



## Editor's Preface: A New Beginning

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It gives me great pleasure to present the July 2023 issue of Nidān, and I would begin as usual, by first thanking our readers, contributors, peer-reviewers, and book-review writers for their encouragement, inspiration, advice, and patience. In many ways this is a new beginning for Nidān. While my predecessor and mentor Professor P. Pratap Kumar helped to build the journal as an institutional product since 1989, first at his own university department in South Africa, and then with Sabinet—a publishing house in Durban since 2012—Nidān has made a new, meaningful shift in 2023. From the July 2023 issue, Nidān is open-access, published and distributed as an e-journal by Heidelberg Asian Studies Publishing (HASP), a publication division of Heidelberg University (Germany). With this open-access format, our authors and reviewers will henceforth retain copyright control over their contributions—a move, which I am sure will especially benefit students. I must thank my colleagues at HASP for helping me launch a renewed Nidān just as I must thank my colleagues at Sabinet for working closely with me in the last two years. I hope our readers will also enjoy the older issues of the journal that have been uploaded in the archives section of the journal website on the HASP portal. As tribute to the lifetime achievement made by Nidān, Professor P. Pratap Kumar has penned a special and poignant retrospective in this issue that not just describes his own academic journey as Nidān editor, but the journey that Nidān itself has taken as a journal, traversing many a choppy waters. I would not have been able to carry on as Nidān editor either without the support of my editorial team members, Professor P. Pratap Kumar and Westin Harris. I therefore take this opportunity to thank them for their priceless teamwork.

This issue is again, as usual, also an intellectual 'special issue' that introduces a fresh scholarly approach to the history of architecture and space in South Asia. I approached the present guest-editor, Venugopal Maddipati in 2022, and after many discussions and brainstorming sessions that took place both online and in Delhi, this special issue along with its cohort of scholar-contributors has consolidated itself into what is now a rich and rigorous investigation of relational space as an intellectual concept. Research on any subject, however specific the theme, is never completely closed. While brainstorming up until now has resulted in the publication of this special issue—both the July and forthcoming December volumes—this is not the end of all that can be said about relational space. This is also, therefore, a powerful new beginning. Our guest editor for this special issue, Venugopal Maddipati will I hope, feel enthused in the future to rework and re-collate articles from this issue, and transform the endeavour into an expanded collected volume that would promise an even more theoretically intense academic intervention. Not only do we at Nidān wish him the very best, but we are also proud to witness his academic journey of relational space, that started with us in 2023.

Relational space as a concept interrogates our own blind spots about how we perceive spaces and places as given entities—as if natural and self-contained along with its constitutive elements. This special issue investigates how space is formulated through social relationships that wield it and transform it, treating it not as a given, but as a part of an ever-changing physical, social, and political network that is imbricated within a historical power struggle. Apart from five research articles that are part of this special issue, the July 2023 issue contains three additional articles: “The (Im)possibility of Winning the Untouchables”, “Beyond Reformism”, and “Remembering Sharmila Rege.” While the first article explores historical tensions between Ambedkarite and Gandhian politics in colonial Malabar, the second article on Shahu investigates the third space of lower-caste, Hindu politics in colonial Maharashtra (Bombay Presidency) that deconstructs dichotomized *savarna* and Dalit politics. The third contribution is a commemorative research article about Sharmila Rege by two colleagues from the Women Studies Centre at the Pune University. This is an emotional article for me, as the Women's Studies Centre was my Alma Mater as well, with Sharmila Rege being an important mentor and source of inspiration in my academic life. Her inspiring work: academics, politics, and teaching has served to motivate and inspire many colleagues and friends for many generations that thankfully included mine. The article is also special for other reasons. As feminist-academics, we specially remember Sharmila, ten years after her passing on the 17th of July 2013, and celebrate her Dalit-feminist academics and Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogies of grassroots feminism that were combined with tremendous academic rigour and personal empathy for students from non-privileged backgrounds. A special shout-out over here goes to dear Rohini Shukla, for providing a poignant illustration for the article, based on some photographs of Sharmila that are still available in the public domain.

Lastly, this issue contains five intensive book-reviews of excellent monographs written by Ehud Halperin on the Himalayan goddess Hadimba, Anirudh Deshpande and Muphid Mujawar on Kanoji Angre, Francis Clooney's translation of Tempavani—a Tamil work composed by Catholic missionary Beschi—and Paul Joshua's writings on Indian Christianity. As usual, I have contributed a book-review to this issue as well, where I present and analyse Kalyani Menon's thought-provoking and brilliant monograph on the place-making practices of Muslims in contemporary Old Delhi—an academic investigation that fits both with Venugopal Maddipati's special issue on relational space, as well as with Sharmila Rege's activist-academic, Phule-Ambedkarite pedagogies.

I hope our readers will enjoy Nidān's July 2023 issue!