

Guest Editorial: “Faces of Precarity: Restructuring Care-mentality in Asia”

Om Prakash Dwivedi

Bennett University, India

Isha Malhotra

University of Jammu, India

Our everyday life is defined by what we do. These actions are vital to the meaning of both the present and the future. The future lies in the now, and hence we need to nourish this now, the present moment, with intimacy, social engagement, aesthetic education, and resilience. That is to say, the future of the planet and possibilities of life conditions for human and more-than-human survival need to be invested with components of care and repair right here, right now.

However, the post-1990s has marked a turn to more rigid forms of suppression and disruption of the elements of care. Perhaps, a case can be made that the neoliberal regime has rendered a transformation from care-mentality to governmentality - precisely the reason why Margaret Thatcher went on to claim that there is no such thing as society: “There are individual men and women and there are families, and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first.”

Consequently, social infrastructures were rendered fragile, and, in many countries, they were even devoured. The extractive nature of the neoliberal regime led to the emergence of precarious lives. It also led to the onslaught of rapacious colonization of the planet. Likewise, many scholars, including Amitav Ghosh, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Achille Mbembe, ask us to reconsider our relationship with the planet, to become more cognizant of the lurking threat of destruction or extinction that awaits us if we remain inactive. They advance the need to think more collectively, and to create modes of care and repair of what Wai Chee Dimock (2020)

terms the “weak planet”, where the “baseline condition” of humans and other forms of life is vulnerability and susceptibility to harm. Dimock advocates human agency in initiating interactions and collaborations for resilience building, because “these precarious mediations release us from paralysis, sustaining hope in a future still unforeclosed, weakly but meaningfully open to our efforts” (12)

This special issue of SARE: Southeast Asian Review of English, “Faces of Precarity: Restructuring Care-mentality in Asia,” advances discussions about different forms of precarity that pervade our planetary life. It discusses the relevance of care in our daily lives that has the potential to mitigate the disruptions caused by extractive economies. The Special Issue identifies care not just as an affective mode; rather it is to be seen as an action and process that holds possibilities to create a sustainable world.

The lead paper by Debajyoti Biswas and Jayashree Haloi focuses on Anuradha Sharma Pujari’s *Iyat Ekhon Aranya Asil*. It is a powerful critique of the effect of modernity on postcolonial ecology. The paper explores the relationship between modern city life and the loss of animal habitat in the surrounding hills and forests. Drawing from the findings made by decolonial critics like Walter Mignolo and Anibal Quijano on the connection between global modernity, global colonialism, and capitalism, the authors argue that in a postcolonial context, this double exploitation can be perpetuated only through consent and political manipulation of a complicit public.

The next paper by Binayak Roy delves into Tabish Khair’s *The Body by the Shore*, exploring the widening gulf between the Islamic and the non-Islamic world and the equation of the Muslims with a threatening germ in a futuristic setting. Roy argues that Khair’s speculative post-pandemic novel narrative is a scathing attack on biocapitalism, xenophobia and the twin forces of profit and privatization. The paper goes on to show how the

technicalities of molecularization have reduced human life to a series of digital chromosomal codes facilitating innovative ways of commoditization of life and furthering biocapitalism.

The third paper by Debashrita Day and Priyanka Tripathi analyses issues of aging through the interpretive lens of precarity, thus showcasing what it means to live a marginalized life with disabling conditions in contexts related to care, assistance, and support. This paper focuses on examining how fictional deliberations - Anuradha Sharma Pujari's *Jalsobi: In the Shadow of Light* (2018) and Avni Doshi's *Girl in White Cotton* (2019) – configure precarity through the markers of frailty, vulnerability, and increased dependency in older Indian women with diminishing cognitive capacities.

In the next paper by Abhishek Ghoshal, we find an engaged discussion of inoperative grammatology of post(g)locality followed by the incremental desires of neoliberal elites to marketize abundant oceanic resources scattered across the world, thus rendering the oceans extremely *vulnerable*—an appalling phenomenon which at once lays bare the vulnerability of the oceans conditioned by the strands of ‘precariousness’ and at times calls for the actualization of ‘micropolitics of care.’ In this context, the paper examines Romesh Gunesequera's *Reef* to highlight the rapid disappearance of coral reefs along with the illegal marketing of endangered marine species like dolphin so as to make readers aware of how the ocean stands at risk and moreover to put literary emphasis on the enactment of ‘micropolitics of care’ which seems to be able to effectively take on the wicked designs of contemporary neoliberal precarity for the greater sake of planetary consciousness.

Rishav Bali and Isha Malhotra in their paper offer a close analysis of the refugee webcomic titled *I am a Leader of My House*, produced online in 2021 by the non-profit organization PositiveNegatives in partnership with The New Humanitarian, to decipher the everyday struggle of Rohingya refugee women through the interaction of the two female

protagonists, Romida and Hafsa. The paper argues for recognizing such challenges and assigning them more responsibilities which can be a strategic and empathetic response to address their specific needs while it is also a culturally sensitive approach considering the conservative cultural norms and restricted interactions between genders in the Rohingya society.

The last paper by Om Prakash Dwivedi examines the ongoing global debate about food scarcity. Recognizing the need for a radical movement against the extractive ideologies that continue to grip and control food supply across the world, this paper advocates an urgency to trigger a new world-making exercise through a social movement that it conceptualises as ‘foodocracy’.

We hope readers will enjoy the engaging and scholarly discussions that follow in this special issue.