



Preface

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It gives me great pleasure to announce the July 2025 issue, the volume 10 of *Nidān: International Journal of Indian Studies*. Titled “Imagining Urbanity in Colonial and Postcolonial South Asia,” this issue is the first part of a two-volume focus on urbanity and its literary expression and experience, guest edited and curated by Anne Castaing (CESAH) and Anne Murphy (British Columbia). Discussions around this special issue first emerged in 2023 during conversations surrounding the same theme at the ECSAS (European Conference of South Asian Studies) in Turin. All the articles in this July instalment, as also described by Castaing and Murphy in their introduction, are thus closely and mutually linked, bringing erudite scholarship on South Asian urbanity to the forefront. While Murphy, Geva and Kurowska’s articles explore postcolonial and post-Partition north India, Harder’s paper on science fiction literature takes an account of many vernaculars from South Asia that voice similar anxieties about a dystopic postcolonial future.

This time’s *Nidān*’s July issue has a fifth article. Though not part of the special focus on urbanity, it addresses the agential role of vernacular literature in encompassing historical lacunae within India’s revolutionary movements. Discussing emerging loopholes in the politicized rural-urban cadres of the Naxalite movement in Bengal (1965-1975), one of South Asia’s largest revolutionary movements known for its violence, Pritha Sarkar and Sayan Chattopadhyay show how these loopholes are discussed and resolved through literature, especially *The Naxalites* written by Khwaja Ahmed Abbas in 1979. The authors show how the novel reveals the inherently hierarchical nature of Naxalite politics, exported from an urban student movement in Calcutta to a rural and embattled landscape of peasant insurgencies, that then serves to stage urban revolutionary politics. This export paradoxically serves as an instrument that the movement’s seniors and leaders use to sacrifice junior revolutionaries and eliminate them from the revolutionary cadre. Sarkar and Chattopadhyay, in their analysis of Abbas’s novel, demonstrate the vicissitudes of the Naxalite movement and the political interests implicit in its mobilization that provides lip service to the cause peasant enfranchisement. The authors make a Zizekian argument identifying the aporia between subjective and objective violence that for all practical purposes are merged as co-contributing domains of political violence. Thus, in how Sarkar and Chattopadhyay read *The Naxalites*, while revolutionaries embody objective violence, the movement get coopted into the subjective violence of the state that it performs an opposition to.

We have many excellent book reviews in this time’s *Nidān* as usual. Ajeet Kumar Pankaj reviews Cháirez-Garza’s *Rethinking Untouchability* that provides readers with an overview of Ambedkar’s intellectual contributions to reformulating the Untouchability debate that then go on to produce the political domain of the Dalit movement in India, bringing together other intellectual streams of thought. Interestingly, and pertinent to this issue’s focus, Pankaj’s analysis of Cháirez-Garza’s arguments outlines how Ambedkar viewed the urban as a rightful space of Dalit emancipation while locating the village as a site of caste oppression. Jessica Vantine Birkenholz reviews Michael Baltutis’s *The Festival of Indra*, another contribution to the studies on the urban that is both textual and anthropological, that takes us through an ethno-historical discussion of the annual festival of the Vedic deity Indra in Kathmandu. Though the festival is one of the most prominent festivals of Nepal, there has been no concerted effort

before Baltutis's monograph, to explore its ramifications in the urbanized space of Kathmandu. Resonating with Birkenholz's review of an annual festival, Dilip Menon's review of Deepa Das Acevedo's *The Battle for Sabarimala* explores the unfolding legal battle surrounding women's entry into the 'bachelor' god Ayyapan's temple in the Kerala High Court in 2018. It is important to note that Acevedo's research is located in growing interest in legal history and anthropology that explores the disputes surrounding religious shrines in modern India. Judhajit Sarkar reviews Mallarika Sinha Roy's monograph on Utpal Dutt (*Utpal Dutt and Political Theatre in Postcolonial India*) that explores an Avant Garde age (1970s and 1980s) of theatrical and political performance that meshed ideology with mass entertainment in Bengal. Among other facets, Sarkar explores Sinha Roy's investigation of thespian Utpal Dutt's location in politics and entertainment, exemplified by his revolutionary playwriting and his engagement with the theatrical genre of *jatra*, a people's theatre that transcended the aesthetics of urban and middle class Calcutta. Though Lucia Ciranni Salazar's review of Dunja Rašić's *Bedeviled* does not delve explicitly into India and South Asia, the review is nevertheless relevant for the history and anthropology of everyday Islam in South Asia. The book explores a theme that is well-known for scholars of *dargah* and Sufi healing for example: the question of the *jinn*, an ambivalent spirit within Muslim culture and society. Discussions about this particular *jinn* under investigation in this book, the *qarīn*, is familiar, for it is a doppelganger that inhabits the blood of humans. Otavio Amaral gives us a detailed review of Ahonaa Roy's *Cosmopolitan Sexuality* that traces the subaltern lives and politics of the transgender *hijra* community in urban Mumbai and Pune, which again brings the issue's focus of urbanity to centre-stage. Amol Saghar's review of Baijayanti Roy's explosive *The Nazi Study of India & Indian Anti-Colonialism* similarly gleams with erudition, as he traces the author's exploration of Indology and its history as a political strategy specifically developed by Nazi Germany. As Saghar confirms, based on Roy's detailed archival research, Indology was a specific and strategic Nazi instrument that under the guise of friendship and solidarity, coined and used the discipline of Indology as an instrument of intelligence gathering. Ashish Kumar's exploration of Oly Roy's *Chastity in Ancient Indian Texts* gives us an insight into texts from a gender perspective that explores pejorative notions about feminine chastity, discursively resulting in the suppression of women. Finally, Britta Ohm's review of Abraham and Barak's *The Routledge Companion to Caste and Cinema in India* makes an incisive analysis of how caste and discrimination are depicted and reformulated in and by postcolonial Indian Cinema. Being a sizeable *Companion* volume, Ohm takes a meticulous approach to its various sections and chapters through which she provides readers with an overview of the *Companion*'s main arguments.

I hope that this July 2025 issue of *Nidān* will make for informative and fun reading!