

Imagining Alternatives: Or, a Post-Comparative Spin on Post-Truth

Ipsita Sengupta

Abstract

“Post-truth” as a category defies or desires truth, there could be no eluding that enmeshment. Yet who could be custodians of the truth? And how would they shift the shape of that which is posited as uber-intractable, sanitized and respectable and comes beset with contesting versions, stitched as the shadow-narratives testing and teasing its limits? Such questions, and the impossibility of dousing them with final solutions, riddled hegemony-seekers and truth-inflictors across tenses and myths, and not only from the First World emergent since the late eighteenth century. As Bharata’s *Natyashastra* memorialises, the first performance onstage had been disrupted by the vighnas – literally the disrupters – since they found its projected “truth” scaled in favour of the gods and humiliating for their close contenders and occasional collaborators, the asuras and danavas (I.64-75). Brahma, creator of the performative arts in *Natyashastra*, placated the vighnas with the promise of post i.e., plural and multi-nodal truths to be presented hitherto in performance which must “show good and bad actions and feelings of both the gods and yourselves” (I.98-129). Alas, that promised land seems to lie someplace else, since “post-” remains a country without a post-office, without the refuge of terminals to reach or wait for. As Bob Hodge and Vijay Misra argue in the 2005 paper “What was Postcolonialism?”, “post-” represents a fissured complex capable of much cunning and both oppositional and complicit possibilities. “Post-truth” could puzzle with alleged truths atomized and echoed, it could kindle or stoke with afterlives bestowed on elect fragments or narratives from the past, or amplify the mirror-worlds shared by groups and based on radical expulsions of various others. While I shall provide examples of each in my paper, I hope to interrogate the viability of “truth” as an epistemological or ethical category in performance or arguments, even in a postal avatar. How about an alternative category with epistemic-political humility and the hunger of imagination and conversations with counters built into it, a category like Abhinavagupta’s “tarkasamsara” for instance?

Keywords

Post-truth, Comparative Literature, Natyashastra, England, England, Enlightenment, post-colonial, Abhinavagupta