EDITORIAL: The Power of Memory

I am writing this editorial on Christmas day, having just spent the Eve and the morning enjoying fellowship (and of course food) with friends and relatives. At the same time, I am of course constantly aware of the prevalence of conflict in our world, as well as the simple human responses to it – signified, for example, by the decision of churches in Bethlehem to offer solemn prayer, rather than the singing and celebration usually associated with the season; or by the deeply moving nativity scene which depicts the infant Jesus in a pile of rubble. It is through artistic responses like this that human feeling is perhaps most effectively showcased.

Much has been said about the power of art and literature to enhance our capacity for empathy and fellow-feeling – something that has been neglected in our obsessive push towards technological and scientific advancement. It is appropriate, therefore, that this issue begin with a contemplation from Mohammad Quayum's article "Envisioning the Future of Literature in the Age of Globalisation: Bangladesh and Beyond", which looks at how "literature and the arts can be instrumental in developing such rounded, unbiased, objective, thoughtful, and conscientious citizens". Querying the global drive to ensure that graduates are "job-ready" and employable, with the effectiveness of individual programs often hinging on perceptions of graduate employability, Quayum calls instead for education which focuses on "human development and fostering balanced and fair-minded citizens". While Quayum contextualizes his ideas within the framework of Bangladesh, the points he makes are widely applicable.

Pratyusha Pramanik and Ajit K. Mishra approach the idea of empathy and human connections in their article "Trajectories of Care: Representations of Empowered Mothering in Contemporary Bollywood". They examine how two recent films expand commonly-received ideas of what motherhood entails, through complex, nuanced portrayals of mothers who have to care for children with disabilities. Because films are so popular in India, they have the ability

to effect change. One can think, for example, of Aamir Khan's film *Taare Zameen Par*, and how it opened up conversations about dyslexia and how to deal with dyslexic individuals. The authors suggest that similarly, there is the possibility that the more complex experiences of motherhood shown in the two films discussed, could potentially make a difference to social perceptions of what a mother 'should' be like.

Memory, of course, is a vital component of what makes us human, and several of the articles in this issue touch on the topic in different ways. Jian Zhu's article "Revisiting South Vietnam: On Battlefield Tourism in 'The Americans' and 'Fatherland'" focuses on the site of an intense conflict, and the ways in which tourism "provides opportunities for previously marginalized and silenced voices to assert themselves, cultivating a diverse discursive field that beckons further exploration and reinterpretation". Focusing on Viet Thanh Nguyen's first collection of short stories, *The Refugees*, this article examines the intriguing interplay between American tourists, who have perhaps forgotten or become distanced from the war in Vietnam, and the local inhabitants who are shifting the former power dynamics through the ways in which they curate sites in the 'battlefield tourism' industry. Dependent on the tourist dollar, they nonetheless use conflict zones to subtly undermine the former adversary.

Nikhita Mary Mathew and Smita Jha also touch on the effects of conflict in "Fear and Disillusionment: Cultural Memory and Trauma of the Indian Emergency in M. Mukundan's *Delhi: A Soliloquy*", especially looking at the ways in which memories of conflict can be constructed, manipulated, or buried. Mathew and Jha highlight a point made by Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt: "the historical truth about the political crimes of the past – uncovered from archival sources or oral testimonies of victims – is today considered to have great ethical and transformative power". The authors point out the power of the memories of the people to fight "the state-aided process of forgetting" by highlighting their own humanity and suffering.

Taking another approach towards memory is "'Taste of your Hometown': Evoking Nostalgia Through the Diner Space in *Midnight Diner*", by Gunjan Gupta and Dishari Chattaraj. Looking at the television adaptation of a Japanese manga, the authors examine how memories of food are tied to our experiences of the past, and the power of food to evoke deep emotions, providing "a certain comfort and emotional support in a world where everyone is battling emotions of past and present". One thinks, perhaps, of Proust's madeleine's in *In Search of Lost Time*. Food, and the space within which it is prepared according to the wishes of the person ordering it, is presented as healing and nostalgic.

Sk Sagir Ali's article "Imagining Indian Nation-State: Rereading Qurratulain Hyder's Select Novels in Contemporary Scenario" moves away from the idea of memory *per se*, though it does turn to the India of the past, as portrayed in the work of novelist Qurratulain Hyder. Where the modern nation-state lays claim to "ethnic homogeneity, and religious uniformity", Hyder turns to "premodernist cosmopolitan historiography" to put forward more complex, diverse and multifaceted (and therefore more inclusive) possibilities for the nation-state.

In stark contrast to this extensive journey down the byways of memory, stands Jhilam Chattaraj's article "Are You a Designer Bride? Power Relations Between Popular Media and the Indian Bride". Chattaraj examines the spectacle of lavish Indian weddings and the "fashionable brides", asking if they "are foolish consumers or artful minds who bend patriarchal structures even if for a short time". Are they empowered, like the bride in *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* "who is culturally traditional, yet dares to go beyond patriarchal conventions"? Or, ultimately, does the sense of empowerment stop at the spectacular wedding?

The last article in this issue, by Yang Safia Mior Azli, Susan Philip, and Surinderpal Kaur, like Chattaraj's article, shows SARE's commitment to covering popular culture as well as literature. In their article "The Importance of Ludonarrative Design in Improving Women's Representation in Videogames: A Comparative Ludonarratological Analysis of the Hero's

Journey in *Final Fantasy 13* and *Final Fantasy 15*", they take on an increasingly popular and important type of text, the videogame. This article is a focused attempt to read these games as texts to examine gendered treatment of the hero figures in two of the *Final Fantasy* games, showing that even when the main character of a game is female, she is not necessarily treated as the hero.

Turning to our creative writing section, the short story by You Lin, "The 'Daap Sung' Man", roots itself within childhood memory. The narrator's memory of the food-delivery service her family relied on when she was a child pushes her to spiral into memories of an unhappy past, and an inability to understand who she is as a person now. Daniel Chan Yee Ann's poem "For My Son" continues with the theme of childhood, through a simple but moving exploration of a parent-child relationship, and the impossibility of simple conversations.

We round off the issue with three book reviews. Adib Faiz critiques a book by Alexa Alice Joubin on *Shakespeare and East Asia*, Sharifah Aishah Osman looks at *Hamra and the Jungle of Memories* by rising Malaysian novelist Hanna Alkaf, and Aruna Parandhama and Hutulu Dasai examine a translation of Sheela Tomy's Malayalam work *Valli: A Novel*.

The articles, creative works, and book reviews included in this issue cover South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia, reflecting the scope of the journal. More importantly, in its small way, it reflects the diversity and inclusivity which this world needs. As we move into the new year, I wish our contributors and readers all the best.

Susan Philip