

## The Idea

Since the late 1980s Forum on Contemporary Theory (FCT) is deeply engaged in fostering interdisciplinary and critical thinking in the humanities and social sciences in India. As a congregation of scholars and a 'community of practice', it views 'theory' as a necessary resource for both disrupting as well as re-constructing the established practices of academic learning.

FCT wishes to expand its work to include a meditation on India's *Bhasha* literature as a source of conceptual thinking and a site for normative deliberations. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as is established by the current literary historiography, *Bhasha* literature in India acquired a new lease of life, a new quickening, largely through the world of 'print' and civic dissemination. It is also true that strong 'identitarian' concerns provided *Bhasha* literature its peculiar boundedness, its political moorings, its shifting affiliations, and its strategic erasures.

It is not surprising then that literary and educational institutions and pedagogical protocols kept India's *Bhasha* literature tethered to various kinds of 'identitarian' and 'nationalist' imaginaries. They still do. However, literary production and reception are always in excess of their selective forging and specific instrumentalities. As we aspire to gather and evaluate conceptual resources embedded in *Bhasha* literature, it is in some sense an effort to unhinge old connections and tetherings. How do we discover or read the conceptual storylines lodged in its various genres? Whether we think of conceptual resources as 'tools' or defined landscapes or marked territories or specified horizons, they point towards an approach, an orientation- if not a clear method - towards understanding the layered realities of the world.

Although theoretically informed, this is not an attempt to forcibly bend *Bhasha* literature to the logic of philosophy. This is also not an exercise in explicating the mobilization of Indian philosophical thinking in literature. This is primarily about seeing different structures of thinking and evaluating, about enduring human predicaments and affiliations, as articulated in India's *Bhasha* literature (including in its epics and *puranas*). In this we are as much interested in clear articulations, as we are in 'hints', 'indications' and 'gestures'.

As we launch this line of work we plan an exploratory meeting to discuss ways in which this can be taken forward. The conversation will include discussions on both the validity and coherence of FCT's new line of work and on the nature of our intellectual labor required to build this into a collective and critical practice.



## Forum on Contemporary Theory

Studies in Bhasha  
Literature:  
Reflections on  
Conceptual &  
Normative  
Resources

**an exploratory  
conversation**  
*(for invited  
participants only)*

**Nov 17-18, 2017**  
**Baroda, Gujarat**

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