



**VIT**<sup>®</sup>  
Vellore Institute of Technology  
(Deemed to be University under section 3 of UGC Act, 1956)

## International Virtual Conference

# CONTAGION NARRATIVES: SOCIETY, CULTURE AND ECOLOGY OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH



## About the Conference

The 'outbreak narratives' (Wald) emerging from across the globe afflicted by the COVID-19 pandemic have once again accentuated human vulnerability and have turned the spotlight back on the nonhuman (microbes, animals, climate and so on) and its 'confederation of agencies' (Iovino and Oppermann). The Corona pestilence, like its antecedents such as the Great Plague of London (1665-66), Spanish Flu (1918-1920), SARS (2002-2004) and Ebola

(2013-2016), narrates 'biological catastrophe[s]' (Caduff) of varying degrees as it puts forward embodied discourses of pain, fear, fatigue, exhaustion and suffering. The permeability of bodies (Alaimo) that COVID-19 foregrounds has sharp parallels with the human survival struggles in the otherwise toxified locations like those near nuclear dumps, landfills and factories.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the fore astonishing discrepancies in response to the threat among different locations in the Global North and South. Emerging records of strategies and successes from different regions indicate that resourcefulness in handling the pandemic is not necessarily correlated with affluence or the availability of the best healthcare. The contagion that rapidly spread from China to Europe and the US, arguably, has effectively highlighted the flipside of both high capitalism and globalisation.

The extensive periods of nation-wide lockdowns in response to the pandemic have unequivocally demonstrated that environmental despoliation is largely anthropogenic. News reports from across the globe point to several instances of environmental recuperation such as drops in air and water pollution, fish returning to water resources and the sightings of birds and wild animals in cityscapes. The entanglement of such upbeat tales of ecological healing with stories of multiple socio-cultural problems like insanitation, stigma, unemployment, poverty, and migration that countries, mostly in the Global South, confront suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic ought to be seen as a 'naturecultural' (Haraway) phenomenon.

The tragic stories of deaths from COVID-19, which are increasingly becoming part of our everyday reality, make us reflect on the complex causal network that has led to the spread of this 'zoonotic' disease. The fact that the disease has spread from animals to human beings makes us think more closely about our relationship with members of other species. Our attitudes to other animals range from kindness and condescension to hostility and clash for resources. When they are experimented on, they serve as instruments to satisfy our quest to understand the secrets of life. This is one precise instance where this outbreak gives us a motivation for looking more closely at the relationship between us and other animals.

More questions arise as we take a look at the larger ecosystem on which the living world is dependent. It has been observed that the outbreak of this disease is concomitant with an increasing number of extreme climatic events and both are argued to be connected to global warming. As pathogens mutate and increasing temperatures create conditions for the increased breeding of disease vectors, infectious diseases could become deadlier and more difficult to contain. Further, owing to unhealthy living conditions and dependence on daily wages, socio-economically disadvantaged individuals of the Global

South are more affected by infectious diseases in terms of health as well as their already low economic status.

As historian Yuval Harari noted, the virus SARS-CoV-2 has affected aspects of our lives that make us human, such as the possibility of close communication in a direct, face-to-face mode. If infectious diseases become recurring phenomena in a world transformed by climate change, all aspects of human life, including our notions of literature, films and other forms of art, would have to be re-thought. The ways in which our forms of aesthetic expression respond and change would be a matter of interest to this conference. Against this background, the two-day international virtual conference welcomes papers that analyses narratives from the Global South about deadly infectious diseases like COVID-19 by situating them in their wider medical (including biochemical), eco-social and cultural contexts. The conference is conceived as interdisciplinary and participants are encouraged to draw on theories ranging from the medical and environmental humanities, philosophy, gender, cultural and film studies, as well as various strands of social sciences.



## Sub-themes include, but are not limited to

Contagion and literature  
Contagion and language  
Contagion and climate change  
Contagion and environment  
Contagion and the Global South  
Contagion and social challenges  
Contagion and culture  
Contagion and philosophy  
Contagion and films  
Contagion narratives and technology  
Contagion and gender

## Publication

Selected papers from the conference will be published in conference proceedings with ISBN. Further information will be shared in due course of time.

## Submission

Abstracts of about 700-900 words on the above-mentioned themes should be emailed to [contagion.narratives@gmail.com](mailto:contagion.narratives@gmail.com) on or before July 24. The abstracts, typed in MS Word (Times New Roman, 12, double space) should contain the title, name and affiliation of the author, and email address.

### Note

- A registration link is provided on the last page of this brochure. Registration is free.
- Registered presenters will be provided with the link for virtual presentation.
- Details regarding the link to the virtual conference and password will be communicated to the registered email address by August 22, 2020.
- The conference organisers will issue e-certificates to all the registered participants who attend a minimum of three sessions.

## Important Dates and Deadlines

Abstract Submission	July 24, 2020
Notification of Abstract Acceptance	July 31, 2020
Registration Opens	August 12, 2020
Registration Ends	August 21, 2020
Submission of Full Paper	August 22, 2020



## Keynote Speaker

### PROF KAREN LAURA THORNER

is Harry Tuchman Levin Professor in Literature and Professor of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University, USA. She has authored three major scholarly monographs: *Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature* (Harvard, 2009); *Ecoambiguity: Environmental Crises and East Asian Literatures* (Michigan, 2012); and *Global Healing: Literature, Advocacy, Care* (Brill, 2020). Prof. Thorner is also the author of multiple (co)edited volumes and more than 70 articles/book chapters on a range of fields in literature and cultural history globally. She is interested in a wide range of research fields such as the medical humanities, health humanities (including chronic illness, death and dying, mental health, and disability), environmental humanities; displacement, migration, diaspora; social justice, including inequality, and economic, health, racial, criminal, and environmental justice; gender, Asian/global feminisms, gender and leadership; trauma; and global and comparative indigenities. Her detailed profile can be accessed at <https://complit.fas.harvard.edu/people/karen-thorner>

## Plenary Speakers

### PROF DILIP M. MENON

is the Mellon Chair of Indian Studies and the Director of the Centre for Indian Studies in Africa at the University of Witwatersrand, South Africa. He was educated at the Universities of Delhi, Oxford and Cambridge and earned his PhD from Cambridge. His research for the past decade has engaged with issues of caste, socialism and equality in modern India. He is the author of *Caste, nationalism and communism in south India: Malabar, 1900-1948* (Cambridge, 1994), *The blindness of insight: Essays on caste in modern India* (Navayana, 2006), *The cultural history of Modern India* (editor, Social Sciences Press and Berghahn, 2006), *Capitalisms: Towards a Global History* (co-editor, Oxford, 2020), and the translator of Potheri Kunhambu's 1893 Malayalam novel *Saraswatijayam* (Book Review Literary Trust, 2002)

### DR ANDREW FENTON

is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy, Dalhousie University, Halifax, Canada. He holds a PhD in Philosophy from the University of Calgary. His research interests include animal ethics, philosophy of animal cognition and behaviour and Buddhist philosophy. He has authored or co-authored papers that have appeared in journals like *Biology and Philosophy*, *Cambridge Quarterly of Healthcare Ethics*, *Developing World Bioethics*, *Journal of Animal Ethics*, *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, *Journal of Ethics in Mental Health*, *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, *Neuroethics*, *Public Health Ethics* and *The Monist*.

### DR KALPITA BHAR PAUL

is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Krea University, Sri City, Andhra Pradesh, India. Her research primarily captures the changing trajectory of the human-environment relationship and its impact on environmental ethics and environmental sustainability. She has been working in the Indian Sundarbans for over a decade. She has published widely in international journals such as *Environmental Ethics*, *Environmental Philosophy*, *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *Ethics & the Environment*, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* and *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics*. Currently, she is completing her monograph on the Sundarbans, which is going to be published by Cambridge University Press. She, by collaborating with a national award-winning documentary filmmaker Sourav Sarangi, is also making a documentary on the Indian Sundarbans.

## Poet

### ARUNDHATHI SUBRAMANIAM

is the award-winning author of eleven books of poetry and prose. Widely translated and anthologised, her volume of poetry, *When God is a Traveller* (2014) was the Season Choice of the Poetry Book Society, shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize. She is the author of five books of poetry, most recently *Love Without a Story* (Amazon Westland, New Delhi, 2019), *When God is a Traveller* (HarperCollins India, New Delhi, 2014 and Bloodaxe Books, Newcastle, 2014). As a prose writer, her books include *The Book of Buddha*, the bestselling biography of a contemporary mystic, *Sadhguru: More Than a Life* and most recently, *Adiyogi: The Source of Yoga* (co-authored with Sadhguru). As editor, her most recent book is the Penguin anthology of sacred poetry, *Eating God* (Penguin Ananda, 2014).

## About VIT

VIT, one of the premier institutes in Tamil Nadu, was established in 1984. It is a major, comprehensive, student-centred research university dedicated to excellence in teaching, research, and service. VIT today comprises various schools and interdisciplinary research centres offering undergraduate, postgraduate and research programs in various disciplines. The institute was established to provide quality higher education at par with international standards. The campus has a cosmopolitan atmosphere with students from all corners of the globe. Presently the student's strength has crossed 25,000. Our Memoranda of Understanding with various international universities are our major strength. The mission of VIT is to educate students from all over India, including those from the local and rural areas and from other countries, so that they can become enlightened individuals, improving the living standards of their families, industries and society. VIT provides individual attention, world-class quality education, and takes care of character building. There are student and faculty exchange programmes, to encourage joint research

projects for mutual benefit.

VIT Vellore obtained grade "A" for all the programmes offered by the University during the re-accreditation processes in February 2015. The University was recently ranked No.1 Private Engineering Institution by MHRD, Govt. of India. VIT – Recognised as Institution of Eminence (IoE) by the Government of India.

## About the Department of English

The Department of English is part of the School of Social Sciences and Languages. The school offers language courses at basic and intermediate levels for UG and PG programmes in a diverse set of disciplines that come under science, technology, commerce and management to enable all learners to avail opportunities across the globe. The department aims to build communicative competence and confidence in students of engineering and other streams. In addition to teaching communicative English, the faculty members carry out research in different areas in literature and the humanities.

## Organising Committee

### Chief Patron

Dr G. Viswanathan  
Founder & Chancellor of VIT

### Patrons

Mr Sankar Viswanathan  
Vice President

Dr Sekar Viswanathan  
Vice President

Mr G. V. Selvam  
Vice President

Ms Kadhambari S. Viswanathan  
Assistant Vice President

Dr Sandhya Pentareddy  
Executive Director

### Co-Patrons

Dr Anand A. Samuel  
Vice Chancellor

Dr S. Narayanan  
Pro Vice Chancellor

Dr K. Sathiyarayanan  
Registrar

### Convenor

Dr G. Velmurugan  
Dean, School of Social Sciences and Languages

### Co-Convenor

Dr Sarika Gupta  
Head of the Department  
Department of English  
School of Social Sciences and Languages

### Organising Secretaries

Dr Sreejith Varma R.  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English

Dr Jobin M. Kanjirakkat  
Assistant Professor  
Department of English

### Contact Us

Dr Sreejith Varma R., Dr Jobin M. Kanjirakkat  
Assistant Professors  
Department of English, School of Social Sciences and  
Languages, Vellore Institute of Technology  
Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India  
PIN: 632014  
Mobile: +91-9940236178, +91-9449305995  
Email: contagion.narratives@gmail.com

### Registration Link

<https://forms.gle/6HJGCRRe4cATyZof6>