

IACLALS

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ABOUT IACLALS:

The Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies— is the officially recognised Indian chapter of the international **ACLALS** (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies). IACLALS was instituted in India in 1974.

Its objectives are to promote and coordinate Post Colonial/ Commonwealth Literature Studies in India, organize seminars and workshops, arrange lectures by writers and scholars including those visiting India, publishing a newsletter about activities in the field of Commonwealth Literature in India and in other parts of the world, and holding the annual conference in collaboration with various Universities and Institutions in India.

The International ACLALS holds a conference once in three years. The international ACLALS was started in 1964 with a conference in the University of Leeds. Since then the headquarters have moved every three years, and conferences have been held in different parts of the world including Canada, Australia, Singapore, Jamaica and India.



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EDITORIAL

In January 2020, as we welcomed a new decade, none of us would have imagined that in a few months' time, a sea of change would take place wherein we would be attending lectures and meetings on a virtual platform in our housecoats and carrying the burden of wearing a mask every time we stepped out of the house. The outbreak of Covid-19 has disturbed the very foundation of human society and created a fissure in our lives between pre-and-post pandemic time frames. As a world without face masks or zoom classes is hard to remember, the impossibility of reproducing the everyday realities compel us to cling to the pre-pandemic memories. While the irretrievability of life's norms belonging to pre-pandemic times is daunting and distressing, the earlier histories and literatures of conquering epidemic and pandemic (plague, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis and the 1918-19 Spanish flu, etc.) offer optimistic views about the future. In this context, questions such as — what does it mean to be human during a major crisis? What can the humanities, history and literature in particular, offer to help us survive such trauma? —become important.

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, looking back in times has helped us to understand how this disease has affected us and how our precursors handled a similarly critical situation. In this sense, literature becomes a valuable resource in our attempt at comprehending shared human experience throughout history. In several works from the ancient world to the modern world— from Homer's epic *Illiad* to the biblical book of *Exodus* that describes ten plagues of Egypt to the references to The Black Death in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, to Katherine Anne Porter's 1939 novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* referring to the 1919 Spanish flu to Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), to name a few—we see an exploration of a wide range of themes in relation to diseases. There has been an increased interest in the study of epidemics/pandemics in order to understand their impact on politics, socio-economic structures, and personal relationships. The overdramatised extremes of human behaviour depicted in Dystopian and Holocaust literatures have become a reality after the human race was held ransom to Corona virus since March 2020. As the certainties of humanism are interrogated in these narratives, bodies, desires, minds, knowledge and being itself are reinterpreted in new ways which cannot possibly be explained by traditional anthropocentrism. With the collapse of the opposition between human and the inhuman there has been a blurring of the conventional distinction between fact and fiction.

When we consider the changes, both short and long term that the coronavirus may bring for us, we cannot forget that the world we know today has been shaped by the pandemics of the past. Thus, the academic world has responded with more alacrity: various webinars, workshops, and symposia held online since March 2020 have attempted at mapping similar themes and concerns of both fiction and non-fiction pandemic literature, and also at underlining their differences. The IACLALS International conference (March 17-20, 2021) on "Utopias and Dystopias in our Times," while highlighting the Indian response to utopic/dystopic imaginations vis-à-vis Western conceptualization of the same, successfully addressed the complex aspects of the subject through a wide array of texts from India and abroad. It has become necessary for the academic fraternity to address the concerns of the real world on a priority basis; some of our previous IACLALS conferences ("Reimagi(ni)ng Identities in the Global South: Challenges, Transgressions and Articulation," 2020; "Literature, Culture and

Society in the Age of Post-truth,” 2019; “Tolerance and Bigotry: Contestations in Indian Literatures in English,” 2018 etc.) can be discerned as attempts to bridge the gap between the academia and the real world.

Several writers and scholars have deliberated on the profusion of pandemic writing. Tabish Khair opines that pandemic writing is not only an index of fighting the virus, but also an index of privilege, to be able to engage in creative activities in relative safety. According to him, significant literature from this pandemic is yet to come: “Perhaps significant literature will come from those who walked miles to reach ‘home,’ or lost jobs or had their homes repossessed, if (like Manoranjan Byapari) they ever get the chance to write” (“Inside the Tortoise: On the Literary Responses to the Ongoing Pandemic,” December 19, 2020, *The Hindu*). While evolution of genres, increase in short content, resurgence of books written during times of crisis are the phenomena observed during the pandemic times, fiction will take some more time to emerge since it involves contemplation and retrospection.

In the midst of coping with illness, losing many scholars, writers and loved ones, our IACLALS members have penned heartfelt obituaries and tributes, have taken time to send reports of various events held in their institutions and have contributed book reviews of the most recently published books. Prof. Nandini Saha and Prof. Fatima Rizvi have happily reviewed and edited contributions in the Book Review and the Creative Writing/Translation sections respectively. Kalyanee Rajan has assisted with last moment proofing, formatting and designing. We are happy to bring to you in this Newsletter, 9 Reports, 6 Creative Writing pieces, 9 Book Reviews, and 10 Tributes/Obituaries, along with the details of the New Publications by IACLALS members, Awards/Honours/Achievements (of our members), IACLALS Distinguished Speaker Series, Call for Papers, and the Memorial Meeting for Subhendu Mund. Closure of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have brought far-reaching changes in all aspects of our lives. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices.

Hopefully, we will be able to make sense of all these in the times to come.

Dr. M. Shobha

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Regional Representative (South Zone) IACLALS

REPORTS

IACLALS ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE 2021 (ONLINE)

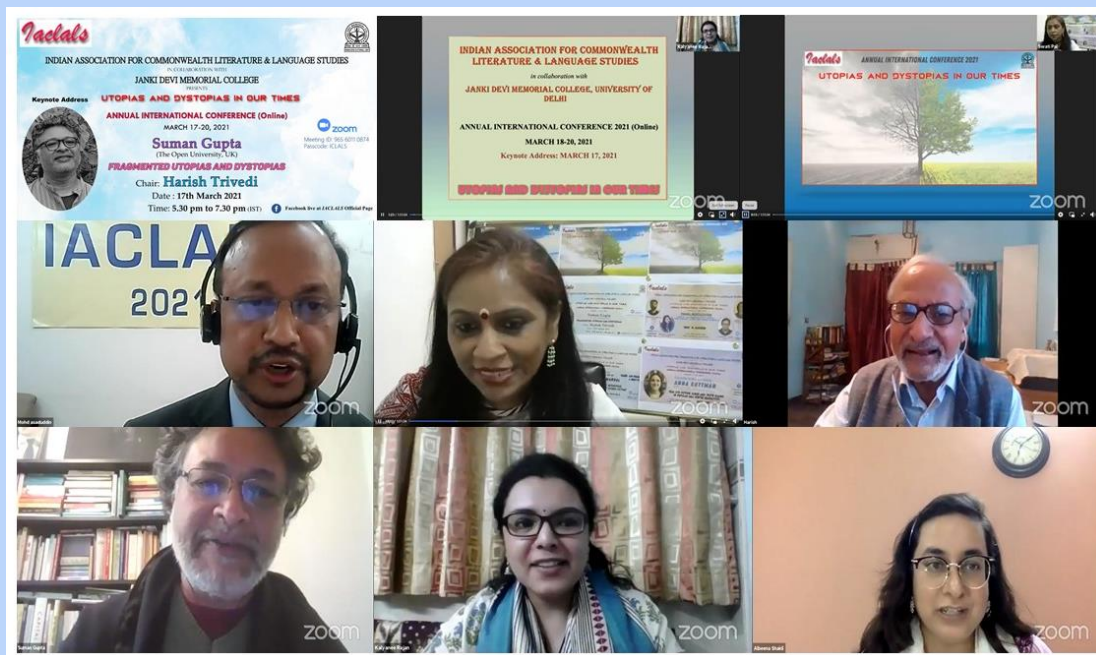
Co-Hosted By Janaki Devi Memorial College, Delhi University

March 17-20, 2021

“Utopias and Dystopias in Our Times”

With the Covid-19 pandemic slowly creeping over the world in 2020, the Annual IACLALS Conference of 2021 was held from 18 to 20 March in the digital mode on “Utopias and Dystopias in Our Times.” The conference was co-hosted by Janaki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi. Four days of discussions were held on utopian and dystopian imaginations from across the world in order to ponder over whether we, as humanity, could emerge the better or the worse on the other side of the pandemic.

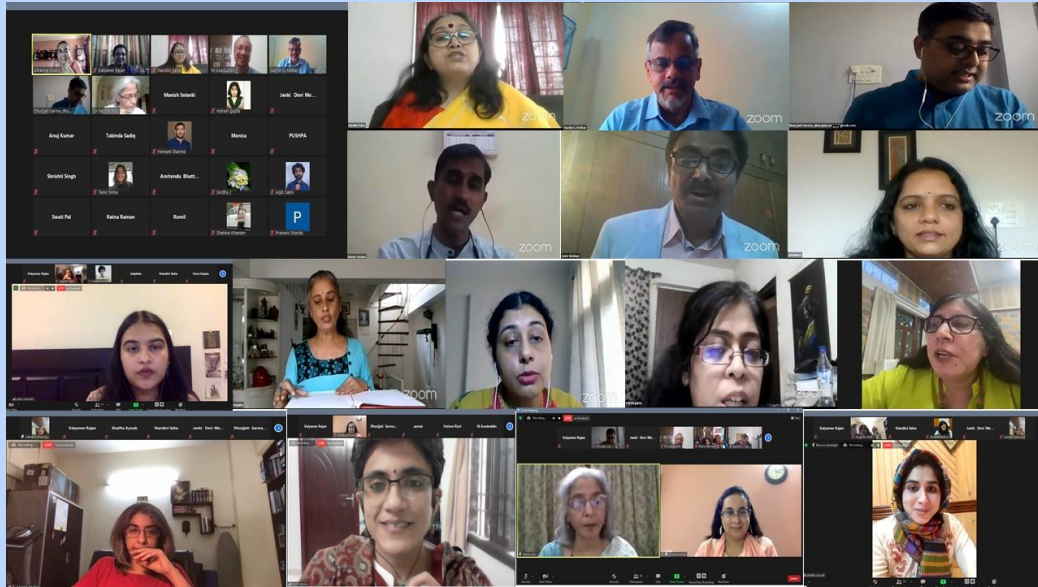
An inspiring keynote address was delivered on the eve of the Conference by Professor Suman Gupta, The Open University, UK, wherein he proposed a prognosis about considering utopias and dystopias as inherently fragmented by nature, with the world not offering the easy comfort of either-or options.



Sessions during the three day conference were organized around the following sub-themes: post- and trans humanism, ecocides or ecotopias, anti-utopias or anti-anti-utopias utopias of Indian modernities, techno-dystopias, dystopias of children and young adults, rethinking generic links with science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction, utopias in elsewhere places but also in intermediate other places like Foucault’s heterotopias, dystopian writings by women, feminist & queer utopias and ustopias, postcolonial dystopias, and pandemic fictions.

In all, fifty-six papers presenters of this online conference navigated very tight and demanding schedules of the webinar mode along with the vagaries of technology to offer a lot of food for thought with brevity. Like in all IACLALS conferences, a wide array of print, graphic and

video texts from India and abroad, in English, in translation and in many Indian languages as well as issues of theory were under discussion by a mix of early, mid to late career scholars.



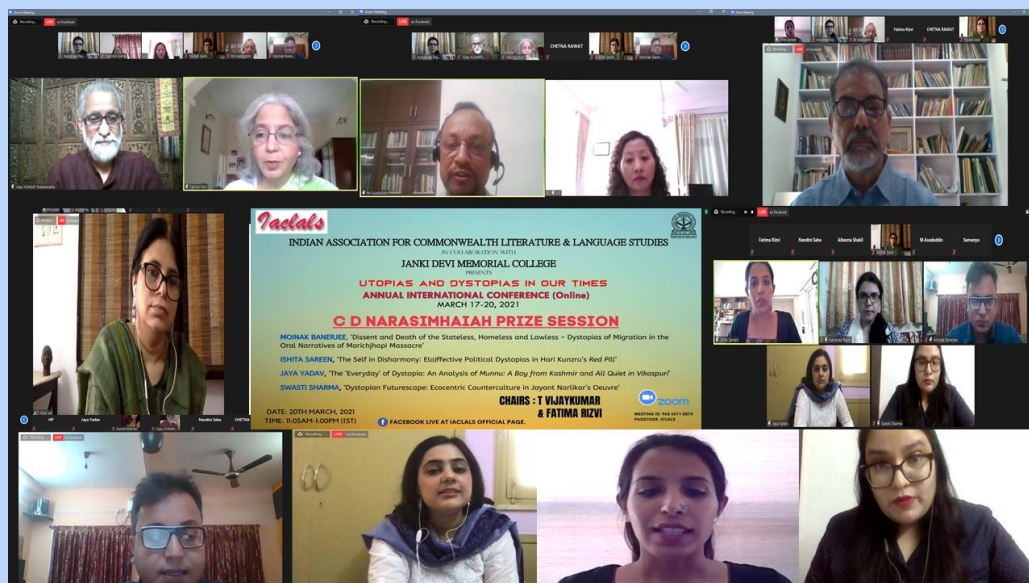
Holding a virtual/online conference was a rare occasion to rekindle connections with many long associated members, some of whom graciously agreed to chair sessions and add value to the conference and forge new connections. The following scholars added to the conference discussion by agreeing to be session chairs, namely, Professor Harish Trivedi and Professor GJV Prasad, both former IACLALS Chairs, Prof. Supriya Choudhuri, Professors Sachin C. Ketkar, M. Asim Siddiqui, Vibha S. Chauhan, Angelie Multani, Somdatta Mandal, Meenakshi Bharat, Priyanka Tripathi, Ranu Uniyal, Sukrita Paul Kumar, T Vijaykumar, Rukmini Bhaya Nair, Meenakshi Pawha and Subhendu Mund.



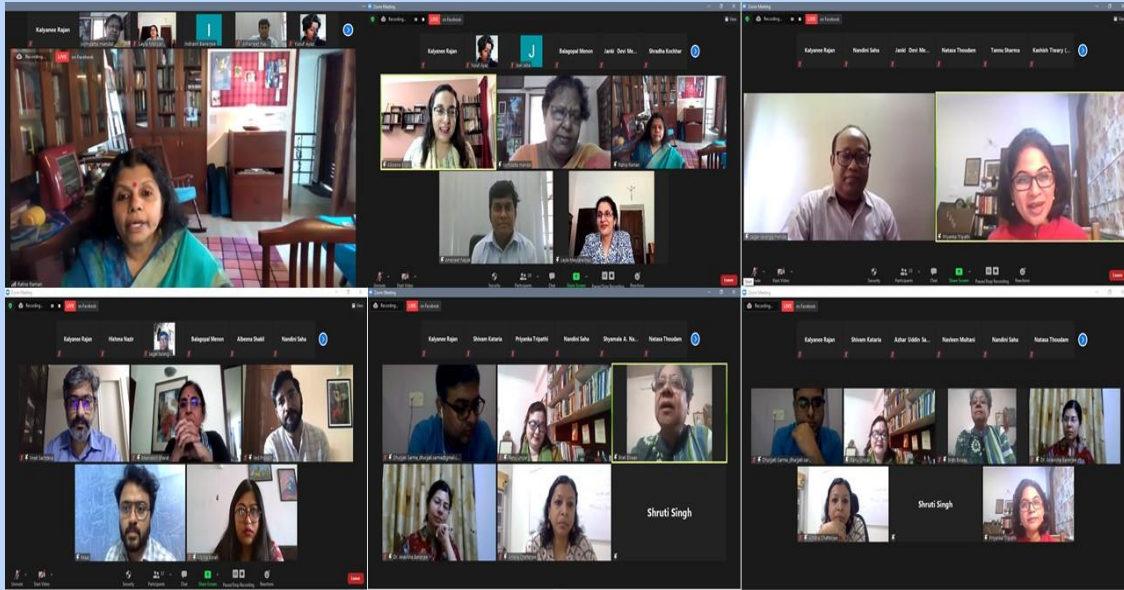
A special panel discussion moderated by Prof. M. Asaduddin was held on 'Leila: An Indian Dystopia? The novel and The Web Series' with author Prayaag Akbar and screenwriter Suhani Kanwar engaging in a very vibrant and lively discussion with Prof. Nishat Haider, Jamia Millia Islamia and Dr. Avishek Parui, IIT Madras.



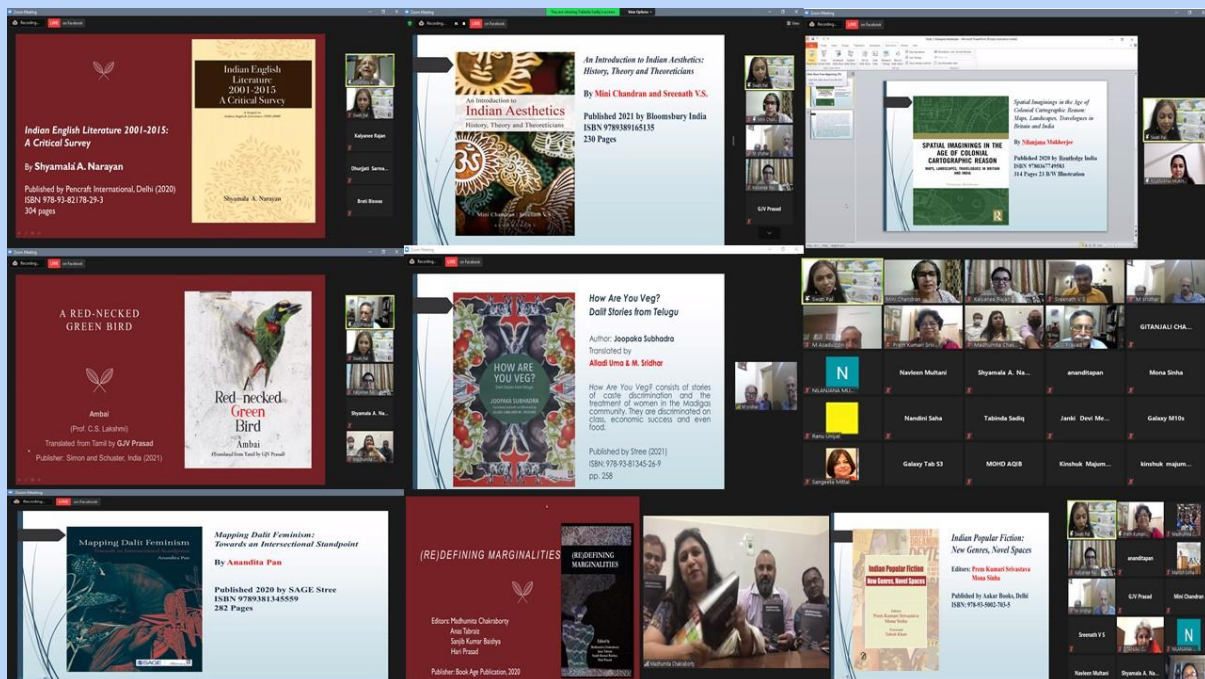
Enthusiastic entries were received for the Meenakshi Mukherjee Prize and the C D Narasimhaiah Prize for best paper published in the block of the past two years by an IACLALS member and the best paper presented at the conference. Judges and jury who invested their invaluable time and careful attention to the papers and presentation included Professors Asim Siddiqui and Snehal Sanghvi, Professors Malashri Lal, Suman Gupta, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Nishat Zaidi, Margaret L. Pachuau and Sumanyu Satpathy.



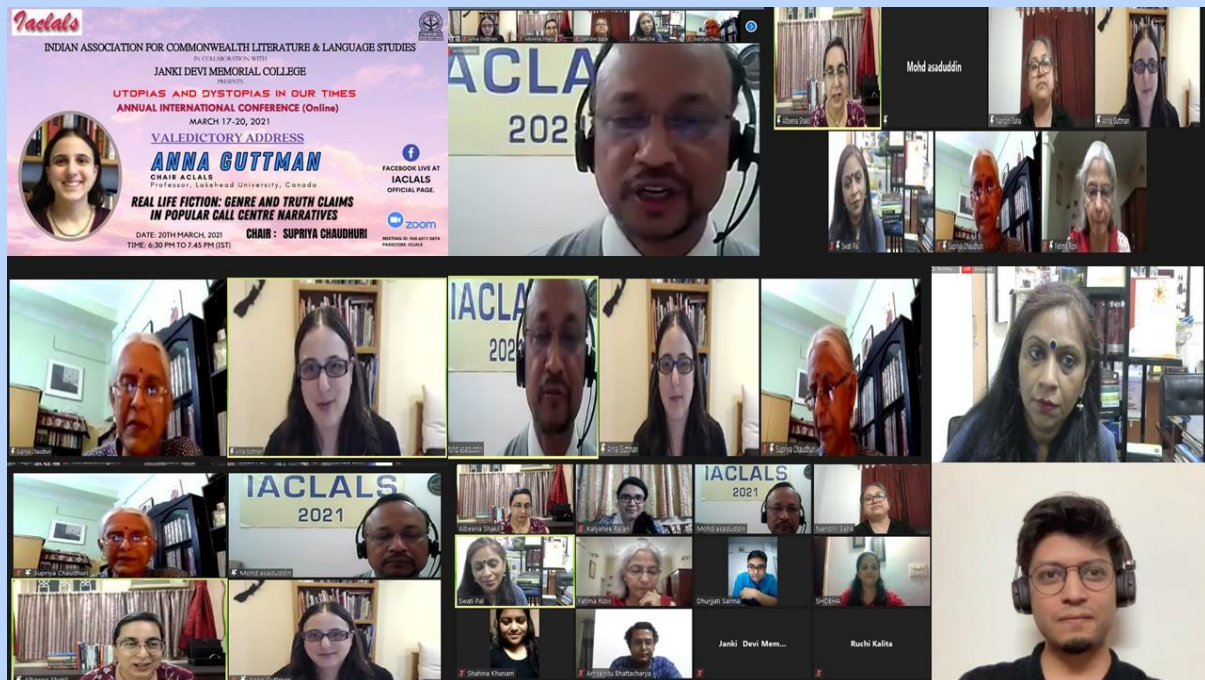
Sagar Taranga Mandal was the winner of the prestigious MMM Prize and Moinak Banerjee was the winner of the CDN Prize, both outstanding winners of the prizes. Ms. Kalyanee Rajan, Treasurer (IACLALS) engaged in a discussion with Mr. Sagar Taranga Mandal on his paper, while Mr. Moinak Banerjee emerged the winner from among the four shortlisted finalists that also included Ishita Sareen, Jaya Yadav and Swasti Sharma. Professors Swati Pal and Fatima Rizvi from the IACLALS Board coordinated the overall prizes.



A special book release session was held for IACLALS members who had authored, translated and edited books that were published since the last conference during the pandemic year. Books by the following were released during the conference, namely, Prof. Shyamala A. Narayan, Prof. GJV Prasad, Dr. Nilanjana Mukherjee, Professors M. Sridhar & Alladi Uma, Prof. Mini Chandran, Dr. Sreenath V.S., Dr. Anandita Pan, Dr. Madhumita Chakraborty, Mr. Anas Tabraiz, Dr. Sanjib Kumar Baishya, Dr. Hari Prasad, Dr. Prem Kumari Srivastava and Ms. Mona Sinha, Dr. Gitanjali Chawla and Dr. Sangeeta Mittal, and Dr. Navleen Multani. Brief glimpses were offered into their scholarship and creative work.



The befitting Valedictory Address was delivered by Professor Anna Guttman, Chair ACLALS and Professor, Lakehead University, Canada, on 'Real Life Fiction: Genre and Truth Claims in Popular Call Centre Narratives' connecting many sub-themes of the conference to contemporary Indian fictions navigating utopian and dystopian themes.



Along with the entire IACLALS Board comprising of Professor M. Asaduddin, Chair IACLALS, Jamia Millia Islamia, Prof. Swati Pal, Vice Chair and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, Prof. Albeena Shakil, Secretary, from OP Jindal Global University, Ms. Kalyanee Rajan Treasurer, from University of Delhi, regional representatives, namely, Prof. Nandini Saha, from Jadavpur University, Kolkata. Dr. Fatima Rizvi, from the University of Lucknow, Dr. M. Shobha, from Bangalore University, Dr. Dhurjjati Sarma, from Gauhati University, Dr. Amitendu Bhattacharya, from BITS Pilani, Goa, Dr. Shaifta Ayoub, from Srinagar, a team of twenty-four volunteers from across the country ranging from faculty members, research scholars to graduate and undergraduate students made the successful and organization of the conference possible. While initially, the CFP of the conference was floated with some trepidation because some leading scholars of Utopias and Dystopias hold the view that there are no significant utopias or dystopias outside of the western world. Yet, the enthusiastic response to our CFP and the wide set of papers presented in the conference made us seriously ponder whether in India we are already, always negotiating so many socio-economic-political imperfections in such a deeply stratified and diverse society so as to neither get enthralled by seeking perfections in the form of collective or shared Utopias, nor as a corollary be prone to dystopian thinking either, or whether for us with decolonization delivering both independence and the painful blow of partition together, our utopian impulse has since been on a long road to the more recent surge in retro-topias that seek to reach or restore our lost or stolen futures through amnesia and contested recollections of the past.

While the conference did not deliver a final verdict on this debate, enough threads were generated to continue this conversation in productive ways in the days to come.

Albeena Shakil

Secretary, IACLALS

Professor of English, Jindal Global Law School,
O P Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana.

Expressions@RGNUL

29-31 August, 2020

International Online Inter-University Competition

Expressions@RGNUL is an academic event organized by Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab. This competition is a venture of the Department of English, RGNUL, Punjab. The objective of the event is to provide a platform to young learners for sharpening their cognitive skills. The event gives students an opportunity to develop their writing, speaking, critical thinking skills and creative abilities through the activities of essay writing, elocution, debate, declamation, poetry recitation, book talk and poster-making. Expressions@RGNUL was organized from 29 August – 31 August 2020 in collaboration with Kamaljit Neuropsychiatry Centre, Mukerian, Punjab. “Lockdown Times and E- Learning” was the theme for the third edition of the event. Undeterred by the challenges posed by COVID-19, this academic event for the development of skills of students was organized virtually at the international level. The competition was opened to National and International Undergraduates, Postgraduates and Research Scholars of all disciplines through Institutional and Individual registration. The poster and brochure of the event were released on 13th May 2020. Several students from India and abroad responded to the competition invite but only those who fulfilled the eligibility requisites were registered for the event. 45 participants competed in the final rounds of different activities.

Students from various institutes, Punjabi University Patiala, Army Institute of Law Mohali, Bhartiya Vidya Peeth Pune, MIT WPU Pune, Punjab University Chandigarh, GNDU Amritsar, SCD Govt College Ludhiana, AB College Pathankot, Uttaranchal University, Indore Institute of Law, Law College Dehradun, RGNUL Punjab, Mount Royal University Canada and MSU America, participated in the event. Expressions@RGNUL 2020 commenced with the inaugural session on 29th August 2020. This was followed by Elocution and Book Talk. The panel of judges for both the events constituted Dr. Jogindern Paul, HOD, Govt. Mohindra College Patiala; Mrs. Amanjot Pannu, Punjabi University, Patiala and Dr. Navleen Multani, Assistant Professor of English, RGNUL, Punjab. On the second day of the event, i.e; 30th August 2020 two activities Debate and Poetry Recitation Competition were held in the morning and evening session respectively. The Judges for Debate were Dr. Parvinder Singh Arora, Senior Civil Judge-cum-Judicial Magistrate, Shimla, HP; Dr. Shweta Bajaj, HOD SGT University, Gurugram and Mrs. Bharati Rattan, Lecturer, Apeejay Educational Society, Delhi. The poetry recitation competition was adjudged by Dr. Sumandeep Kaur, IAAS, Shimla, Mr. Sumesh Wadhera, Managing Director AOJ, Bangalore and Ms. Sangeeta Raj, Lecturer, APS Patiala. Earlier the Essay writing competition and poster making competition received online submissions on 17 August 2020 and were judged by Dr. Jasleen Viridi, Assistant Professor, Khalsa College Patiala, Dr. Neena Sharma, Associate Professor and Dr. Sunaina Jain, Assistant Professor, MCM College for Women, Chandigarh. The judges for the poster making competition were Ms. Sangeeta Raj, Mrs. Reena Gupta, Jalandhar and Mrs. Beenu Malhotra, Pune. The participants competed for Prizes worth Rs.45000/-. The result was as follows:

<u>Sr.No.</u>	<u>ACTIVITIES</u>	<u>PRIZES</u>
1.	Poster Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1st Prize Rishika Sharma (SCD Government College, Ludhiana, Punjab)

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IInd Prize DipsaPrasanth (Army Institute of Law, Mohali)
2.	Elocution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ist Prize Anmol Sharma (SCD Govt. College Ludhiana) • IIndPrize Vibhuti Devgan (Army Institute of Law, Mohali)
3.	Book Talk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ist Prize Japleen Kaur Pahwa (SCD Govt. College Ludhiana) • IIndPrize Dilisha Dileep Nair (Army Institute of Law, Mohali) • IIIrd Prize Dipsa Prasanth (Army Institute of Law, Mohali)
4.	Debate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ist Prize SAVNOOR SINGH HARKIM KAUR (SCD GOVT.COLLEGE LUDHIANA)
5.	Poetry Recitation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ist Prize Samridhi Seth (Army Institute of Law) • IInd Prize Praveen Kumar Tiwari (Army Institute of Law) • IIIrdPrize PARTHSARTHI (MIT WPU PUNE)
6.	Essay Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IstPrize Aryan Puri & Sanya Rawali (MIT WPU Pune) • IInd Prize Vibhuti Devgan (Army Institute of Law, Mohali)

Special Prizes were awarded as follows:

1. Best Speaker – Harkim Kaur, SCD Govt. College, Ludhiana
2. Best Team - SCD Govt. College, Ludhiana
3. Ambassador@RGNUL – Dr. Kirandeep Kaur, Assistant Professor of Law (Army Institute of Law, Mohali)



The Valedictory session on 31 August 2020 was presided over by Prof.(Dr.) Naresh Kumar Vats, Registrar, RGNUL, Punjab. He congratulated the winners and thanked Kamljit

Neuropsychiatry Centre, Mukerian, Punjab for collaborating with RGNUL, Punjab for the conduction of this academic event. Dr. Navleen Multani, Assistant Professor of English and Coordinator Expressions@RGNUL, extended a vote of thanks.

Navleen Multani

Assistant Professor of English,
RGNUL, Punjab

International Interdisciplinary Lecture Series on Social Sciences and Humanities

Organized by Calcutta Comparatists 1919 (5th September 2020 onwards)

The Legendary Vice Chancellor of the University of Calcutta and a pivotal figure of the Bengal Renaissance, Sir Asutosh Mukherjee (1864-1924) envisioned the cultivation of scholarship and research in Indian languages at his institution, and to serve this goal the Department of Modern Indian Languages of the university was introduced in 1919. A new department of Comparative Indian Languages and Literatures was established at the same university in 2005 in order to carry forward academic works in related fields by applying the comparatist study of literature and culture.

To continue the legacy of Sir Asutosh and in accordance with the recently studied disciplines at the institutional level, the Calcutta Comparatists 1919 was formed by a group of researchers of mainly the University of Calcutta and Jadavpur University in the second half of 2020 – that is, during the first wave of COVID-19 pandemic – as an independent forum for young early-career researchers in language, literature and social science to make original contributions to overlapping areas of humanities. The first initiative of CC 1919 has been an online interdisciplinary Lecture Series, started on the teachers' day, September 5 2020, and drawing together experts, academicians, writers, research scholars from around the globe in the seventy-five lectures/discussions/interviews organized so far (till April 27, 2021).

The topics covered by this ongoing Lecture Series, meant for seamless scholarly dialogues, broadly include psychoanalysis, linguistics, Anglo-European canons, Bengal Renaissance and genteel class, modernisms and poststructuralist culture studies, popular art and media, mass movements, gender, militant nationalism and subaltern struggle, historiography, postcolonialism, diaspora, migration and international relations, Indian cultural diversity and regional art-forms, archive study, posthumanism, ecology, and public health and pandemic. The Series observed events of cultural significance like the 200th birth-anniversary of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and the 100th birth-anniversary of Satyajit Ray; other key thinkers, individually examined, being Nazrul Islam, Arabindo Ghosh, Ambedkar, Savarkar, Krishnabhabini Das, and W.E.B. Du Bois.

The inaugural lecture of the series was delivered by Professor Manan Kumar Mandal, Director, School of Humanities, Netaji Subhas Open University, who, discussing social power-structure, mind and culture, set the tune of the series by inviting a lively debate. These interactions found a global exposure particularly through the lecture on "Postcolonialism Today" by Professor Bill Ashcroft on February 13, 2021 and an interview of Professor Homi K. Bhabha on "Revisiting Postcolonial Identity" by Aratrika Ganguly, the chief coordinator of CC 1919, on January 31, 2021.



While Ashcroft insisted on crossing the imperial borders, Bhabha invoked radical utopianism in a global fight against totalitarianism. The comparative outlook of the post-postcolonial era was explored by Professor David Damrosch of Harvard University in a conversation with Dr Mrinmoy Pramanick of Calcutta University on March 31, 2021. Besides talks of intellectuals of the Indian subcontinent, Europe and USA on texts and contexts, and historical (de)constructions of aesthetic, linguistic and socio-political identities, a few deliberations were on research institutes. Dr Avishek Parui and Dr Merin Simi Raj, IIT Madras, talked about the Centre for Memory Studies, Institute of Eminence, IIT Madras on April 7, 2021; and Professor Swati Guha of Kazi Nazrul University explained the role of the Nazrul Centre for Social and Cultural Studies, Kazi Nazrul University, on March 8, 2021. In a book-discussion event, held on January 26, 2021, Dr Francesca Ferrando of New York University conversed on “Philosophical Posthumanism” with Dr Subhadeep Paul of Bankura University.





The video-recordings of most of these lectures, each of which deserves separate attention, are available on the website of CC 1919: www.calcomp.org serves as an ever evolving resource centre and platform for sharing arguments. The forum has currently started an online biography series: "One India, Plural India". It plans to conduct language course, workshop, book-launch, and translation projects. Against a world where humanity has become defenseless – to follow the latest talk of the cultural theorist Professor Simon During – CC 1919 works for a future of critical spirit and mutual understanding that is also our cultural heritage.

Jemima Nasrin,
PhD Scholar of English,
Calcutta University
Founder Member, CC 1919
Kolkata

Subhadeep Ray
Associate Professor of English
Bidhan Chandra College
Kazi Nazrul University
Asansol, West Bengal

19th Annual/5th International Science Fiction Conference 2020 **(For all Domains of Science, Engineering and Humanities)**

Organised by Bangalore University in collaboration with
Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies, December 7th - 10th, 2020
Bengaluru, Karnataka

The 19th Annual/5th International Science Fiction Conference 2020 was organised online by Bangalore University in collaboration with Indian Association for Science Fiction Studies from December 7th to 10th, 2020. The vision of the conference, coming as it did at a very challenging time in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic, was distinguished by its academic vision, which sought to include not only faculty members and students of academia, but also industrialists, film professionals, media persons, advocates, farmers, software engineers, homemakers, writers and business people. The idea "All Roads Lead to Science Fiction" was creatively implemented to bring diverse perspectives to the conference at a time when the disruptive and disorienting effects of the pandemic were being experienced worldwide.

Some of the important sub-themes under the general rubric of Science Fiction which were explored through plenary sessions, panel discussions, special lectures and paper presentations were: (a) Future Science and Engineering (b) Fictions of Future Technology (c) Fictions on Physical and Chemical Sciences (d) Fictions on Life (Biological) sciences (e) Fictions on Earth/Marine sciences (f) Fictions on Astrophysics (g) Fictions of Humanities (h) Fictions of Literature & Languages (i) Future of Library and Information Science (j) Fictions of

Economics and Commerce (k) Fictions on Law & Education (l) Social Science Fiction (m) Western Science Fiction (n) Indian Science Fiction in Vernacular Languages (o) Future Shocks and Plausible solutions (p) Science Fiction on Natural Pandemics (q) Myth, Utopia and Fantasy in Science Fiction (r) Portrayal of women in Science Fiction (s) Space, Time, Alien, Robot and Artificial Intelligence. These sub-themes also accommodated instances of creative writing in addition to research /academic paper presentations.

Since the conference took off in virtual mode, it was accessible in the form of parallel channels on Youtube, Facebook and other social media platforms. The plenary session on the first day of the conference (December 7th) was planned as a special lecture series which focussed on science fiction from the Czech Republic and Singapore: the distinguished speakers were Julie Novakova, award-winning science fiction author from Prague, Czechoslovakia, who spoke on “Hieroglyphs & Dystopias: Inspiring the Future” and John RoLacco, neural engineer and amateur historian from Singapore, whose lecture was titled “The Future is Here”. This plenary session was followed by paper presentations by participants from wide-ranging fields of study and varied professions, grouped around the theme of Artificial Intelligence.

Day 2 (December 8th) marked the second plenary session, the themes of which were “Centenary of the play: *Rossums’ Universal Robots* by Carl Capek” and “SF from Indian, American and Czech Republican Perspectives”. It contained special lectures on “Sci-fi movement in Maharashtra with special reference to Marathi Vidhyan Parishad, Mumbai” by AP Deshpande, Science and Science fiction Communicator, MVP, Mumbai, India; “Asimov's Robots, Today's Machine Learning, and Tomorrow's World” by Dr. Ashish Mahabal, Astro-Physicist, Pasadena, Caltech, USA; “Folk Tales and Myths of Prague in Science Fiction” by Lucie Lukacovicova, SF writer & Translator, Prague, Czech Republic. The themes of the paper presentations were Ecology and Science Fiction, Portraiture of Women in Science Fiction Works, and varied sub-themes. After the paper presentations on each day, the evening was enlivened by cultural programs conducted by the Department of Performing Arts, Bangalore University.

Day 3 (December 9th) was fully devoted to parallel sessions of paper presentations since the conference had a very large number of registered participants. The sessions were themed as follows: Authors Narrate Stories of Tomorrow, Visual-Science Fiction Movies, and miscellaneous sub-themes within the rubric of science fiction. On Day 4 (December 10th), there was a panel discussion which involved a sustained interaction with Dr. Rajeev Ranjan Upadhyaya, Former Professor, Cancer Research, NORAD-Fellow, Norway, President of the Indian Science Fiction Association, Chief Editor of *Vignyan Katha*, Ayodhya, UP; Mr. Dip Ghosh, Webmaster, *Kalpabishwas*, *Kalpabignyan*, Kolkata, West Bengal, Mr. Prasanna Karandikar, Webmaster, *Sci-fi Katta*, online SF forum, Sindudurga, Maharashtra, Dr. Siddhivinayak Barve, Director, Scientific Research Center, Mumbai, Maharashtra; Mr. Hasan Jawed Khan, Editor, *Science Reporter* and *Scientific Temper*, NISCAIR, CSIR, New Delhi; and Dr. Tarlochan Singh Anand, Professor (Rtd), Chief Editor, *Literary Voice*, Canada.

The session was followed by a Science Fiction Author Speak exclusive interview with Dr. Sami Ahmed Khan, New Delhi; Mr. Rishabh Dubey, Mumbai; Ms. Savitha Srinivas, IPS, Bangalore; Dr. Arvind Mishra, Telitara, Varanasi, UP and Mr. Soham Guha, West Bengal. This was followed by more paper presentations, some of which focused on the implications of science fiction in relation to undergraduate curricula, story-telling sessions and film reviews. The Conference Organisers, participants and special invitees all then came together for the Valedictory session which was conducted on a common channel.

All in all, the conference was a commendable effort by Bangalore University and the Indian Association for Science Fiction for bringing together diverse knowledge-systems and experiences across academia, professional fields, entrepreneurship, the unorganised disenfranchised labour sector, creative writing and arts, in its exploration of the potentialities of Science Fiction at a memorably difficult and challenging phase in contemporary human history.

Sindhu J

Associate Professor

Department of English

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FOUNDATION LECTURE SERIES

Department of English, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi

The English Department Association of Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, organised a series of foundation lectures for their English Honours students in 2020-21. The primary aim was to bring to the students a set of lectures that would widen the scope of their preferred subject of study and broaden their outlook in forming areas of interest.

The series started with Dr B. Mangalam's lecture titled "17th Century England and John Milton" on 7 November, 2020. Dr Mangalam's lecture covered crucial topics of the rise of smaller groups of protest in seventeenth century England (sometimes referred to as the Age of Anarchy). Dr Urmi Ray's paper "Reliving Descartes' Discourse" delivered on 23rd November 2020 brought out the basic tenets of Cartesian theories. On the 1st of December 2020, Dr Arpa Ghosh's paper "The Evolving Detective: From Poe to Christie" looked into the broad concept of the figure of the detective in American and British novels, it was hugely beneficial for students pursuing BA (Prog) as well as English (Hon). Dr Shiladitya Sen's engaging paper titled "Women in Shakespearean Drama: In the audience and on the stage" presented on 27th January 2021 provided a look into the enigmatic nature of the Elizabethan audience, this was aimed to create a wider understanding of the craft of Shakespeare's writing and the response of the sixteenth century London theatre-goer. On the 9th of February 2021 Dr Anasua Bhar in her paper titled "Romanticism: a journey into the 'life of things'" provided a broad overview of the Romantic period and British Romantic thought. Dr Gill's paper "Roman Literature and Culture" presented on 24th February 2021 acquainted the students with an in depth understanding of the historical, cultural and literary significance of the Roman period. The foundation lecture series opened up multiple areas of study and research for undergraduate students, the focus was to keep within the limits of the canon and also too venture into areas that help broaden the oeuvre of English literature.

Writers Festival

The Writers Festival was conducted by Iridescent and the English Department Association of Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi. The festival was held from 5th -16th March 2021. The online mode of communication made it possible to bring together literary artists from across the subcontinent living in different time zones. The renowned novelists and poets from multiple disciplines spoke about their work, their area interest and their craft. The format

was in the form of a conversation in which the interviewer (who are renowned in their own right) played a significant role in bringing out the nature of their writings, their research and the essential quality that brought out the creative nature of the writers.

On the 5th of March 2021 British author Mr Peter Parker was in conversation with Mr Ankur Roy Choudhury. On the 6th of March 2021 Mr Simon Parkes was in conversation with Dr Saumya Gupta, it was a lively conversation on food habits and cuisine of Calcutta. On 9th March 2021 Prof Pallavi Rastogi was in conversation with the prize winning South African novelist Imran Coovadia. Ms Shabani Hassanwalia was in conversation with Ms Nisha Susan the young contemporary writer on 10th March 2021. Dr Payal Nagpal was in an engrossing conversation with the poet Vivek Narayanan. On 13th March Mr Ankur Choudhury in conversation with Mr Diran Adebayo touched upon modern Britain and the lives of African Diasporas. Dr Indu Jain was in conversation with fiction writer Ms Sheba Karim on 15th March 2021. The final session was a conversation conducted by Mr Ankan Dhar with the Assamese novelist Mr Aruni Kashyap on 16th March 2021 touching upon regional identities and personal pain and reflection.

All the sessions were an enriching experience and provided vital perspectives on the art of creative processes. The aim as always has been towards opening up avenues for budding writers among the audience and fathoming the mysterious quality that leads to the production of lasting creative journeys.

Sanjukta Naskar

Associate Professor
Department of English
Jnki Devi Memorial College
University of Delhi

Swami Vivekananda's 158th Birth Anniversary Celebrated

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE RESEARCH CENTRE

Sahitya Akademi, NECOL, Government of India and Children's Literature Research Centre jointly celebrated the 158th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda as a youth day at the Seminar Enclave, Sahitya Akademi on 12 January 2021 at 3pm, Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman presided over the celebration. On the dais, besides the President, sat Prof. Satyadeo Poddar, Vice-Chancellor, MBB University as the Chief Guest, B.K.Singh, Director, National School of Drama and H.N. Jha, Director, Sangeet Natak Akademi, as Special Guest and CK Murasingh, Director, NECOL. The inaugural lamp was ignited by the chief Guest. The inaugural song was presented by Sumita Dhar Basu Thakur. Subhrangsu S. Bhattacharya, Secretary CLR, delivered the address of welcome and also orchestrated the whole programme. In the speeches by the chief guest and special guests, in those of Dr Malay Deb, Assistant Professor, Tripura University and Dr Rabindra Datta, eminent writer and in the presidential address the impact of Swami Vivekananda's famous Chicago speech at the Parliament of World's Religions in Chicago on 19 September 1893 on the West and his influence on the youth of India are highlighted. CK Murasingh, Director, NECOL, gave the vote of thanks.

Bhaskar Roy Barman

128th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago Speech Observed

Readers Club International

**South Bank of Girls Bodhjumb Dighi. Itakhola Road, Banamalipur (Middle)
Agartala 799 001, West Tripura. Tripura, India**

Just a few founder members of Children's Literature Research Centre Agartala gathered on 19 September 2021 at 5pm in view of the Coronavirus-affected situation at the house of Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman, President, at Banamalipur (Middle), Agartala, Tripura to observe the 128th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago speech. This event was limited to the speech by Dr Bhaskar Roy Barman. Subhrangshu Sekhar Bhattacharya, Secretary, just started off the speech. All the founder member wanted the duration of the event shortened. On 19 September 1893 Swami Vivekananda delivered his famous Chicago speech at the World's Parliament of Religions. In this speech his concept of religion as realization expressed itself vividly. The first day of the parliament limited itself to speeches of welcome by the officials and responses by the delegates. Vivekananda sat, meditative and praying all the time, through the speeches and responses, waiting patiently for his turn. In the afternoon session, after four other delegates had presented their prepared papers, Swamiji, urged by the kindly and scholarly French Pasto, G. Bonet Maury, who was seated next to him, arose to address the Congress, and through it, the world. The speech that began with 'Sisters and Brothers of America' electrified the whole congress.

He seeks to explain how he realized spirituality and brings forth a simile between creation and creator. They have no beginning and no end and run parallel to each other. God to him is the extra-active providence and thanks to his power are evolved systems after systems out of the chaos. Creator is omnipotent and so is creation. He stresses the eternality and immortality, perfection and infinity of the human soul and death beings a change of centre from one body to another. The present is determined by our past actions and the future by the present. He exhorts his listeners to shake off the delusion and regard themselves as immortal souls and free spirits, blessed and eternal. This concept of godhood Sri Ramkrishna, his religious guru, taught him is the essence of the Gita. The Gita and other great religious scriptures teach us against the selfishness of purely contemplative faith, estranged from human sorrows and sufferings and practised far from the madding crowd in seclusion. Practisers of contemplative faith in seclusion had no spirit of worship and had often material gains to pursue. These great books are opposed to philosophy of inaction. The Gita enjoins upon us the duty to do work. But unlike other monks, Swami Vivekananda, tutored by Sri Ramkrishna, mustered the confidence to take himself away from the reading of scriptures, practising of meditation. Sri Ramkrishna epitomizes his concept of godhood which he passed on to Vivekananda and other disciples of his in a simile. It is even easy even for an ordinary householder. He speaks of a maid servant who can be devoted to god in the person of her masters. She is busy doing the household chore during the whole day and the waking hours of the night and serving her masters. She knows that the household and its interests are not hers. In her heart she is apart, but has her own interests, her own beloved to think of.

Now let us dwell upon what contributed to the unique success of Vivekananda in representing the religion of India at the World's Parliament of Religions and determined his purpose of visiting America to participate in the Parliament. It should be mentioned in this connexion that Vivekananda, after the death of his Guru Sri Ramkrishna, left the Ramkrishna Math to wander on pilgrimage through India. During his extensive travel he came into direct and intimate contact with all classes of people, high and low, educated and illiterate, Maharajas and pariahs

and this intimate contact unfurled before his very eyes a vista of the pitiable condition which Indian masses were grappling with. He spent many a sleepless night pondering over numerous problems that gripped India. His first-hand experience of the pitiable conditions foisted upon him the realization that religion, rather than being the cause of their downfall, shielded and stabilized Indian culture and accommodated divergent elements in the nation and, at the same time, preserved and protected them from total disintegration in the face of ruthless domination for nearly thousand years by alien rulers. He realized that it was necessary to resuscitate the fundamental truths of Hinduism through an intense study of the Upanishads, the Bhagavat Gita, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and so on. He felt that it was not possible to make them study these religious books if they went on starving, His brilliant insight had him realize that the help of science and technology was urgently needed to relieve the poor of the threat of starvation. Science and technology had been developed over the last three hundred years in the West. The system of science, based, as they are, upon reasoning, experimentation, observation and verification, would be attuned to the rationality and nature of physical world. By adopting technology they would apply scientific truths to ministering to the needs of the individual and the society. Thinking these thoughts, Vivekananda decided to go out to the West and participate in the World's Parliament of Religions to gift America the essentials of Hinduism and take from them the assurance of their help in ameliorating the wretched condition of the poor of India. We are often struck with wonder at how Americans responded so warmly to Vivekananda's message and how it was possible that the seeds that he had sown there started bearing fruit. The philosophy of life practised over there is naturalism, pragmatism, empiricism or positivism that runs counter to the Hindu philosophy. Though the Romanic Catholic Churches allow for contemplative Orders, Christianity does not (as does Hinduism) press home meditation and introspection; but it accepts, as does any other religion, the personal god as ultimate reality and believes in the doctrine of exclusive salvation. The religious feeling of a Good Christian generally expresses itself in moral life and humanitarian activities. People often go to Church to entreat them to give them worldly benefits, such as relief of sickness or success in a mundane undertaking. Thus it is quite natural of a Vedantic to lose out in Christianity on the concept of liberation by the knowledge of Atman or Brahman gained by adopting the practice of such disciplines as renunciation, chastity, truthfulness and unselfish love.

Bhaskar Roy Barman

Founder and Director

Tripura Poetry Society

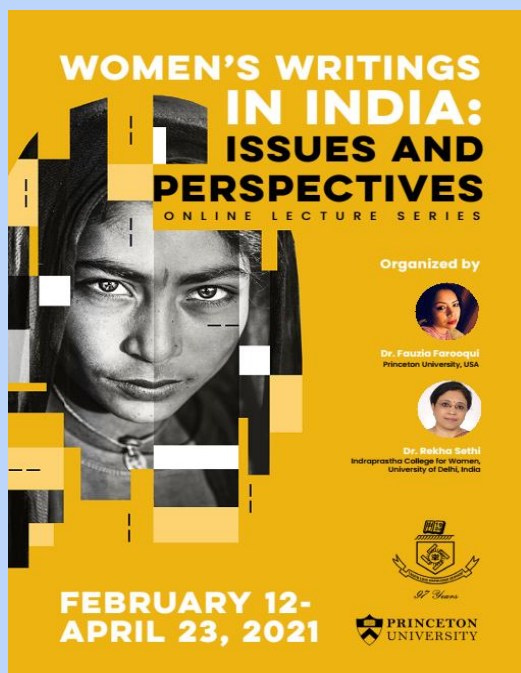
Agartala, West Tripura

Women's Writings in India: Issues and Perspectives- Online Lecture Series

**Organized by South Asian Studies Program, Princeton University in collaboration with
Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi
February 12- April 23, 2021**

South Asian Studies Program, Princeton University in collaboration with Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi organized an online lecture series from 12th February 2021 to 23rd April 2021, on the theme of Women's Writings in India. Dr. Fauzia Farooqui, South Asian

Studies, Princeton University, and Dr. Rekha Sethi, Department of Hindi, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, were the organizers from the two institutions of eminence.



Translation and Translation Studies Centre Indraprastha College for Women University of Delhi in collaboration with South Asian Studies, Princeton University presents Online Lecture Series ON Women's Writings in India: Issues and Perspectives February 12-April 23, 2021 Organizers Dr. Fauzia Farooqui, Princeton University, USA Dr. Rekha Sethi, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi, India			
Lecture	Date / Time	Language Topic	Speaker Discussant Moderator
Lecture 1	Feb. 12, Friday 8:30 IST / 10 am EST	Hindi Representations of Patriarchy and Liberation in Anandita's Poetry	Speakers: Rekha Sethi Vidya Sinha Moderator: Fauzia Farooqui
Lecture 2	Feb. 13, Friday 8:30 IST / 10 am EST	Urdu Jinnah's Chapter: Crusader of Progressive Ideals	Speaker: Samita Paul Kumar Discussant: Fauzia Farooqui Moderator: Rekha Sethi
Lecture 3	Feb. 16, Friday 8:30 IST / 10 am EST	Punjabi Patriarchy and Aesthetics	Speaker: Hina Namdhari Discussant: Vidya Sinha Moderator: Rekha Sethi
Lecture 4	Mar. 5, Friday 8:30 IST / 10 am EST	Bengali Representing the Subaltern: Multi-Voiced Discourse in the Fiction of Mahasweta Devi	Speaker: Rekha Chatterjee Discussant: Nandini Sen Moderator: Fauzia Farooqui
Spring Break			
Lecture 5	Mar. 19, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Kannada Woman Only in Name: Akkamarasa's Poetry as Celebration and Transgression of the Feminine	Speaker: H.S. Shiv Prakash Discussant: Anamika Moderator: Fauzia Farooqui
Lecture 6	Mar. 26, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Telugu Mudgalapati's Radhika Samantam (Appraising Radhika)	Speaker: K. Latha Discussant: Manita Sagar Moderator: Rekha Sethi
Lecture 7	April 2, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Malayalam and English Body, Desire and Politics: Re-reading Kamala Das/Kamala Surayya/Madhavikutty in a Post-feminist World	Speaker: E.V. Ramakrishnan Discussant: Sandhya Rao Moderator: Rekha Sethi
Lecture 8	April 9, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Tamil Cultural Feminism in the Discourse of Ambedkar	Speaker: Kalyan Rajan Discussant: Srinjoyee Dutta Moderator: Rekha Sethi
Lecture 9	April 16, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Marathi and Gujarati Dark Women's Writing from Western India	Speaker: Sachin Ketkar Discussant: Aparna Langewiesche Moderator: Fauzia Farooqui
Lecture 10	April 23, Friday 8:30 IST / 11 am EST	Assamese India's Women: Life, Narrative and Social Change Other Languages Women's Writings from the Northeast: An Overview	Speaker: Malashri Lal Discussant: Manjula Das Moderator: Rekha Sethi

The lecture series aimed to introduce participants, mainly students at the South Asian Studies Program, Princeton University, to the richness and diversity of such writing in Indian languages. The concept note to the lecture series noted that while writings by women from the Indian subcontinent can be traced as far back as 600 BC, Women's Writing as a category of literature and literary scholarship emerged only in the twentieth century. A huge corpus of literature produced by women writers in regional Indian languages has paved the way for feminist discourses and discussions. While these literary texts are rooted in their own linguistic traditions and influenced by the local cultural landscapes, they also explore the prevalent socio-political thought at both local and national levels. The lecture series focused on regional Indian communities, cultures, and subcultures while examining social issues and cultural values from women's perspective. Eminent scholars from India discussed Indian women's writings emerging from various Indian language traditions.

The languages and linguistic traditions covered in this broad based, one of its kind online lecture series were: Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bangla, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and English, Tamil, Marathi and Gujarati, and Assamese and other languages. Writers and scholars such as EV Ramakrishnan, Mamang Dai, H S Shivaprakash, Anamika and Radha Chakravarty were some of the notable speakers. Several IACLALS members participated in the deliberations including Malashri Lal, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Sachin C. Ketkar, Nandini C. Sen, Kalyanee Rajan and Srinjoyee Dutta. The lectures are likely to be made available for public viewing soon. The lectures were delivered in English, with each one focusing on a renowned woman writer from a distinct language tradition, examined through the varied feminist lens. Registered participants also contributed to the follow-up blog discussions.

Compiled by:

Kalyanee Rajan
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IIT Madras launches Indian Network for Memory Studies, 17th June 2021

Indian Institute of Technology Madras has launched the 'Indian Network for Memory Studies' (INMS) on 17th June 2021, the first formal national network in the field of Memory Studies in India and Asia, which has been formed under the aegis of the international Memory Studies Association (MSA), Amsterdam. The INMS will coordinate complex engagements with 'memory' from different institutes including cultural studies centres as well as neuroscience laboratories and industry research on AI and related fields. The Network was inaugurated virtually on Wednesday (16th June 2021) in an event witnessed by around 600 participants from India, Iraq, Finland, France, Germany, Mauritius, Sweden, U.K., and the U.S.

The Indian Network for Memory Studies is founded by Dr. Avishek Parui and Dr. Merin Simi Raj, Assistant Professors (English), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras, who will also be its Chairpersons. Dr. Parui is also a nominated member of the Advisory Board of the International Memory Studies Association. The Indian Network for Memory Studies has emerged from the Centre for Memory Studies, IIT Madras, which has been funded by the Ministry of Education, Government of India. The other funding to the current projects in this research cluster comes from XR Lab, TCS Chennai, and Anglo-Ink, Chennai. Addressing the inaugural event, Prof. Bhaskar Ramamurthi, Director, IIT Madras, said, "I wish this effort a speedy success. This Network has already built a commendable critical mass which reflects its relevance and reach. Success in this case will be to get the activities going, establish lot of collaborations, conferences, workshops and form a community of people working in this field. For India, memory studies can be very important, for a lot of historical developments are captured only in memories and not on documentation." Further, Prof. Bhaskar Ramamurthi said, "The fact that there are so many participants from India too has shown that this network has not come a day too soon. There is enough work going on in India to warrant the creation of such a Network. There is a good base for creating this network in India and it can plug into the huge global network."

The Vision of Indian Network for Memory Studies include:

- Offering an India-centric model of memory studies departing from the established Eurocentric models in theory and practice.
- Producing and promoting an innovative interdisciplinary engagement with the complex cognitive, cultural, and machinic modes of memory.
- Examining the processes of encoding and effacement that simultaneously inform acts of remembrance and re-construction in private as well as shared orders, and how such processes may be recorded as well as represented by a range of fields such as fiction, history, media, urban geography, and technology.
- Producing exhibitions, conferences, workshops, and special journal issues on a range of themes in Memory Studies, in collaboration with partners from academia and industry.
- Academically accentuating as well as promoting the rich research on imperialism,

Partition, and post-colonial identities through the interdisciplinary lenses of memory studies.

- Re-creating Indian and South-Asian pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial events and identities using the model of memory as reconstruction, foregrounding the textuality and the technology informing processes of remembering.

Speaking on 'The Pleasures of Memory Studies,' Prof. Astrid Erll, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, Director, Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform, identified the pleasures of memory studies in its 'internationality', 'interdisciplinarity' and 'ongoingness.' Commenting on how INMS synthesises the tools of literary studies with newer forms of technology, Prof. Erll said, "My definition of Memory Studies would be an interplay of present, past and future in socio-cultural contexts. Memory is a biological, social, material and cultural phenomenon and increasingly a technological phenomenon." Further, congratulating Dr Avishek Parui and Dr Merin Simi Raj on the efforts made towards the creation of Indian Network for Memory Studies, Prof. Astrid Erll noted, "What has happened in the last two decades is that Memory has become more and more institutionalized. In 2016, a group of memory scholars realized that they needed to have a global platform. Hence, for the past five years, we have an International Memory Studies Association to facilitate this global collaboration. MSA India is the latest entrant to this association." Dr. Hanna Teichler, Goethe-Universität Frankfurt, Acting President of Memory Studies Association and Co-Director, Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform, delivered an address on 'Transoceanic Entanglements in Memory Literature: M.G. Vassanji's *The Inbetween Life* of Vikram Lal and Amitav Ghosh's *Sea of Poppies*' highlighting memory genres and transnational narratives during the event.

The Chairpersons Dr Avishek Parui and Dr Merin Simi Raj formally inaugurated the official INMS website, membership form, and the newsletter. Sharing their vision for this network, Dr. Avishek Parui, Chairperson, Indian Network for Memory Studies, and Assistant Professor (English), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras, said, "We are moving away from the Big-event model of memory studies, and instead examining the dailyness of remembering and forgetting through the innovative incorporations of the literary as well as the technological lenses. At the INMS we are particularly interested on researching the Indian landscape of memory studies, and in so doing integrate the immediate, the local, and the international through an interdisciplinary theoretical lens." Further, Dr. Merin Simi Raj, Chairperson, Indian Network for Memory Studies, and Assistant Professor (English), Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras, added, "The internship and the research opportunities that INMS offer will bring about a paradigm shift in humanities research in Indian academia in collaboration with the top international bodies in the field. A number of initiatives including new courses, training workshops, and interdisciplinary programmes are already in the pipeline." Dr. Avishek Parui and Dr. Merin Simi Raj have already established partnerships for the Indian Network for Memory Studies with the Memory Studies Association, Amsterdam, Frankfurt Memory Studies Platform, Germany, Memory Group, University of Warwick, U.K., Cultural Identity and Memory Studies Institute (CIMS), University of St. Andrews, U.K., XR Lab, TCS and Anglo-Ink, Chennai. They have also facilitated a MoU with the University of St. Andrews.

Mr. Rajendra Prasad Narla, Chief Archivist, Tata Central Archives, spoke on the topic 'The Genesis of an Archive.' Prof. Jyotirmaya Tripathy, Head, Department of

Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras, also spoke during the event, foregrounding the need for incorporating Indian frameworks in memory studies. The INMS through the research conducted at the Centre for Memory Studies, IIT Madras, would facilitate departures from Eurocentric approaches in terms of theoretical framework and worldviews. It will also open up research and internship opportunities for Indian students as well as international scholars through an annual membership programme in collaboration with the International Memory Studies Association. Dr Avishek Parui and Dr Merin Simi Raj aim to offer an entirely original perspective on studies in national memory, history, and cultural identities, drawing on theoretical models from humanities research as well as innovative tools of technology.

Report Courtesy: <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/iit-madras-launches-indian-network-for-memory-studies/>

CREATIVE WRITING/TRANSLATION

POEMS BY SUBODH SARKAR

Translated by Jaydeep Sarangi

BRIBE

A suicide note under the ninth volume of *Rabindra Rachanabali*
Written to his son. Then with a blade in his hand
The school master had entered the bathroom.
In the afternoon, the maid saw a streak of blood
From under the door, and she screamed out.

This is the first and last letter written to his son:
'Arani,
I have a conviction that a son is as holy as water.
my relation with you is not smooth
Still, let me write this to you
Since the last two years, whatever little I had saved
Is spent up now, for your mother's treatment.
I was not able to bear the burden of the treatment anymore.
I never ever touched your money in my life; I won't even in my death.
I taught students all my life, never did anything wrong knowingly.
Last month, a parent came to my school, he was desperate to admit his son.
I refused the first day
I refused the second,
But I couldn't on the third. In a big envelope
He left with me thirty thousand rupees.
With that money, your mother's treatment is going on this month.
No hope whether she will ever return home.
If she does, tell her, that I have lost the right to live in this world.
Yours ever, Father.'

When the whole country is cashing on bribes
Then just one suicide note under the *Rabindra Rachanabali*!
In the hospital under the tree, I was having a chill down my spine.
I went forward to my Master, covered with all white cloth
Towards two lone feet, sticking out from under cover
Those two uncovered feet as it were, were the last soil of India.

MOTHERS OF MANIPUR

Stood up my naked mother of Manipur
We got eyes from the eyes of this mother

Got her tongue, got the tunes – sa re ga ma
Stood up my naked mother of Manipur.

Army and Police can do whatever they wish
Curfew on streets, Charminar burns
No one has any word to say, they are not supposed to
Stood up my naked mother of Manipur.

Army jeep moves below the sky
The girl tosses in the army jeep
Crying “sare jaha se”
She is unbuttoned in the army jeep.

Even if the girl returns home
Even if she dies under the sky
The police erased her name
Where does she live? In a village outside Imphal!

It happens, day in and day out
Somewhere a girl is lying abused
Somewhere her sister is not found
Only their scarves hang from the trees.

But this July has crossed all limits.

Mothers of Manipur stood up
Stood up the naked breast-milk- givers
Can't count how many veins are there in your mother's breast
How do you feel when you see your mother being naked?

The moment Assam Rifles shut the gate
Where I was in that mother's womb
From there gushed out hot Ganga

Mothers of Manipur redefined my mother with a new name.
Where mothers walk naked in a procession
Commanders, what you were doing then?

Do you still think your mother as sacred?
She is burning, she is burning...
My strongest mother is burning
Within all mothers of Manipur.

MOURNING AND HONEYMOON

It will sound bad, yet let me say
Man's sorrow and honeymoon
Neither is long lasting.
My wife has left me six months ago

My son still tosses while sleeping
 He doesn't hold my chest anymore, he is twenty one now.
 If you scan his head you will get Kafka and Nietzsche
 Yet I hold him tight in my bosom and
 Remain awake throughout the night
 He wants to be free and says,
 I want to sleep on Red Road.

We have a common syndrome
 We, the father and the son have lost a river
 We are unable to find a home
 The room we knew as kitchen
 Is now a drop of tear? Papers that we thought as rubbish
 Are Life Insurance.
 That the plumber is the younger brother of God
 After we could trace out his contact number, we realised the life
 Is stagnant without him.
 We father and son went to the forest with a golden axe
 We left the axe in a hospital
 By mistake, hospital never returns gold.
 Hospitals fix iron rods in all the nine holes
 And tie a pot around the neck
 That is a loan
 Which we must pay back with a bowed head.

I saw a sign board in a tea stall
 "Don't ask for things as loan."



Subodh Sarkar is a Sahitya Akademi winning renowned Bengali poet, writer and editor of the *Bhashanagar*.



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POEMS BY VINEET MAXWELL DAVID**A Cupful of Storm**

A storm in a tea cup belittles a truth
Some malice brews an intention uncouth

Held in the stealth of manners refined
The ivory porcelain livid in kind

A tempest that swirls in a violent gyre
Clouds of smoke that rise ever higher

Piping red its caramel hue
Reason unreason all subdued

Meant in a meaning of proverbial voice
Tea cups tremble as nonsense buoys

A trophy it becomes as the cup ascends
For the cup and the lips run to befriend

Now quiet the storm annulled its pangs
The rumpus molten now still and dank

A Cynosure Embodied

Flexed in a human figure refined
articulated in a craft so fine

Alabaster radiance motions a craft
hands reasoned a man in marble stark

A bit olden and a little chipped
history made him a rare exhibit

Now stands in the gaze of a thousand visions
marked in a silhouette of angular precision

Paralysed in the stiffness of afteryears
his form became a delicacy of yesteryears

Wondered at by tourists admired by aesthetes
his appearance favoured an anatomy discrete

He became a rare handiwork divine

appearing in stone and human combine

Softly stroked by the implements of refinement
mallets and chisels were his creators' enticement

For he became a man or something more
made rare in the accounts of desire of yore

His form ebullient and sinews majestic
his heart made in stone, his beauty characteristic

So he remains guarded in a museum confined
glorified, magnified, typified through time

They say he was his creator's reflection
more than the marble he was his affection



Vineet Maxwell David is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. His foray into creative writing, especially the creative craft of poetry is a calling that stimulates his interest. Poetry acclaims an empowered thought, so he believes and reasons his poetic endeavour to the illimitable stretches of imagination. His area of study includes contemporary theatre and representations of gender through drama. He was also a participant at the Mellon School of performance research at Harvard University.

POEMS BY BHUMIKA R

Polka Dot Ribbon

She counted the days with her tiny fingers.
It was Friday, finally!
Daddy had promised he would get her a polka dot ribbon today.
She helped her mother in making rotis.
Hot rotis. Round, soft and nice.
Her daddy would be so proud of her when he brought her the polka dot ribbon.

She pleaded her mother to allow her to roll the rotis.
Smiling, her mother helped her bake two tiny rotis.

She remembered it was almost evening.
Comb my hair and plait it, ma, she told her mother.
Daddy will get my polka dot ribbon today.

Feeding her rotis, her mother asked, will you help me pack?
Granny is feeling lonely in the village, we need to go.
We will meet your daddy on the way.
We will give him the rotis you made.

She packed and thought how the polka dot ribbon would look on her plait.
Her notebook, frocks and old toffee wrappers, hidden in her notebook.
She held her mother's hand and walked and thought of her daddy and her new polka dot ribbon.
Because it was Friday! Her daddy would give her polka dot ribbon, wrapped in a packet.
She had been a good girl. She had made roti. Her daddy would be so proud of her.
She smiled.
Holding her mother's hand she walked towards a toll plaza that marked the boundaries of a city that had become the little girl and her family's home.
A crowded bus swerved and screeched.
Red polka dots and a little girl hugged each other on the road.

'Dal moth, glycerin bubbles and India Gate'

One plate *gol gappe*,
divided by three.
one *dal moth*,
divided by three.
one spiced *meetha aloo*,
divided by three.
None remembered who had ordered what.
Two paper plates and a paper cone
passed from one hand to the other.

Farther away, a fire they said was for the martyrs

Burned bright yellow.
A bored guard stood looking around and yawned.

Glycerin bubbles floated weightlessly
in all directions,
someone here and someone there blew glycerin bubbles
through the plastic ring,
which landed just anywhere- humans, lamppost or plain tarred road.

And then a dog chased a glycerin bubble on the grassy floor,
Rolled over and crushed it.

More glycerin bubbles, colourful ones,
floated together again.
The dog chased,
not knowing
which bubble to crush
on the grassy floor.
Then the bubbles hit the dog's eye,
one after the other, hurting
its eye, almost blinding it.
And then more bubbles, big and small
floated lazily, landing here and there.



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SHORT STORY**CASTEISM****MANORANJAN BYAPARI**

Translated by Somdatta Mandal from the original Bangla story “Barnabad”

It was a bright sunlit morning. The weather was neither warm nor cool. On such days, singers can sing songs comfortably, poets compose poems to their hearts' content. Nevertheless, however nice the day might be, it was not the same for everyone. For some people it might be a good day, but for others it can be bad, or even worse. Just as the local saying goes, for some it is the beneficial month of Poush, but for others it is totally destructive.

It was probably eight or eight-thirty in the morning. In the office of a local police station belonging to the railway department, six adolescent teenagers were sitting on the dirty floor, their backs resting against the wall where the plaster had peeled off. This was definitely not a good day for them. Having worked the whole day, they had slept at night on the railway station. Their tired bodies had fallen into deep slumber. Just then they received kicks of heavy boots on their chests and backs -- “*Uth sala log, uth ja* – get up you bastards, get up!” Even before they could properly wake up and rub the sleep off their eyes, they were tied up with thick ropes. After that they received batons on their backs asking them to move along.

The morning was just commencing. The first train of the day was entering the platform. All of them were made to board the vendor compartment and then brought to the police station. None of them knew their crime, nor why they had been tied up. Out of fear they sat huddled together in one place. They understood that a serious danger had come down upon them from which there was no means of getting relief. The saying goes that you get eighteen injuries if a tiger touches you, but thirty-six if the police does so. So since the police had touched them, they had thirty-six kinds of trouble awaiting them.

A wooden table stood in front of where the boys were sitting. On the table lay a thick note book, a ruler and a pen stand. There were also a water bottle and a small canon made of brass. The nozzle of the canon was aimed at the youngsters. A photograph of Goddess Kali hung from a nail high up on the wall. Her red tongue was enticing and it seemed as if she had just drunk someone's blood. A stale marigold garland hung from the photograph. Two large cupboards along with an iron chest stood on one side of the room. In another corner there was a thick rope and a few cane batons. Handcuffs hung on the wall.

The person in charge of the police station was of very dark complexion. He was around thirty-five to forty years of age. On his head was salt and pepper hair and a thick moustache adorned his face. After a fresh morning bath and worshipping his ritualistic gods, he had just arrived at the office. Last night a few adolescent teenagers had been arrested after a police raid at the railway station. Sometimes they had to raid the station and clear the platforms by picking up people whether they had committed any crime or not. For this reason, those who felt that the railway station was a comfortable place to sleep at night lived in constant fear in their minds. This was a way to exercise a sort of control over unwarranted crowd. At the same time there was also official proof in the government records regarding the efficiency of the police working at the outpost there. It was a way to ascertain that they just didn't draw their salary every month and remain idle. They also did some work.

The boys who had been brought here didn't have regular families. Some of them just had their mothers but no fathers; and some had fathers but no mothers. Some had neither father nor mother. Again some had parents but they were not worth mentioning. Some of them had run away from home and taken shelter on the railway station; some had been left there by their relatives. Some of them were rag-pickers; some shelled fish in the market, washed glasses in the local toddy shop, and some carried luggage. A few of them also indulged in petty theft.

If they could collect a little extra money, they would go to the cheap hotel of Chechan Shaw near the railway station and have rice, dal and vegetable curry. When they had less money, they sat on a brick and had *sattu* and chutney from Chechen's brother Pujan's shop on the pavement. If they had no money, they just drank a lot of water and slept at night by spreading their *gamcha* on one side of the railway station.

All of them were aged thirteen to sixteen. They were dark like ghosts and their clothes had never seen the face of a soap or soda from the time they started wearing them.

As soon as the officer arrived, a cup of black tea was served to him. Having drunk it, the officer sat down with pen and paper. The names of the *chokras*, the boys, had to be entered in the register. They would then be sent to court. From there they would be taken directly to the juvenile prison at Mullick Fatak. It was suspected that they were involved in 3RPF case – that is, they were suspected of gathering there to steal bits of iron pieces belonging to the railways that were lying here and there. Otherwise there was no logical reason for them to be present at the railway station in the middle of the night. No charge-sheet would be given; so in such cases usually they would be detained in the prison for ninety days and then automatically released.

--“What is your name? Tell me your name.” The officer asked the boy sitting at the right hand corner. The boy who was asked the question replied in a quivering voice, “Gokul Das.”

Gokul Das. This was the first time he was going to visit a prison and so he was a little scared. His face darkened; his throat parched in fear. Next time he would be arrested he would no longer feel scared. Since he lived at the station, this kind of confinement in prison would occur now and then. This was the fate of unwanted residents at the station. This time he would go and get to know that the prison was not such a fearful place as it appeared to be from outside. It was quite a nice place. He would go and get confined with a smile on his face.

For these people who did not get to eat anything outside, at least they would get to eat something in the prison. They wouldn't have to starve. In the morning they were given boiled chick pea or gram and rice, dal and vegetables for lunch. But those were served in limited quantities measured in big serving spoons. On some days a small piece of fish as small as a soya bean nugget and on other days a spoonful of curry with a few pieces of ground meat was also available. Outside they had to get wet during the monsoon but there was no such fear inside the prison. There were concrete walls on all sides with a concrete roof above their heads. They had to shiver in the cold outside, but two thick coarse woollen blankets were available in the prison. Though they were bit by lice called *chillar* which lived in those blankets, at least the cold could not overpower their bodies. When they were outside they could never get any medical treatment if they were sick but they got medicines in the prison even for little ailments. A red lotion was available for cuts, wounds and boils, and for fever, dysentery, pneumonia, malaria, typhoid and tuberculosis white round tablets were given. Even if they died they could die with the consolation that they had been treated by an MBBS doctor. At least they were not dying without any treatment at all like the people living in the pavements outside.

In other words, for such poor people living in the pavements, the prison was a comfortable place to visit. If one came here sometimes, he would get both rest and comfort. He would have plenty of leisure to think and make future plans. It is said that many big criminals sit and plan things while in prison and then implement them when they get out. After knowing all these things Gokul would sometimes go and work in the prison just as people casually went to Digha or Puri for an outing.

There were many illegal drinking joints around the railway station. Produced in a place called Charan, the great drink would reach these joints to be served to ordinary people at very cheap rates. It would help one forget all the sorrows and sufferings of life and seep him in pleasure and happiness.

There was a secret understanding between these illegal joints and the excise department. They would collect the monthly *hafta* and as long as they received that they would never disturb or harass the owners in their illegal business. But there were some terms and conditions to be followed by the people who work in the excise department. Once in a while they had to conduct raids and arrest some people. They had to slap some kind of case against them. So sometimes they came to 'raid' these illegal toddy joints with a lot of fanfare and slap cases against some people. Like the railway police, the excise department also had a quota to fulfil, and so every month they had to manufacture a few cases.

Usually messages were sent beforehand that 'raids' would be conducted. They would be coming on a particular date at a particular time and so had to be prepared. Then one person from each of these illegal joints was ready to be arrested so that he could be presented before the judge in the court and be punished and fined according to the seriousness of the crime. If he was unable to pay the amount, he would be sent to prison.

Gokul who was serving his term in the prison today would in future be arrested several times by the excise department posing as the husband of Sudashi Bala who had deserted her. Part of the contract was that once Gokul came out after serving term in prison, the money calculated as fine would not be paid in the court but paid directly to him. From this he could easily travel as well as earn his living.

The officer asked Gokul, "What is your father's name?"

--"My father died after he was hit by a train."

The officer made faces and snarled at him, "Has his name also died? Tell me his name quickly."

--"Late Dukkhiram Das."

--"Go and sit in that corner." After ordering Gokul he asked another boy, "What is your name?"

-- "Gopal Sardar."

--"Father's name?"

--"Sir, I don't know my father's name. I have never seen him. My mother never told me his name."

The officer thought for a minute. The son cannot be blamed if he didn't know his father's name. What will the poor thing do if his mother never told him his name? This happens with many people. The mother who spent her nights at the station didn't even know who had implanted the child in her womb. Four or five people had raped her one after the other. Any

one among them could be the father of her child. So for him it was difficult to understand and state correctly who his actual father was.

Apart from drunkards, *goondas*, loafers and vagabonds on the station, it wasn't strange for policemen who were on night duty to do such jobs. Whatever it might be, this boy had to be assigned a father's name. A tree without fruit and a boy without a father didn't seem nice.

He told the boy, "Remember your father's name is the Government of India. You will be in trouble if you forget it. You will go to prison but will not be able to come out if you can't mention your father's name."

The boy was scared and said, "Sir, my name is Sardar."

"Sardar? But I have written 'Sarkar' in the papers. Nothing will happen. From today you are no longer a 'Sardar' but a 'Sarkar.' Keep that in mind. Once you are out of the prison you can become 'Sardar' once again."

The officer then asked another boy, "What is your name?"

--"Kalu."

--"Kalu what?"

--"Everyone calls me Kalu or Kallu. I don't know anything else."

--"Father's name?"

--"I don't know."

What a problem! One had to be assigned a father's name. This one needed a father's name as well as a surname. Looking at the policeman next to him the officer smiled and said, "Ram, I am giving you a son. I am writing his father's name as Ramchandra Kayal."

--"No, no." The policeman objected. Why will you give my name, sir?"

--"What will happen if I write your name? Who will know? Then with a wry smile on his lips he added, "You can never tell. He can really be your son."

--"No, no." Nothing more came out of the policeman's mouth.

--"What no, no!" The officer smiled and added, "Didn't you do anything to anyone at the station? Look at goddess Kali's photograph and answer, "Didn't you do it to anyone?"

The policeman's face turned dark and he kept on looking the other way. He did not like such dirty jokes early in the morning.

The officer looked at Kalu and said, "Go to that side."

Then he called another boy and said, "Tell me your name."

--"Haru Paramanik. Father's name is Khagen."

--"Yours?"

The boy whom the officer asked the question replied, "Babu Acharya."

--"What?" The officer was startled. "What name did you say?"

--"Babu Acharya."

The boy repeated his name once again. After that he added his father's name. "My father's name is Ashim Acharya."

--"Brahmin! You are a Brahmin? What does your father do?"

--"He helps to perform the puja rituals at the Radhamadhav temple in the station."

The officer looked at the constable Ramchandra standing near him and said, "Bring me a baton."

--"What will you do with a baton, sir?"

--"First bring one and then I will show you."

As soon as the constable brought a cane baton and handed it over to him, the officer started beating. No, no, not Babu Acharya but the other five boys. With raw curse on his lips, he said, “You bastards, you have been born as thieves and will die as thieves. And you are turning this chaste Brahmin boy also into a thief? You low caste people!”

After getting beaten the boys started yelling in unison, “Sir, sir, we have not turned him into a thief. We all work on our own. I shell fish, Kalu washes glasses in the wine shop, and none of us are into stealing. He does all wrong things because he cannot do any other job. Otherwise what will he eat? His father has married again. That mother does not give him food to eat. He has been beaten and thrown out of the house. Now he has come to live in the station.”

--Don't talk rubbish. Don't talk rubbish at all. I will beat you black and blue if you talk rubbish.” The officer started grumbling. “He has turned into a thief just because he has mixed with you. Otherwise a Brahmin's son can never do such a heinous crime as theft.”

The funny thing was the man who was beating the boys had his name shining on the nameplate. Kamal Mondal. He was not a Brahmin but belonged to a lower caste. But in his mind was ingrained the age-old faith – Brahmins and Kayasthyas meant people of noble thought, high lifestyle, people who worked in high-level jobs. They could never do anything wrong. Even if they did, it was because of bad company. He did not have any fault. All the wrong deeds were due to these low-caste companions.

After that he sent all the boys away. All of them would go under the 3RPF case to the juvenile prison at Mullick Fatak. And Babu Acharya alone would go to the home in Liluah. He would stay there at government expense, eat and get educated to become a good ‘human being.’ The police officer was a religious person who worshipped every day. His mind was filled with happiness in being able to do a good deed early in the morning.



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EXCERPT FROM NOVEL**LAVANYADEVI
KUSUM KHEMANI****Excerpt from the English translation of the Hindi novel, *Labanyadevi* (Orient Blackswan forthcoming) by Banibrata Mahanta**

Having bid goodbye to the two girls when Labanyadevi returned to the ashram early next morning, Guru-ji said, “Labanya beti! Would you like to accompany me to Badrinath for a few days? I hear the weather is very pleasant these days. When we get there we will review the activities of the ashram, then we will proceed to Gangotri.” Guru-ji was aware that Labanyadevi did not like the crowds and hustle-bustle of Badrinath. She would always say, “Guru-ji! Diesel and transistors have converted this pilgrimage spot into a junkyard. This place has lost its spirit; it is like another disorganized little town infected with the cancer of urbanization and modernity. The ill-effects of the disease are visible all over the place.”

Labanyadevi never disregarded Guru-ji’s wishes. She immediately called out to Aalo, “Aalo! Pack my things. I’m going to Badrinath.”

What was it that prompted the Shankaracharya to choose Badrinath over Kedarnath, Gangotri or any other nearby holy spot as one of the Char Dham – the four most revered Hindu pilgrimage sites? As on her previous visits, this was the thought that first crossed Labanyadevi’s mind when she saw the summit and the flag fluttering atop the Badrinath temple. Impressed as she was by the natural beauty of these places, she hadn’t been able to comprehend the logic of the Shankaracharya’s choice. But today she arrived at an answer. He must have chosen Badrinath because it was easily accessible to the pilgrims. Besides, it had a relatively large tableland. As Labanyadevi made her way to the ashram, memories of previous visits flickered through her mind. The first incident she was reminded of was pure, unadulterated humour!

When she was around eleven or twelve, Labanyadevi, along with her mother Jyotirmoyi Devi, mama Aniruddha and mami Suryabala Devi had come to Badrinath to offer prayers for her grandmother, the late Prabhabati Devi. Dhananjay-babu was benumbed by the loss of his wife. Around this time, one of his knowledgeable pandit friends told him that performing the ritual of *pind-daan* on the banks of the Alakananda in Badrinath would free the departed soul from the cycle of birth and death and bring about its salvation. It would also ensure moksha for Prabhabati Devi. He added that carrying out the ritual here would be better than conducting it at Gaya. That was why this son, the poor Anglicized gentleman Aniruddha Roychoudhury, also had to accompany them. The reason for their journey apart, little Labanya had thoroughly enjoyed the trip and the banter between her mama and mami.

One day, probably on someone’s prompting, Suryabala mami said to her husband, “Can you please spare a moment to listen to me?”

From the tone of her request, mama gauged that there was a catch somewhere. Immediately wary, he responded playfully in a nasal tone, “Tell me, what is it?”

“Listen, stop all this fun and jokes and tell me what you treasure most.”

Mama asked her the reason for this unexpected query. “Listen,” she said, “one can avail the merits of a pilgrimage only by renouncing forever, the thing dearest to oneself. I’m thinking of

giving up mangoes. Tell me what will you give up? Oh! You're still thinking about it! Why haven't you been able to make up your mind yet?"

"Oh! You're still thinking about it! Why haven't you been able to make up your mind yet? I won't take a moment to give up what is dearest to me. I'm a man who can make great sacrifices and can practice great restraint. Therefore, following the dictum 'everything is at your feet, Govinda' – *twadiyam vastu Govindah tubhyamewa samarpaye* – I hereby sacrifice my favourite Suryabala to Him." Saying so, Mama burst out laughing.

Mami made a grumpy face and raised one hand as if to strike him; in her other she held out a bottle of single malt scotch whisky. "See! This is the favourite object you ought to dedicate to God," she implored.

But she was up against Aniruddha mama! Poor Mami was no match for his intelligence or wit. He replied in a grave voice, "You are absolutely correct, Surya! I am also inclined to honour your wish."

As soon as she heard mama's words, mami's face lit up with the joy of fulfilment of a long-awaited wish. But mama, like Khwaja Nasiruddin, finished his sentence thus: "But Suryabala Devi! I'm always worried about all of you. I can offer this bottle to the Supreme Almighty and believe me, I will not experience an iota of sorrow. But what will happen to you after that?" Saying this uncle furrowed his brow as if deep in worry. Mami excitedly said, "What about me? Arey I will be very happy and offer lots of prasad to the Lord."

"That's alright; but listen carefully. See, I'm merely a clay puppet in the hands of the Lord! When I get drunk, I lie quietly in a corner. But if the Lord and Master of all three universes gulps down the bottle and starts nodding off in a state of intoxication, what will happen to all of you? Every morning, you hold him captive with your doe-like eyes. What will you do? And imagine the bigger picture – what will happen to this entire earth? Won't His inebriation lead to *tandav* in the universe and bring about its end?"

It took some time for Aniruddha's sarcastic humour to sink in and when it did, she slapped her forehead exasperatedly and said, "Oh! You're intolerable! It's impossible to argue with you."

Mama affectionately took her hand in his, trying to persuade her to calm down, but she jerked her hand out of his and stomped away. No sooner had she left than young Labanya and her mama were both in splits.

Trivial, memorable episodes like these not only repair cracked and broken-down walls of human existence, they also paint them in new colours and open casements for light to stream in; it is through incidents like these that people garner strength to move on in life. That is what family means – the sense of being indirectly yet caringly sheltered by a protective shield one feels safe behind.

Labanyadevi was suddenly reminded of the time when, as a six or seven-year-old, she had accompanied her maternal grandfather Dhananjay-babu, Soumitro mama and her mother Jyotirmoyi Devi to the *shraddh* ceremony of Champa nani's husband Mangatrai-ji. Champa Devi's children, Purushottam and Savitri, had taken great care to nurture their mother's relationship with Prabhabati Devi's family. Champa Devi's granddaughter Pushpa and Prabhabati Devi's granddaughter Labanya played for hours together at Purushottam's place, swinging on swings that hung from branches of the tall trees in the garden and running around the big lawn in front of the house. Labanya and Pushpa, both centres around which the rest of their families revolved, got along well with each other.

Purushottam mama was against petty rituals, but both Indira mami and Savitri mashi were very conscious of their social standing. Since mama held his father in very high regard, he arranged for brahmins with excellent command over the Vedas for the cremation. He was, however, not very favourably disposed to the family priest, Bhagwati Maharaj. Not only was the priest illiterate and uncouth, he also consumed cannabis and opium with abandon. In every way, he was a blot on the image of the Brahmin. Mama was of the opinion that donating money to the undeserving was sinful; he felt that the entire sum of money that was ritually mandated to the family priest ought to be donated for some good cause, instead of being wasted on him. But Savitri Devi and Indira mami were adamant.

The rituals began. Pandit-ji was made to sit on a velvet mattress placed on a silver bed decked with velvet quilts and pillows. On one side were silver dishes, gold jewelry sets, expensive clothing and numerous other gifts piled up like all those expensive accoutrements placed inside the pyramids of the pharaohs of Egypt. As was the custom, Indira mami made a semicircular motion with the loose end of her sari to symbolically bestow all this on Pandit-ji and formally donated everything to him.

Labanyadevi recollected every detail of how as children she and Pushpa, their bodies half-hanging out of the first-floor window of the Merlin Park bungalow, could clearly see and hear whatever was going on in the courtyard below. Just then they heard Savitri Devi's loud voice crackling across the courtyard, "Purushottam! Don't talk rubbish! Why are you after this poor man's life?"

"That's great, Sawaa!" he retorted. "This good-for-nothing fellow is intent on swallowing all the wealth. Then why not the opium as well? Who is supposed to have that? He must have the opium too, here and now!" said Purushottam. "Gathro," he called out to Indira using her nickname, "go and get a glass of water for Pandit-ji."

There was deathly silence in the courtyard. Mami stood there, dazed, unable to move, looking, in turns, at Savitri Devi and the small gold container in which a ball of opium was symbolically kept. Since Mangatrai-ji consumed a pinch of opium every day, a quantity approximately equivalent to his annual consumption was kept in the container.

Purushottam mama knew well enough that if this stupid Brahmin were to gulp down the entire quantity of opium, he would surely die right there; but he wanted to demonstrate his annoyance about the donation to Bhagwati Maharaj and get even with his family members for wasting money on him. He refused to budge from the position he had taken.

However, at the insistence of Dhananjay-babu, Soumitro Ranjan, Jyotirmoyi Devi and the elders present on the occasion, he relented. As he tossed the container on to a plate and turned to go indoors, Savitri Devi caught hold of the *angavastra* on his shoulder and pulled him back, saying, "Arey wait, brother! Where are you going? Get Pandit-ji to lie on the *sukh shaiyya* – the bed of comforts – and swing the bed gently for him. It is only then that Bau-ji will be able to get all these things."

"Sawaa! Have you just gone crazy? This addict! This good-for-nothing trickster! Will he help my saintly father cross the river Vaitarni?"

But on seeing Savitri Devi's entreating eyes and Indira Devi's folded hands, he relented yet again. He called the children. "Devaki! Vijay! Soumitro! Come here and help me lift this bed," he said. The three young men immediately hauled the bed up as far as they could raise their hands, the priest atop it.

The scrawny, haggard brahmin priest, scared already of that height to which the bed had been lifted, was terrified as it lurched to the left and then to the right and swayed dangerously as it was swung energetically by four strong, young men. Labanyadevi clearly remembered how absolutely delighted Pushpa and she were at the sight of the swaying bed, clapping and egging the young men on. “Wah Mama-ji! Well done! Raise it higher! Yes! Still higher! Bring it to the level of the window!” they shouted. Ayah didi, who was standing behind them, smacked them gently on the head as she said, “Ore! *Chup koro re!* Silence! Mama-ji has gone crazy. Look at the faces of Mami and Ma downstairs! They have both turned pale. Durga, Durga ... *rokkhha koro!* Goddess Durga save us!”

Meanwhile the poor priest was shaking uncontrollably, as if afflicted with malaria. He was sweating profusely; he couldn't utter a word. He tried balancing himself with both his hands, using them to prop himself up, but how could he? And even if he did manage to get up where could he go? He was dumbstruck; his petrified eyes pleaded with Savitri Devi, begging for his life. God-fearing Savitri Devi, couldn't bear this sight either.

In the end, the curtains came down on the scene when Savitri mashi, unable to tolerate the scene any longer, came forward and delivered a stinging slap on her son Vijay's cheek and said, “Lower the bed immediately. Your mama is out of his senses. If this son of a brahmin were to die tomorrow, what will happen to Bau-ji's soul?” The impact of the slap was felt by the other three as well, though they hadn't been hit. On being rebuked in this manner by his elder sister, Purushottam mama let go of the bed mid-air and walked off; but the other three, out of their fear of Savitri Devi, somehow managed to balance the tottering bed and bring it down to the ground safely with the priest on it.

Labanyadevi reminisced the incident in all its vividness, props and all. She also recalled that on their way back from Mangatrai-ji's *shraddh*, Dhananjay-babu had specially instructed Jyotirmoyi Devi and Soumitra Ranjan to ensure that his death rituals should be conducted as simply as possible. He had specifically instructed that rituals like *ashouch*, which was the norm in most households, should not be observed, nor should any pandal be set up to feed relatives. All rituals that appeared superfluous were to be done away with and only such as were convenient in the current times be followed. Whatever the family wished to spend was best donated to deserving persons. No donation was to be made to undeserving people, and they were not to be allowed to come anywhere close to the pyre, even if they were family priests for seven generations.

That is why her grandfather sent them to Badrinath for the *pind-daan*. He had great faith in the wisdom of the priests of Badrinath because over here, they conducted rituals without pomp and show, just the way he liked it.



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SHORT STORY

Internal Matters

By Shayeari Dutta

I think of the hesitancy of storytellers, forever moved by their first impulse to deliberate on the weather, buying precious time before getting to the heart of the matter, the affairs and events involving people, their homes, societies, workplaces, sites of worship, burial grounds, cremation grounds- the tenuous limits of human affairs and events worth recalling. Sample this perhaps-

The heat pressed on, bouncing off the plexiglass of cars parked by the college gates, car bonnet turned furnace, sending off fumes that made the road dance all the way to the horizon. There was no shade, the trees had been pulled out by their roots during successive beautification drives; now concrete upon concrete framed a city burning and melting away with each passing summer. Auto-rickshaws piled up at the gates, in precious crevices between cars, unloading freight, counting bills, cursing at the cat that had just crossed its exit out of the great big pile-up at the gates. The red brick wall continuing for miles, plastered with advertisements printed on cheap paper- pink, blue and white- promising the “best of the best” in coaching, PG accommodations, beauty salons and spas. And the heat pressed on, knocking out each breathing thing with recurrent waves of hot air...

What follows then? Often the storyteller hesitates for lack of purpose. While the heat persists, yes, as an intolerable fact of the balding metropolis shorn of shade and water, far less elemental incidents elude the chronicler. Imagine then the great press of bodies at the college gates on a Tuesday morning in the high tide of Delhi summer, the guards at the gate dripping sweat down the edge of their temples and onto the laminated identity cards of students rushing for attendance. Inside the premises of the walled college the buzz of invertors sends a surge of dismay; the massive power outage in this part of the city has persisted through the previous night, when at 12:50 am sharp, a quarter of a city suddenly disappeared into a greater mass of darkness dotted intermittently by vehicular lights tripping along the distant highway. Now the corridors threw shadows against the whitewashed walls and the classrooms filled up fast with the smell of bodies, sweat-drenched cotton, deodorant, footwear and phenyl. Local eddies of warm air circulated around tables where the students had turned to their photocopied textbooks or sheaves of writing paper for respite- the swish! swish! of the makeshift fans signaled a day that promised to stretch into eternity. Soon news arrived that the canteen has shut down because of a water seepage incident after the ancient refrigerator thawed its contents overnight.

A day stretching into eternity might not have much else to offer by way of a story flush with horror and adventure, other than perspiring bodies and stagnant air. Of course everyone was angry and frustrated. That's one way of looking at it. Yet imagine a scene of near revolt at the Principal's door, thronged this time by female teachers. They carried a sheet of paper, possibly a petition of some kind, and demanded an audience now. About twenty odd women stood shaking with passionate anger, nodding at each other for confirmation of their collective rage against some irreparable wrong- “Enough is enough really! Something needs to be done now. He must agree to this!” Finally, standing before the Principal's sprawling desk, one of the women screamed, “Sir kya badboo! The stench!”

The petition mimicked the passion that now spilled out on the principal's desk; written in black ink, each word left its festering mark on the other side of the sheet. Signature upon signature, quite like the great pile-up of auto rickshaws, private cars and motorbikes at the college gates, the signatories huddled before the institutional head to register a desperate double presencing- of the hand that had signed, and the body which has been defiled.

The theme was cleanliness. For so many days now, the "Teaching Staff's Toilet" for women has become "uninhabitable"; as the petition read- "Every afternoon, we teachers find that the toilet is so dirty and unclean that it seems nobody has cleaned it at all." Haltingly, the letter grappled for appropriate words, usable euphemisms, to speak of the scatological horror they have witnessed, again and again. How must one, in all formality, mention, even in passing, the traces of excreta on the white marble floor? Or, the drops of urine around the toilet bowl? What words might correspond to the bodily revulsions? And then, imagine carrying shit and piss under the heels of your shoes into the staffroom, the classrooms, the carpeted interiors of private cars?

"Is this really a Central University college?"

"Will we not think of basic hygiene and sanitization?"

"Is this how you intend to treat your professors?"

Burdened by the rhetorical volley, the principal offered- "Madam you all are welcome to use my personal to..." His voice trailed off as he became distracted by his own murky half-reflection on the glass tabletop, the forehead with its retreating hairline stretched too far, too dangerously towards a familiar pose of supplication, and then, by the absurdity of his offer.

Something must be said of this Principal of course. Note, for instance, the burden of his starched collar hemming the neck, sodden with sweat, a red rashy glare spreading gradually from neck outwards towards the protruding ears; signs on a man who is equally discomfited by the abrupt demands on his authority as well as the scene of confrontation presented by his female colleagues and the petition bearing his name as the recipient of their all-too-personal woes- the demand on his centrality in this drama of checks and balances. It made him slightly suspicious. He had only been around for a mere seven months; a political appointee by accident, he had been handpicked and uprooted- rather violently- from his suburban life as a college teacher in the department of physics, as a manageable alternative in a two-pronged tussle over administrative control in this particular city college. A puppet, if you will. Yet he had harboured ambitions of his own, even visiting the local MLA for speedy transference away from the machinations and harassment by veterans at his department who would often enough thrust their cultural capital under his nose- "Smell that! You couldn't dream of possessing this, ever!"

The red rash on his neck was like a shard of memory, erupting episodically at moments such as this, piercing through the fragile film of authority, consciousness of dignity, the windfall of his designation, and exposing the absurdity of that room he inhabited, that upholstered chair he occupied, the shining nameplates on his door, on his table, his name on the many letterheads and official missives. "I am a puppet, why do you ask for my intervention? I cannot move things or alter events"- the rash might've hissed if rashes could manifest something deeper than their surface reality. No doubt he had imagined the door to be his shield, the room his refuge. After all his appointment was made on the assurance that he would be required to do nothing more than oversee 'the smooth running of the college', leave the rest to the governing body, remain 'clean' above all else. Yet he might have desired something other the stricture to remain clean.

“Madame, do not worry, I shall speak immediately to the sanitation workers, the cleaning ladies...”

“Haanh! Cleaning ladies! Sir that’s the main problem. We have stated in that letter, please see...Alka di and Pinky di, the names are also mentioned, see!”

“Sir we have our suspicions but are too embarrassed...”

So the story goes, rather mundane and petty, yet this story keeps pushing forth, asking to be told- A grand urban tale, this followed by another, equally bland and insignificant, also because they are as commonplace as perspiring bodies pasted together in alcoves of our public education system unsupported by broken furniture, blinking tube lights and perennial water crisis.

So this story goes- Of staff toilets qualified in bold by the words “FEMALE TEACHERS”, of a set of keys meant to lock up and preserve these thoroughly private sites of defecation and ablution, of *safai karmacharies* or cleaning ladies- specifically, Alka di and Pinky di- who have provisional access to the keys for the purpose of cleaning, sanitizing, making the toilets habitable each morning, out of sight, before college hours begin, and then these keys, returning to their designated spot in the top drawer of the staffroom pantry for the exclusive use by teachers, till break-time, when the cleaning ladies are expected to get to work in the toilets again, in pin-drop silence, while the teachers eat. A deviously simple process meant to enhance work efficiency, eliminate the awkwardness of battling the stench of urine while discoursing with colleagues on the merits of open-book tests, a process which also relies on a certain approved mendacity whereby each morning the scene must be staged- and the toilets cleaned, ventilated, dried off- as though no hands were applied, no waking up at dawn for Alka di and Pinky di, no cooking of *roti-sabzi* for the family and for themselves, no waiting in queue for the buses which would take them till their Sonapat or Faridabad borders and then wait some more for the Delhi route buses, and then the electric rickshaw rides or the long walk to college, no scrubbing, bending, disposing of the day’s abundant waste, no calluses on the palm, and also, no laughter against the backdrop of the latest Haryanvi song playing on their phone devices propped up against the sink, no exchange of woes, worries, anger at the authorities who have been delaying their salary for the past three months, no frustration with the contract which bound them in a relationship of further dispossession.

“Sir! We firmly believe, certainly, that those two also use the teachers’ toilets!”

“Yes! We are so busy whole day running from class to class, no time to notice these petty things...”

“Proof Sir? Why Sarita ji will tell you. Tell him what we have all been suffering!”

“Hey bhagwan Sir, kya bataoon! So embarrassing, tchi tchi! I went to the toilet first thing in the morning, after coming to college, and it was anyway ok ok clean, not up to our standards certainly, but later in the day after my third period class I went again, and tchi! I cannot describe the dirt, the stench, specks and stains all around the commode, tchi!”

“And chappal marks on the toilet seat, imagine!”

“Sir only someone who does not know how to use a Western toilet will make such a mess!”

“Only someone with no civic sense.”

“Only someone who is not used to modern toilets, Sir, aap samajh rahein hain na?”

“And of late, for some time now, the toilets are unclean even in the morning time, as if they haven’t bothered to clean them properly.”

“Aur ek baat, Pinky di often leaves her dupatta hanging on the hook of the main door. Waise koi problem nahin hain, but this is a proper formal place...also matter of hygiene.”

“Haan Sir, I asked her once, pointedly, ‘Pinky! Yeh tera dupatta hain?’, and imagine Sir, she is smiling and telling me that it gets too hot while cleaning so she hangs it up there!”

“Yes! Yes! Exactly what I was going to say as well! They answer back, smiling cunningly, jaise ki hum kuch nahin samajhte!”

“They are always there, sitting around that toilet area outside in the corridor, listening to their music, talking loudly, sitting in...kya boloon...unladylike, distracting ways, you know. After all this is a college. Has to be some discipline.”

“Sir main problem is with the keys. They have too easy access, we can’t confront them directly, you are the authority. Something must be done!”

“Sir they do have their separate non-teaching staff toilets neeche, why can’t they use those?”

“Aadat, habit...they are lazy enough anyway; imagine them walking all the way down to use their own toilets!”

By now the Principal’s room had turned into a hot box of spiraling temper; the heat seemed to rise up from the furniture and the floor and lie flat against the false ceiling above, threatening to crash down any moment on the Principal’s steaming scalp. In his mind he was grasping desperately for a manual, any guide book on matters of correct procedure in handling a situation such as this, anything that would be sanctioned, correct, and smooth. “Good optics, haanh!”- the opponents’ sneers following his ‘safe choice’ appointment as the college Principal had come to him via the malicious grapevine of well wishers and instigators. Yet throughout his brief career he has invested every ounce of his energy towards remaining invisible, tiptoeing around his own office, being mindful of the sharp screech of wood against marble every time he pulled back his upholstered throne or bring down the heavy glass paperweight too hard on a sheaf of papers. The sound of efficiency- of a job well done- was another matter. He has studied the conduct of his peers at meetings with the VC of the university, how certain principals always carried about them the sound of excellence, not merely the optics, but also the briskness of their gait, the certainty of their social roles manifest in the way they interacted with others in baritones and a rich, velvety English, drawing in others into a charmed circle, warming up the room with easy laughs and ready quips, yet destabilizing it with their excellent poise which would take generations to cultivate perhaps.

“Ok madam, don’t worry. I will speak to the staff, tell them to be a little careful...”

“What good will come of that?”, one of the women interjected suddenly; her almost accusatory tone laced with a very thin film of mockery caught him off-guard.

Now a second document presented itself besides the former- the petition of course now rendered a mere formality, calling upon the principal’s passive observant eyes, asking nothing else of him, bestowing on themselves far greater power than the initial tenor of their performance implied. This second document wasted no time on investigation, interrogation, formal dialogue/ rebuke. It went straight to a strategic reclaiming of lost ground. On this sheet of paper an elaborate routine appeared, days and dates mimicking class timetables, equally somber and business-like, so many boxes carrying initials and names of departments. It was such a busy piece of document, so liberally colour coded that the Principal had to blink twice to adjust his eyes on this frightening programme.

“We just came here to inform you that no communication will help. I mean Sir, how do *you* even expect to broach the subject when we, who have been working in this college for so long, haven’t found a way to?”

“Yes, it just isn’t a topic we are comfortable with.”

“And imagine if they get hostile and start demonstrating by stopping work? I mean they are already protesting outside the university administration building for months now...”

“”Why?””, someone asked in a low voice.

“Arre salary issues and all that...”

“The point is, Sir, we have decided to secure the keys to the toilet in a separate locker box with its own locking system...”

“And then we will keep that locked locker box in the staffroom pantry so that even if the keys are still there they wouldn’t be accessible to everyone.”

“Then this timetable, we have put in a lot of energy into it Sir! The matter is that urgent for us!”

“Yes, basically this key to the locker box will be in each of our possessions on a rotational basis, depending on our classes and off-days of course.”

“Don’t worry, we won’t paste this routine on the notice board or anything, we know some may not like it, you know some will always see discrimination in everything, do politics around it, all of that, by saying that the students should not see such a notice, which will happen if we make this strategy public...So we will circulate a screenshot of this document among the other teachers. Simple!”

“So whenever any teacher needs to use the toilets they can just ask the teacher who has been given charge of the key to the locker box for that time period. We will soon get used to it, we are confident!”

“And we will follow it without making a big thing out of it.”

“That way the keys to the toilet remain in the pantry, as tradition would have it, no fear of losing them either by changing hands, and we get to control this mess at the same time.”

“Alka di and Pinky di can clean the toilets only in the morning before we arrive; we will be removing the toilet keys from our safe box at the end of the day so that they get access to them first thing in the morning...”

“Haan! No break in efficiency.”

“No drama.”

“After all it is our internal matter.”

“Exactly! Very private matter too!”

Wiping the sides of his temple, the Principal asked tiredly- “So if you have decided all this, should I speak to the staff and tell them about the change, you know, this matter regarding keys and locker boxes and rotation. I mean they need some information at least...?”

“Sir, nothing. We will speak to them, gently tell them that keys are getting misplaced so we have formulated this extra cautious move.”

“We will tell them they need not clean twice. That should do. No further explanations needed.”

“Oh! And of course, this! This will be shown to them of course, you know, all matters must be done through official channels, with excellent paperwork.”

Here a third piece of official writing presented itself, the black ink on the white A4 size sheet of paper still warm from the printer. This letter was also addressed to the Principal, evoking all the correct forms of address, adequately supplicatory in tone; yet it seemed to have anticipated the exact trajectory of this scene in the Principal’s office on that burnt-out summer’s day. Like a script, it elaborated on the issue- the matter of cleanliness and hygiene and bad manners- and in its next paragraph described the solution arrived at, of course “after deliberating at length with our esteemed Principal” and only after receiving “his complete support for our cause”. All that was asked of him was his signature and stamp.

His cousin brother had warned him a day after he was appointed to the post of Principal- “You might go to jail some day for putting your signature on the wrong piece of paper!” Whether the terrifying advice came from a place of residual bitterness- because fortunes in their part of the society and community did not alter, weren’t given enough opportunities to alter, for the better, all that often; because when fortune knocks at one door, it does not spread its warm glow across the hundreds of other houses resting precariously against each other and struggling for a bit of that warmth- the Principal had taken it, and turned it into an inner voice. Good optics or bad?- He asked himself. Will I end up in jail?

He suddenly wished to hear the other side of the story, the versions of those found lounging in the corridor with their legs branching out in various ill-poses, with the songs playing in the background, the cracking of *moongfali* shells on winter afternoons especially, even the dupatta drying in the toilet after it had soaked out the last expendable drops of perspiration from the laboring bodies. Bodies familiar, like those of his mother and aunt, also his father, and the many stories of bodies breaking, bodies pulverized under years of back-breaking work at construction sites, at people’s homes and farms, and in factories or its precincts, loading or offloading crates and cartons and bales ten times bigger than their bodies. This kind of work too, as he had seen quite often, his friend’s father returning with a *jharu* resting horizontally on the carrier of his bicycle after having cleaned the municipal district office toilets. Yet what might he ask which would not implicate him in their woes- this Alka di and Pinky di- burden him with their stories which might not be as easy to shed as experiences of humiliation have become, at least to a certain extent. Confront them in what tone? Deploy what words of authority which would not bounce back and hit him in the face? He could hear his opponents sneer- “bad optics, very bad optics indeed!” Also, these ladies, who have anticipated his own reluctant authority and thus arranged for him a scene so perfected, so rehearsed, that he had not even realized how complicit he had been in its success simply by adhering to their elaborate script. Now the letter lay before him and he could do no more than sign-and-stamp. Perhaps he would never truly learn to tip the scales by simply reserving his judgment- “Thank you for coming to me, I will go through your petitions and will get back to you soon.” Perhaps he had already become far too clean.

This was the story then. It drags on like the endless day in the sun; or, if it doesn’t qualify as a story, maybe an event of no great significance. Having blundered through the beginning of this telling by obsessing over the weather, it seems, like the relentless heat wave, this narrative must return where it begun. At the gates of the college, where two open jeeps have arrived in an aggressive burst of dust, the guards were being bullied to let up, open the gates, the angry young men hanging out of the jeeps shouted a couple of expletives and seemed poised to break through the black iron gates. The Principal had only just signed-and-stamped on the final letter regarding cleanliness and the business of the toilets. He had drank some cold water, washed his face and rubbed water behind his ears, and was on his way towards regaining his composure and preparing for the shelter of home, when the secretary burst in, a man in his early thirties, and started explaining excitedly this other fresh scene at the gates.

“Sir those men have come to do trouble! Bol rahein hain their sister, who is a final year student in our college, has eloped with some boy in our neighboring college...eloped or in some relationship I don’t know clearly sis, but they are furious, want to take her back to the village...can’t reach her on the phone apparently and she is not to be found in the college that easily, and also Sir! They are looking for the boy too! What a solid mess Sir!”

“What is all this? Why were they allowed to enter like this? We have some rules about safety...”

“Sir, samjhiye, *jaat-paat* ki baat hain, they are very very angry, and they are her family who have come from her village, please understand...”

“Call the police right now! Listen to the ruckus they are creating! The students must be so scared...”

“Sir, listen to me...”

There is not much to this story either. When the police arrived they deliberated at length with the angry young men, nodding their heads far too many times, patting the more stubborn kinsmen on their shoulder, a touch of reassurance. Then the head of the policemen visited the Principal in his office. The man got straight to the point while dabbing at the pointy ends of his theatrical mustache with a white handkerchief.

“Arre Sir, aap yeh saab mamlo mein mat padiye. Aapko hi problem hoga. The village’s honour is at stake they are saying. This is a very serious matter. Society, biradari, after all, can’t go against it na? Law apni jag ape...Aap kuch mat kariye. Let them handle this. Bas they won’t be returning to your college, ok? No problem phir! Their internal matter, let them solve. Why interfere?”

Soon the vehicles had cleared out of the college premises, both the private jeeps and the police vans. The campus stood still as the dust settled and the invertors continued their steady drone. The students who had gathered in various parts of the building to watch the spectacle had dispersed having only witnessed a dumb show, not knowing that one of their friends might not ever return to those classes they struggled through each day, scribbling on the margins of a photocopied text to plan their lunch-break hour.

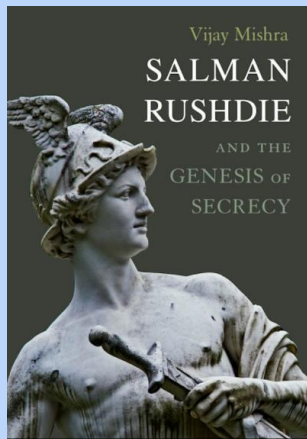
Back in his office the Principal summoned the gardener and instructed him in a voice heavy with fatigue, “second floor ki female teachers’ toilet ke bahar jo corridor hain...line up potted plants all along that corridor. From corner to corner, ok? Do it today before going home.”



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BOOK REVIEWS

Rushdie in Undress



***Salman Rushdie and the Genesis of Secrecy* by Vijay Mishra. London: Bloomsbury Academic. 2019 /paperback ed. 2021. 249 pp.**

This is the first book written with access to the Salman Rushdie archives housed in Emory University at Atlanta. Any other critic would have crowed about that privilege from the rooftops, i.e., mentioned at least the word “archive” in the title of the book. But that would be too crass and unsubtle for Vijay Mishra. This book is valuable not only because it uses the Rushdie archives but because it exercises fine critical discrimination in using them. Mishra knows enough about “archive fever,” as Derrida (deriving from Freud) termed it, to be in any danger of suffering from it.

Time was when a writer’s manuscripts and private papers, so called, remained forever private; only the finished, published works were open to view. (To publish means to make public.) But the latest trend in these matters is that well-known writers themselves come forward, not only in dotage but even in mid-career, to offer their still evolving archives to competitive global bidding, in order to get as high an “undisclosed sum” as they can manage. It’s a bit like being a major beneficiary of one’s own will, or attending one’s own funeral feast and making merry.

So, what do the Rushdie archives contain? To a substantial extent, it is earlier drafts of Rushdie’s published works, which have only a limited interest. As Mishra himself asks in the title of his Preface: “And what so tedious as a twice-told tale?” His first chapter is about “Archival Fever,” and then in the second chapter, he describes the “Manuscripts in the Archive.” Of the greatest interest here perhaps are the several early works Rushdie wrote between June 1968, when he graduated from Cambridge, and April 1981 when *Midnight’s Children* was published.

There are five texts here that Mishra focuses on, four of them prose narratives and one a screenplay. All are unpublished, and “perhaps even publishable,” as Mishra puts it. He offers here a detailed account of each of them for the first time, though Rushdie himself has, in passing, referred to them now and then ever since *Imaginary Homelands* (1991).

Two major strands of these early works can be picked out from these accounts. The first is how heavily influenced Rushdie was, by his own explicit acknowledgement, by a whole range of Western writers: by Thomas Pynchon in the case of one of these early manuscripts, by Philip

Roth in another, and by Joyce and Beckett in two other works. In his more mature works too, Mishra notes that Rushdie nearly always had a Western template before him: *Julius Caesar* and the Greek tragedies in *Shame*, Mikhail Bulgakov in *The Satanic Verses*, the Orpheus myth in *The Ground Beneath Her Feet*, Balzac in *Fury* etc. One may add even more obvious debts in later works: to *The Great Gatsby* in *The Golden House*, and to *Don Quixote*, of course, in *Quichotte*.

The other strand already present in some of the early manuscripts is a “magic-realist” exoticization of India, quite comparable to the depiction of the country by earlier Western writers. Rushdie camouflages this with the occasional lip-service he pays to the great Sanskrit epics and to the folk narrative traditions of India, thus also seeking to authenticate his own insider status.

It is clear that Vijay Mishra possesses as thorough a knowledge of Rushdie’s life, his published works, and now his unpublished works as well, as probably anyone on this planet. He had already demonstrated this in his encyclopaedic work *Annotating Rushdie* (2018), and in the extended exegeses and analyses that he offers here, he attests his unrivalled expertise all over again. And his considered conclusion in the matter is that Rushdie is “very much an English writer” whose mindset is “thoroughly English-European.” Further, his work “manifests, uneasily, what may be called a late modern orientalism.” So far as I am concerned, this is all the proof I need for my long-held suspicion that Rushdie is in fact a British writer in an Indian writer’s clothing/skin.

Another notable aspect of Rushdie is that he has always prided himself on being a radically political writer. His castigation of the Emergency years under Indira Gandhi in *Midnight’s Children* is often adduced in this regard. What Mishra reveals here is that Rushdie even earlier had an almost unhealthy obsession with Mrs Gandhi. In a manuscript discussed here titled “Madame Rama,” in which she is the thinly disguised protagonist, Mrs Gandhi is shown as having a father who still has an erection after he is dead, and then, in Rushdie’s own summary, “beneath her sari she [grows] a talking penis” herself.

Perhaps it was just as well that this work was never published. For in *Midnight’s Children* too, Rushdie said something about Mrs Gandhi for which she sued him in a British court of law, and won. In speaking Truth to Power, as the phrase goes, one may, like Rushdie in that instance, speak a libellous untruth and be caught out.

A major strength of this book is that Mishra discusses not only the early manuscripts but all the later works of Rushdie as well. In the chapter on *Midnight’s Children*, Mishra reproduces several typescript pages with corrections marked by Rushdie in hand; he also notes that one of the draft versions of the novel is missing from the archives, as it may be under embargo. His discussion of blasphemy in *The Satanic Verses* is especially illuminating, and he is at his theoretical best perhaps in the chapter titled “The Affective Turn and Salman Rushdie.” But the chapter Mishra has written with the greatest zest is “Salman Rushdie Cinema and Bollywood,” for the unsurprising reason that he has earlier published a whole book on Bollywood.

Mishra is a diasporic Indian himself but not like the not-quite-not-white Rushdie. In stark contrast, his ancestors had gone as “coolies” or bonded labour to work on the sugar plantations of Fiji. Though Mishra has a D. Phil. from Oxford, he still retains and cherishes the *girmitya* attachment to the Tulsi *Ramayana* and old Hindi film songs. (He sang them with gusto and to everyone’s enjoyment in the evenings at the IACLALS conferences he attended some years ago.) His next book is going to be on that other great Indian diasporic writer, V.S. Naipaul,

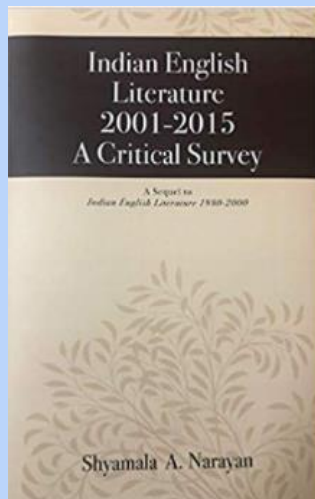
whose ancestors too were *girmitya*, and Mishra has had access to Naipaul's archives too. One can hardly wait for the book.

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***Indian English Literature 2001-2015: A Critical Survey* by Shyamala A. Narayan (New Delhi: Pencraft International, 2020), pp. 376, Rs. 1195/-**

This is a work that could only have been done by Prof Shyamala Narayan, the indefatigable bibliographer of Indian English Literature. She has been compiling the 'Annual Bibliography of Indian English Literature' from 1972 onwards for the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*. The "Annual Bibliography" is a meticulous recording of both primary and secondary sources with a lucid critical introduction. I have always liked her light touch, her throwaway comments, and her respect for all writers and their works. Nothing is beneath her notice or appreciation, nothing too high for her no-nonsense approach. She knows that to use current theoretical positions would make her contributions seem more immediately relevant, but it would also mean that her work would become dated quickly. No bibliographer can afford this.

It is this approach she brings to this much-needed *Critical Survey*. As an example of her no-nonsense but thorough approach, one only has to read what she has to say about Salman Rushdie. Take the short paragraph on *Luka and the Fire of Life*, the sequel to *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. After four sentences on the work, Shyamala Narayan writes that the "sequel lacks the imaginative power and the wider allegorical significance of the earlier book." (276) Writing on *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*, Shyamala Narayan calls the third person narration "an irritating affectation." She goes on to call his treatment of the women in his life, in this book, "ungenerous"! (285) You can see that her approach does not change, that she reads the works of all writers with the same careful critical attention when you read her comments on new writers. She points out their strengths but is alive to their weaknesses.

This book is a sequel to the most useful book she co-authored with M.K. Naik, *Indian English Literature 1980-2000; A Critical Survey* (2001), which in its turn was a wonderful follow-up

to M.K. Naik's *A History of Indian English Literature* (1982). In the nine main chapters of the book (leaving out the Introduction and the Conclusion), four are devoted to fiction (with one of these devoted to short fiction), two are on poetry, one on drama, one on books for children and young adults, and the last one on non-fiction prose. One chapter on the novel is on established novelist, another on new novelists, and the third on new trends in fiction (listing novels under various genres that seem to rule the roost in this century). This is a fairly useful division for the readers, enabling us to approach long fiction from different perspectives.

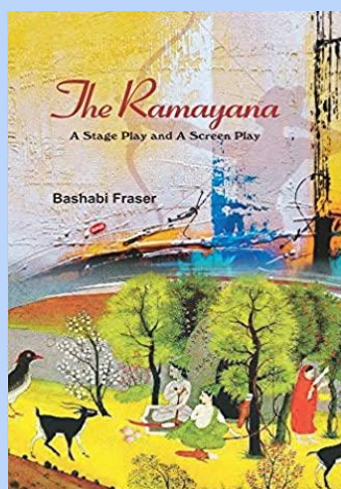
In her characteristically modest Preface, Shyamala Narayan gives a quick look at the limitations of the book and the challenges of surveying a huge corpus. Her attempt is to list all – an impossible task, you might think, but this is Shyamala Narayan, a one woman-army. She is aware that she may have missed some, but the effort is always there. You can see this in her chapters on new writers but also in the chapter on drama. I name the latter because most of us flounder when we try to name new Indian English dramatists!

This is the resource book you will turn to if you want to know the Indian English books published during the period under survey. Narayan's task is to notice as many books as possible, giving us a quick introduction to the works, even managing to quote reviews of or scholarly reactions to the publications. What crowns her efforts is also the forty-three pages of bibliography of secondary sources published in this period that she adds on to the book. This includes general studies and studies on individual authors. This is then the book that students and scholars have been waiting for, but it is also a book that anyone can leaf through in the library, gaining valuable insights into contemporary Indian English writing, accessing invaluable information in one place.

I would recommend this book to all libraries, to all people interested in Indian English Literature. Buy it and its prequel and keep it along with Naik's history. You will thank me for the advice one day!

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***The Ramayana: A Stage Play and a Screen Play* by Bashabi Fraser (Jaipur, India: Aadi Publications, January 2020. 133 pages, ISBN: 978-93-87799-28-8.**

The story of Ram, composed by the sage Valmiki as *The Ramayana*, is essentially an oral epic and has been narrated down the ages not only in India but also in many other countries in Central and Southeast Asia. It has manifest itself in Sanskrit and different *bhasha* literatures, and in different literary genres ranging from stories, poems and drama and also in visual representations like carvings in stone and wood, paintings on cloth and paper scrolls, performances like dance, puppets, television serials and every other imaginable art form. In other words, the popularity of this ancient epic has never waned even till the present times.

Based in Edinburgh, Scotland, Bashabi Fraser has added to this tradition by writing a new book of two plays that is based on the Indian epic *The Ramayana*, and which had been commissioned by the Scottish Arts Council and Edinburgh Puppet Lab. Narrated in two sections, the text under review is divided into two halves – a stage play, and a screen play. Dedicating the book to her daughter Rupsha “and all her friends who live outside India and have heard and enjoy the story of Diwali,” the objective of the book becomes clear – namely to acquaint the second-generation non-resident Indian children with the rich heritage of our great Indian epic. Told in the simplest possible narrative form, Fraser therefore tells us the well-known story once again in a way that is meaningful to author and audience alike. She contemporizes the language, adds her own bit of wit and humour without deviating from the source narrative, thus bringing in a special appeal and charm in reading this well-known story. Apart from the queens of Dasarath being described as Bari Rani, Choti Rani, etc. she tries to maintain the traditional salutations of Pitaji, Mataji, and yet at the same time, narrates incidents with a tongue-in-cheek humour that appeals to the present readers. For example, when the rakshashi Taraka is challenged by Lakshmana for insulting Ram, Taraka replies, “Oh my tiny morsel. You wouldn’t even do as a pakora starter! I could open my mouth and swallow you and your skinny brother at one go! See how he has turned blue with fear” (Act I, iv). This is not replicating the gravity of the epic’s narrative, but contemporaneity is the USP of the writer’s style. Again, when Vishwamitra bring his pupils Ram and Lakshman to King Janaka’s court to try their hand at lifting the famous bow and win Sita, they are described as “strapping young men.” Fraser also draws interesting parallels between the Fire of Lanka and the Fire of London in the stage play. After the building of the bridge between India and Lanka is ready, we find Hanuman commenting on the rebuilding of Lanka after the fire:

“Since Ram has blest me with the ability to look into the future, I know that years later, there will be a big fire in the city called London like the one I started and it will take years to rebuild, with the designs of an architect called Christopher Wren” (Act V, ii).

Though narrated in brief scenes which are easy for the performance, the stage play is completed in the traditional method of five acts with several scenes in each of these acts. Act I Scene I begins with the curse on King Dasarath that he will never enjoy the company of his most beloved son after he inadvertently killed the young Sravan Kumar in the forest and the last scene vi in Act V ends with Sita being freed, performs her agnipariksha (trial by fire) in order to free the suspicion of her honour in the hearts of the citizens of Ayodhya.

The stage direction ends with the following sentence: “*Fireworks burst and people clap and rejoice, lights appear everywhere and beautiful music can be heard*” (83). In spite of space constraint, Bashabi Fraser does not deviate much from the widely accepted storyline of the original epic. The intermittent scenes and acts are duly described through the ‘narrator’ who recreates the ancient practice of introducing ‘kathakata’ (storytelling in the manner of rhapsodes) and is also akin to the narrative technique of the ‘sutradhar’, the introducer, who often foreshadowed the event and helped to bind together the interconnected threads of the dramatic events. He also often summarizes the events in the third person.

When we come to the second section of the text that is narrated as a screen play, we find Fraser even more innovative by making Sita the narrator. In the Prologue Sita states:

“This is Ram’s story, the eldest and most beloved son of King Dasharath. ...this story goes back a long, long time, but it seems it happened only yesterday. ...it is my story too, for at the centre of my husband, Ram’s story is the story of my undeserved trial which upset everything forever, and nothing was the same again” (87-88).”

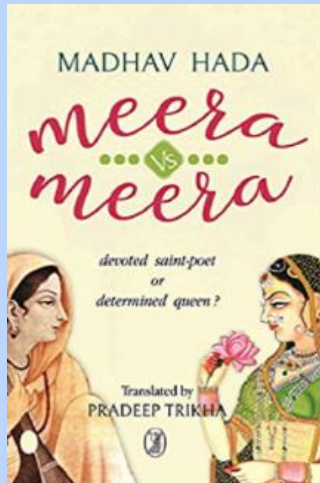
Sita as the narrator further elaborates that “the story is about a curse and promises, about love and loyalty, about good and evil and a mighty battle.” Since it is easier to make frequent changes of time and place in a screenplay, Fraser’s narrative method in this section is much more concise, but she manages to retain the main story line in a much more dramatic way. The concluding line of the screenplay narrated by Sita is rather significant and open-ended when she says, “But this is not the end of my story or Ram’s story...It goes on...” (133).

According to the well-known Indologist and scholar Sukumari Bhattacharya, searching for values in life, *The Mahabharata* stands to be several times richer than *The Ramayana*, but in spite of that *The Ramayana* has gained greater popularity in our country. Also, complicated family relationships and kinship are found very little in *The Ramayana* which is also comparatively simpler and less significant. When man has to choose any one idea from the clash of values, he has to re-evaluate the inherent moral debates once again. And to respond to it, the reader has to face a moral dilemma which has pain ingrained in it. So, the ordinary man dismisses it and remains contented with the simple values of life that are found in *The Ramayana*. This is the reason why *The Ramayana* is more popular than *The Mahabharata*.

Brotherly love, conjugal love, parental affection, duties of a Kshatriya warrior, valour, obeying a father’s orders, friendship, fighting to maintain the prestige of one’s own lineage – all these were practical issues in the socio-political life of those times. These have been emphasized as well as analyzed in *The Ramayana*. Also, description of natural elements – trees, forests, mountains, rivers, ocean, valleys, along with descriptions of animals and birds, sunrise, sunset, night, dawn – all add up to the enjoyment of the simplicities of life. This epic also has beautiful descriptions of spontaneous human emotions in various moods and so all these elements easily overwhelm the reader. The troubles of a kingdom do not affect many men directly; instead he has to regularly face conflicts in family values. These values are presented in *The Ramayana* through different incidents; hence the ordinary man has found a reflection and a solution to all his problems in it. Thus, Indian society has easily accepted the epic as a guide to its own limited socio-political life. With a very colourful and attractive cover, Fraser’s book is a delight to go through, especially for the very simplistic way of narrating the story of the epic without compromising on the basic framework of the original text which is not only more than two and a half thousand years old, but has also been narrated down the ages in every possible conceivable form and style.

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Meera Vs Meera: devoted saint-poet or determined queen? By Madhav Hada. Translated by Pradeep Trikha. Vani Book Company, New Delhi 2020. Rs 399/-

Most of us in India have grown up with stories about Meera, with listening to her bhajans. We may have heard the stories from elder members of our family, read books and graphic fiction, watched movies, and listened to MS Subbalakshmi or other famous singers. We may even have read Kiran Nagarkar's epic novel *Cuckold*. Meera is an icon, someone to be interpreted and adopted by each generation in its own light. According to Hada, Meera received a new lease of life during the freedom movement and after independence. However, it is the image of the 'saint-devotee' bhakti poet that has proved to be all pervasive regardless of the subtle changes in the demands of perception since colonial times. It is this image of Meera that Hada sets out to deconstruct, to give us multiple images, to show us Meera in all her complexity, regardless of true historical sources from her times, endeavoring to read other histories and biographies in terms of their times and ideologies. This is a massive effort to enable us to understand a famous icon of our land, and he sets about it with all humility of a true scholar. One realizes the worth of this effort even though one is reading an English translation by the redoubtable Pradeep Trikha who should be congratulated for carrying out this mission.

Who was Meera? In a sense, every chapter of this book tries to explicate it, by traversing the terrain of Meera's life as if on a swing looking at the ground, and indeed the horizon, from different points of view, bringing to our notice different aspects of Meera's life and works, in order to situate them in different frames of argument and references, to give us as complete a picture as possible – a narrative strategy that has been used with success by others before, especially when the sources are scanty. It is a voyage of discovery for us with Madhav Hada, a voyage on a swing, as we settle down with this book, to critique various writers and positions, to debunk historians of all hues, to scorn hagiographers and dissenters alike, to swat like flies those who would not look at Meera's material conditions, as also those who would 'willfully' misread them because of their own ideological positions. Yes, before one can smile at Madhav Hada's disdain for leftist historians and feminists, and for colonial writers, we realize his disdain has no biases, he is against all people who have tried to 'appropriate' or 'read' Meera for what he sees as their own purposes. How can you not like him, or be in sympathy with his project?

In six chapters, Madhav Hada leads us through Meera's life, her society, religious narratives about her, her poetry, her canonization, and her image construction. He alerts us to sources not regarded by others, looks at both the oral and the written sources and tries to trace the different interpretations and indeed the different facts that make up our various versions of Meera. Is she

a victim, an oppressed woman? Is she a romantic, a pious woman who lived out a love story? Is she well and truly part of the elite, with privilege and agency, charting her own life, patronizing others? Is she a saint-poet, one who was otherworldly, not made for the intrigues of the court and for the life of the material world? Who is/was Meera? From chapter one to six, we move from who was to who is! For Madhav Hada knows that what we have and what we make of Meera are religious and historical memories. If anything, that is established about her comes from sources written centuries after she lived, then we have to accept that every generation or era has made its own Meera, taking what they wanted from the stories told about her. Hada shows us the family woman, the queen, the one who knew the ways of the home and the court, one who could take care of herself, one who had agency and exerted it, one who had privilege and used it, one who was devout and one who lived her life fully, as well as anyone during her time could.

Hada shows us how tangled the history is – where was she born? When? When did she marry? What happened to her in her life? How was she received everywhere? Why are some stories more prevalent about her? How much can you believe them? He reads all texts closely to tease out the possible truths. It is to Hada's credit that he doesn't give us easy answers even as he shows us all that he can. Even the merging of Meera in Krishna in the temple is viewed from multiple points of view – all with great reason and with great respect to Meera.

Who is our Meera? Who is your Meera? Madhav Hada leaves it to you. Read this in Hindi or read him in Pradeep Trikha's admirable English translation – and make up your mind.

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***In the Labyrinth: Poems* by Payal Nagpal. Foreword by Anand Prakash. New Delhi: Signer, 2020. 127pp. Paperback. Price Rs.199/- ISBN 978-81-920134-5-9**

Literary critic and theatre activist Payal Nagpal has been teaching in Delhi University colleges for more than two decades. She has acted in and directed plays in English and Hindi, and authored critical books on drama, *Shifting Paradigms in Culture: A Study of Three Plays of Jean Genet* (2015) and *Text and Performance: A Theoretical View* (co-authored with Anand

Prakash, 2017). She has also published critical editions of prescribed texts, containing essays by leading critics: *Othello* (2014), Ibsen's *Ghosts* (2015), *Macbeth* (2016), *The Glass Menagerie* (2016) and Mahesh Dattani's *Tara* (2021). But there is nothing academic or dramatic/ melodramatic about the poems of her first collection, *In the Labyrinth*; the tone is of quiet (and sombre) reflection.

In the Labyrinth has poetry of suggestion, not statement; the disparate images force the reader to think, and experience a poem the reader him/herself creates. "Is the Stranglehold of Custom Sanity?" the poet asks in a poem beginning with this line:

At times I want to give in
To the sharp edges
Poking into my skin.
No blood flows.
The pointed barbs give me sensations
Of resistance.
Strangely I call this sanity.

It also shows how colourless custom is. (75)

The experiential poems reflect quotidian life. A simple household chore has philosophical implications:

Hidden corners
Are full of dust, specks of grey and brown,
I use the rag
To remove the muck,
The particles coalesce, make rounds, short lines,
They dance into formations their own.
They tease my eye
Asking secretly—
Can you whisk away
Memories? (126)

The vivid images, many from nature, have a sensuous quality – "the softness of fresh snow/ the caress of early morning breeze" (57). Natural processes have metaphorical implications:

The wood burns
The sap sizzles.
The thick liquid
Sticks to the bark
And burns. (47)

The river mirrors the complexity of human memory in the poem "Strange Situations", the "ringing within" is "muffled", but soon "its clear baritone" asserts itself,

Like the river flowing with music to its own,
Cajoling the stones beneath
Conversing with them,
Prancing on the river bed
It seeks new directions now (111)

Some of the poems are about unequal relationships. It is not exactly unrequited love, it is more about the persona being more committed to the relationship than her partner:

I stood there
Collecting the ashes.

You moved on
Disturbed
Melancholic
Facing perhaps a crowd
Of thorny issues. (74)

Some poems have a note of hope, of resistance: “I inhale/ The fragrance of tomorrow/ With a new challenge” (124). Payal Nagpal’s comment on poetic composition has a light-hearted touch:

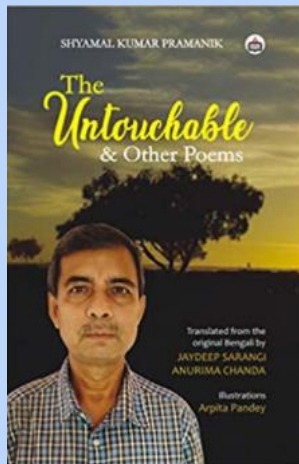
Words tumble
Fall from the page
Run here there
Soon they may stop and settle
I try to catch them,
They tease me,
Poke fun at my timidity, (110)

The book production values are excellent; I did not find even a single misprint. Most of the poems (all in free verse) are quite short, less than a page in length. They have been arranged in four sections: the first section, “A language my eyes understand” has 25 poems, the second “How we join, disconnect” (15 poems) and the third section “How difficult it was” (21 poems). The last section, “I do not aspire to obey”, is the longest, with 34 poems; four of the poems occupy a second page, reflecting the poet’s growing confidence in her writing.

Payal Nagpal prefaces the poems with a four-page essay, “The Treachery of Writing”, about the creative process. “Writing is a treacherous act, of betrayal. It is a much needed act” (16). The situation becomes more complex when a woman writes, “the many possibilities of her writing unsettle all around her” (16). She declares, “The poems in this collection present the emotional woman living inside most of us” (14). She wonders, “Is the pen I wield mine alone? Does it partake of other beings and lives?” The poems present the emotional *human being* living inside all of us. The perspective presented in the poems is that of a woman, but the negotiations with relationships apply to both men and women.

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The Untouchable and Other Poems by Shyamal Kumar Pramanik. Translated from Bengali by Jaydeep Sarangi and Anurima Chanda. Illustrations by Arpita Pandey. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2020. 92pp. Paperback. Price Rs. 295. ISBN 978-93-90155-96-5

Though it has a history of more than a century, very little Dalit writing from Bengali is available in English translation (Manoranjan Byapari's work is an exception). Activist Shyamal Kumar Pramanik, author of short stories, novels and poetry, is a significant voice in Bengali Dalit literature. Jaydeep Sarangi and Anurima Chanda have performed a great service to the pan-Indian literary community by translating 50 of his poems (23 poems by Sarangi, 27 by Chanda). The poems here, like Dalit poetry from Maharashtra, deal with the pain of discrimination and the violence Dalits face; however, there is a strong note of hope, as Pramanik repeatedly talks of "descendants" who would live in a world of equality. Nature imagery — the forest, rivers, rocks, moonlight, the night sky and the coming dawn — is an important aspect of Pramanik's poetry:

Under the moon all night, filters in music,
Coupled with the sound of broken fetters
Dear brother, at the end of this hour, the sun will rise
A new life will be born. (54)

Untouchables have to live under "a restricted sky/ Never have we enjoyed the seven coloured rainbow or the moonlight" (73). The poem, "The River Rising Inside My Heart", has a river of tears, such is their life:

Inside my heart, a river slowly gathers force
Salty, its water
Tears spilling out of my eyes
Such hurt and pain, the humiliation of life. (61)

Pramanik is fully conscious of the ill-treatment meted out to Dalits: his anger is palpable when he addresses the oppressors directly in the poem "They Who Had Destroyed":

They who had destroyed our houses
They who had destroyed our lives
Played Holi with our blood
And they, who did not speak
They saw, but did not see
To them I say – you were not true to your world

Caged within yourselves, you are,
And blind
Your destruction is inevitable. (74)

Another poem, “Come Hold My Hands”, talks of solidarity, of holding hands with other Dalits:

So much restlessness, insult
I am tired, yet sing will I the morning song
One century later, if another comes
I will extend these gaunt hands
I know, we have no home, no nation,
Still this fire, water, soil and sky,
Stays in constant touch with our bodies
I have been clutching at its edges and sitting all this while. (75)

He directly denounces the societal rules laid down by Manu: “Those whose hearts were dark, were ones to write Manu” (67). In the poem “They Did Not Let It Happen”, he holds the *Manusmriti* responsible for the pathetic condition of untouchables, ruining the beautiful earth which was for everyone:

Man was not born with caste
Nobody came equipped with Brahmatya.

Songs of the green on earth
Stars studded with memories
Love
But still, so many riots
So many murdered

Yet, this was not what had been promised
Can anybody hear the trickle of tears?
That what the earth wanted to be at its inception
They did not let it happen (52)

The Dalits have to “struggle unto death” to get human rights:

O my homeland, I pledge on your soft soil,
The struggle unto death.
Look, the prison bars surround me
Like hell stripped naked
Look, my two hand are soaked in blood
Both my hands bear the scars of bondage
In my voice, the songs of prison.

O my homeland, it seems I don't belong here
For me are dark nights,
Pain and tears,
For me only hunger and hate. (65)

As pointed out in the “Notes on Translation”, it was difficult to find equivalents for the local proverbs and idioms which are an important element of Pramanik's poetry, or to replicate the

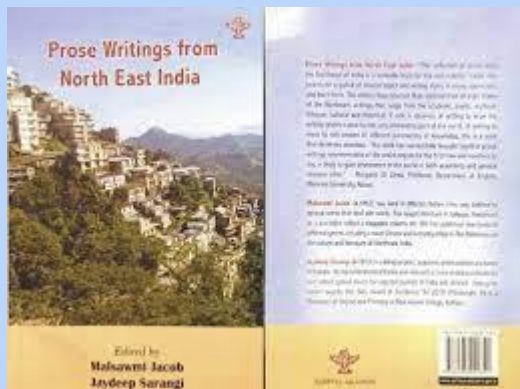
rhythm of his free verse. The raw emotion of the original gets toned down in English, “it was his rage that posed the biggest obstacle to the text’s translatability” (14). I do not know Bengali, but I get the feeling that there are some instances of Pramanik’s “rage” not coming through. Here is an example: “All day long I have carried a heart heavy with anguish and affront/ Of life’s suffering” (50), from the poem “All Day Long, I Have Dismantled Rocks”. The word “affront” fails to convey his anguish; the line “So much restlessness, insult” (75) is also somewhat mild.

“Writing Back”, the ten-page interview with Pramanik, is very informative, tracing the history of Dalit literature in Bengal. Gopal Lahiri’s review of *The Untouchable and Other Poems* included at the end of the book provides a good introduction. The biographical notes on the poet and translators help the reader to “place” the writers; as a literary historian, I wish they had mentioned the age of the poet. There are a few printing mistakes: “I see memories of mothers **trolling**” (33); “I ask him, who is he? / He **relies**, I’m Shambok” (37). The Glossary could be improved – what is the necessity of glossing words like “Brahmin”? “Shudras” is glossed as “The lowest of all castes in India”; “lowest of the four castes” would be a more correct meaning for Shudras. The *panchamas* – the untouchables like Chandalas and Chamars – are the lowest in the caste hierarchy. The note on Shambok, “A Shudra ascetic found in the Valmiki *Ramayana*” ignores the controversial story of Rama killing a Shudra for practising asceticism.

Jaydeep Sarangi and Anurima Chanda have opened a window into Bengali Dalit poetry for the English reader; I hope they give us English translations of Shyamal Kumar Pramanik’s fiction.

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Prose Writings from North East India: Edited by Malsawmi Jacob and Jaydeep Sarangi **Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi (2020)**

The present volume brings together a host of prose writings from North East India composed by writers noted for their efforts to articulate the specific concerns of their respective locations from within the region. What the volume aspires to do is also to negate and nullify any overarching judgement that seeks to gloss over the characteristic specificities of the states that comprise the region. With this aim in view, the volume is divided into eight sections (with nineteen chapters), representing the states arranged in the alphabetical order.

The first section comprises the solitary chapter from “**Arunachal Pradesh**” on “The Adi A:Bang” by Mamang Dai. She writes about a mnemonic genre of literature called A:bang. In its emphasis on the affective and reverberative aspect of articulation, the A:bang becomes a language about “transformation and evolution” (4) and signifies the antiquity and sustenance of a particular community held together by a common belief in the power of the spoken word.

The second section entitled “**Assam**” contains three chapters: “The Question of Being India’s Northeast” by Anasuya A. Paul, “The Cuisine of Assam” by Mitra Phukan, and “Incorporating Gender: Bodies, Binaries and Modes of Challenge in the Literature of the Northeast” by Nabina Das. Paul’s chapter is a critical reflection on the strategic position of the region *vis-à-vis* the Indian mainland and the attendant politics of exclusion and isolation. Phukan, in her chapter, undertakes a journey into the food culture of Assam, conceptualised as an interface between the “rest of India” and the “orient.” In the third chapter, Das takes a gender-based perspective on the marginalisation of the female body, and citing examples from the literature of the region, argues in favour of deconstructing the constructed sociologies of gender roles within the patriarchal society.

The third section on “**Manipur**” features four chapters, namely, “Evolution of the Manipuri Culture and Literature” by Jodha Chandra Sanasam, “Theatre of the Northeast India: An Overview” by M. Priyobrata Singh, “Mythology in Manipuri Literature” by Th. Ratankumar Singh, and “The Man who Revolutionised Manipuri Theatre after World War Two” by Tayenjam Bijoykumar Singh. Sanasam’s chapter documents the development of Manipuri literary culture from the pre-Hindu era through the Hindu era in the early part of the eighteenth century into the closing years of the nineteenth century which marked the beginning of modern Manipuri literature. M.P. Singh provides an overview of the theatrical traditions in each of the North Eastern states and alerts government agencies and institutions for their negligence towards the well-being of the performers. R. Singh explores the place of myths *vis-à-vis* the *Lai Haraoba* festival and traces its origin to the oral culture, and the continuation of its performance by the traditional priests of Manipur. T.B. Singh’s chapter analyses the life and works of Tongbram Geetchandra Singh, who actively propagated the need for theatre to move beyond traditional themes and focus on the realistic portrayal of social issues of the time.

The fourth section on “**Meghalaya**” comprises three chapters: “Literature of Shillong—Where Prose and Poetry Meet” (Ananya S. Guha), “Chhumleivak” (Baruk Jacob), and “Not Khalish, But Khasi and English” (Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih). Guha makes an interesting reference to the continuing presence of the “Shillong motif” in the poetry and fiction produced from the region since the 1980s. Jacob’s story is a delightful experiment in sensitising the readers to the affective powers of linguistic nuances expressed through personification of natural elements, the clouds in this context. Nongkynrih explores the history of development of the Khasi language in Meghalaya *vis-à-vis* the overwhelming influence of English and Hindi in the region.

The “**Mizoram**” section, the fifth one, features three chapters, namely, “Weaving Culture: A Brief Note on the Puan of the Mizos” (Cherrie L. Chhange), “A Glimpse of Pre-literate Mizo Society through the Lives of Five Women Poets” (Malsawmi Jacob), and “Anatomy of a Big, Black Rainstorm on the Mountains” (Zualteii Poonte). Chhange’s chapter explores the significance of the *puan*, a garment “worn mostly wrapped around the waist” (91), and its position as a long-standing identity marker among the Mizos. Jacob carries out a textual–sociological discussion of early Mizo women’s poetry *vis-à-vis* Pi Hmuaki, Laltheri, Lianchhiari, Saikuti, and Darpawngi, who were also social critics in voicing their concerns for women’s rights and reforms. Poonte’s analysis of *ruahthimpui*, literally translated as “big, black rainstorm,” emphasises upon the traditional meteorological knowledge of the Mizos, in

their ability to comprehend different types of rains based on factors like their impact upon the vegetation, their time of arrival during the year, and their periods of stay.

The sixth section, which is on “**Nagaland**,” contains two fascinating chapters: “A Poem is a Song is a Story” (Easterine Kire) and “The Son of the Village: *Gaon Bura*” (Vishū Rita Krocha). Kire’s chapter is a reflection on the genre of poem-song popular among the *Tenyimia* Nagas, which serve a multimedial function within the lifeworld/lifeworld of the communities. In the other chapter, Krocha depicts the horrors of state violence through the story of Lekho and his grandfather, inhabitants of a village in Nagaland that was caught between the conflicts of the Indian army with the underground rebel forces of the region.

The penultimate section on “**Sikkim**” comprises two chapters (in the form of stories) entitled “Passing Time” (Pem Choden) and “A House for Anum Adek” (Tashi Chophel). Choden reflects upon the gradual changes brought about by “development,” which have also effected visible changes in the climatic pattern of the region. Chophel, on the other hand, exposes the bizarre manner in which government entitlements operate, as seen in the case of Anum Adek who is allotted a house to be built under a government scheme only to be penalised later for not completing the construction work in time. The two stories in the section reveal the flip sides of modernisation and welfare schemes and inescapable vicissitudes of bureaucratic mechanism.

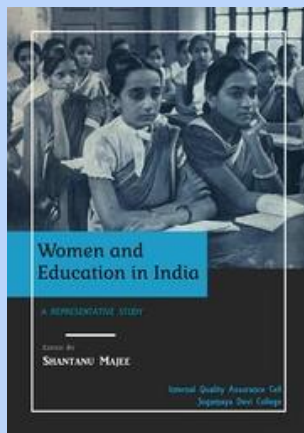
The last section on “**Tripura**” features a solitary chapter entitled “Kanika by Anangomohini Devi” by Bhaskar Roy Barman. It narrates the story of the eponymous princess-poet and her first poetry collection, published in 1902. Her poetry is replete with imageries drawn from her own life as a daughter of a loving father and then as a young widow as well as from the wider world of nature, from her devotion to Lord Mahesh, and the divine love play of Radha and Krishna.

To sum up, *Prose Writings from North East India* has successfully mapped the varied textures of life, literature, and culture of the region. The chapters have addressed themes and issues endemic to the social-cultural geographies of the regions represented by them. A few chapters have been descriptive, which shall aid anyone willing to know more about the specific regions within North East India. However, from the editorial perspective, the work suffers from a few glaring copyediting issues. But this does not take anything away from the stupendous task accomplished by the two editors of the volume—they deserve to be applauded and congratulated for their endeavour and hard work in bringing “North East India” home for everyone, including those from the region.

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***Women and Education in India: A Representative Study.* Edited by Shantanu Majee. Kolkata: Jogamaya Devi College, 2020, ISBN: 9788193829035.**

Discourse surrounding women's education in India since the late twentieth century has seen a steady rise in interest in academic circles, where the patriarchal and colonial structures that work around the topic have been called out. However, conversations orbiting around education for women doesn't follow a unilateral pathway of critiquing patriarchy alone but embraces variegated avenues through which it can be sought to be understood. There must be an exhaustive cognizance of laws (both religious and legal), along with feminist philosophical and ethical debates, and also an acute awareness about the promotion of indigenous and gendered perspectives in science and technology, in order to grasp the nuances of the domain.

This book under review, titled *Women and Education in India: A Representative Study* edited by Shantanu Majee, is a holistic academic representation of women in education, women and education, and women's education. It does so not by the classical narrowed down analysis of each topic, but by allowing a range of discussions on varied questions starting from the colonial visions of women's education in India, the sustenance, and traces of Victorian morals in the imagination of the figure of an educated woman, to studies on contemporary issues surrounding the education of women, and on persons and institutions that contributed to the establishment of institutions for women in post- colonial India. Through 15 edited articles divided into 3 thematic sections, the book gives a sense of the issue and concerns that have come to constitute the field of women's studies over the last few decades.

Each of the 15 articles in the book addresses a distinct aspect of women's education in India. These articles employ various methodologies, from archival historiographies to ethnographic fieldwork, to discuss the multifaceted aspects of the question of women's education in India. The first three articles in the book are clubbed as "Initiation." Articles in this section act as a historical background to the further discussions around the representation of women and education in India. For example, Ramkrishna Bhattacharya's article involves archival study on the works of D. D. Kosambi, and other documents relevant to laws on Hindu marriage acts. He shows how debates surrounding the question of widow remarriage had been contested along the lines of caste, and how Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar had to carefully manoeuvre around religious sentiments of their time in order to bring mass acceptance of the practice. Following the archival grain, Biswadeep Chakraborty's essay calls to attention the social narratives of the late 19th century, especially the scandals involving transgression of normative sexual and gendered boundaries that emerged along with the introduction of legal courts by the British in India. Though the article starts with the Victorian scandals, it later shifts attention to the Victorian ideals of domesticity, and the status of schools for women in colonial Bengal. While

Chakraborty's article attempts to capture the shifts in ideas regarding female education movements in late 19th century Bengal, Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty's article takes the reader on a journey through the works of Kailashbasini Devi, who wrote extensively on the subject of women's education. The general condition of women in colonial Bengal is evoked throughout the article, and Paul Chakraborty delicately outlines Kailashbasini's personal struggles (with her in-laws) and her political stance. Her support for British reformist policies stands in contrast with her espousal of moral based syllabus for women in schools. Paul Chakraborty rightly concludes that "perhaps, she (Kailashbasini) could not completely overcome the overpowering influence of the Hindu Brahminic patriarchy," where education for women defined its limitations prominently rather than urging for empowerment.

The second section of the book titled "Individuals" consists of 6 articles, each dwelling on the contribution and legacy of individuals in the discourse. Anchita Ghatak's essay on Ms. Neena Singh, highlights the personal and ethical battles waged by a renowned city high school teacher to establish safe learning environments for girls. Similarly, Miratun Nahar brings out the legacy of Rahila Khatoon, a less famous personality known for her words. Prof. Nilanjana Gupta and Rebecca Gordon's contributions offer very important insights into the contemporary debates on the topic. Their respective works in Kerala and Bihar consolidate the foundation of this book. Prof. Gupta's empirical research on the status of Madrasa education in Kerala adds valuable insights into the normative understanding of Islam and education. She argues against the prevalent notions surrounding education of females in Muslim communities, and shows how in Kerala, state sanctioned contemporary education plans has been able to intervene into the sphere of education and bring out progressive reforms. Similarly, Gordon's article subverts comfortable and urban notions of women's education about rural areas. She studies the lesser looked into factors behind women's education in India, such as mothers' encouragement for daughters' achievements, the disadvantages of belonging from caste and tribe groups, etc. which structurally affect women's education. Similarly, Rosina Ahmed's article on women in medical education broadens any possible limitations of the book.

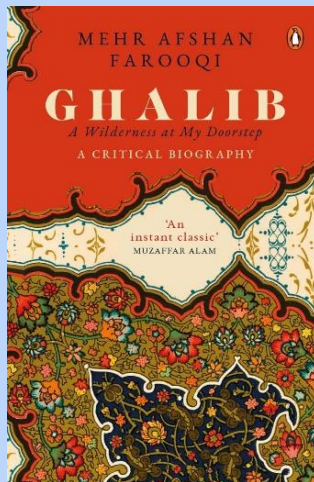
The six articles in the third section of the book, titled "Institutions," dwell on the structures and institutions that enabled the rise of women's education in India. Rahi Soren's work stands out amidst the other brilliantly written articles. Soren connects gender with wildlife and highlights the role of gendered perspectives on environmental conservation. Aditi Das Gupta, Samata Biswas and Nirajana Chakraborty's articles on the significance and contribution of institutions such as Loreto and Bethune to the field of women's education adds important accounts. Sukla Basu, Nilmani Mitra and Satyabrata Bhattacharya's articles throw light on Tagore's contribution to the discourse, while Reena Bhaduri, Lekha Mukhopadhyay and Kajol Kumari through their articles on Jogamaya Devi College demonstrate a contemporary picture of female education in India.

Women and Education in India provides the academic field of women's studies with a collection of related writings. It includes divergent dimensions that together provide a complete overview of the topic. Each contribution is unique, and compliments the other contributor in one way or the other. The absence of an introductory chapter by the editor of the book does make for a sad omission. Again the careful compartmentalization of the articles in the three sections makes it easier for the reader to grasp the flow of the book. However, it is appreciative that the editor did not let the limitations of the compartmentalization be a necessary impediment in selecting articles for the book. Needless to say, the book is an important addition to the literature on women's education in India. It caters to a wider audience outside the regular niches of academia, and might interest those who are not only acquainted with issues surrounding women's studies, but also those who are newly venturing out into the field.

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***Ghalib: A Wilderness at My Doorstep: A Critical Biography* by Mehr Afshan Farooqi, Allen Lane/PRH, 2021. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0670094295, 416 pages, Rs. 799/-**

Literary biographies, as a genre, has remained popular in the west, covering a wide spectrum, from the purely documentary and factual to the wildly and extravagantly imaginative. The latest in the genre that created a buzz when it came out was *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* by Maya Jasanoff that had as its subject Joseph Conrad, the great writer of Polish origin and stylist of the English novel. Readers had wondered -- after more than a dozen biographies that explored Conrad's life (and its relationship with his works) from all possible angles, and eleven well-curated tomes of his correspondence, what new facts or perspectives could Jasanoff bring to light. Yet when the book finally came out they were dazzled by its brilliance. Jasanoff, a professional historian, drew on insights both from history and literature, to substantially redefine how we see Conrad. Her book compelled many to revisit Conrad as one who prefigured several important concerns and anxieties of the twentieth century. A new book on Ghalib's life justifiably raises the same kind of speculations.

Ghalib's life has been fairly well-documented in English by the foundational collaborative work of Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell, particularly in the volume *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (1969). Natalia Pregarina's 'Creative Biography' of Ghalib (in Russian, 1986, translated competently into English by Osama Faruqi, 2000) really lives up to the reputation of that title, bringing into play both facts and imagination in abundant measure and in a judicious combination. Pavan Varma's *Ghalib: The Man, The Times* (1989) was really intended for the general readers. Besides these works in English, there are pioneering works in Urdu, starting from Altaf Husain Hali, through Malik Ram, Gyan Chand Jain, Kalidas Gupta Raza to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, to name only the most prominent ones, dealing with every probable facet of his life and works. So, one wondered -- what Mehr Afshan Farooqi was going to bring to the table that was not already known to Ghalib admirers. She calls her book a 'critical biography' which might create the impression that she was going to hold certain facts of Ghalib's life, described in earlier life writings, to scrutiny, which is not the case. Neither does she attempt to 'critically' assess the available criticism on Ghalib's poetry. Instead, what the book engages

with, is the textual history of different manuscripts of Ghalib's celebrated 'Divans'. The author signals this in her introduction where the phrase 'textual history' occurs four times. And what an interesting textual history it is! It involved quite a bit of literary sleuthing, pouring over brittle, dog-eared tomes in dusty libraries, and finally, serendipity, all of which helped Farooqi along in her journey of discovery and resulted in this beautiful book which is undoubtedly a valuable addition to Ghalibiana. Another phrase that occurs twice in the Introduction is 'reception history'. To me, these are the two axes around which she largely frames her arguments. The author feels that new insights into these two areas will allow readers reconstruct Ghalib's biography in more meaningful ways, rather than the other way round.

Interestingly, the author's research work began with her investigation of Ghalib's *muztarad kalaam* ('rejected verses', not included in any divan compiled by the poet) of which there was plenty. An interesting question that she asked herself, as others did before her, was the reasons that led the poet to deselect/ not include such a large number of poems in his divans. Did Ghalib have any criteria, any well-thought-out poetics which served as the benchmark for inclusion, or was it only subjective choice, individual whim? This led the author to make her own speculations, as also excavate the *dibachahs* and *khatimahs* (Forewords and Afterwords) to his collections to tease out a probable poetics, if there was one. I will come to this later.

Ghalib must have been unique among his peers, both contemporaries and forbears, to ruthlessly excise a substantial part of his Urdu corpus. Much of the scholarship on his poetry depended mostly on the divan known as *Nuskhah Hamidiya* (Bhopal edition) which seemed to have the largest circulation. Post the Bhopal edition several other manuscript divans were discovered that created, according to the author, 'a dynamic textual history'. It is to this she focuses her attention, treating each divan as individual entities, 'a record of the poet's composition to that date', because 'the divans show a continuity, and a remarkable editorial progression'.

Ghalib's manuscript divans have been given different names, depending either on the place where they were discovered, or after the name of the researcher who discovered it or the editor who edited it. In Chapter 2 she discusses the divans of 1821 (*Nuskhah Hamidiya*) and 1826, known as *Nuskhah-e Sherani* (named after Hafiz Mahmud Sherani who discovered it) respectively. The author deals with the chequered history of these divans, different modes of determining their authenticity, and the changes in them as they changed hands. Chapter 3 deals with the *Nuskhah-e Amroha* (1816), Ghalib's earliest divan. The author opens this chapter with the statement that 'The most unbelievable, serendipitous and propitious discovery of Ghalib's early work happened as late as 1969, the year his birth centenary was being celebrated across the Indian subcontinent with great fanfare.' She goes on to tell the story of its discovery, as narrated by Malik Ram, the famed Ghalib scholar, the controversies surrounding the divan and the insights contained in the statements of Nisar Ahmad Faruqi who edited it and published it in *Nuqush*:

A characteristic feature of this manuscript, according to Nisar Ahmad Faruqi, is the exclusive use of the pen name Asad. The change of the pen name from Asad to Ghalib happened soon after this manuscript was completed. In subsequent revisions of his manuscript divans, Ghalib changed Asad to Ghalib in several places and made appropriate metrical adjustments. Faruqi makes an important observation when he explains how the Divan of 1816 was useful in correcting or emending the scribal errors in the Divan of 1821. (72-3)

Chapter V deals with the Divan *Gul-e Rana* (1828), consisting of both Urdu and Persian verses, compiled by Ghalib during his sojourn in Calcutta at the instance of Maulvi Sirajuddin Ahmad,

the editor of *Ainah e Sikandar*, a Persian weekly. The author deals with the no less interesting accounts of several nuskahs of this divan and the way Ghalib organized this bilingual divan.

Ghalib was ahead of his time and he knew it. In one of his celebrated verses he characterizes himself as ‘the bulbul of a garden yet to be created’ (*Main andalib-e Gulshan-e naafridahhun*). There is a Persian verse that reiterates the same conviction and ends with, ‘The fame of my poetry will/spread in the world only after/I am no more’. He embraced the incipient modernity encountered in Calcutta (for lack of space I am not dealing with his eventful journey to Calcutta described in Chapter V which was an adventure by itself) with great enthusiasm, be it in the form of electricity that illuminated the wide streets or the printing press that promised speedy and wide dissemination of knowledge and information. With great foresight he understood the possibilities of the new print culture that would liberate writers from the hegemony of the elite few who could access manuscripts because of their privileged position in the society, and a new configuration of author-reader relationship would be forged. Now his ambition now was to ‘publish’ his next divan which, for different reasons, would not materialize till 1841 when he achieved the distinction of being the first Urdu-Persian poet to publish his divan. Following 1841, five editions of Ghalib’s Urdu divan were published during his lifetime. In Chapter VI (The Culture of Book Publishing and the Divan of 1841) the author discusses the significance of print modernity and how Ghalib responded to it, forming a life-long relationship with Munshi Naval Kishor, the legendary Lucknow publisher who published Ghalib’s prose works and his entire Persian corpus. The author rightly comments that Ghalib’s popularity owed, in no small measure, to the new print culture in general and the printing of text books in particular where Ghalib has remained a permanent fixture, both for his poetry and the specimens of excellent Urdu prose found in his copious letters.

Ghalib’s dual loyalty towards Persian and Urdu has been the subject of much scholarly speculations. What cannot be disputed, however, is the fact that no deep understanding of Ghalib is possible without an understanding of both the corpuses. It would be like trying to evaluate Premchand only on the basis of his Hindi corpus, ignoring the more capacious Urdu one. Ghalib’s bilingual poetic career, his oscillation between Urdu and Persian and return to Urdu in later life, the status of Indian style Persian known as ‘Sabk-e Hindi’ and ‘Tazah-goi’ (vis-à-vis the Iranian Persian of ahl-e zuban, the native speakers) have come up for discussion at several places. The author explores reasons behind Ghalib’s dogged attachment to Persian for close to two decades during his mid-career, his self-fashioning as the true inheritor of ‘genuine’ Iranian culture and language that set him apart from ‘lesser’ Indian poets writing in the language, to the extent of ‘inventing’ for himself a mentor/tutor who was a native speaker of Iranian Persian! In some ways, this discussion constitutes an extension of the debate initiated in English by the author’s father, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi through his two seminal essays, “Unprivileged Power: The Strange Case of Persian (and Urdu)” and “A Stranger in the City: The Poetics of Sabk-e Hindi” (*Annual of Urdu Studies*, University of Wisconsin, Madison, vols. 13 & 19; 1994 & 2004)

I would like to conclude the review by commenting on Chapter 7 (Prefacing the Poetry: Ghalib’s Self-presentation) that will be of particular interest to students of Urdu and Persian as it constitutes a critical study of Ghalib’s *dibachas* and *khatimahs* in order to extract his poetics from them. To provide a historical view, the author goes as far back as Amir Khusru’s *dibachahs* to his *Tuhfatul Sighar* and *Wastul Hayat*, and then touches on important specimens of this paratextual literature during the Mughal period. Coming to Ghalib’s *dibachahs* the author opines that they provided ‘a rhetorical mode of discourse that uses tropes to organize modes of perception.’ (170) She further points out that the relatively perfunctory *dibachah* (1841) to the Urdu divan published earlier and the dazzlingly brilliant one appended to the

Persian divan (1845) reveal Ghalib's intellectual and emotional attitudes towards his poetry in the two languages. In modern times, the importance of paratextual literature has been explored by Gerard Genette in his pioneering work. Borges's term for a preface was "vestibule" which offers readers the possibility of either entering or turning back. Ghalib scholars will do well to try to unpack these fairly intricate and convoluted but revealing specimens of Persian prose for a deeper understanding of his creative process and his poetry.

M Asaduddin

Chairperson, IACLALS

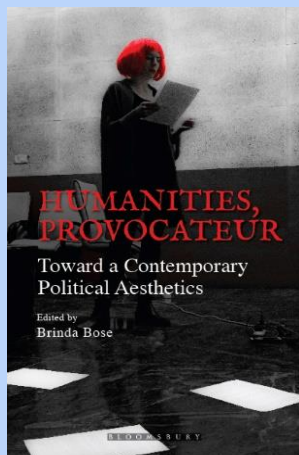
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(A version of the review will appear in The Book Review, January '22 issue)

NEW PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS



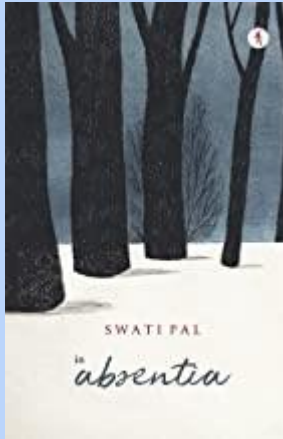
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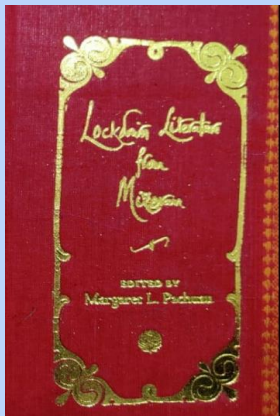
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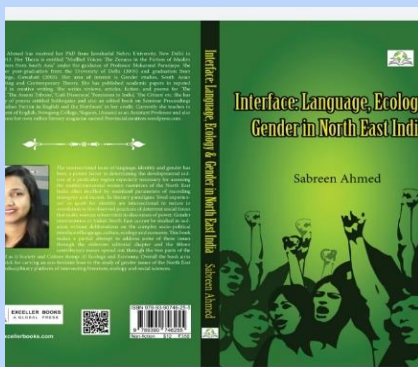
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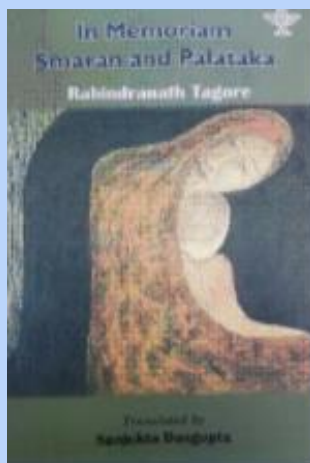
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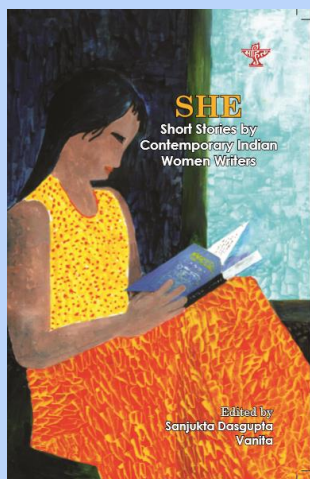
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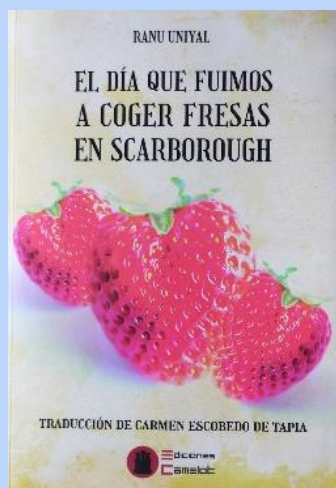
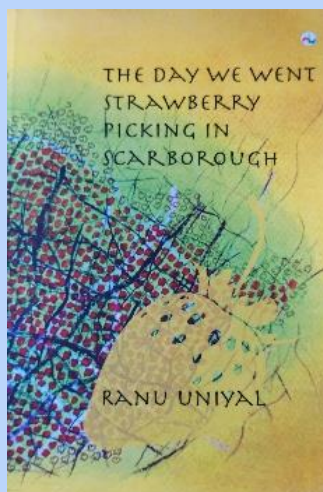
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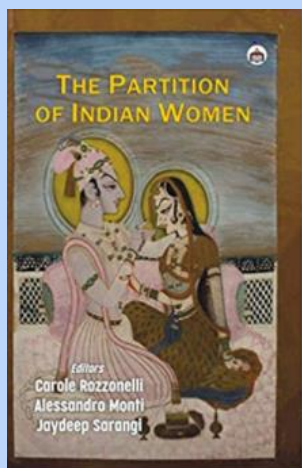
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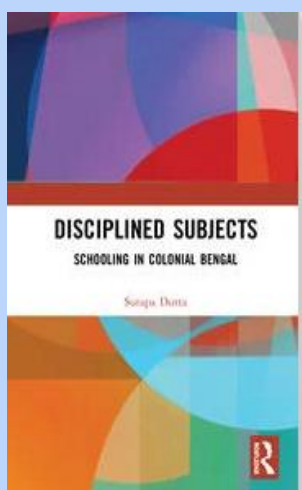
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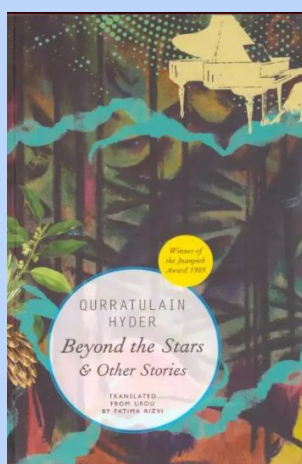
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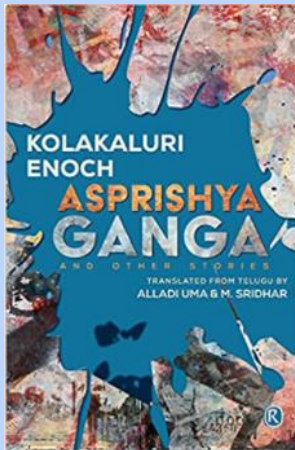
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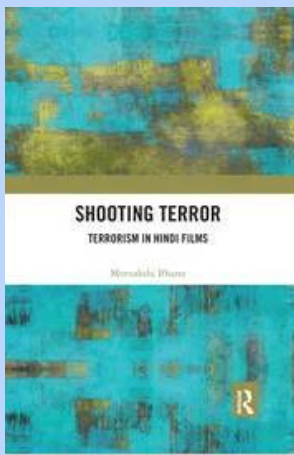
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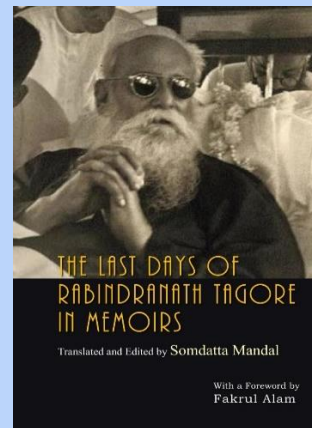
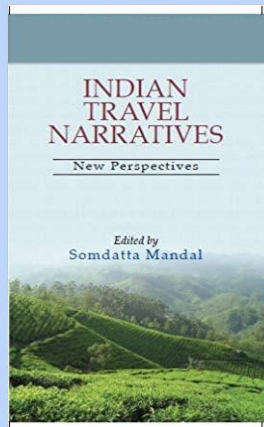
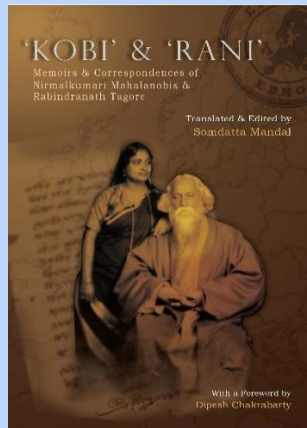
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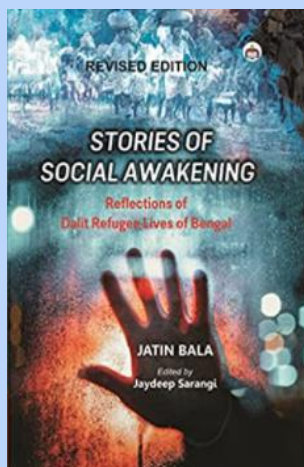
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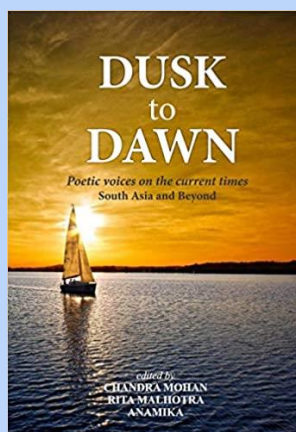
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AWARDS / HONOURS / ACHIEVEMENTS

Avishek Parui



Dr. Avishek Parui has been elected to be Executive member of the Advisory Board of the International Memory Studies Association (MSA).

Parui teaches at IIT Madras as Assistant Professor (English). He has earned his PhD from Durham, UK. He is Associate Fellow, UK Higher Education Academy. He is also the Founder and Chairperson, Indian Network for Memory Studies (INMS), Centre for Memory Studies, Institute of Eminence (IOE), IIT Madras. Parui won the 2019 edition of the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize, awarded by IACLALS. He is a life member of IACLALS.

Banibrata Mahanta



Press release: PEN America is delighted to announce the 2021 grant winners. With the help of our partners, PEN America confers over 20 distinct awards, grants, and prizes each year, supporting writers and translators of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, children's literature, oral history, and more. The following grant winners will be supported as they continue their works-in-progress, and we look forward to seeing these thought-provoking and challenging examples of literary excellence brought to the world.

PEN/HEIM TRANSLATION FUND GRANTS

Now in their 18th year, the PEN/Heim Translation Fund Grants promote the publication and reception of translated world literature into English. Established by a gift from Priscilla and Michael Henry Heim in response to the dismayingly low number of literary translations appearing in English, the fund has supported almost 200 projects. For the 2021 cycle, the judges

reviewed 348 eligible applications from a wide array of languages of origin, genres, and time periods. Selected from this vast field of applicants are 10 projects, including Serbian, French, Nepali, Bulgarian, Icelandic, Hindi, and more, and each translator will receive a grant of \$3,575 to support the translation's completion. *Judges: Kareem James Abu-Zeid, Peter Constantine, Karen Emmerich, Nicholas Glastonbury, Elisabeth Jaquette, Tess Lewis, Aditi Machado, Sawako Nakayasu, Wanda Phipps, Jeremy Tiang, Lara Vergnaud, and Jeffrey Zuckerman.*

Banibrata Mahanta's translation from the Hindi of *Labanyadevi* by Kusum Khemani

From the judges' citation: "An ambitious, far-reaching novel, *Labanyadevi* follows a Bengali family across the generations before and after India's independence, using the eponymous protagonist's journey to ask questions about being and womanhood. Kusum Khemani's energetic prose, deadpan sense of humor, and exquisite control of tone are a pleasure to spend time with, while Banibrata Mahanta's translation stretches and manipulates language to produce a vivid text with a rich infusion of Indian English."

* <https://pen.org/literary-awards/grants-fellowships/2021-pen-america-literary-grant-winners/>

Banibrata Mahanta teaches at the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. His areas of interest include Translation Studies, Disability Studies, Contemporary Theory, Postcolonial Literature and Theory, Politics and Pedagogy of English Studies in India, Indian Writing in English, Iconography of Indian Nationalism, Linguistics and English Language Teaching. He is a life member of IACLALS.

Bharti Arora



Dr. Bharti Arora has been awarded the Charles Wallace India Trust Fellowship (2021-22) by the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities, University of Edinburgh. She will pursue her research in alliance with the latest themed campaign of the IASH, Institute Project on Decoloniality (IPD'24) for a duration of four months, beginning from January 2022 onwards. Arora teaches at the Department of English, Tagore Government Arts and Science College, Pondicherry University. She has earned Ph.D. (English) from Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Her areas of research include Gender Studies, Women's Fiction, Indian Literatures, Social Movements and Nation. Her doctoral thesis was published as "Writing Gender, Writing Nation: Women's Fiction in Post-Independence India" by Routledge in 2020. She is a life member of IACLALS.

IACLALS DISTINGUISHED SPEAKER SERIES

The **Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies** (IACLALS) organized the second and third editions of its ***Distinguished Speaker Series*** in collaboration with Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi.

The second talk was delivered by Prof. Fakrul Alam (University of Dhaka) on “English Studies in Bangladesh”, on Saturday, January 30, 2021. The session was chaired by former Chairperson of IACLALS, Prof. GJV Prasad. The talk was attended by members of IACLALS and members from academia across borders. The talk was streamed live on the IACLALS Facebook page, and the complete video can be accessed here: <https://fb.watch/4fnHZBTZJi/>





**INDIAN ASSOCIATION FOR COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE
AND LANGUAGE STUDIES (IACLALS)**

IN COLLABORATION WITH
JANKI DEVI MEMORIAL COLLEGE
PRESENTS

Distinguished Speaker Series
(Lecture 2)

English Studies in Bangladesh



Fakrul Alam (University of Dhaka)
Chair: GJV Prasad (Jawaharlal Nehru University)

SATURDAY, JANUARY 30, 2021

Time: 5:30 pm IST/ 6 pm BT
Login Time: 5:00 pm IST/ 5:30 pm BT
Zoom ID: 82042755803
Zoom Password: 513154

M. Asaduddin
Chairperson, IACLALS

Swati Pal
Principal, JDMC

Catch us live on on Facebook at IACLALS Official Page!

For any queries, please contact Kalyanee Rajan at treasurer.iacials@gmail.com

The third talk of the Distinguished Speaker Series was delivered by Muneeza Shamsie, a Pakistani writer, critic, literary journalist, bibliographer and editor. She spoke on “Pakistani English Literature: Identity and Belonging”, on Saturday, April 3, 2021. The session was chaired by eminent academic and critic, Prof. Malashri Lal. The discussant was Prof. Suman Gupta from The Open University, UK. . The talk was attended by members of IACLALS and members from academia across borders. The talk was streamed live on the IACLALS

Facebook page, and the complete video can be accessed here: <https://fb.watch/62XMYEr2wq/>




Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature & Language Studies (IACLALS)

in collaboration with

Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi

presents

Distinguished Speaker Series (Lecture 3)

Pakistani English Literature: Identity and Belonging



Speaker: Muneeza Shamsie

Discussant: Suman Gupta (The Open University, UK)

Chair: Malashri Lal (University of Delhi)

Date: April 3, 2021 (Saturday)

Time: 05:30 PM – 07:30 PM, IST
Login Time: 05:15 PM

Zoom ID: 94421359972
Zoom Passcode: IACLALS

M. Asaduddin
Chairperson, IACLALS

Swati Pal
Principal, JDMC

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Members can watch this dedicated page on our website for information regarding the next lecture: <https://www.iacials.com/dss--lectures.html>

TRIBUTES / OBITUARIES

KAPILA VATSYAYAN (25th December 1928—16th September 2020)



Kapila Vatsyayan was one of the finest scholars of the literary, visual and performative arts of India of our post-independence era, and thus a luminous successor to Ananda Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch. She was also an insightful theoretician of Indian aesthetics. As if all this knowledge were not enough, she was a performative artist herself, having learnt not one but several forms of classical Indian dances, each from an eminent guru of that tradition. Had she not been born a woman, she might have been called a Renaissance Man.

She also had a day-job. Beginning in the 1950s and continuing up to her dying day, she was a hands-on cultural and academic organizer, innovator and administrator. She played a part in putting on the road the very first Republic Day parade on Rajpath, and she rose to represent India at numerous international organizations including the UNESCO. She curated on behalf of the Government of India exhibitions of Indian culture held in numerous countries, and she sent out delegations abroad of writers and performers to promote a better understanding of Indian culture. She was not a czarina of culture; rather, she was an impresario who was herself a true connoisseur of culture. For her culture was not just a government department; it was what she lived and breathed every day.

She was born to enlightened parents; her mother Usha Malik was a Hindi writer. Educated initially at Santiniketan, she did an M.A. in English from Delhi University, and then taught for a couple of years at Miranda House. She did another M.A. at the University of Michigan, and on return decided to opt for something completely different. She proceeded to the Banaras Hindu University to do a Ph.D. on the interrelation between Indian literature and the other arts, especially dance, painting and sculpture. In Banaras, she had for her supervisor a Sanskritist who was one of the most innovative scholars of our times, Vasudeva Sharan Agrawala. His first major work was *India as Known to Panini* (1953), in which he performed the miraculous feat of extracting and inferring a whole social and economic history from Panini's dry and aphoristic grammatical *sutras*. Kapila-ji would love to recount how he would say to her at the beginning of her tutelage: "*Arre Moorkha, tu Amerika se yahi seekh ke aayi hai?*" (You idiot, is this what you learnt in America?)

The poet Kabir, also from Banaras, had said that a disciple is like a clay-pot whom the guru supports with one hand from within, while he hammers away with the other hand at even the

slightest defect on the outside. Such a guru was Agrawala, and it is to Kapila ji's credit, anglicized as she was, that she remoulded herself like putty to become his perfect *shishyaa*. Almost the last books that she published were two large volumes, running to nearly a thousand pages each, that she edited of the best writings of her great guru, with one volume in English and the other in Hindi (2015). Agrawala could have had no more apt *guru-dakshina*.

Kapila ji returned from Banaras to take up a job in those days of Nehruvian idealism as a cultural adviser in the Ministry of Education where Maulana Abul Kalam Azad was her punctilious boss. She helped shape numerous cultural institutions, with the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA), founded in 1985, being her special baby. It embodied her vision of the interrelatedness of all the arts, both folk and classical. Her original scholarly contribution was spread across several related areas. Her pioneering doctoral work was published as *Classical Indian Dance in Literature and the Arts* (1968). She wrote a book on that much evoked but little read seminal text, the *Natya Shastra* (1996). She theorized concepts of Time and Space as manifested in Indian art (1983, 1996).

She also searched out and published several series of paintings illustrating Jayadeva's long poem the *Gita-Govinda* from remote corners of India, ranging from Bundi to Darbhanga to Assam. She knew this text and its illustrations better probably than any other scholar ever has. When a multi-media DVD containing her rare findings and erudite reflections on the subject was released at the IGNCA in May 2015, it seemed to be the culmination of her life's work. A *festschrift* for her had been published under the apt title *Art: The Integral Vision* (1994). She was awarded the Padma Vibhushana in 2011. A biography of hers by Jyoti Sabharwal with the sub-title *Afloat a Lotus Leaf* was published in 2015.

Always gracious and generous, Kapila ji had a commanding presence. An old friend of hers has said that when he first saw her in the 1950s, she looked to him like a Greek goddess. Others reported a corresponding *hauteur* as well. Certainly, with her classical elegance, no one could ever fail to notice her. I first met her in 1971 when a colleague of mine from St Stephen's College and I went to invite her to give a lecture in our college. She came, and illustrated her talk by performing the appropriate dance steps and *mudra*. Later, she would often talk to me about English literature, and I went up in her esteem unduly when in 1997, I became the Head of the English Department at Delhi University, for she seemed to transfer to me some of the regard she had in her youth for my great predecessors!

In 2004 she and I happened to be the two invitees from India to a conference on World Literature at Stockholm, and as she could not travel at the last minute, I had the pleasure of presenting her paper there. She would often invite me to speak at book-discussions and other events that she helped organize at the India International Centre, including at the launch of her biography. In turn, she came and chaired the launch of a *festschrift* for me. With her questing intellectual rigour, delightful wit, and easy grace, she enhanced each event and discourse she participated in. She will be missed for a long time to come.

Harish Trivedi

Former Chairperson, IACLALS

Professor (retired), Delhi University

Currently: Advisory Council Member of The Comparative Literature Association of India.

MANGLESH DABRAL
(16th May 1948 – 9th December 2020)



Voice of Humanity

Born in Kafalpaani village in Tehri Garwal in 1948, Manglesh Dabral took the road to the city and never returned back. His poem *Shehar* ('City') aptly summarizes this sentiment:

मैंने शहर को देखा और मैं मुस्कराया
 वहाँ कोई कैसे रह सकता है
 यह जानने मैं गया
 और वापस न आया (1974)¹

I looked at the city and I smiled
 Who would ever want to live there
 I went to know
 and did not come back.

The poem talks about helplessness of a man, who felt rootless and could never return to his place of birth as the insensitive 'city' entraps him. His poetry is replete with mountains; rains; local tales; dreams; and familial relations and their importance — father, mother, grandfather.

In his poem *Ghar ka Rasta* (*The Way Home*), he writes:

मैं अपनी उदासी के लिए
 क्षमा नहीं माँगना चाहता था
 मैं नहीं चाहता था मामूली
 इच्छाओं को चेहरे पर ले आना
 मैं भूल नहीं जाना चाहता था
 अपने घर का रास्ता²

I did not want to apologize
 For my despair
 I did not want my simple desires

¹ <http://kavitakosh.org>

² <https://www.hindwi.org/kavita/ghar-ka-raasta-manglesh-dabral-kavita>

To show on my face
I did not ever want to forget
The way back home.

Memory and displacement of soul also play an important role in his poetry. He wrote about those who were ignored by the system. “He wrote about the worries and needs of those who don’t figure in the imagination of the power people. His poem, *Sangatkar*, was about the singer who guides the main performer but who’s never in focus and doesn’t have an identity of his own... He was an intellectually and ideologically honest person. He refused to attend a famous literature festival because he felt that the sponsors were dubious,” says Satyanand Nirupam, editorial director, Rajkamal Prakashan Group (The Times of India December 10, 2020).

Considerate and unassuming, he spoke against dictatorial and divisive forces in his latest collection *Naye Yug Mein Shatru*. For his contribution to Hindi literature, the Sahitya Akademi awarded him in 2000 for his poetry collection *Hum Jo Dekhte Hain*. He returned the award due to the prejudiced attitude of the authorities.

He talked and wrote about humans and humanity. Dabral wrote about the real troubles of the common people. “He knew that what is characterised as inhumanity is, in fact, a crisis of humanity” (The Wire December 11, 2020). He was deeply concerned with the way the essence of Hindi language was being distorted and destroyed. Probably it was in one of those melancholic moments that he wrote:

हिंदी में कविता, कहानी, उपन्यास बहुत लिखे जा रहे हैं, लेकिन सच यह है कि इन सबकी मृत्यु हो चुकी है। हालांकि ऐसी घोषणा नहीं हुई है और शायद होगी भी नहीं क्योंकि उन्हें खूब लिखा जा रहा है। लेकिन हिंदी में अब सिर्फ ‘जय श्रीराम’ और ‘वंदे मातरम्’ और ‘मुसलमान का एक ही स्थान, पाकिस्तान या कब्रिस्तान’ जैसी चीज़ें जीवित हैं। इस भाषा में लिखने की मुझे बहुत ग्लानि है। काश, मैं इस भाषा में न जन्मा होता।³

Although there is much that is being written by way of poetry, stories and novels in Hindi, in truth these forms have died, although there has been no pronouncement to this effect, simply because of the spate of writings. However, it is only themes like ‘Jai Shri Ram,’ Vande Mataram, ‘just one place for Muslims: Pakistan or the graveyard’ that are alive in Hindi now. The fact that I write in this language fills me with remorse. How I wish it was not my mother tongue!’ (The Wire)

The social realities and the carelessness towards Hindi language troubled Dabral. He wrote:

सड़कों पर बसों में बैठकघरों में इतनी बड़ी भीड़ में कोई नहीं कहता
आज मुझे निराला की कुछ पंक्तियां याद आयीं। कोई नहीं कहता मैंने
नागार्जुन को पढ़ा है। कोई नहीं कहता किस तरह मरे मुक्तिबोध।

एक कहता है मैंने कर ली है खूब तरक्की। एक खुश है कि उसे बस
में मिल गयी है सीट। एक कहता है यह समाज क्यों नहीं मानता
मेरा हुक्म। एक देख चुका है अपना पूरा भविष्य। एक कहता है देखिए

³ <http://thewirehindi.com/150891/hindi-literature-remembering-manglesh-dabral/>

किस तरह बनाता हूँ अपना रास्ता
एक कहता है मैं हूँ गरीब। मेरे पास नहीं है कोई और शब्द⁴

In the streets, on buses, in meeting places,
no one in such a huge throng says — a few lines of Nirala came to my mind today.
No one says – I have read Nagarjuna.
No one talks about how Muktibodh died

One says — I have made huge strides.
One is happy to find a seat in the bus.
One asks — why does society not follow my command.
One has already seen his whole future laid out.

One says –just wait and see how I carve out my way forward
One says — I am poor. I don't have any other word left.⁵

Dabral's poetry talks about the tribulations faced by common people. He was a "poet of delicate doubts and anxious assertions. He began his *Sahitya Akademi* award acceptance speech, *Kavi Ka Akelapan (The Loneliness of a Poet)*, with a reference to Pablo Neruda. The Chilean poet had begun questioning his art upon learning that a man had committed suicide after reading some of his melancholic poems. This anecdote, perhaps, epitomised Dabral's artistic life — how to write about sorrow without losing hope, how to be a poet without ceasing to be a human" (*The Indian Express* December 11, 2020). Not only his poetry but his prose is also about 'people's cause.' He "dedicated a book of his prose pieces to 'prose masters of past and future,' that included writers from various factions. His language, thus, operated in a luminal zone, illumined both by the rigour of prose and the lyricism of poetry" (*The Indian Express*).

He also enjoyed classical music and could play the harmonium wonderfully. He "remembered his childhood village and the time spent with his father, who used to play *Raga Durga* on a harmonium with German reeds in the essay *Ek Raag Ke Awshesh (The Remnants of a Raga, IE, November 12, 2017)*. As Dabral was leaving his village, with the trees and the hills falling behind, it occurred to him that he was gradually going away from his most adored raga. [In the essay, one comes across] the sensibility of the young man who was 'banished from a raga.' He ended the essay with the words: '*Durga* was like a civilisation — a restless raga that floated inside a thin layer of darkness and was composed of elements like water, trees, grass, river, rocks and birds. A raga that now survives in its remnants'" (*The Indian express*).

He worked in Hindi *Patriot*, *Pratipaksh*, *Aaspaas*, *Purvagrah*, *Amrit Prabhat*, *Jansatta*, *Sahara Samay*, National Book Trust of India, the Hindi monthly *Public Agenda* and had a lifelong association with *Jan Sanskriti Manch*, a cultural organisation linked with the CPI-ML. He was one of the most known voices from Hindi. He wrote five poetry collections — *Pahar Par Lalten (Lamp on the Mountain)*, *Ghar Ka Rasta (The Way Home)*, *Hum Jo Dekhte Hain (What We See)*, *Awaz Bhi Ek Jagah Hai (Voice is Also at One Place)*, and *Naye Yug Mein Shatru (Enemies in the New Era)*. He also wrote two collections of prose – *Lekhak Ki Roti*

⁴ <http://thewirehindi.com/150891/hindi-literature-remembering-manglesh-dabral/>

⁵ <https://thewire.in/the-arts/manglesh-dabral-poet-tribute>

(*Bread of a Writer*) and *Kavi Ka Akelapan* (*The Loneliness of a Poet*); and a travel diary about his time in Iowa — *Ek Baar Iowa*. His works have been translated into many Indian languages as well as in Russian, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, Polish and Bulgarian. Dabral passed away on December 9, 2020. He was one of the most celebrated poets of 'hills.' The legacy of his poetry, which talks about sorrows without giving up hope, will, however, live on in the hearts and minds of his readers forever.

Dr. Neenu Kumar

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SUGATHAKUMARI

(22nd January 1934 – 23rd December 2020)



Veteran Malayalam poet and environmental activist Sugathakumari, popularly known as Sugatha Teacher succumbed to Covid19 pandemic on 23rd December 2020. Born in Aranmula town of Kerala on 22nd January 1934 as the second daughter of eminent litterateurs, Bodeshwaran and Karthyayini, she was raised in Thiruvananthapuram. While her father donned several hats including that of a renowned Gandhian, social reformer, Independence activist, wrestler and poet, her mother taught Sanskrit at Thiruvananthapuram's famous Women's college, and her Master's degree found her a place among the first few Keralite women to acquire it. Sugathakumari followed suit and acquired an Honours degree in Philosophy. She however, could not complete her doctoral degree in Comparative Philosophy on the "Concept of Moksha". She moved to Delhi after her marriage to educationist and writer Dr. K Velayudhan Nair, who also specialised in Educational Psychology, apart from authoring

a notable study on Sri Aurobindo. Sugathakumari's sisters were acclaimed writers and won Akademi awards too: her elder sister, Hridayakumari won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 1991 while her younger sister, B. Sujatha Devi won it in 1999. Both passed away several years ago, while her husband lost his life to cancer in 2003. She is survived by their daughter Lakshmi Devi, also a poet and lyricist.

Sugathakumari's earliest work was published under a male pseudonym "Sreekumar", which was spotted by NV Krishna Warriar, former editor of Mathrubhumi, who provided her with valuable encouragement and enthusiastic support, to expand her literary horizons. She started with poems that were characterised by their lyrical, romantic, love-quest with tragic undertones quality, which eventually veered into pensive, philosophical, feminist and environmentally conscious terrains; she would later be recognized as acutely philosophical, as well as endowed with critical sensitivity among her contemporary poets writing in Malayalam. It is a lesser known fact that she also dabbled quite a bit with literature for children, recognized in due course by an Award in 2008 for Lifetime Contribution to Children's Literature, instituted by the State Institute of Children's Literature.

Throughout her career spanning nearly six decades, Sugathakumari authored fifteen collections of poems, which include Mutthuchippi (Pearl and Oyster) Pathirappookkal (Midnight Flowers), the much awarded Paavam Manavahridayam (Poor Human Heart), Irul Chirakukal (The Wings of Darkness), Raathrimazha (Night Rain), Ambalamani (Temple Bell), Kurinjippookkal (Kurinji Flowers) Radhayevide (Where is Radha?), Devadasi, Abhisarika, and Krishnakavithakal. It is crucial to mention here her unparalleled contribution towards preserving Silent Valley, a tropical evergreen forest in Palakkad district of Kerala, housing the lion-tailed macaques, a highly endangered species, one of the last undisturbed tracts of the Southern Western Ghats' mountain rainforests, and a delicate haven to both endemic biodiversity and a few indigenous communities. The Save Silent Valley Movement rooting against the Kerala State Electricity Board's (KSEB) proposed hydroelectric dam, took speed in the 1970s, and was commanded by the likes of John C. Jacob, M.K. Prasad among others. Sugathakumari's rousing poem written in this context, Marathinu Sthuthi (Ode to a tree), effectively took the prime spot of being the movement's anthem, and was prescriptively recited at every protest organized under the aegis of the movement. Sometimes labelled as environmental terrorist by those in power, she also spearheaded a long-drawn-out struggle to halt the implementation of an atomic power project at Peringome in Kannur district in north Kerala. She took her commitment towards women's welfare further by setting up an organization called "Abhaya" in 1980, to cater to the needs to women from unprivileged sections of the society, especially those who lacked financial security, who were survivors of physical and domestic violence, and heinous crimes such as rape, as well as those addicted to drugs.

The Kerala Women's Commission established in 1996 saw Sugathakumari as its first Chairperson, and in her tenure spanning five years, she was responsible for spearheading several significant projects towards empowering the womenfolk of Kerala, including the Kudumbashree Mission and the Jagratha Samitis for women's safety. Apart from these activities involving activism and extensive field work, she also served as the principal of Kerala State Jawahar Balabhavan at Thiruvananthapuram, an institution established under the aegis of the Department of Culture with the aim of promoting creativity of children. The Kerala State Institute for Children's Literature, a one of its kind institute in the country established by the Govt. of Kerala, started the publication of its Children's Magazine named *Thaliru* with Sugathakumari as its founding editor-in-chief. Sugathakumari's distinguished work profile

includes her role as the Secretary of Nature Conservation Committee, the General Council member of the Sahitya Akademi, and member of the Kerala Film Censor Board among others.

The list of awards Sugathakumari was decorated with equally glowing, and nearly endless too: she won the first of her two Kerala Sahitya Akademi award for her collection titled *Pathirapookkal* (Flowers of Midnight) in 1968, and the second one a decade later in 1978 for *Rathrimazha* (Night Rain). Her elder sister, Hridyakumari translated *Rathrimazha* into English, a powerful though melancholy poem in six sections, dwelling upon the parallels between a woman and rain, and the various stages of a woman's emotional evolution alongside the rain as her constant companion.

Night rain,
Like some young madwoman
Weeping, laughing, whimpering,
For nothing
Muttering without a stop,
And sitting huddled up
Tossing her long hair...
...
Night rain,
Witness to my love,
Who lulled me to sleep
On those auspicious nights long ago,
Giving more joy than the white moonlight
Which made me thrill with joy
And laugh.

Night rain,
Now witness to my grief
When on my sweltering sickbed
In the sleepless hours of night
Alone I reel with pain,
Forgetting even to weep
And freeze into stone...

Sugathakumari also received an enviable number of awards like the Odakkuzhal Award in 1982 for the collection titled *Ambalamani*, the Vayalar Award in 1984 for the same collection, the prestigious Asan Smaraka Kavitha Puraskaram in 1990, the Lalithambika Antharjanam Smaraka Sahitya Award for Lifetime contribution to Malayalam Literature in 2001, the Award for Lifetime Contribution to Children's Literature in 2008, the highest literary honour given by the Kerala Sahitya Akademi- Ezhuthachan Puraskaram in 2009 – for her outstanding contribution, and the 15th Basheer Award in 2009 for her significant efforts to “awaken people's social consciousness” along with her exceptional contribution as a poet. Her collection titled “*Manalezhuthu*” (The Writing on the Sand) won the prestigious Saraswati Samman in 2013. Among non-literary honours, she won the first Indira Priyadarshini Vriksha Mitra Award in 1986, the Government of India's fourth highest civilian award, Padma Shri in 2006, and the Streesakti Award for her exemplary courage in working for social issues in 2007.

According to KA Shaji writing for the forum downtoearth.org, Sugathakumari told her followers to plant a banyan tree without any engraving, when they asked for her last wish. She wanted such a tree for her memorial. “Do not keep even my ashes there. Let birds come and

eat the fruits; that is all I want.” A long-term critic of flawed governmental policies, she did not want any posthumous government honour. She also told her followers to not place any flower or wreath on her dead body. Instead, she went on to suggest a spot to plant the memorial tree — in the backyard of Abhaya, the institution she had established. Her unflinching commitment towards the cause of environment, women, children, and philanthropy found luminous expression in Sugathakumari’s poetry as well as her numerous non-literary pursuits; notwithstanding her failing health, she extended all possible support to causes brought to her attention, for instance, joining the protest by nuns from the Missionaries of Jesus, demanding the arrest of rape-accused bishop Franco Mulakkal in 2018. A very minor portion of her work is available beyond Malayalam; one hopes for translations in several languages in the times to come, so that her sensitive and environmentally conscious voice receives the long overdue global recognition. A humanist to the core, and a steadfast social justice activist, Sugathakumari’s peerless legacy will endure, inspiring many across all strata of society and for generations to come.

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SANKHA GHOSH
(5th February 1932 – 21st April 2021)



On 21 April, 2021, the death of Sankha Ghosh marked the end of an era in Bangla poetry. Over the years, Ghosh has been the conscience of Bengal through his voice of resistance against all forms of socio – political injustice.

Born as Chittopriyo Ghosh on February 5, 1932, in Chandpur (now in Bangladesh), to Manindra Kumar Ghosh and Amalabala, Sankha Ghosh spent much of his childhood in small town in Pabna district, Pakshi. His family moved to India during the Partition. He studied Bangla literature at Presidency College and received his BA degree in 1951 and an MA from Calcutta University in 1954. He taught for decades at Calcutta University and at Jadavpur University, Kolkata. A formidable and scintillating poet, Sankha Ghosh was also a beloved teacher and benevolent guardian for many students and aspiring writers.

In 1967, he was part of the University of Iowa’s prestigious writers’ residency. He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi award in 1977 for his book *Babarar Prarthana* (*Babar’s Prayer*) and the Narsingh Das Puraskar for *Murkha baro, samajik noy*. For *Dhum legechhe hrit kamale*, he was awarded the Rabindra Puraskar in 1989. In the year 1999, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award for the translation of Girish Karnad’s Kannada play *Taledanda*. He was also honoured with the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India in 2011 and the Jnanpith Award in 2016.

The 1930s and 1940s had ushered in a revolution in Bangla poetry with the advent of poets such as Jibanananda Das, Buddhadeva Bose, Bishnu Dey, Sudhindranath Dutta and others. It was a movement that tried resist and negotiate the overwhelming presence of Rabindranath. Sampa Sen, Professor of Bangla Literature, opines “Shankha Ghosh, when he burst into the scene in the 1950s, was an inheritor of that new movement, but he did not adhere to any one particular tradition or form. In fact, there has never been a poet who has ever participated so wholeheartedly in mass movements without having any allegiance to any particular political party or political line. In spite of being very political, his poetry was fiercely individualistic. Stylistically, too, his poetry was varied, and he constantly explored metres and rhythms.”¹

One is reminded of his poem “Advertisements Hide My Face”:

All alone I wait for you
In the lane I find my place
I think of giving you a glimpse
But advertisements hide my face

All the things I meant to say
Are in that lane now, languishing
But my mask, so exhausted,
Dangles from the advertising²

The poem offers a sharp critique of the crass consumerism of our times and draws attention to a masked world, an ironical moment in a post Covid–19 scenario. Then again, in the poem “Doubt” he portrays a voice of resilience against all forms of absolutism:

“Let some doubt remain, too much certainty isn’t right”
With these last words you left for the uncertain world.
Since then, out of natural doubt over what you told me
Can I have my original certainty back once again?³

¹<https://frontline.thehindu.com/other/obituary/obituary-shankha-ghosh-1932-2021-conscience-of-bengal-tribute/article34455473.ece> Accessed 15 July 2021

Sankha Ghosh believed in the power of poetic truth—intensely personal and consistently political at the same time. In an interview with Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee, he spoke on the nature of poetic truth: “Once I wrote that telling the truth is the only function of poetry. This is what I still believe as the true nature of poetry. But the word ‘truth’ is problematic, as there are many manifestations of truth. We have a personal truth; then there is the social truth; and somewhere hidden is the truth of our whole existence. Sometimes, they come from three directions and clash at a particular point. That becomes the moment of poetic truth. If an adequate language can suddenly touch that moment, once or repeatedly, only then perhaps true poetry is born. This may happen only on a few occasions.”⁴

With his sharp intellect and sense of subtlety, Sankha Ghosh’s oeuvre has provided us with many such moments of poetic truth that pave the way for a life of resilience and sustenance in the darkest of times, in the face of all forms of absolutism. His poetry helps us find a possibility to be in this world.

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² <https://scroll.in/article/992899/advertisements-hide-my-face-nine-poems-by-the-bengali-poet-shankha-ghosh-1932-2021> Accessed 15 July 2021.

³ <https://scroll.in/article/992899/advertisements-hide-my-face-nine-poems-by-the-bengali-poet-shankha-ghosh-1932-2021> Accessed 15 July 2021.

⁴ Ghosh, Sankha, and Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee. "Sankha Ghosh in Conversation with Nirmal Kanti Bhattacharjee." *Indian Literature* 61, no. 4 (300) (2017): 26-33. Accessed July 15, 2021. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26791421>.

SUBHADRA SEN GUPTA (1952 – 3rd May 2021)



‘Tinker Bell’ Subhadra Sen Gupta

I had met Subhadra for the first time in 2000 when I was researching for the Indian section of the *Cambridge Guide to Children’s Books in English* published in the spring of 2001. I had undertaken the project, piqued by a Westerner’s comment that there was no children’s literature

of any worth coming from India, other than a rare, stray offering by an Anita Desai or a Salman Rushdie. Subhadra Sen Gupta's name was a ready topper in my list of homegrown, Indian children's authors, my ablest ally in this battle against unthinking supercilious dismissiveness.

Much loved author, Sen Gupta's signal quality was her ability to reach difficult, esoteric material to her child audience without speaking down to them, without ever boring them. Shunning the distancing monotonous drone of history text books, she brought history and historical personages to life for her young readers. The way she ferreted out little warming details—of Akbar's limp, of paan-chewing Ashoka, of Gandhi, being taught by his wife Kasturba—which lit up the dim pages of the past. In times, when invested intellectual comment on vexing contemporary issues was the 'done' thing, she stepped in to make the most astute interventions in the most direct and simplest manner. One of her latest books, *The Constitution of India for Children* (2020) came as one of the sanest, frontal and grounded reminders of the openness of the founding tenets of our Constitution. It was this humanistic appeal of her writing, it was this gutsy raising of voice against divisive polarizing forces, that gave her writing a time-defying power.

Feted widely, she had been honoured by Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar in 2015, the Tata's Big Little Book Award in 2020 and three White Raven Awards at the Bologna Children's Book Fair. Published by nearly all the leading publishing houses—Penguin, Rupa, Zubaan, Niyogi, Scholastic, HarperCollins India, Pratham, she authored a rich and variegated literary fare: historical fiction and non-fiction, mythological tales, travel writing, adventure stories, detective stories and ghost narratives, and comic strips and graphic novels.

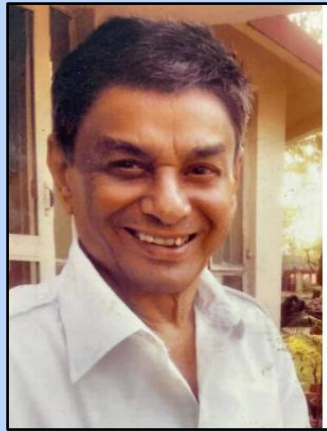
With more than sixty books to her credit, Sen Gupta yet wore her accomplishments and recognition lightly. It is no wonder that Sen Gupta will be remembered not only for her immense creative output but also for her warm, responsive, caring charm. She loved her child audience so much that she was ever ready to listen to them to the extent of posting her email id in all her books, giving freely of her bountiful narrative skills to them; incorporating their inputs in her creative offerings. Always helpful and generous with practical advice, always convivial yet firm in her beliefs, she became a valued friend to the people she worked with: writers, editors and illustrators, all remember her with fondness, deeply mourning her loss to the cruel Covid 19 pandemic.

The sense that she had so much more to give to her readers leaves us with a sense of loss. But this sorrow is tempered by the fact that she will live on in her published word, ever-fresh, ever delightfully inviting, ever potent. Her tinkling voice may no longer be heard, but the magic of Tinker Bell, as her fellow author Anupa Lal called her, will continue to weave its spell.

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R. S. SHARMA
(11th July 1939 – 10th May 2021)



Professor R.S.Sharma died on 10 May 2021 in Hyderabad after a brief illness. His death brought a flood of memories to my mind from my numerous visits to ASRC (American Studies Research Centre), Hyderabad between 1988 and 1995. In all these visits I had the good fortune of spending a lot of time with Professor Radhey Shyam Sharma, better known as R.S.Sharma in ASRC. Those were the heydays of ASRC when young and senior scholars interacted with each other in a very informal manner, a luxury usually denied to young scholars in the regimented atmosphere of their own universities and colleges. Of all the Hyderabad-based professors, especially from the University of Hyderabad and Osmania University, who frequented ASRC, Prof R.S.Sharma was considered the most approachable and the most popular. He not only kept pace with the latest in scholarship but also in what was going on in the small world of ASRCians.

Sharma Saheb was a good scholar and a very warm person. He loved to talk. We often sat on the small boundary walls leading to the main ASRC gate. Young scholars flocked around him and he was never short of company. He was full of wit and humor and always had interesting anecdotes to share. Thus on seeing one professor who was a regular at ASRC, he would whisper " look, this fellow is running Mark Twain Society of India and he doesn't know how to smile". Once after chairing a selection committee of the department of Arabic as the dean, he asked a candidate to speak something in Arabic. Sharma Saheb found the words spoken by the candidate a bit familiar. After a while, as Sharma Saheb loved to recount, he, because of his familiarity with Quranic verses, 'caught' the candidate reciting a verse from the Quran and passing it off as modern spoken Arabic.

I once accompanied him and his wife Professor Kausar Azam, a distinguished scholar of political science, in his car to Nizam College where he delivered an excellent lecture on Emily Dickinson. I especially remember his discussion of references to 'itr'(perfume) in that lecture. On the return some security personnel stopped us and started checking his car. He lost cool and scolded them " you people only know how to trouble ordinary law- abiding citizens." (Yes there was a time when a university professor could shout at security personnel, but to be fair to the security staff, they were perfectly well-behaved and civil.)

Professor Sharma was originally from Assam. Born in Tinsukia on July 11, 1939, he did his graduation from Gauhati University in 1962 and came to Hyderabad the same year. His admission in Hyderabad was the result of a directive of the government of India which permitted students of Assam to go to different Indian universities for higher education. He obtained his MA degree in English literature from Osmania University, Hyderabad in 1965,

winning the William Shakespeare Gold Medal. He joined Osmania University as a lecturer in 1965 itself and worked on D.H.Lawrence for his doctorate. He won a British Council Scholarship in 1973. Incidentally he was in England to study Shakespeare along with my supervisor Maqbool Hasan Khan, a Professor of English at Aligarh Muslim University and a brilliant Shakespeare scholar and an exceptionally good teacher. In fact, whenever Sharma Saheb met me, he loved to recall his days spent with Professor Khan in England. He also won a fellowship of American Council of Learned Societies and Fulbright Foundation.

Sharma Saheb had a distinguished career serving the Department of English as Head and the Dean of Humanities. Apart from the English and American canon, he also had interest in Latin American literature and introduced Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Octavio Paz in English translation to his students.

As a senior academic he influenced a number of young scholars who have become distinguished scholars in their own right. Professor Sachidananda Mohanty, who had a long association with him since 1987, writes that “with Professor Sharma’s avid academic support, I developed scholarly interest in D.H.Lawrence and American literature.” Professor Mohanty also praises him for his reading of the “foundational texts, especially in the newer areas of research.”

Sharma Saheb not only taught poetry with great interest, he also wrote poetry in Hindi, using the pen name of Pradeep Sharma. His poetry touches different threads of life, the fallibility of man, the vanity of self, the pain and pleasures associated with memory, the ordinary desires of day to day life, and above all his humanism. Thus he could write:

Farishte ham bhi nahin aur farishte tum bhi nahin
 Ham aadmi hain to phir aadmi ki baat karein
 Khadam khadam pe jahan mout intezaar kare
 Hamein to ishq se matlab, milan ki baat karein
 Khuda ka zikr karein ya tumhari baat karein
 In another poem he expresses the complex nature of self-using the metaphor of a mirror:
 Aina na ban saka
 Dhool ban bikhar gaya
 Yash ko dhoondhta huwa
 Khud mein jo ulajh gaya
 Vistar aham ka kiya
 Aur khud simat gaya
 Aina na ban saka
 Dhool ban bikhar gaya
 Woh main nahin woh main nahin
 Woh to koi aur thaa!

His poems can also evoke tender romantic feelings, employing a very gentle imagery:

Kya yaad hai tumhein bhi
 Kya naam tha un phoolon ka jo main ne tumhein diye thay?
 Aur woh dhoop kaisi thi jo ham ne
 Kabhi banti thi?
 Kaun se waqt ka tha aakaash us din
 Jab chalte chalte waqt tham gaya tha
 Aur tum nein achanak ruk kar kaha thaa
 Usi gulmohar ke neeche

“Kahin ye wahi pagalpan to nahin
Log jise pyar kahte hain?”

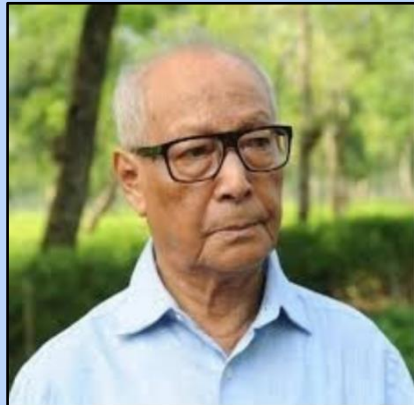
As can be seen in the above poems an important feature of his Hindi poetic diction is the use of both Hindi and Urdu words, with a little touch of Deccani Urdu. Sharma Saheb lived the composite culture of India.

Indian Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language extends its heartfelt condolences to Professor Radhey Shyam Sharma's family, his friends and students. All ASRCians will miss Sharma Saheb. May his soul rest in peace.

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HOMEN BORGOHAIN
(7th December 1932 – 12th May 2021)



The Covid -19 pandemic has been cataclysmic in nature right from its onset, and it has rudely snatched away many a loved one. Unfortunately for Assamese society in particular and Indian literature at large, the disease also claimed renowned writer, journalist, columnist, Sahitya Akademi awardee, poet, and editor par excellence Homen Borgohain on May 12, 2021. Although he had tested negative for Covid-19 and returned home from the hospital, he suffered a cardiac arrest as a post-Covid complication and passed away suddenly.

Born to a modest family in Dhakuakhana, a village in Assam's Lakhimpur district, Borgohain completed his schooling from Dibrugarh Govt. Boys' Higher Secondary School and then went on to do his higher studies at Guwahati's premiere institution – Cotton College. He started his professional journey as an officer in the Assam Civil Service, but after a brief stint he turned to the worlds of journalism and writing.

In his lifespan of 88 years, Borgohain gave to the world a veritable treasure trove of literary gems. A remarkable factor is that in spite of growing up in a rural area, he was adroit in understanding and writing about many a complexity related to urban life. His works had the

rare quality of being loved and acclaimed by critics and the masses alike. In spite of his immense knowledge and capability and all the makings of an intellectual's writer, he was always a people's writer, which contributed to his immense popularity among readers of all ages. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear people say that it was a Homen Borgohain novel that turned them into avid readers and Assamese literature lovers. His rich, expansive body of work includes eleven novels, four non-fiction books, numerous edited volumes, short stories, and a book of poems titled *Hoimonti* (1987). Notable works by the author include *Subala* (1963), *Tantrik* (1967), *Pita Putra* (1971), *Halodhiya Soraye Baodhan Khai* (1973), *Timir Tirtha* (1977), *Saudor Puteke Nao Meli Jay* (1987), *Matsyagandha* (1987), and *Nishangata* (2000).

One thing that has always been admirable about the literary maven was how he handled multiple roles in his career with ease and excellence. It would not be incorrect to say that his journalistic integrity, practices, and keen observational power regarding society are reflected in his writings, as every piece of work was backed by in-depth research on the subject. Moreover, most of Borgohain's works have been landmarks of sorts. His first novel *Subala* was path-breaking in that it was among the first Assamese literary works to be based on a sex worker's life. *Pita Putra* was the first jointly-written novel in Assamese. Borgohain wrote the novel along with his wife Nirupama Borgohain (née Tamuli), an eminent Assamese journalist and writer. *Halodhiya Soraye Baodhan Khai* was made into a movie by esteemed filmmaker Jahnu Barua and it went on to receive the National Film Award for Best Feature Film in 1988 and various awards at the Locarno International Film Festival the same year. *Matsyagandha* (1987), which depicts the devastation caused by opium and deals with the subject of untouchability, is widely considered a must-read work for anyone interested in Assamese literary works. This was his second book of fiction to be made into a feature film. The writer also worked with a Calcutta-based daily named *Aajkaal* for a few years in the course of his career, where he served as a special correspondent with several of his pieces appearing in the paper's North-East section. He holds the distinction of being the first journalist from Assam to have interviewed the then Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

His rich journalistic experience soon led him to becoming an editor known for his intense yet witty political writings, and he was at the helm of affairs for several magazines, dailies, and weeklies. His intrinsic leadership qualities were perhaps what led him to becoming the founding editor of no less than four weeklies – *Nilachal* (1968), *Nagarik* (1977), *Samakal* (1987), and *Sutradhar* (1989).

The author's many works were recognised widely, earning him several prestigious awards in addition to the adulation he received from the people of the state. His awards include the Asam Publication Board Award (1977), Sahitya Akademi Award (1978), Assam Valley Literary Award (1991), Nilamoni Phukan Award from the Asam Sahitya Sabha (1991), and the Srimanta Sankardev Award (2007).

That Borgohain was inherently a thought leader, rebel, and critic who was not in the practice of mincing words is an unmissable fact. *Nilachal* was among the first anti-establishment newspapers in the state, and as its editor Borgohain gave to the Assamese people his firebrand journalism – something that was not common at the time. He was known to be a staunch critic of the Emergency in 1975, making his displeasure known with blank editorials during the period. He was also known for not shying away from voicing his political opinions, even if they were against popular sentiments. He won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1978 for his novel *Pita Putra*, but returned the award in 2015 in protest against the Dadri lynching and increasing intolerance in the country. The prominent writer held the post of the President of the Asam Sahitya Sabha, the state's biggest literary organisation, from 2001 to 2002. However, he

resigned from all posts including honorary ones and lifetime membership in 2003 as a mark of protest against alleged indiscretion within the organisation.

Borgohain had also penned four autobiographical works – *Mur Xangbadik Jibon* (1989), *Dhumuha aru Ramdhenu* (1997), *Mur Hriday Ekhn Juddhokshetra* (2006), and *Atmanusandhan* (2014). These books give us, the readers, the opportunity to learn many an interesting detail about his varied, inspiring experience throughout life captured beautifully in the literary artisan's own words.

These are not the only hats that Homen Borgohain donned. Even as an octogenarian, he used to host a popular interview-based television show called *Kotha Barta*. A few years ago, a non-profit trust was formed under his initiative with an aim to helping people with various mental and physical disabilities. Thus, Karunadhara came into being with Borgohain as the organisation's Chief Advisor. Moreover, the late author did not just impact minds through his writings. In fact, he had mentored and nurtured many young writers, journalists, academicians, and others, thanks to his gift of noticing creative talents. There are several people in Assam today who, at some point of time, had been guided by Borgohain – be it career advice, finding work at leading publications, or giving them platforms to voice themselves.

It is an impossible task to measure or sum up Homen Borgohain's contribution to Assamese literature. Such is the magnitude of his work. Counted among the doyens of Assamese literature, he stayed a devout student of literature throughout life, revealing in an interview that he used to read for two hours and spend the same amount of time in writing every day. Such dedication and constant honing of skills will remain an eternal inspiration for many. He had also mentioned that he wanted to keep working till his last breath. And that's exactly what he did – stayed in touch with the written word till the very end. He was still serving as the Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Niyomiya Barta* when he breathed his last. While not everyone can be a polymath, the penchant for sheer hard work and fearlessness is something we all can take away from the life and works of Homen Borgohain.

Joydeepa Sarma Sarkar

Content Consultant, Writer and Editor

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SUBHENDU MUND
(16th May 1951 – 28th May 2021)



There was this man in a suit, holding forth on texts that I had not heard anyone speak about with any kind of close acquaintance, let alone the authority that he was displaying, and keeping the audience spell-bound, so keen were they to take down notes and ensure they had every title down correctly. This was in a classroom of Utkal University, Bhubaneswar, Orissa where the Annual Conference of IACLALS was being held in 1996. I whispered to my colleague and the then Chairperson of IACLALS, Prof Meenakshi Mukherjee, “Have you even seen the text he is talking about?” She smiled and whispered, “No.” The man in the suit was quoting profusely from the text. I decided that I had to meet him right after the session, and so did my colleague. We went up later and introduced ourselves to Subhendu Mund, for it was he who had claimed our astounded attention in the preceding session. He was extremely chuffed, extremely genial, and told us the story of his research that had had him crisscrossing Orissa and the country in his hunt of early Indian English writings. Generous to a fault, he was willing to share his handwritten copies of these texts and also tell us where exactly he had located each one of them.

It was difficult not to like him. We became friends soon and sought each other out in the annual conferences that followed and remained in touch in between. We shared our academic ups and downs with each other and our family stories and one evening in every conference was reserved for this. I kept urging him to publish on early Indian English writing because others with infinitely more resources were catching up. But he wasn’t just an English teacher, scholar and critic but he was also a well-known Odia poet and critic, a public personality, an Odia litterateur of renown. He was also a good family man, taking pride in the achievement of all his family. This meant that he didn’t feel the need to publish on early Indian English works with the kind of urgency he would otherwise have felt. But he worked in the area with determination and discrimination and he was soon to publish with Sahitya Akademi and also with Taylor and Francis – the latter bringing out his book *The Making of Indian English Literature* this month (July 2021). I am sorry that this took so long and that he is not around to see the book in our hands but this man who was always full of life and filled with plans for the future is gone too soon in any case.

Subhendu Mund will be known forever for his archival and scholarly work – for his edition of Toru Dutt’s *Bianca, or the Young Spanish Maiden* (2001); for *The Indian Novel in English: its Birth and Development* (1997); for *The Young Zemindar : Reminiscences of a Kerani's life ; Shunkur: A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 ; The Republic of Orissa : A Page from the Annals of the Twentieth Century* and for the authoritative introduction to this book, and for *The Making*

of *Indian English Literature* (2021). He will be known for his Odia poetry and for other works in the language. But he will also always be remembered by those who knew him for his affection, for his genuine concern in the well-being of others, and for his *joie de vivre*. He was honest to a fault, he trusted people as much as he invited trust, he believed that there were no problems without solutions, and he was a great mentor for the young members of IACLALS, taking them in hand in his usual bluff manner.

Subhendu was an office-bearer of IACLALS for many years, from 2008 till 2020. He was great to have on the team, a colleague who would ensure that every conference went off smoothly, that all organizational work done without hiccups. He was so much a part of IACLALS and IACLALS so much a part of his life that he told me at our last physical conference at Jadavpur in 2020 that he was giving up his office but not the organization and that he would be there at the next conference and so should I be. Regardless of Covid, the conference took place even if virtually, and both of us were there. The IACLALS family will miss him as a presence in conferences, so will many of us as a presence in our lives.

GJV Prasad

Former Chairperson, IACLALS
Professor (Rtd), Centre for English Studies,
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LAKSHMI NANDAN BORA (15th June 1932 – 3rd June 2021)



For very few persons, death comes but only as a date in the calendar, for their existence sustains itself perpetually in the collective memory of the people, hardly ever to be forgotten. Lakshmi Nandan Bora is one amongst them. Born on 15 June 1932 at Hatichung of Kudijah village in Nagaon district, Assam, he was the youngest among his five siblings. He studied at the Nagaon High School, then moved to Cotton College for his graduation with major in Physics (1952), followed by his postgraduation in Physics (1954) from the Presidency College, Kolkata, and a PhD degree in meteorology (1977) from Andhra University. He served as a faculty member, for the greater part of his career, in the Assam Agricultural University, and retired in 1992 as a professor and head of the department of Physics and Agrometeorology. He was also a visiting professor of meteorology at the Johannes Gutenberg University in Germany, besides being

associated with the Assam Pollution Control Board as well as the Planning Commission of Assam.

Lakshmi Nandan Bora's claim to immortal fame is, however, attested by his manifold contribution to the world of Assamese literature for a period of more than sixty years, beginning in the mid-1950s till the time of his passing. His first short-story "Bhaona" was published in 1954, followed by his debut collection of stories, *Drishtirupa* (1958). One predominant characteristic of his early stories was his close identification with the smiles and sorrows of the rural folks of Assam, who were then witnessing a gradual transformation of societal dynamics under the impact of modernisation and urbanisation. Written against the backdrop of such a transitional phase in post-Independence India, his story "Sakha Damodar," hailed as one of his greatest, is about a farmer's son who sells off his father's cow due to poverty and takes up a peon's job in the city. The story describes his coming-to-terms with the new urban lifestyle and the accompanying sense of loss and regret for leaving behind his actual life in the village. One of his other stories, "Monbirikhor Jokh", delves into the depths of physical intimacy between the two lovers, Parabhat and Binda, confronting the conservative moral dictates of the families within a rural social setting. Desisting from pronouncing a verdict on the appropriateness of their action, the writer simply describes the natural imperfections of the human mind and empathises with their sensibilities without at all sounding prudish. As seen again in the story "Sanmoh" where his protagonist is a man who is forced into murdering an innocent man out of poverty, Bora's stories have somehow managed to shed light upon those unrealised and unarticulated aspects of human psychology. However, rather than making them sound unreal and far-fetched, his economy of description ensured that they seem easy and palatable for his readers to accept and appreciate. A few representative collections of his stories are *Xei Xure Utola* (1960), *Gopan Godhuli* (1961), *Achin Koina* (1963), *Devatar Byadhi* (1966), *Nisiddha Chetona* (1976), *Dustar Karagar* (2002), *Lakshmi Nandan Bora'r Galpa Samagra* (2004), and *Lakshmi Nandan Bora'r Charita Doshokar Galpa Samagra* (2007).

His first novel *Nishar Purabi* came out in 1962; his second novel *Ganga Chilonir Pakhi* (1965) turned out to be a classic in the genre of Assamese novel. His novels continued, albeit upon a broader canvas, his preoccupation with the depiction of life in the villages of Assam with special emphasis on the mannerism and worldview of the inhabitants articulated through their own voices. The turbulent years of the Assam Movement (1979–1985) provided him the backdrop for the composition of the novel *Akou Saraighat* (1980) which gave expression to the then widespread anxiety of the people over issues of illegal migration and deportation of foreigners from Assam. He was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi award for his novel *Patal Bhairavi* (1986), which marked a shift of focus away from rural life and towards exposing the corrupt practices of political officials implicated in illegal drug trade. This novel explores an area hitherto unapproached within the genre of Assamese novel, i.e., the dark and sinister politics of the underworld. An author of about 30 novels, his *Kayakalpa* (2002; translated into English as *Kayakalpa: The Elixir of Everlasting Youth*) is an intriguing blend of science fiction and existentialism as the protagonist of the novel endeavours to develop a new drug that will enable humankind to resist the inexorable process of ageing and, therefore, stay young both mentally and physically. Again, signifying a fresh intervention in the history of Assamese novel, the work earned him the *Saraswati Samman* in 2008. Two of his important novels, namely, *Jakeri Nahike Upam* (1993) and *Xehi Gunabidhi* (1997), are based respectively on Sankardeva and Madhavdeva, the two Neo-Vaishnavite saints of medieval Assam. Very few writers in Assam have endeavoured to write a novelistic biography on either of the two saints, and Bora's twin attempts in this direction signified his deep and confident awareness of the cultural-historical dynamics of the region. He was fittingly honoured with the Ambikagiri Roy

Choudhury Award of Assam Sahitya Sabha for *Jakeri Nahike Upam* in 1996. His other equally impressive novels include *Bolukat Bijuli* (1969), *Uttar Purush* (1970), *Radhikapur aru Malakshi Niketan* (1982), *Pratirodh* (1987), *Matsya Kanya* (1995), *Tejaswini* (2003), and *Xehi Sabyasachi* (2014). His autobiography *Kaal Bolukaat Khoj* was published in 2010.

Lakshmi Nandan Bora served as the president of the Assam Sahitya Sabha for the 1996-97 session. He was the editor of the monthly Assamese magazine, *Goriyoshi*, a post he occupied till his death. He also offered his service as the editor of two weekly newspapers, namely *Rangpur* (1992–1995) and *Abhimat* (2004). He was elected as the convenor of the Assamese Advisory Committee, Sahitya Akademi, in 2008. The government of India recognised his lifelong contribution to literature and education by conferring upon him the prestigious Padma Shri Award in 2015. As evident from his literary output as well as his deep involvement with various literary establishments in India, he was always vocal about the wider function of literature in the socio-political sphere. As he himself admitted in an interview, his early inspiration to write came from observing the lives of the people belonging to various communities who inhabited his ancestral village. It may be remembered that he was a science student and later professor in the same discipline; this enabled him to adopt a diversified yet nuanced view of the life and society around him and also reorient his vision to capture the moods of the changing times. Literature should, according to him, be a dynamic vehicle to articulate these transformations, and, for this to happen, he advocated the need for translating works from other languages into Assamese and vice versa.

I had the good fortune of meeting him twice, first in Delhi in 2009, and then in 2017 when he was invited as the chief guest to a memorial lecture programme organised at my department in Gauhati University. I remember him constantly telling me that he was not a man of literature and he was miles away from comprehending literary criticism. However, he was quick to remind me of my responsibilities towards my discipline. On both the occasions, I found him to be extremely encouraging towards new talents, and he never missed an opportunity to talk about one or two bright prospects around and their works in particular. He was vocal in his opposition to the implementation of CAA as he felt that such an act would change the entire social-cultural fabric of the state of Assam. His death on 3 June 2021 signalled the end of an epoch in the history of Assamese literature that spanned for more than sixty years. It also marked the departure of an ever-alert sensibility which felt the pulse of the people at every changing moment in history and represented their voices and aspirations through his writings. The twin spirits of imagination and thought that energised him and his writings throughout his life shall continue to inspire and motivate generations of Assamese writers in the days to come.

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SIDDALINGAIAH
(3rd February 1954 – 11th June 2021)



On Friday, 11th June 2021, we lost renowned Kannada Dalit poet, playwright and activist, Dr. Siddalingaiah to Covid-19 related complications. He battled the corona virus for more than a month, but due to his fragile health, bid farewell at 67. His death left the Kannada literary world poorer; he was a great writer, who with his self-deprecating humour and hard-hitting poetry narrated the pain of Dalits and strived to awaken their spirits. A key figure in the Dalit Bandaya movement of the 1970s and 1980s, he was also one of the co-founders of Dalit Sangharsha Samiti. He inspired a generation of not just Dalit writers and activists, but all those who wanted to question many forms of oppression. His was one of the most prominent voices for social justice. Though he served two terms as member of the Legislative Council, his unobtrusive appearance celebrated the quotidian identity, so much so that he was denied entry to Vidhana Soudha a couple of times (Karnataka Government Secretariat).

Dr. Siddalingaiah was born in Manchanabele (Magadi Taluk) on 3rd February 1954, just 40 kms from Bengaluru, but far different from the urban, metropolitan milieu of the city. His father Dyavanna was a farm labourer; like the rest of his community, he too was in huge debt, faced humiliation and suffering. Dr. Siddalingaiah, however, narrates the hardships of his childhood sans bitterness, (first chapter of his autobiography, *Ooru-Keri*) combined with the joys of growing up.

Dr. Siddalingaiah's poetry conveyed the anger of the oppressed classes. During an interview in 2019 to *The Hindu*, he had revealed what inspired him to write poetry, "I travelled all over Karnataka spreading the cause and the movement. I saw the suffering of the people from close quarters, and as I was an emotional person it flowed out of me as poetry." His early poetry was integrated with his involvement in Dalit Bandaya movement of the 1970s and the 80s. He co-founded the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti (DSS) along with two prominent Kannada writers, Devanuru Mahadeva and Prof. B. Krishnappa in 1974. He was also responsible for Bandaya Sahitya Sanghatane in 1979. Mavalli Shankar, a senior DSS leader recalled that Dr. Siddalingaiah was "a key person in bringing the Dalit consciousness to an entire generation. He showed us the world in a different way." Dr. Siddalingaiah's poetry resonated with raw

energy and anger that shocked readers, but inspired the Dalit movement. Some of his early poems—“*Ikrla oadirla . . .*” (“sock it to them, kick them”), “Saviraru Nadigalu,” “Yarige bantu, ellige bantu, nalavattelara svatantrya?” (“Who got freedom in 1947?”)—became the psalms of protest against discrimination and oppression. When Dr. Siddalingaiah’s first poetry collection, *Holemaadigara Haadu* (‘Songs of the Untouchables’) was published in 1975, his teacher, and later his colleague at Bangalore University, Baraguru Ramachandrappa remarked on the newness of the poems: “It was such a break from poetry as we knew it till then. It was an assertion of the subaltern that captured the imagination of a generation.” In his college days in the 1970s, rationalism was a popular movement under the aegis of H. Narasimhaiah and Abraham Kovoor. Dr. Siddalingaiah identified himself as a rationalist and atheist. Interestingly, he wrote many of his poems sitting on the gravestones of a cemetery in Srirampura, a Dalit colony in Magadi, Bengaluru. He reminisces in his autobiography that the silence and the cool air of the cemetery inspired him to write. He was a fearless debater who never hesitated from taking a stand and challenging the conservative society.

Dr. Siddalingaiah’s autobiography *Ooru-Keri* written in three parts with the first part appearing in 1996, consists of brief narrations of events from his childhood to the beginning of his adult career. Many critics have remarked on how Dr. Siddalingaiah’s work, unlike many other Dalit autobiographical writings, represents a compassionate, witty and a positive approach, instead of resentment, towards the workings of caste and class. It has been reprinted in Kannada over 15 times, translated into English, Hindi, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu. A sequel, *Ooru-Keri-2*, was published in 2009. S.R. Ramakrishna’s English translation *A Word with You World: The Autobiography of a Poet* (2013) brings together both the parts. *Ooru-Keri-3* (2018) is again a recollection of rich experiences ranging over his family life, Dalit movement, University days, his stint at Karnataka Legislature and the multi-faceted life of Dr. Siddalingaiah’s engagement with the social world. What distinguishes this autobiography is Dr. Siddalingaiah’s ability to laugh at himself and invite the reader to laugh with him, even when he is narrating tragic, humiliating and violent experiences. As Dr. Ramachandrappa (noted Kannada writer and critic) points out, “Dalit autobiographies in Marathi and Telugu are an unflinching recounting of hard realities. But *Ooru-Keri* stands apart in Indian Dalit autobiographies for the use of laughter, satire and irony as resistance.” Dr. Rajendra Chenni (noted scholar and critic in Kannada and English) calls *Ooru-Keri* as a subversive text, “full of humour and the joy of struggle,” while, the late D.R. Nagaraj (eminent cultural critic and political commentator in Kannada and English) describes its humour “as the rebellious laughter of the poor people.”

In his later years, however, Dr. Siddalingaiah courted controversy when he was nominated for two terms as a member of the Karnataka Legislative Council, and when he described the BJP leader, B.S. Yediyurappa as a “modern Basavanna” and the Congress leader Siddaramaiah as a “modern Ambedkar” when they were Chief Ministers of Karnataka. He stirred up a hornet’s nest when as a leading Dalit intellectual he released a book on the positive aspects of *Manu Smriti*. Dr. Chenni, however, while acknowledging Siddalingaiah’s complex legacy, notes that “he (Siddalingaiah) remained an important voice and nobody else could have opened up the Dalit world, with its rich subaltern cosmology.”

M. Shobha

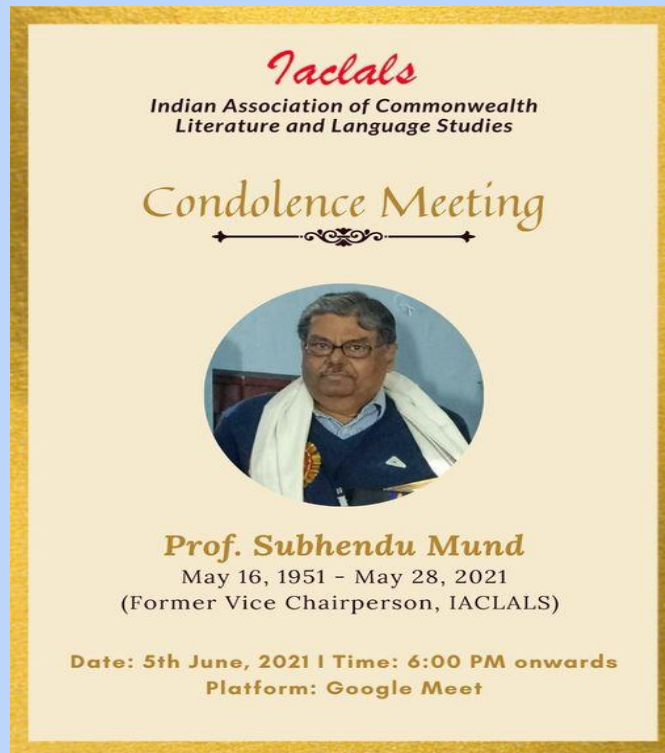
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MEMORIAL MEETING FOR SUBHENDU MUND



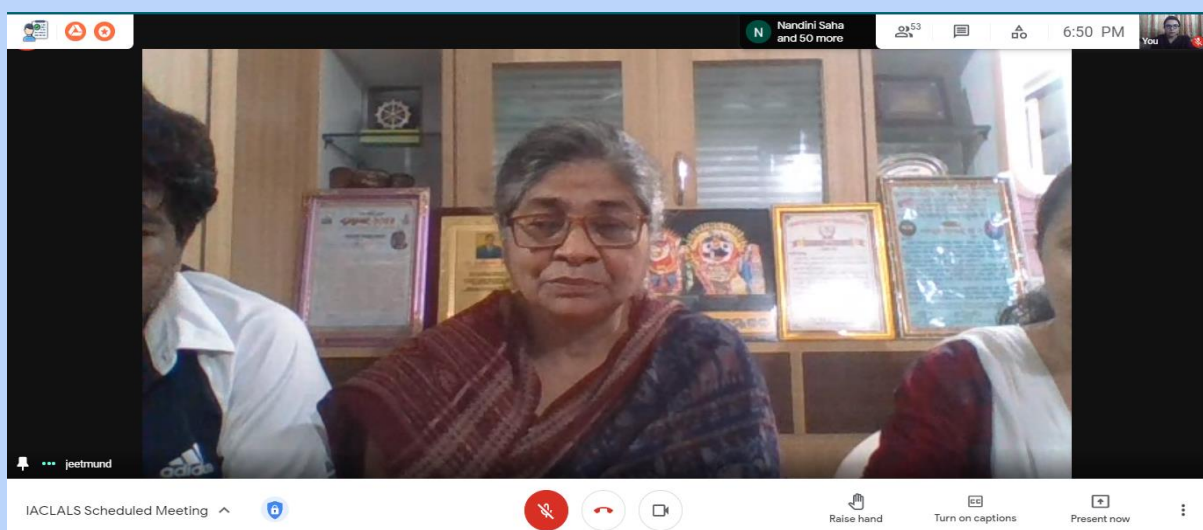
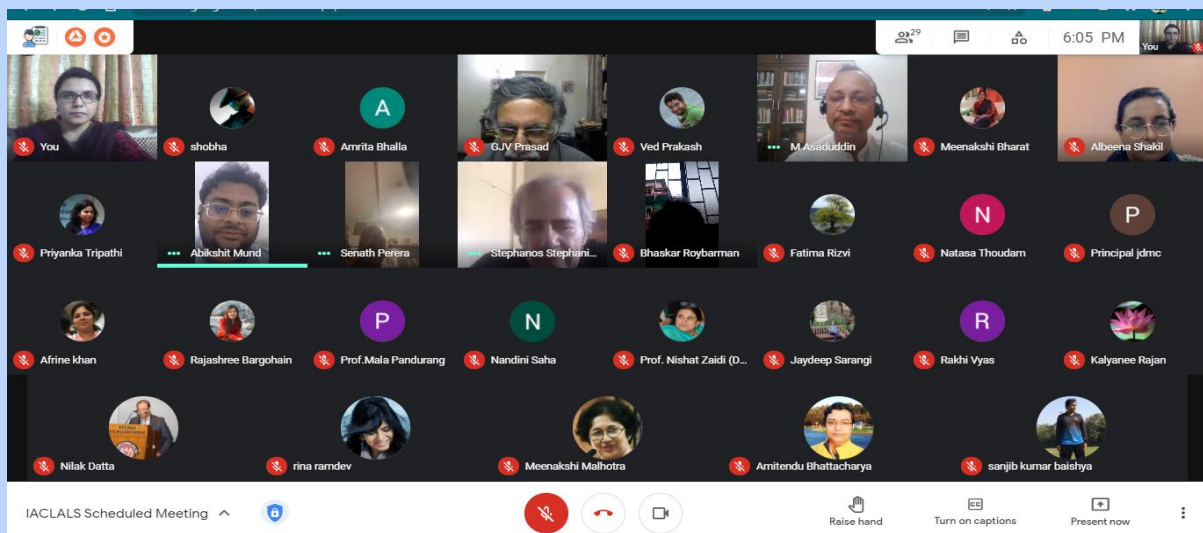
A Condolence Meeting in the memory of Prof. Subhendu Mund (Former Vice Chairperson, IACLALS) was held on Saturday, 5th June 2021, 6:00 pm onwards, on the virtual Google Meet platform. The meeting was attended by several members of IACLALS from India and abroad. Speakers who shared condolence messages were: M. Asaduddin, GJV Prasad, Amritjit Singh, Stephanos Stepanides, Senath Walter Perera, Shyamala A. Narayan, Somdatta Mandal, and the bereaved family members- Pranati Mund, Aakash Mund, Jeet Mund, Artund Mund. Many written messages and personal reminiscences were also received during the meeting via the chat box. The memorial meeting brought alive the erudite, effusive, gentlemanly, and humorous persona of Prof. Mund for all of us. The meeting concluded with prayers for the departed soul, and an expression of solidarity with the family of Subhendu Mund.

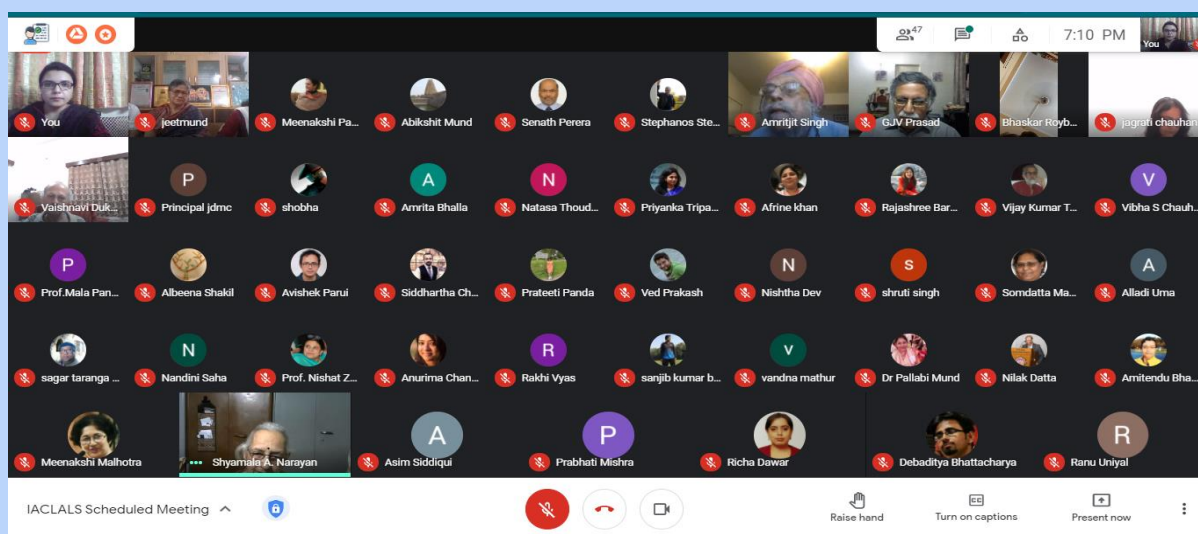
On behalf of IACLALS, the following message was circulated by the Chairperson:

Dear friends,

With profound grief and shock, The IACLALS announces and deeply mourns the loss of Dr. Subhendu Mund who breathed his last at the age of 70 after suffering a heart attack on the morning of 28th May 2021. We express our sincere condolences to his bereaved family members and friends. Dr. Mund was an outstanding academic, litterateur, lexicographer and translator with over 40 books and 100 research papers to his credit. Starting his teaching career in 1973, he was associated with various colleges and universities across Orissa. He retired as the Principal of BJB Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar, in 2009 and continued to be associated with IIT Bhubaneswar. He was an internationally renowned scholar of Indian English literature, particularly of its early phase and his works are prescribed as course material both in India and abroad. His book, *The Making of Indian English Literature*, was recently published by Routledge in 2021.

Dr. Mund served as the Vice-President of IACLALS from 2014-20 wherein he was the Editor of the IACLALS Newsletter and remained a lively and integral part of all its Annual Conferences. But more than anything, Subhendu Mund cultivated and embodied the true spirit of being a member of the academic community by being accessible, affable, generous and encouraging towards all our members. Subhendu Mund will be deeply missed by IACLALS. We join the entire academic community in paying tribute to his creative and academic scholarship and legacy.





Kalyanee Rajan
Treasurer, IACLALS
Assistant Professor of English
Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College
University of Delhi

CALL FOR PAPERS: CONFERENCES / VOLUMES

IACLALS ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2021 (Online)

March 3-5, 2022

Call for Papers

Circulations, Mediations, Negotiations: New Perspectives on Translation from South Asia

Translation (Latin: carrying or bringing across) is no longer considered a simple literary or linguistic activity of translating a text from one language to another. Rather, it now encompasses and evokes a range of speech acts of translating thoughts and emotions into words, sign and body language into verbal expression, translations to and from languages of the same family, translations into other language families, translating words into performance or multimedia texts, and/or vice-versa. Carrying or bringing across a sense of equivalent time, history, place, nationality, culture, gender, religion, sexuality, caste, class into another asymmetric linguistic or social terrain is no easy feat despite digital technologies making translations more accessible, prevalent and frantic every day. Translations involve transcreation, transmutation, adaptation as well as interpretation. In contemporary times, when mis-communication and mis-translation seem to prevail all around us in the world, the task of more or better translations remains urgent for facilitating mutual understanding and communication.

Translation in South Asia is as unique as a region itself. South Asia as a region is both old as well as new, existing in an unbroken web of interconnections continuing since ancient times framed by the ecological terrain of the Indian Plate and the Indian Ocean, as well as arriving anew from the more recent area studies departments of the West to encompass a joint gaze at countries like Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Home to over 650 languages belonging to six notable language schools, namely, the Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burman, Tai-Kadai, and Great Andamanese (Source: [World Literature](#)). The region is one of the most linguistically and culturally diverse and rich in the world while sharing many customs and cultural practices with each other. The experience of colonialism was common among many peoples of the region. In fact, colonial modernity was negotiated in the region through translation when works of new/western knowledge were translated massively into the languages of the region. Conversely, classical texts from this region were translated into European languages by leading Indologists, leading to increased awareness in the West about the East, what Raymond Schwab termed as 'Oriental Renaissance'.

So, is translation in South Asia an act of inter-cultural translation or intra-cultural translation? Inter-cultural translation is an act of retrieval wherein marginalized writers and their works can be discovered by means of translation, particularly women writers belonging to marginalized communities who experience multiple marginalizations at various levels right from the actual creative exercise to the publication of their texts. In a decolonized world, translation, transcreation and adaptation contribute majorly towards discovering and/or consolidating literary canons. In intra-cultural translations, linguistic chauvinism can play a role in marginalizing not only a language but also a culture. Intra cultural translations of texts between sister languages can help reach out to larger readerships. Inter and intra cultural self-

translation exercises are often undertaken by bilingual writers and authors looking for larger outreach. In postcolonial times, the objectives of translation, whether inter-cultural or intra-cultural, should be to subvert the hegemony of the dominant/prestige languages and literatures and redress the asymmetry between dominant literatures and minor languages/literatures.

As mentioned in the beginning of this CFP, Translation Studies in recent time has expanded its canon to embrace diverse domains of learning such as Colonialism, Film Studies, Anthropology, Geography, Refugee/Migration Studies, Memory Studies etc. This was signalled more than a decade ago by Maria Tymoczko in her book *Enlarging Translation: Empowering Translators*. The Conference will explore convergences and intersectionalities of Translation Studies with other modes, mediums and domains of scholarship. For example, when Satyajit Ray 'translates' Tagore's *Noshto Neer* into his film **Charulata**, or the famous painter A R Chughtai 'translates' Ghalib's verses into masterpieces of painting, or Marie Chouinard 'translates' Jérôme Bosch's cluster of paintings known as **Les Jardin Des Délices** (Garden of Delights) into a masterpiece of choreography, we get to see how intermedial translation collapses boundaries imposed by different mediums and results in new interpretations and illumination of the 'original text'. Moreover, South Asian literary cultures, particularly during the precolonial, premodern, preprint periods, exhibited ample instances of 'translation' from oral/aural to written, oral/written to mnemonical, verbal to visual, and vice versa. Translation, in these contexts, becomes a complex process that circulates, mediates, and negotiates between ideas scattered over a larger public sphere, which in turn also regulates their movements and accessibility within cultural realms. The conference visualises translation as a dynamic factor in the construction of a multimedial literary cultures in South Asia.

Papers are invited on the following sub-themes:

- Translation and Modernity in South Asia
- Translation as Cultural Negotiation
- Translation and Literary Historiography
- Intermedial Translations
- Translation and Multilinguality
- Translating Literary Forms/Genre
- South Asian Adaptations of Shakespeare and modern/avant garde playwrights
- Translation and Archival Research in South Asia

Guidelines for Submission

Abstracts (250 words) with a short bio-note (max. 70 words) should be sent by **October 30, 2021**, to iaclalsconferences@gmail.com.

The conference is open only to members of IACLALS (please visit <https://www.iaclals.com/membership.html> to know how to become a member).

Submission of Abstracts by: **October 30, 2021**

Registration: **January 15, 2022**

Registration Fees: Rs 500/ for research scholars and Rs. 800/ for employees.

If you wish to be considered for the **CD Narasimhaiah Prize** for the Best Paper presented at the conference, please submit complete papers latest by **December 15, 2021**. Kindly indicate 'Submission for CDN Prize' in the subject line of the email.

For more details, visit: <https://www.iaclals.com/cdn-prize.html>

All other participants should also submit their papers by **December 30, 2021** in no more than 3500-4000 words. Please note that presenters shall have fifteen minutes to read their papers. Registration to be completed by **January 15, 2022** (details will be sent along with acceptances).

IACLALS also announces the next edition of the **Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize** for the Best Paper published in the previous block of two years (2020-21) by a member of the IACLALS. For MMM Prize submission guidelines, do visit:

<https://www.iacials.com/mmm-prize.html>

In accordance with the detailed MMM Prize submission guidelines available on the website page listed above, you can submit your published paper by **November 2, 2021**, to iacialsconferences@gmail.com. Please indicate 'Submission for MMM Prize' in the subject line of the email.

Call for Papers: Conference at RGNUL, Punjab, April 2022

“Literature, Environment and Climate Change”

The Department of English and Public Relations, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab invite research papers on "Literature, Environment and Climate Change" for conference in April 2022. The conference shall be on hybrid mode.

Concept note:

Urbanization and modernization have greatly influenced the interaction between man and environment in the recent times. Man's ability to exploit nature and her resources indiscriminately is responsible for the environmental crisis of the planet Earth. The excessive consumption of scarce resources, huge amount of garbage, ozone layer depletion, and various types of pollution and extinction of species are among the major environmental problems. Nature stirs creative minds to write about the hungry tides, floods, fissured lands, unquiet woods, creatures great and small, belated spring, dust bowl, biopiracy, violence of green revolution, environmental injustice and climate change. This environmental literature also emerges from protests like Chipko movement, Narmada Bachao Andolan. It reinforces the interconnectedness between living beings and their surroundings. Environmental education can sensitize one and all regarding the efforts and skills required to improve the quality of the ecosystem.

The modern environmental movement dates back to the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Carson's writing raises an alarm against the harmful effects of the contentious use of insecticides. She talks about the irresponsible acts of human beings that could silence the Earth. The changing relationship of human beings with the natural world gives rise to an array of fictional and nonfictional writings. The writings on endangered Earth engage human minds with ecological issues. Ecocriticism explores the environmental dimensions of literature. Ecocriticism converges with its sister disciplines in humanities, history, anthropology, philosophy, ethics, law, religious studies, political science, geography, sociology and others, to understand the ethics of human environmental interactions. Lawrence Buell traces environmental imagination and ecological ethics in the literary works of various American writers. He asserts that discourses on landscapes and toxicity can propel transformation in the environmental consciousness. Environmentalists and writers across disciplines reflect on the endangered existence of human beings, locally

and globally. Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Donald Worster, Walt Whitman, Ramachandra Guha, Vandana Shiva, Amitav Ghosh, Arundhati Roy, Indira Sinha, Lakshmi Thiripurasundari, Syed Abdul Malik, Madhav Gadgil, Anupam Mishra, N K Sukumaran Nair, Barbara Kingsolver, Clara Hume, J.M. Coetzee, Margaret Atwood, Barbara Gowdy and many more raise public awareness to the environmental concerns.

Various writings on Nature and Environment make ecological destruction intelligible to human beings. Several genres of Green Writing also suggest “ethics of earthcare”. These include *Earth Democracy*, *Stolen Harvest*, *Ripples in the River*, *Earth Songs*, *Longing for Sunshine*, *The Fissured Land*, *Environmentalism*, *Back to Garden*, *Walden*, *Dust Bowl*, *The Hungry Tide*, *The Drowned Earth*, *The Burning World*, *Mother of Storms*, *Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow*, *Ecofeminism*, *Ecospeak*, *Ecoambiguity*, *The Environmental Imagination*, *The Practice of the Wild*, *The Family Tree*, *When Species Meet*, *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes*, *Listening to The Land*, *Green Cultural Studies* and *The Great Derangement*.

Research Papers from Academicians, Professionals and Research Scholars across disciplines are invited on the following sub-themes:

- Writing Nature/ Green Writing
- Environmental Imagination
- Environmental Justice
- Endangered Landscapes
- Transcendentalism
- Environmentalism
- Environmental Ethics
- Environmental History
- Ecopoetics / Green Voices
- Ecofeminism
- Green Screen
- Post-Colonial Environments
- Critical Posthumanism
- Environmental Laws
- Green Politics
- The Economics of Ecosystem and Biodiversity

Guidelines for Submission:

Submission of Abstract: 27.12. 2021. Intimation of acceptance of Abstract: 17.01.2022

Submission of Paper: 27.02.2022.

Abstract must be of 500 words; File must be Microsoft Word Format following MLA style Times New Roman, 12 font size, 1.5 space and both sides justified. Title must be 14 font size, bold; Endnotes 11 font size. Word limit for Paper 5000-9000 words

Only Original work will be accepted. The Papers will be double-blind reviewed. Submit a Self-Declaration along with the paper regarding the originality of the work and that it has not been published / sent for publication anywhere else. A brief Bio-note of 150 to 200 words of the authors should be attached with the paper. The selected papers will be published in a book with ISBN. Only two Co-authors allowed. Submit the Abstract and Paper to exagium2020@gmail.com and navleenmultani@gmail.com

Dr. Navleen Multani,

Assistant Professor of English

Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab.

Call for Papers
Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics
Spring 2023
Gender Activism in South Asia

Guest editors: Munira Cheema (King's College London) and Salma Siddique (Humboldt Universität zu Berlin)

Feminist Encounters seeks multi-format submissions for a special issue on Gender Activism in South Asia for Spring 2023.

In this issue, we wish to consider historical activisms, and also how gender activism in the region has been changing over the last decade. Arguably, it is an unprecedented moment for urban South Asian gender activisms. Multi-city collectives and calls such as Why Loiter? , Pinjra Tod (Break the Cage), and Girls at Dhaba seek to tackle the double bind of protection and risk for urban women. On the one hand, South Asian gender activists are using conventional methods such as public protests, but we have also seen a huge growth in the use of social media to shape their respective discourses in the public sphere. Populist regimes continue to try to define and restrict the role of women, including in the resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan, which in turn is producing – and hopefully will produce – various kinds of resistance. In India, the BJP-led state has upheld a paternalistic protection of ‘daughters’ and ‘sisters’ in several media campaigns and measures, reiterating its jurisdiction over women’s bodies. We invite proposals for articles that will address how civil society, nation states and the media are shaping narratives of feminism and gender activism in the region of South Asia.

We are interested in contributions from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Themes are not restricted to, but may address the following questions:

- * How are choreographies of gender centric protests challenging the patriarchal state?
- * How has social media redefined gender activism in South Asian countries such as India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Afghanistan and others?
- * How do right-wing feminists utilise social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter?
- * Ask whether gender activism can be understood to be unifying or dividing the region across religion, class, caste and ethnicity?
- * What narratives of feminism emerge in the labor of online influencers?
- * How can we map contradictions and similarities amongst different shades of Muslim feminisms?
- * How does intersectionality inform new media activism?
- * How are Muslim feminisms changing to meet emergent challenges in South Asian countries?
- * What is the relationship between Muslim feminism and the patriarchal state?
- * Can gender activism thrive under populist regimes?
- * How does the #MeToo Movement redefine the culture of shame in South Asia?
- * What is the role of documentary filmmaking in shaping activism on gender?
- * How do instances of online misogyny such as ‘sulli deals’ and ‘bois locker room’ produce new activisms centered on online safety?

Submissions can include interviews, video essays and long-articles (7000-11000 including notes and references).

300 words abstract and bio by 1 November 2021 to Munira.cheema@kcl.ac.uk or salma.siddique@hu-berlin.de

Decision by 1 December 2021. Submissions due by 1 April 2022.

CFP: Indraprasth – An International Journal of Culture and Communication Studies

USHSS Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi, invites submission of manuscripts for Volume IX (2020) of *Indraprasth – An International Journal of Culture and Communication Studies*.

Contributions may be made in the areas of Literary and Culture Studies, Communication Studies, Translation Studies, Media Studies and Film Studies.

Word Limit: Research Papers: 3500-5000 words Book Reviews: 1000-2000 words

Submissions should strictly follow MLA Style (8th edition) and should be emailed to journal.ipu@gmail.com in MS Word format by November 30th, 2021.

Contributors should include a brief bio data including their institutional affiliation and contact details accompanied by a 100-word abstract and a disclaimer stating that this is an original work and not published or sent elsewhere for consideration.

LAST DATE: 30th November, 2021

For more information, please visit: <http://www.ipu.ac.in/indraprasth/Index.php>

Note – 'Indraprasth: An International Journal of Culture & Communication Studies' published by University School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi, ISSN 2278-7208, is a refereed, doubleblind peer- reviewed journal and charges no publication/processing fee.

ACLALS Triennial Conference 2022 CFP: "The Ruptured Commons" July, 11-15, 2022 Toronto, Ontario, Canada

At a time when we are experiencing profound and unexpected disruptions to our shared spaces, routines, economies, societies, and work-lives, ACLALS 2022 proposes that we convene in Toronto (fingers crossed!) to consider the nature and implications of rupture, the commons, and their conjoining: *the ruptured commons*. And while disease and risk are top of mind these days, imperialism and colonialism were always, of course, forms of severe rupture – to lifeways, cultures, and forms of inhabitation, community, and governance. Capitalism is inherently disruptive, and disruptive technologies (from the printing press to social media, the

steam engine to the drone) transform lives and present their own opportunities and threats. Rupture is increasingly becoming a *modus operandi* among political actors, whether they seek to exploit and accentuate divisions, or, in the case of anti-colonial movements and Black Lives Matter protests, to contest hierarchies, privileges, and prejudices embedded in social attitudes and institutional practice. The increasingly frequent eruptions of such moments raise important questions about social consensus around common realities and common truths.

Garnett Hardin wrote in 1968 about “the tragedy of the commons” – the tendency for publicly owned, shared space to degrade through the neglect, abuse, overuse, and simple taking-for-granted of its multiple owners, who, because there are so many, do not identify as owners and take little responsibility. With each new climate-change study we become more aware of the ways our common environment has seen its natural states and processes violated by human activity. The ruptured commons is at the heart of the concept of the Anthropocene and what Amitav Ghosh has called “the great derangement” of our unsustainable ways. The global pandemic, with its multiple and far-reaching disruptions, has forced us to rethink our common spaces and how we use them, from city streets to airplanes, domestic spaces to workplaces – including academic ones. Indeed, our work as scholars, teachers, and students has been ruptured in countless ways as our institutional commons of classrooms and conferences fragment into rectangle-bound faces and voices on screens. Finally, the “common” in Commonwealth has come under fire for decades, whether by rewriting it as “common poverty” or by rejecting its presence in the names of our discipline and, for some, in IACLALS itself.

At a time when so much of our shared future is uncertain and when we have the opportunity to reimagine the commons, we invite delegates to place notions of rupture and commons in a wide variety of pan-historical contexts and scales from the local to the global. Approaches and topics could include but are not limited to:

- Borders and boundaries: disrupted, shored up; transgressed, (re-)imposed
- Disruptive histories and aftermaths of imperialism and colonialism, including trans-Atlantic slavery and the legacies of anti-Black racism
- Ecological and ecocritical approaches to the literary representation of the commons and of its inhabitants, non-human and human
- Environmental humanities
- Finding commonalities, understanding differences
- Healing ruptures and reconciliation
- Inclusive vs. exclusive models of the commons: access, control, ownership
- Indigenous knowledges and perspectives: on ruptured places and times; on the commons
- Interrogating “Commonwealth”
- Literature and contagion, health, medicine, and/or dis-ease
- Literature and disaster: natural or otherwise
- Literature of protest and activism: disrupting the present to transform the future
- Medical Humanities
- Mending and reclaiming the commons
- New perspectives on risk and the risk society
- Representation and inhabitation of common spaces
- Resource extraction and the ruptured commons
- Rupture as a mode of literary representation
- Ruptures of community, culture, economy, family, language
- Shared paths
- Spaces and places in times of rupture: private and public, physical and virtual; urban,

- rural and wild
- Teaching and scholarship in a time of rupture and as means to disruption
- Technology and/as rupture

Confirmed Keynote Speakers include:

Kateri Akiwennze-Damm (University of Toronto)

Lillian Allen (OCAD University)

Cajetan Iheka (Yale University)

Susie O'Brien (McMaster University)

Ruth Vanita (University of Montana)

Proposals for papers and panels on these or other topics of relevance to our discipline are welcome. Abstracts should be no more than 350 words and are to be submitted online by Nov. 30, 2021 at the following site:

<http://aclals.net/conferences-and-cfps/aclals-2022/>

This site can also be used to submit panel proposals.

MEMBERSHIP OF IACLALS

Members of IACLALS are subscribed to the exclusive pan-Indian mailing list and the e-newsletter, are eligible to participate in our Annual Conference, and are welcome at all other association events. Life Members receive a free copy of the IACLALS Journal.

To become an IACLALS member or to renew membership, the following options are being offered:

- 3-year Membership for Rs 1500/-
- Life Membership for Rs 5000/-
- Students may also avail of an Annual Membership for Rs 1000/-

The amount can be paid by *electronic transfer* (NEFT) or PayTM or Google Pay to:

IACLALS
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A/C 10851525016
JNU New Campus Branch
Branch Code: 10441
IFSC CODE: SBIN0010441
MICR: 11000242

After payment, members are requested to send a scanned copy of the transfer document/receipt to our Treasurer on the official email id- treasurer.iacials@gmail.com

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