
Editors' Note

Writing an editorial note on representation and its politics is not an easy task. Few words in English are so fraught with meanings, particularly in the era of post-Truth. A representation may be the copy of an original or, it may bear a synecdochic relation to ideas, ideologies or groups, manifested through a created image symbol, or, 'representative' lobby. To represent something is to admit a distance from the originary idea or entity, yet seek to epitomise its essence. It is therefore, an act of mediation.

In the arts, the idea of representation has long posed the problem of the relation between reality and shadow, cognition and communication, the absolute and the partial. Plato's opposition to the creative arts as mere mimetic gestures, at two removes from absolute reality has generated debates and clarifications down the ages. A few centuries later, Coleridge, standing at a point of literary history when the literal began to yield to the symbolic, observed the difficulty of transforming thoughts to words when he said, "The formation of a copy is not solved by the mere pre-existence of an original; the copyist of Raffael's Transfiguration must repeat more or less perfectly the process of Raffael" (*Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 8). He was thus pointing out the affective power of the arts. Given such a view, representation becomes a process in which a reader or an onlooker becomes an active agent and not merely a passive receiver. Recent developments in fields like Media and Cultural studies, which use the prisms of Gender, Race, Postcolonial perspectives, among others, have further complicated our understanding of what representation entails.

Who decides what is to be represented? How objective can such an act of judgment be? How far does the representative, an image, object or a specifically constituted body, actually succeed in conveying the original? Who is at the receiving end of such representations? What effect does the representation seek to achieve?

In a world where group identities are increasingly getting fragmented, the same complications have invaded the field of Politics. The idea of ensuring social justice to different groups through political representation is increasingly becoming a contested territory. This is particularly true in India, where gender and economic status and even ethnicity are being added to the simple categorizations of caste and religion, often resulting in challenging the overarching narrative of the nation itself. Democratic politics, traditionally identified with the voice of the majority, is also learning to accommodate the aspirations of various minority groups who have learnt to leverage their numbers in the larger political games. This is bound to have its repercussions in the field of public policy making and developmental initiatives, which concern a wide group including sociologists, politicians, educationists and even industrialists.

The increasing reach of the celluloid, electronic and digital media, and their ability to manipulate popular perceptions has also added another potent tool for generating new realities through the power of their emotive outreach. Current world events like the unexpected political verdicts in the UK and the USA have manifested the unpredictable ways in which the representation of selected aspects of facts can work upon aggrieved groups, whose weapon maybe the ballot.

As the problem of representation becomes more charged with various kinds of politics, not only electoral, the need to re-examine representational strategies and their relation to the individual and the contextual, is also becoming necessary. The articles in this volume of Colloquium, drawn from the disciplines of literary studies, Political Science, History, Sociology, address these concerns and we hope they will generate ideas and debates in their respective fields.

**Dr. Suchandra Chakravarty &
Prof. Ananyya Banerjee
Editors in Chief, Colloquium**