

language that questions certainties of identity offers new sociological/cultural/ecological ethics?

SR: I won't be able to answer this question satisfactorily. I'm not conscious of writing from the constituencies of my identity, my identities. I also don't—can't—write with a specific constituency in mind. Believe me, I feel nervous when I hear phrases like 'identity and belonging' now. Like all children today, I immediately blame my parents—there must be some genetic defect in me that does not allow me to see anything as an abstraction. What exactly is 'human identity'? From the phrase I understand that it must be something important. But I don't understand it completely. I wonder whether those I feel close to—the plant and elemental world, for instance—have a sense of identity in the way we do. I've seen the ravages of communal identity on the material and psychic world around me. Through my own writing and reading, I have been looking at language, both literary and of the street. Why has the English language become so violent, for instance? Why do people *grab* a coffee, why is someone a *bomb*, why does a song (or the mic) have to *drop*? Literary criticism is not a byproduct of literature—it is literature itself. I write from that belief, that criticism is a sense-making project, and it is available to everyone, not those with a university education alone.

SS: There is so much to unpack in this thought. It does, however, take me to my next question. Do you think creative writing can serve as a form of resistance, offering alternative narratives to exploitative capitalistic relationships with 'nature'?

SR: I don't understand—and therefore don't feel close to—the category 'nature'. 'Nature', whatever it was supposed to mean, has perhaps always been an anachronistic word. It is more aspiration than the reality of the moment. Rabindranath recognises this when he writes about Kalidasa—that the natural world that the Sanskrit poet is writing about in *Meghdutam* isn't reportage, it's not in front of him; he has to imagine it because it doesn't really exist. Our experience of 'nature' is always a belated one—we have arrived late to it, to its ruins. When my students write about plant and animal lives, they often begin writing from a sense of guilt—emotionally educated, they acknowledge the human's irresponsibility. But soon enough they realise that guilt is not a productive emotion. Then they migrate to intimacy—how might it feel to be a certain species, for instance? Snigdha Dhameja, for instance,

wrote her Creative Writing dissertation on various kinds of animals, from their points of view, animals and insects that are as much family as her parents and brother. It is said that fiction teaches empathy. I think any kind of creative practice compels us to notice, to pay attention, to come out of our selves. Being forced to think about form in their writing also leads them to question the obvious truth of the centrality of the human gaze that has been the drug of publishing. And academia—which is, let's accept it, the most anthropocentric site of all.

SS: Yes, academia does still exist as an anthropocentric, often determinedly self-righteous site. We do, hope, however, to hold ground for further conversations, interventions, and moments of unlearning like this one, to reassess our social spaces, re-navigate our classrooms, and find new methods of thinking and teaching that can address some of the concerns you have brought to our collective attention. Again, thank you for your time and your valuable insights.

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Language Activity

Fostering Language Skills Using Advertisements

Shadab Khan & Tharsni M.

Focus: Listening, Speaking, Building Vocabulary

Level: Upper-intermediate

Estimated Time: 50-60 minutes

Objectives: By the end of the activity, learners will be able to:

- Activate and expand vocabulary related to advertising,
- interpret the message and emotional appeal of an advertisement,
- express and justify opinions during group discussions, and
- produce short, audience-specific spoken texts.

Materials: Images related to advertising, Blackboard/whiteboard, Video advertisements for example, the Coca-Cola advertisement (<https://youtu.be/lb5eUeg5-mU>) or any other ad that the teacher finds suitable for her learner needs.

