

EDITORIAL: “Interventions and mediations”

As the new Editor-in-Chief of *SARE*, I wish to state what an honour and privilege it is to be taking over the reins of steering this fine journal to greater heights from my senior colleagues, Associate Professor Dr. Susan Philip, who retired earlier this year, and before that, Professor Dr. Sharmani Gabriel, who helmed the journal from 2016 to 2022, and to whom we credit with not only bringing *SARE* firmly and successfully into the digital age as a fully open-access journal, but also in raising the profile and visibility of the journal globally by being indexed with Scopus. As highly respected scholars in their respective fields, both Sharmani and Susan were also deeply committed Chief Editors dedicated to upholding the high standards of scholarship and expertise that *SARE* has come to be known for, and remain inspiring professional and intellectual mentors. Mindful of the long and esteemed history of the journal — *SARE* is now entering its 45th year of publication — and the hard work and dedication of all those who have come before, the *SARE* team is proud to continue its endeavour of foregrounding original, inclusive scholarship from and on Southeast, South, and East Asia “that transcends established canons while being attentive to texts and constituencies that occupy the margins of cultures, histories, and nations”.

A key consideration is the journal’s cognisance of the power of literary and cultural productions as forms of intervention and mediation, allowing for the interruption, revision, or challenging of dominant narratives and power structures, and an appreciation of the processes through which such texts are produced, circulated, interpreted, and valued. The current issue has been developed and organised with such principles in mind, and brings together the work of academics, researchers, activists, and writers from the region whose scholarship and creative output not only traverse a variety of genres, subjects, and critical approaches, but also expand

and enrich the canon through their focus on diverse voices, whether from Indigenous, queer, and/or other historically marginalized communities.

In the first article, “Mediated Transmissions and the Construction of the Disenfranchised Malaysian Tamil Child in the Film *Jagat*”, Janagi Komravaloo and Shanthini Pillai examine the mediated transmissions of working-class childhood in the Malaysian Tamil feature film, *Jagat* (2015), arguing that the harsh realities confronting Malaysian Indian working-class families inhibit the role of parents, elders, role models, and religion in guiding the disenfranchised Malaysian Tamil child’s development, and highlight the vicious cycle of social marginalization that emerges in their formative years. In acknowledging the lack of attention to working-class Tamil children within the broader spectrum of scholarly conversations on Malaysian Indian identity in literary and cultural studies, their article demonstrates the compelling interventionist power of film as “communal fictions” that can facilitate a greater awareness of the role of socio-economic conditions in the formation of systemic injustices and how to address them, both within the Malaysian context and further beyond.

Shreyaa Gajraj and Nagendra Kumar’s article, “Most Lankans are Silent Seethers”: Haunting as Resistance, Spectral Temporality, and “the Dark Heart of Lanka” in *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* expands the discussion of social inequalities and identity formation foregrounded in Komravaloo and Pillai’s article in their analysis of Sri Lankan author Shehan Karunatilaka’s 2022 Booker Prize-winning novel. Through the emphasis on haunting as a means of political resistance, the article interrogates the ways in which the novel portrays the victims of Sri Lanka’s long-standing civil war as ghosts that “demand reclamation of silenced events and delayed justice” and who demonstrate a defiance of “institutionalized erasure” and

“structural amnesia”. In doing so, the article centralises the persistence of memory in their exploration of Karunatilaka’s narrative depiction of Sri Lanka as a spectral space haunted by the victims of its bloody past and present.

Similarly, Mousana Nightingale Chowdhury and Payal Jain explore the fragmentation of memory in their article “Narrativizing Memory’s End: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Indian English Dementia Narratives”, which highlights the challenges in representing the lived experiences of dementia in relation to identity, memory, and aging. Through the insightful analysis of selected contemporary Indian English caregiver memoirs and novels, the article engages with emerging debates in the global discourse of dementia in disciplines like the Medical Humanities and Disability Studies to foster a more inclusive and sensitive approach to the dementia experience in developing nations like India. Their findings demonstrate the various narrative strategies that may be used or developed to enhance the literary and cultural representation of dementia and provide an “agential space” for the subject of dementia within these narratives. Such contextually specific and nuanced depictions not only serve to propagate alternative narratives of dementia in ways that resist homogenisation and stigmatisation of the condition, but also underscore the dynamism and significance of interdisciplinary and pluralistic approaches in English literary and cultural studies in responding to real-world crises.

Debashrita Dey and Priyanka Tripathi’s article, “Between Mothers and Daughters: Acts of Care and the Reclamation of Self in Geetanjali Shree’s Fiction” also considers the ethics of care and the multifaceted nature of caregiving, with a specific focus on the intergenerational exchange between adult daughters and their mothers. Their analysis of Shree’s *Mai* (2017) and *Tomb of Sand* (2018) reveals how caregiving is a “mediated and contextual process” and how care work can be framed not only as “a site of disconnection, disengagement, and conflict”,

but also as “a new site of reconnection, re-engagement, and new possibilities”. Like Chowdhury and Jain’s article, Dey and Tripathi argue for a reimagining of caregiving, drawing attention to the various experiences and relationships that are often sidelined from dominant discourses of care and in ways that reveal the structural and gendered inequities that support such discourse.

We are also pleased to present in our interview section two authors whose works actively and deliberately interrogate Eurocentric, patriarchal, or heteronormative canons in global literary and cultural discourse and intervene in how literary value is constructed. Rheanna Mathews and Sharmila Narayana’s interview features one of the most distinctive voices in speculative fiction, acclaimed author Nghi Vo, who discusses being a POC (person of colour) fantasy writer, queerness, and the power of worldbuilding. Alluding to Adichie’s concept of “the danger of a single story”, Vo’s emphasis on how counternarratives offered in her writings mediate and disrupt the way stories are told, disseminated, and appreciated is a perspective that is also shared by Avinuo Kire, the subject of the second interview, and whose works (including her novel, *Where the Cobbled Path Leads*) celebrate and reclaim the history and culture of the Naga people in Nagaland, Northeast India. In choosing to privilege the Naga worldview through her writings, Kire aims to subvert prevailing grand narratives that frequently disregard Indigenous history and culture, as her conversation with Bhagyashree Saikia and Binod Mishra reveals.

Our creative writing section features the work of two poets, from Malaysia and India respectively. Ratu Yousei’s “The Lovers Villanelle” takes on one of the oldest and most recognisable poetic forms to delightful effect, exploring the divine dimension of sexual union, while Srinjay Chakravarti’s “Diary Poem, Hong Kong” is a nostalgic and evocative account of the poet’s visit to the cosmopolis, offering a “melange of images, sounds, scents and flavours”

that has been “harboured for years” within the poet’s senses. We conclude this issue with a book review from Shilpa Nataraj, whose discussion of one of this year’s most anticipated books, Arundhati Roy’s *Mother Mary Comes to Me*, provides an illuminating and complementary viewpoint to the complexities of the mother-daughter relationship that Dey and Tripathi’s article explores.

In bringing my first editorial to a close, I wish to thank all who have made the publication of this issue possible—our contributors, whose scholarship and creative work we are proud to feature; our peer reviewers, who have given so generously of their time and expertise despite their own demanding workloads; the esteemed members of our international advisory board, whose support remains crucial in our aim to sustain and strengthen *SARE* and its legacy; and of course, the members of our editorial team, whose cooperation and collegiality I am especially thankful for (Farid, in particular, who has tirelessly assisted me with innumerable tasks as I transition into this challenging new role). Our gratitude also goes to renowned Malaysian artist, Tajuddin Ismail, for generously sharing his art work with us, which graces the cover of this issue. In looking to the future, I would also like to inform our readers and contributors that while *SARE* remains an open and welcoming space to scholars and researchers from all over the world, we especially welcome submissions from academics working on topics that focus specifically on Southeast Asia in the near future, as these have been particularly underrepresented in the last few issues. On that note, I would like to wish all our readers and contributors a happy 2026. May the coming year be a blessed and productive one for all of us.