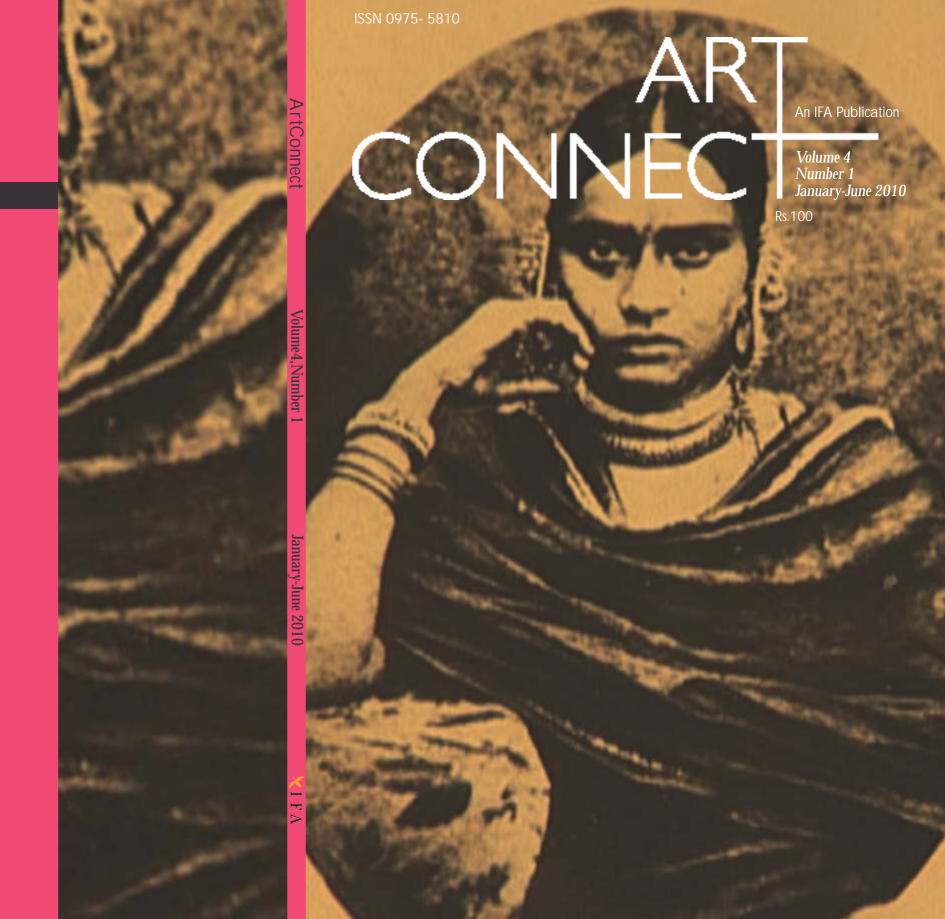
A STRANGE CROSS-CULTURAL INFANCY: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGAL Gargi Gangopadhyay

> KELAI DRAUPADI! (LISTEN DRAUPADI!) Sashikanth Ananthachari



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### Contents

**EDITORIAL** 

3

### INCESSANT SEARCH FOR LANGUAGES: SOME THOUGHTS ON HINDI POETRY TODAY

Teji Grover

6

# IN SEARCH OF THE OTHER SONG: TRAVELS AMONG THE TAWAIFS OF BANARAS

Saba Dewan

21

#### THE SCRAMBLE FOR SOUND

Vibodh Parthasarathi

40

# SOCIETY IN MINIATURE: DASARA DOLL DISPLAYS

Annapurna Garimella

56

## A STRANGE CROSS-CULTURAL INFANCY: CHILDREN'S LITERATURE NINETEENTH CENTURY BENGAL

Gargi Gangopadhyay

70

#### KELAI DRAUPADI! (LISTEN DRAUPADI!)

Sashikanth Ananthachari

86



# ArtConnect An IFA Publication

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#### **Editor**

Anjum Hasan

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#### **Cover Image**

Unknown tawaif. Image from the collection of Krishna Kumar Rastogi.

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### **Editorial**

How does an artist internalise the spirit of older artistic forms while also keeping her art alive to e contemporary context? And, as Frantz Fanon asked 50 years ago, how, in post-colonial societies such as ours, might the artist engage with traditional culture in a dynamic instead of reflexive way?

Shanta Gokhale considers this question the starting point of her novel Tya Varshi, from which we carry an excerpt in this issue. In her introduction to the excerpt she writes that one of the events that set her thinking about how art is and is not transfigured by its times, was the publication of a collection of bandishes composed by an established vocalist. The artist claimed that they were new, "yet they were all of them variations on the old themes of love and separation and were also written in the old language." Gokhale takes the opposite approach—the title of her novel is Marathi for 'In That Time' and Gokhale sees it as an attempt to capture a specific cultural moment. "I was writing a time, I was writing situations arising out of this particular time and how this time was affecting the lives and creative processes of my artist characters."

In his introduction to an interview with dancer-choreographer Astad Deboo, Sunil Shanbag describes the first time he saw Deboo perform, and the strange excitement of the new. "What emanated from the loudspeakers were sounds, not music, and what the dancer was doing on stage was not dance as I knew it... If what I was familiar with was dance, then this surely was anti-dance." The interview goes on to establish how in Deboo's case 'contemporary' dance implies an open-ended, flexible approach to one's resources and contexts, a deliberate suspension of prior assumptions about what the body can create in a space, and a constant search for challenge.

In Clare Arni's photographs of the old-time trades of Kolkata, and in Oriole Henry's accompanying essay, the old and the new are considered in the context of the economic changes sweeping through our cities. The piece shows how Kolkata's old business establishments present both an ethical and aesthetic contrast to the impersonal façades of the corporate world.

Historian Indira Biswas describes the career of a pioneering radio artiste—Jogesh Chandra Bose—who, in the 1920s, started the first children's radio programme in India and who used the medium of radio to create a persona for himself as an affectionate, absent-minded, grandfather-like teller of stories. *Galpadada*, as Bose came to be known, married the new freedoms of early broadcasting and progressive ideas about children's education and recreation, with the traditional image of a storyteller. This carefully constructed image made him one of the country's earliest media personalities as well as someone who "for the first time imagined a space for children in the media".

We also carry essays by Surojit Sen and Janaki Abraham on, respectively, the fakirs of Bengal and the social role of photography among the Thiyyas of Kerala. I hope you enjoy the issue!

Anjum Hasan editor@indiaifa.org

### 5

### Contributors

**Teji Grover** is a Hindi poet, fiction writer, translator and painter. She has published five collections of poetry. Her first novel, *Neela*, appeared in 1999 and a collection of her short stories, *Sapne Mein Prem Ki Saat Kahanian*, in 2008. Her poems have been translated into a number of Indian and foreign languages. She has translated and edited an anthology of 22 Swedish poets, *Barf Ki Khushboo* (2001), as well as the works of Norwegian novelist Knut Hamsun and playwright Henrik Ibsen.

Grover's first solo exhibition of paintings was held in the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore in 2005. She has been a teacher of English literature in a college in Chandigarh for two decades and is now a fulltime writer and painter based in Hoshangabad, Madhya Pradesh.

**Saba Dewan** is a Delhi-based filmmaker whose work has focused on gender, sexuality, culture and communalism. Her notable films include *Sita's Family* (2001), *Barf* (Snow, 1997) *Khel* (The Play, 1994), *Nasoor* (Festering Wound, 1991) and *Dharmayuddha* (Holy War, 1989).

For the past few years she has been working on a trilogy of films on stigmatised women performers. *Delhi –Mumbai –Delhi* (2006), on the lives of bar dancers, was the first film of the trilogy; the second, *Naach* (The Dance, 2008), explored the lives of women who dance in rural fairs. The third and final film of the trilogy is *The Other Song* (2009) which is about the art and lifestyles of the *tawaifs* or courtesans. All three films have been screened widely to critical acclaim.

Dewan received two IFA grants (2002 and 2005) to research and make The Other Song

**Vibodh Parthasarath**i maintains a multidisciplinary interest in communication theory, media policy and comparative media practice. He is one of the editors of the Sage series on 'Communication Processes' which so far includes the volumes *Media and Mediation* (2006) and *The Social and the Symbolic* (2007). He has taught courses in communication theory at various universities in India. Parthasarathi's latest film, *Crosscurrents—-a Fijian Travelogue* (2002), explores the many faces of 'reconciliation' after a decade of coups in the Pacific nation.

Parthasarathi is the recipient of a 2002 IFA grant to study the early recording industry and music culture in India.

Annapurna Garimella is a designer and art historian based in Bangalore. She heads Jackfruit, a research and design organisation which works in the arts, and is the founder of Art, Resources and Teaching Trust, a not-for-profit organisation that gathers resources and promotes research and teaching in art and architectural history, archaeology, crafts, design, and other related disciplines in academic and non-academic fora. Her publications include work on the medieval city of Vijayanagara, modernism in India, contemporary religiosities and art, and the politics of tourism and heritage.

In 2000, Garimella received an IFA grant to research and document the religious art and architecture of Bangalore.

Gargi Gangopadhyay is a full-time lecturer of English at Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Vivekananda Vidyabhavan, Kolkata. Currently working on a doctoral thesis on children's print culture in the context of British imperialism, she also teaches a course on 'Children's Literature' at Presidency College, Kolkata. Besides an academic interest in childhood studies, she nurtures a passion for publishing for children, viewing picture and storybooks as powerful mediums for achieving a parallel and alternative education.

Gangopadhyay is on an IFA grant to research the social and historical 'formation' of indigenous children's literature in nineteenth-century Bengal. A web archive of this research will soon be available online.

Sashikanth Ananthachari is a graduate of the Film and Television Institute of India, Pune. He has worked as a cinematographer on over a 100 films including Aparna Sen's Yugant and Soudhamini's Invisible Flame. He has also directed fiction films for television.

Ananthachari is currently on an IFA grant to make a film on a village festival in Tamil Nadu that is a unique celebration of the Mahabharata. .

### The Incessant Search for Languages: Some Thoughts on Hindi Poetry Today

Teji Grover

What are the different streams that have fed the language we today call 'Hindi' and how have poets extended the range of Hindi poetry by drawing on these older tongues? Leading poet Teji Grover shares her own journey into Hindi poetry, via Punjabi, Urdu and English, talks about the history of Hindi poetry and presents some of the challenges and opportunities facing the scene today.

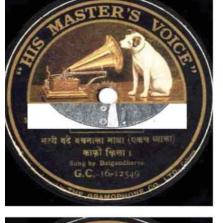




Along with travelogues, autobiographies and copious documentation, Occidental travellers during the Raj left behind the lore of 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen'. Most travelled in the service of the British Empire; but starting from 1902 some were sent by European and American recording companies on the mission of capturing the voice of 'Indian' singers. The travelogues of such recording engineers are tucked away in autobiographies, trade journals and in the house magazines of recording companies. They provide a personalised account of the scramble for sound that marked the early business of recorded music in South Asia.

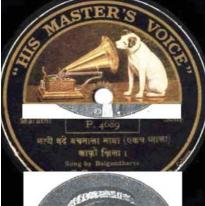
These recording engineers started off as auxiliary technicians in the oldest record companies in Britain, the United States and France during the 1890s. Many of them had a passion for music, some were even amateur pianists. With the expansion of the business in recorded music by the turn of the century, these engineers developed commercial acumen. As the demand for new records grew across North America and Europe, the worth of recording engineers rose exponentially. By the first decade of the twentieth century, when they were racing across Asia, Africa and Latin America to record local music, they had become the prime catalysts of global business in and around the Gramophone.

My research on this first 'new media' of the last century has sought to capture the interplay between the dynamics of creativity, culture and commerce. The travelogues of recording engineers provide an apt entry point to understanding the formative configurations of recorded music in British India. However, making sense of these configurations also entails accounting for the travelogues themselves. This necessitates a careful reading of these specific narratives in the light of the wider regimes responsible for their creation







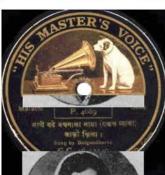


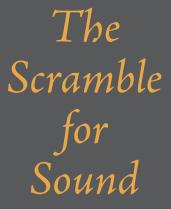












Vibodh Parthasarathi



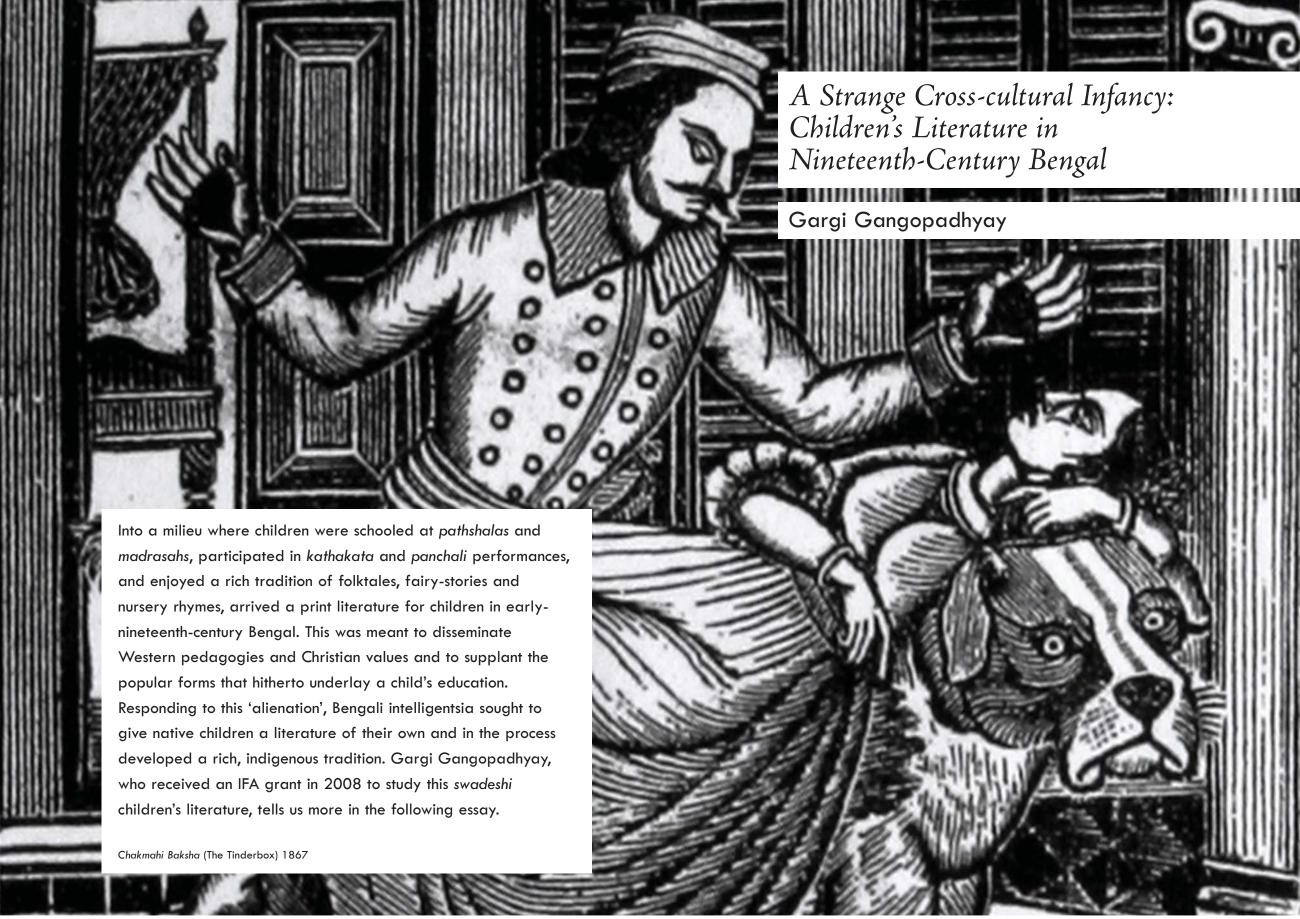
# Society in Miniature: Dasara Doll Displays

### Annapurna Garimella

"When I received a grant from IFA in 2000 to study contemporary religiosities in Bangalore, one of my research questions concerned how women and men entered and participated in civic, public or quasi-private religiosity. I realised that one of the few spaces in which women asserted themselves as makers, not just as patrons, supporters, devotees or viewers, was during Dasara, when they made doll displays and publicised their creations. I was curious to understand the demographics, the aesthetics and the politics of these doll displays, as a way of searching out and theorising how religiosity and ritual make our urban lives."

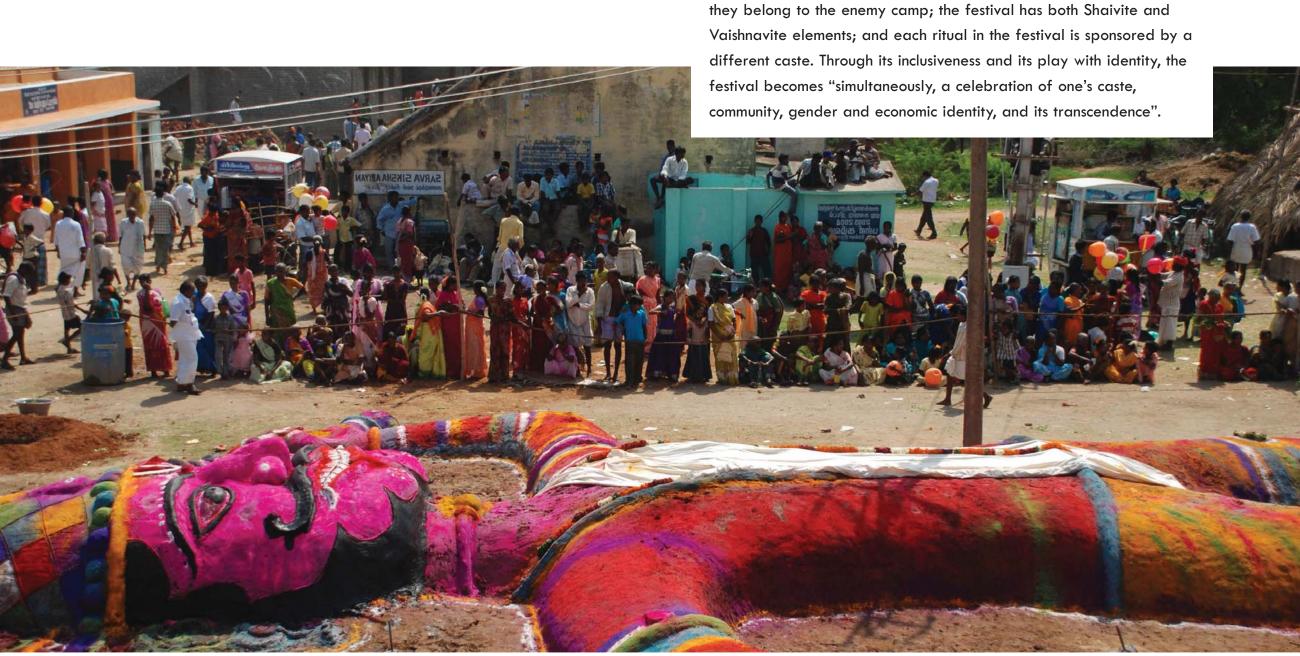






### Kelai Draupadi! (Listen Draupadi!)

Sashikanth Ananthachari



Sashikanth Ananthachari is making an IFA-supported film on the

Draupadi Amman Mahabharata Koothu festival that is celebrated in over 200 villages in Tamil Nadu every year. In the following pages he

explores a fascinating aspect of this festival—namely its portrayal of human identities and values as fluid and permeable. In the Draupadi Amman festival, Draupadi speaks through five Kauravas—even though