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Editorial

It gives me great pleasure to introduce the third volume of *Sabita*—the online journal of Humanities of Asutosh College. Having stepped into its third year, the journal has acquired an international ISSN—a proud feat indeed. Living up to its name *Sabita* which illuminates its surroundings, the bouquet of articles transcends the disciplinary barrier, to enlighten the minds of the readers.

The essays, featured here, capture the vast range of social sciences and humanities, incorporating the twin methodological rigours—quantitative and qualitative—to thread together the past, the present and the future. Gender features majorly in the potpourri of articles. Be it the resilience of the marginalised women of the Sundarbans who challenge the vagaries of nature to better their lives and that of the subsequent generations, or the female characters in the oft-heard folktales, who though sometimes cater to the stereotypical image of a docile, submissive woman, do break the conventional mould to acquire an agency, only to be labelled as a societal misfit—vilified and castigated by the patriarchy. But society can survive and thrive only on equal partnership—nurtured by understanding and bonding between man and woman—an ideal propagated by Gandhiji who believed that man and woman should complement and supplement each other, not dominate and overpower. Although this still remains somewhat of a chimera in reality, the Gandhian vision has influenced and inspired novelists like Paulo Coelho whose characters often echo such spirit of mutual respect, leading to a just society, which we only hope does not remain confined to the pages of fictional writings. That the concept of womanhood is evolving is reflected in a study on the portrayal of women in OTT platforms like Netflix where real life-inspired web series depict women not only as victims but also as active agents of justice and reform.

A just society, calibrated along equality as envisioned by Gandhiji, needs to be contextualised within the ethos of intellectual and moral growth—a path charted out by J.S. Mill, who situates the concept of pleasure against the broad canvas of utilitarian principles to argue that pleasure necessitates an awareness of personal growth, reason, self-control, and societal concern, rather than being a selfish pursuit. Life becomes valuable and worth living only when people are allowed to develop their distinctive abilities, exercise their own judgement, control their impulses, and enhance the lives of others. Mill's philosophy resonates in the ancient discourses of India like the Buddhist philosophy which emphasises compassion as the core value, rather than supporting any one form of ideology or institution. This teaching seamlessly blends with the Advaita philosophy as embodied by Lord Dakṣiṇāmūrti who exists in the destruction of the ignorance of the living entity. The master of creation, existence and destruction resides under the banyan tree and in the posture of silence, imparts the supreme knowledge that slays ignorance among his disciples and as the darkness of mind is dispelled, assimilation and synthesis replace divisiveness as evident from the literary tradition of Bengal. Influenced by Sufi-Vaishnav mysticism, folk traditions, hybrid linguistic practices, the multi-dimensional culture of Bengal

produced a rich corpus of literature that blurred boundaries of faith, where the call of the muezzin merges into the blowing of the conch shell from the temple. And this syncretism is precisely what defines the very soul of Indianness. Syncretism is not only supra-religious, but also supra-regional as portrayed in the music of IPTA, especially that of Hemango Biswas and Salil Chaudhuri, which in the course of articulating the dreams and aspirations of the downtrodden masses, embraces cosmopolitanism in the form of Soviet formalist and anti-formalist modes of literary conventions for a Bengali audience, or the movies of Hrishikesh Mukherjee, a true Bengali at heart, whose films on everyday lives of middle-class families narrated in a simple manner, reflect profound philosophy like that in *Anand*. That unforgettable line, "*Zindagi badi honi chahiye, lambi nahi*" mirrors the insightful message that one's life should be built on courage, resilience and respect, dedicated for the welfare of others, for the betterment of oneself and that of the society. Finally, as we get ready to welcome Goddess Durga to her earthly abode, a survey of the celebration in the *bonedi* families of Kolkata and the collation and preservation of information for posterity will go a long way in the conservation of cultural heritage. In doing the same, one can take inspiration from the National Library which has catalogued, preserved and conserved the rich collection of Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, the doyen of Bengali intellectualism. The collection includes rare books like *Notitia Dignitatum*, manuscripts of Sir Asutosh-authored books, paintings, books on literature, philosophy, mathematics, law. A veritable treasure-trove, it embodies what Rabindranath envisioned—*Jnan jetha mukto.*

Thus, the cornucopia of articles, with interdisciplinary thrusts, is the hallmark of this volume and am sure will trigger the interests of the readers and offer scopes for introspection, reflection and debate.

Dr. Manas Kabi
Editor-in-Chief-*SABITA*
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Principal Asutosh College, Kolkata