

‘Bhāratīyatā’ in the 1950’s: What did it mean in S.H. Vatsyayan Agyeya’s works?

Abstract

In an essay, “Bhāratīyatā”, first published in *Ātmanepada* in 1960, S.H. Vatsyayan ‘Agyeya’ (1911-1987) questions the relevance of the common opinion, or *doxa*, that “Indianness is a particular spiritual quality, which distinguishes Indians from the rest of the world”. Pointing out the evasiveness of such a definition, he pleads for a personal and internal answer particular to each individual, the sole way, in his view, to “give any cultural tradition a new life and progress thanks to its inspiration”. So, which clues and definitions – if any – does the author offer in his texts concerning the notion of “Indian identity” in the decades immediately following Independence?

In this contribution, we will first briefly look at his essays in order to outline some features (such as time, freedom, etc.) proposed by the writer in relation to the so-called notion of “Indianness”. We will then analyse and assess their presence and use in Agyeya’s *Nadī ke dvīp* (1951) and in his poetry of the 1950s, with the following questions in mind: Do these literary works echo the “definitions” given in the essays? Does any “Indianness” really emerge from them? How do these texts deal with the *a priori* contradiction between Agyeya’s emphasis on the individual’s freedom and the idea of a cultural and national identity?