

# In Memoriam: Ananta Charan Sukla (1942-2020)

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His many friends and admirers across the world will be saddened by the death of Ananta Sukla on 30 September 2020, aged 78. Sukla was a polymathic author, scholar and editor who showed extraordinary energy and vision, not only in creating and sustaining an international journal, the *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics* (JCLA), but in numerous scholarly projects of his own, covering literature, philosophy and aesthetics, always with a rich, well-informed, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary flair.

Rather than delineate, in the manner of a formal obituary, his many achievements, as editor and scholar, listing his multiple publications and contributions to scholarly life, I will offer instead only some brief personal recollections.

On the few occasions when I had the pleasure of being in Ananta Sukla's company, for example, at meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics, I very soon acquired a lasting impression of his courtesy, kindness, and indeed impressively wide-ranging interests. If these personal encounters were, sadly, all too rare, nevertheless we built up an enduring rapport through many years of correspondence, as he sought my advice and opinions on many of his projects.

When I took over as editor of the *British Journal of Aesthetics* (BJA) in January 1995, Ananta was keen for me to continue the various (in some cases longstanding) reciprocal arrangements between that journal and his *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*. I was more than pleased to oblige. Copies were exchanged and advertisements for JCLA would appear in the BJA. From then on, I was associated with JCLA in different capacities. Ananta very kindly appointed me to his Editorial Board, which was a distinct honour, and to this day I remain a member. Also, it was a particular pleasure and privilege to have an article of mine published in the Silver Jubilee Volume (volume XXV, 2002).

JCLA is a remarkable journal: even its title, juxtaposing 'comparative literature' and 'aesthetics', was unusual and ambitious for its time. The spheres of 'comp lit' and aesthetics had not seen much overlap in the 1970s and 1980s, indeed in some circles there was an undercurrent of suspicion on both sides. But 'comparative literature' for Ananta was not grounded in Critical Theory, or Theory of any kind. He had a far more ecumenical and open-minded conception, literally pursuing comparisons between literature from different cultures, always against the backdrop

of other arts from those cultures. The contents of the journal attest to this enlightened conception, free from theoretical orthodoxy, dogma, or ideology, and encouraging a broad sweep of interests, international in scope, hospitable to a diversity of approaches. And his cast of authors also reflects this international spirit.

Ananta was himself a man of wide intellectual interests and deep knowledge across many fields. I will not comment in detail about his significant publication output—the range of which is well-illustrated just by attending to his book and article titles—but I will remark briefly on one book, a recently edited volume entitled *Fiction and Art: Explorations in Contemporary Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2015). I had a modest input at an early stage of this project when Ananta asked me to recommend some possible contributors. And I was delighted to see it come to fruition. The volume has all the hallmarks of Ananta's ambition, vision, and intellectual curiosity. In lesser hands an edited volume on the theme 'Fiction and Art' might restrict itself to some limited aspects of fictional representation in, say, literature, possibly painting. But Ananta had something far more enterprising in mind, far wider in scope, and of course far more interesting! He offered sections on Historical, Interdisciplinary, Aesthetic, and Oriental Perspectives, with essays on fictions in mathematics, history, the law, and Greek myths; among the arts he included literature, painting, music, dance, theatre, film, and photography; there are also discussions of the semantics and epistemology of fiction; and for good measure there are essays on Indian, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic fictions. His own essay contribution was on 'Fundamentals of Fiction in Indian Mythology, Poetics and Dramaturgy'.

This gives an image of the man himself: tirelessly pursuing topics wherever they might lead, not bound by narrow disciplinary divisions, or indeed cultural or geographical ones. This is admirable and a model for us all in a world where the narrowing of interests is more the norm than the pursuit of knowledge beyond safe cultural and intellectual 'comfort zones'. Ananta Sukla will be greatly missed, and it can only be hoped that his visionary legacy can flourish and be sustained.

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