

EDITORIAL

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Welcome to Volume 2 of *Indi@logs: Spanish Journal of India Studies*. When we chose the topic of “Indianness” for the second issue of our journal, we were aware of the dangers of falling into clichéd images of India as colonial stereotypes do indeed die hard. However, to our utmost satisfaction, the authors who have contributed articles to this volume have steered away from the heat and dust, the mysticism, the superstition, the pressures and passions of community and caste, the fabulous wealth of a few and the appalling degradation of many. These nostalgic visions of India have slowly receded into the past to be replaced by the reality of a modern, entrepreneurial economy and a thriving democracy. Naturally one cannot overlook the existing poverty, corruption, environmental concerns and gender inequalities that, sadly, bedevil the subcontinent. However, the articles in this volume have, each in its own specific way, addressed what it was and is to be Indian, what Indianness entails in the 21st century and, most importantly, they have done away with any notion of a shared sense of India, despite the temptation to fall back on this well-worn Orientalist approach.

The first three articles centre around the trope of water, usually associated with purity and cleanliness in Indian culture, especially as regards Mother Ganga, but which has become the indirect source of pollution due to current shortages. Isabel Alonso Breto discusses three contemporary Indian novels, all of which involve the use or abuse of water, and which feature somewhat unscrupulous characters who succeed in entrepreneurial India. Despite the critique of bribery and corruption present in these texts, Alonso Breto suggests that the authors subtly empathize with the dubious but understandable methods used to escape poverty. This article links up and complements the work by Eric Vicario, who, from an environmental perspective, argues that the Indian subcontinent is no stranger to ecology and the belief in the interdependence of all living beings. The Indian religions all contain notions of “deep ecology” and Vicario points to the need to promote this traditional understanding as environmental concerns

are becoming one of the major problems in contemporary India. Claire Poulle's article is also devoted to the theme of water but she goes back to Greek and Roman times in her analysis of the representations of India and its rivers. Poulle claims that the sea and rivers with their corresponding flora and fauna played an important role in how space was defined and understood and how these early texts were in some ways responsible for the clichéd images of Asian countries that have survived almost to our present days.

The next two articles deal with the South Asian diaphora and its writers and how Indianness and its values survive outside the subcontinent. Andreas Athanasiades engages directly with a highly controversial topic in recent years: the conflicts surrounding identity politics among Muslims born and brought up in the West. He argues that race should no longer feature as the only marker of identity and, instead, proposes we think in terms of affectivity and desire, which could throw light on how the nation and ideas of belonging are configured. Athanasiades rereads Hanif Kureish's *The Black Album* and suggests that even after twenty years the choice between Islamic fundamentalism and sexual liberation faced by the characters of the novel could easily be applied to third generation British Muslims today. He claims that religion denies pleasure to its disciples in exchange for a perceived stable sense of identity. M. Luz González and Juan Ignacio Oliva examine the writing of the diasporic Indian writer Bharati Mukherjee, now resident in the United States. Their article analyzes the female characters in Mukherjee's work and the writer's outspoken opinion about living in the United States and Canada. The women migrants in Mukherjee's novels are both transformed by and take an active role in transforming the host society. The novels feature characters from various parts of South Asia, but the emphasis is not so much on the reconstruction of, for example, Indianness but rather on the constant fight against cultural memory, the need to survive in the new homeland. Mukherjee herself rejects the use of a hyphenated identity, thus downplaying the balancing act that migrants are obliged to perform between the roles of nostalgics and battlers.

The last article in this volume offers a detailed analysis of the power of the visual image in the creation of knowledge about foreign countries. Marisa Peiró Márquez explores the impact of an art exhibition held in San Francisco in the late 1930s, designed to bring the reality of what India was and what kind of people inhabited its frontiers to a wide audience. She suggests that the sight of the murals of Mexican artist Miguel

Covarrubias and the cultural knowledge and anthropological information transmitted through them was, for many Americans, their first real contact with India. Despite the fact that many of the murals seem to fall back on stereotypical images, Peiró Márquez argues that they provide insights on pre-Independent India.

In the Miscellanea section we are honoured to be able to include work by four outstanding personalities in India studies. Prestigious Sri Lankan scholar, Professor D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke has contributed a perceptive reading of the theatre performance of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. He claims that the play projects a visual representation of India, which underscores the virtual impossibility of taking in India and seeing it whole. Goonetilleke praises the play although he notes its overall lack of cohesion. Author and adult educationalist Nilambri Ghai has graciously allowed us to print an excerpt from the biography of her maternal grandmother, Johanne Nielsen, who learnt to love her country of adoption, India, as much as her own homeland, Denmark. Fijian academic and author, Satendra Nandan, has brilliantly combined a review of Mohan Ramanan's study of R. K. Narayan with an overview of his own early years in the University of Delhi in his essay "From Maigania to Malgudi". Last but not least, the current volume reproduces part of an interview conducted by the editor with the writer Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi in which he comments on how he sees contemporary India. With these closing remarks, Shanghvi neatly summarises the issues addressed in the articles of this volume.

We look forward to receiving research articles from scholars in Spain and abroad as the success of *Indi@logs* depends on the international community of Indian enthusiasts, of which we know there are many. Our third volume will focus on the theme of violences which is to be understood in as wide a sense as possible, bearing in mind that the Gandhian notion of *ahimsa* should never be far from our minds.