TransCultural Practices – Perspectives and Possibilities

2 – 3 August 2024
Convention Centre
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi



A SEMINAR
in memory
and
in honour of
Prof. Anil Bhatti

Centre of German Studies,
School of Language,
Literature & Culture Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Indian Council of
Social Science
Research

Prof. Anil Bhatti

(3.8.1944 – 11.10.2023)

Prof. Anil Bhatti, Professor Emeritus at the Centre of German Studies, was a highly regarded scholar of German literature and Post-colonial Studies, acknowledged for his transformative influence on the discipline of German Studies in India. He repositioned it away from a narrow study of high literature and culture and made it relevant to contemporary contexts in India.

Prof. Bhatti was a founding member of the Centre of German Studies which he joined in 1971 after completing his doctorate on Clemens Brentano from Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. Prof. Bhatti was the Chairperson of the CGS at least thrice and was also the Dean of the School of Language, Literature and Culture Studies as well as of the School of Arts and Aesthetics in JNU. For him institution building was of utmost importance and that led him to establish the Goethe Society of India in 1997. As a founding member of the Goethe Society of India, which was established in 1997, Prof. Bhatti held the position of President of the Society from 1998 to 2012 and continued to be its Honorary President thereafter. The yearly conferences of this society have fostered a lively and fruitful academic exchange between Germanists across Indian universities and abroad. From 1996 to 2001, he presided over the Institute for the Research and Promotion of Austrian and International Literary Processes in Vienna. From 2009 to 2022, Prof. Bhatti served on the advisory board of the Institute of Culture Studies at the Austrian Academy of Sciences.

Prof. Anil Bhatti's influence on *Germanistik* in Europe has also been recognized through the numerous academic honours conferred upon him. To name a few: he was awarded the Jacob-und Wilhelm-Grimm-Prize of the German Academic Exchange Service in 2001, the Cross of Merit 1st Class of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany in 2005, and the Austrian Cross of Honor for Science and Art 1st Class in 2011. In 2011 he received the highest award for international scientists, the Humboldt-Research Prize, from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. In 2021 he was conferred an honorary doctorate by The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of University of Zurich for his lifetime's work.

In the field of modern German and comparative literature and cultural studies, Prof. Bhatti worked extensively on German, Austrian and Swiss literatures from the 17th to the 21st century, which he brought into a dialogue with the literature of India and Asia, as reflected in cross-cultural projects such as *Jewish Exile in India* (1999). As an expert in the field of literary and cultural theory, his research made significant contributions to post-colonial studies leading to the publication of the co-edited volumes, *Utopie - Projektion - Gegenbild: Indien in Deutschland* (1987) and *Kulturelle Identität: Deutsch-indische Kulturkontakte in Literatur, Religion und Politik* (1997). Prof. Bhatti's innovative, original and relevant research paradigm of *Similarity* in Cultural Studies has probably been his most significant contribution to Cultural Studies. He co-edited a highly acclaimed book with Dorothee Kimmich, *Similarity. A Paradigm for Culture Theory* (2018), earlier published in German as *Ähnlichkeit, ein kulturtheoretisches Paradigma* (2015). As Dorothee Kimmich explains it, with the concept of cultural similarity, which Anil Bhatti places alongside and also in opposition to the ideas of cultural difference and identity, he introduced a new paradigm into the debate on globality, interculturality and universalism. Thinking through 'similarity' opens up new possibilities and alternatives both in the cultural and political fields as well as in theoretical discourses. *Similarity. A Paradigm for Culture Theory* became an influential publication. Prof. Bhatti's academic interests were wide-ranging and he was also associated with the *Social Scientist* and the *Journal of Arts and Ideas*.

Prof. Bhatti's demise has been a deeply felt loss for all his students, colleagues and friends, who continue to be influenced by his attitude to teaching and academics.

Centre of
German Studies
Conference

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A SEMINAR
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P R O G R A M M E

2nd August 2024

09.30 a.m.–09.45 a.m. : Welcome Address
(Dean of School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies and Chairperson of Centre of German Studies, JNU)

09.45 a.m.–10.00 a.m. : Introductory Remarks
Madhu Sahni, CGS, JNU

Session I Moderator : **Swati Acharya**

10.00 a.m.–11.00 a.m. :Speaker: **Rekha Rajan**
Circulation of Knowledge of Indian Medicine and Botany in the Danish-Halle Mission

11.00 a.m.-11.15 a.m : *Tea Break*

11.15 a.m.–12.15 p.m. : Speaker: **Shaswati Mazumdar**
Reflections on World Literature in the Contemporary World

12.15 p.m.–01.30 p.m. : *Lunch*

Session II Moderator : **Saugata Bhaduri**

1.30 p.m.–02.30 p.m. : Speaker: **Dorothee Kimmich**
German-Indian 'Similarities.' A Lifestory Beyond Sameness and Difference: Some Reflections on the Paradigm of Similarities

02.30 p.m.–03.30 p.m. : Speaker: **Prabhat Patnaik**
Fascism and the Recovery from Economic Crisis

03.30 p.m-04.00 p.m. : *Tea*

Venue :
Committee Hall
Convention Centre
JNU
New Delhi

3rd August 2024

Session III Moderator : **Babu Thaliath**

09.30 a.m.–10.30 a.m. : Speaker: **Saugata Bhaduri**
Cultural Studies in Literary Interzones: Prof. Anil Bhatti's Contribution to the Internationalization of Research in JNU

10.30 a.m.–11.30 a.m. : Speaker: **Abhay Mishra**
Translation and Collateral Considerations on Similarity in Walter Benjamin

11.00 a.m.–11.30 a.m. : *Tea Break*

11.30 a.m.–12.30 p.m. : Speaker: **Swati Acharya**
Charge of obscenity as an instrument of power. The love stories "Lihaaf" ["Quilt"] by Ismat Chughtai and "Bū" ["Smell"] by Sa'adat Hasan Manto at the cross roads of gender and caste politics in post-colonial India

12.30 p.m.–01.30 p.m. : *Lunch*

Session IV Moderator : **Shaswati Mazumdar**

01.30 p.m.–02.30 p.m. : Speaker: **Andrea Allerkamp**
The concept of similarity and its poetological consequences

02.30 p.m.–03.30 p.m. : Speaker: **Madhu Sahni**
Reading German colonial aspirations

03.30 p.m.–04.30 p.m. : Roundtable Discussion
Rekha Rajan, Andrea Allerkamp, Shaswati Mazumdar, Dorothee Kimmich and **Babu Thaliath**, moderated by **Shambhavi Prakash**

Vote of Thanks : **Shambhavi Prakash**

04.30 p.m.–05.00 p.m. : *Tea*

Circulation of Knowledge of Indian Medicine and Botany in the Danish-Halle Mission.

Rekha Rajan

In recent years there has been a great deal of interest in the transfer of botanical and medical knowledge from India to Europe, which examines the relations of power inscribed into these transfers, the role of local informants and the colonization of the plant world beginning from names given to the plants to their categorization under the Linnaean system.

It is in this context that the paper will highlight a seminal treatise on Tamil medicine sent to Germany in 1713, the *Medicus Malabaricus*. Its author was Johann Ernst Gruendler, a German missionary of the Danish-Halle mission that was working in and around Tranquebar since 1706. Apart from a long preface, the text is a translation of a detailed Tamil medical text containing the kind of illnesses prevalent and the medicines with which they were to be cured, along with the detailed listing of the herbs, plants and other material that these medicines are composed of. In describing all this, Gruendler also highlights the cultural aspect of illnesses and their cures.

This seminal treatise appears to have been used in different ways during the course of the eighteenth century by later missionaries in their botanical studies, and by European doctors attached to the mission. The paper will attempt to show the continuities and discontinuities between the treatise and later studies that were influenced by developments in the science of botany and in medicine in Europe.

Reflections on World Literature in the Contemporary World.

Shaswati Mazumdar

How to conceptualise Goethe's idea of world literature in a postcolonial world was an underlying preoccupation running through Anil Bhatti's theoretical reflections. The paper will briefly outline the main strands of theoretical engagement

with the concept of world literature that have emerged in the last few decades in order to suggest a possible alternative way of thinking about it. This will be illustrated by reference to three examples: Amitav Ghosh's historical fiction, the *Ibis Trilogy*, Kim Stanley Robinson's science fiction *The Ministry of the Future* and Peter Hacks' modern comedy in classical style *Adam und Eva*.



German-Indian 'Similarities.' A Lifestory Beyond Sameness and Difference: some Reflections on the Paradigm of Similarities

Dorothee Kimmich

This paper will look at the development of the concept of "Similarity" as a theoretical paradigm. As this is a story that plays between Indian and German people and texts, it will be part of a history of our disciplines.



Cultural Studies in Literary Interzones: Prof. Anil Bhatti's Contribution to the Internationalization of Research in JNU

Saugata Bhaduri

Sometime in the late 2000-s and early 2010-s, Prof. Anil Bhatti was the Director, International Relations, JNU, and while he initiated several international cooperations during his tenure, probably the most spectacular one was the Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctorate Programme "Cultural Studies in Literary Interzones". The programme, funded by the European Union and co-ordinated by the University of Bergamo, Italy, involved a consortium of five degree-awarding partners (one each from France, Germany, Italy, Brazil, and India), including JNU, and eleven associate partners worldwide. From 2010 to 2014, the programme admitted five consecutive batches of PhD students from all over the world, working on innovative topics in comparative literary and cultural studies, who would

get their doctoral degrees from any two of the five degree-awarding universities, while also having spent a few semesters in one or two of the associate partner universities. I was made the local co-ordinator of the programme in JNU, and I had the privilege of watching, from close quarters, Prof. Bhatti's deft handling of the programme as a member of its Executive Council, and his putting JNU and its research in literary and cultural studies on the global map. In paying homage to Prof. Bhatti's undying legacy, this talk will recollect some memories from those days and also reflect on the need for 'interzonality', perhaps even more today than when we were running the programme.



Translation and Collateral Considerations on Similarity in Walter Benjamin

Abhay Mishra

For Walter Benjamin, the act of translation is related to carrying over the significance of the original text into its translation, and hence translation transcends merely achieving a resemblance of the original. This significance resides in the textual sphere in which both the content and intention acquire importance. Crucial to translation is understanding the supplementing relationship between the content and intention and pure language as the totality of this supplementing relationship of all languages becomes pertinent in the context. The notion of the pure language enables Benjamin to assert that no two languages are strangers to each other and Benjamin invokes the idea of kinship between languages. Benjamin, rejecting resemblance and accepting convergence, considers translation in the light of non-metaphorical objectivity. Here, Benjamin leans on the Platonic tradition of skepticism against mimesis and counters the Aristotelian tradition of mimesis, which had covered up the disconcert against mimesis in Plato. Recent researches on the idea of similarity in Walter Benjamin have referred to Benjamin's sources in the Greek philosopher Epicurus and in his concept of 'eidolon', which emphasizes that our understanding of meaning lies in the in-between zone of

a thing and its image; an idea which endorses the continual interplay between the 'same' and 'not-same', between proximity and distance in the discussion on the theory of similarity. This seems also to be reinforced by Benjamin's insistence that translation occurs in an interlinear version 'between the lines'.



Charge of Obscenity as an Instrument of Power. The love stories "Lihaaf" (Quilt) by Ismat Chughtai and "Bu" (Smell) by Sa'adat Hasan Manto at the Crossroads of Gender and Caste Politics in Post-colonial India.

Swati Acharya

This paper focuses on two of the most important personalities in Urdu literature of the subcontinent, Sa'adat Hasan Manto and Ismat Chughtai, both of whom significantly shaped the discussion on the volatile relationship between literature and law through their encounters with the legal systems of colonial and postcolonial power structures. Manto's short stories depicting the madness of partition and the ensuing bloody riots are considered the most outstanding literary testimonies of partition history. Equally iconic are his portrayals of sexuality, which often incurred the wrath of censorship, leading to numerous court trials. Ismat Chughtai, an equally impactful contemporary of Manto, was known for her writings on the power of literature, its social role, and its ability to address taboo or obscene subjects. The lives and work of Manto and Chughtai are outstanding examples of how writers struggle against the restrictions on their artistic freedom and challenge the limits of what is legally permissible with their literature.

The paper speaks about their contribution to promoting literary freedom and freedom of expression. Based on the legal battles involving their stories "Lihaaf" and "Bu" I try to look at the trials as crossroads of gender and caste politics in post-colonial India. It also briefly touches upon the politics of translation in colonial India.

The Mimetic Faculty and its Poetological Consequences.

Andrea Allerkamp

Similarity arises in the relational, in relationships of kinship (affinity), ancestry or neighbourhood, in which different things or living beings not only resemble each other, but also condition each other. In 1933, at the same time as Hitler seized power and before fleeing into exile, Walter Benjamin described this reciprocal conditionality as a 'mimetic faculty'. The magical thinking of similarity has a sensory cognitive function; it is indispensable for all acts of naming, comparing and speaking. Creating similarities can enable us to overcome the dominating practice of isolating identity coercion. The 'mimetic capacity' can therefore serve as a strategy for the subversion of fascism through its imitation. But does this not conversely also lead to dangerous similarities, in which the subtle tactics of camouflage succumb to their own strategy through self-transformation or self-multiplication? Using Benjamin's 'Doctrine of the Similar', the lecture aims to discuss the poetological consequences of similarity thinking for the historical avant-garde.

Based on essays by the Martinican poet Suzanne Césaire, who used surrealism under the fascist Vichy regime to develop a Creole ecopoetics avant la lettre, the following questions need to be asked: How does a poetologie of similarity articulate itself, when does it succeed and when does it fail? And what opportunities and risks are associated with the poetic effectiveness of the mimetic faculty?

Reading German Colonial Aspirations

Madhu Sahni

A heightened consciousness of Germany's brief colonial history became evident in the years following re-unification. Most of the German colonies had been in Africa, there were a few in the Pacific islands and East Asia. In May 2021 Germany apologized to the people of Namibia for the

massacre of the Herero and Nama people in the early 20th century bringing the discourse of colonization firmly into the public space. This massacre is considered by many scholars as the first genocide of the 20th Century and following the continuity thesis, it is posited as the forerunner of the genocide under the Nazis. The re-reading of the colonial period has led to the publication of both popular novels and to more critical readings of this period and its aftermath, primarily about the African colonies. In this paper I shall be looking at novels which are located in former colonies of Germany and shall attempt to understand whether this renewed engagement with German colonization has a decolonizing impetus.

Rekha Rajan
Former Professor, Centre of German Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Shaswati Mazumdar
Former Professor, Department of Germanic and Romance Studies, University of Delhi

Dorothee Kimmich
Professor of Literary and Cultural studies, Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen, Germany

Prabhat Patnaik
Former Professor of Economics, Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Saugata Bhaduri
Professor, Centre for English Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Abhay Mishra
Professor, Department of German, Banaras Hindu University

Swati Acharya
Professor of German and Head, Department of Foreign Languages, Savitribai Phule Pune University

Andrea Allerkamp
Professor of West European Literatures, Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder)

Madhu Sahni
Professor, Centre of German Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

Centre of German Studies
School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru Uniiversity, New Delhi 110 067

International Conference
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2 – 3 August 2024

The conference will be held in a hybrid form.
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This conference is supported by:



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Organising Committee :

Madhu Sahni, CGS, JNU
Babu Thaliath, CGS, JNU
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Student Volunteers :

Jaya Sharma, CGS, JNU
Manjari Mishra, CGS, JNU
Rituja Pathak, CGS, JNU
Satyam Kumar, CGS, JNU
Tessa Babu Elenjickal, CGS, JNU

Enquiries :
0091-9910657026

Book design : Sreevasudeva Bhattathiri
vbhattathiri@gmail.com (+91-9847345534)



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School of Language, Literature & Culture Studies,
Jawaharlal Nehru University



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