

# IACLALS

E-NEWSLETTER

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(On behalf of IACLALS)

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(February 2024 onwards)

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**ABOUT IACLALS:**

The Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India— is the officially recognized 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

Over the years, IACLALS has consistently engaged with transforming pedagogic practices and innovative research in the Humanities and the Social Sciences from a glocal perspective.

The IACLALS newsletter has attempted to be a reflection of multidisciplinary, pluri-lingual perspectives as evident in the ongoing research practices and creative endeavors of remarkable colleagues, scholars, grassroots activists and students within the country and beyond.

As the newsletter tries to foreground conference reports, creative writing, translations, book reviews, new publications and obituaries of inspirational scholars and writers, it also reiterates the ongoing bonhomie and intellectual exchange between IACLALS members that stand testimony to a wonderful generosity of spirit and scholarship.

In the context of India today, the diverse research interests and activities and legacies of the IACLALS community stand witness to a world that would like to imagine the necessity of a curriculum and a pedagogic practice that rests on processes of inclusion and offers new registers of meaning.

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## REPORTS

IACLALS Annual Conference 2023 (Online) in collaboration with  
Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi

on

Metropolis And Margins: Shifting Configurations in Literature and Language Studies  
April 27-29, 2023

### Conference Report

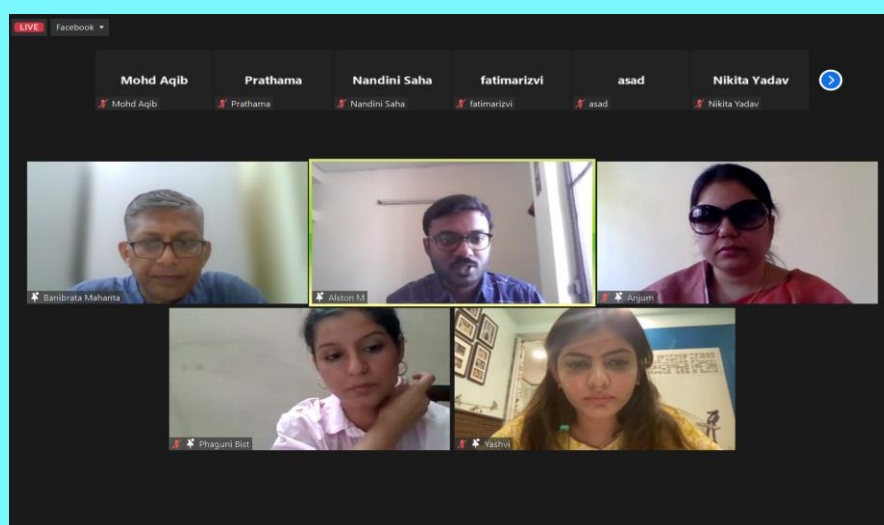
The inaugural session of the conference which was scheduled to be held on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023, with keynote speaker Prof. Harish Trivedi (Former Chair, IACLALS), and chaired by Prof. Suman Gupta (The Open University, UK), was cancelled owing to Prof. Trivedi's ill health.

27<sup>th</sup> April, 2023

#### Technical Session 1

The session was chaired by Prof. Banibrata Mahanta. Dr. M. Anjum Khan, the first speaker presented a paper titled, "Coexisting Beyond Boundaries: An Analysis of *Nostalgia* and Haraway's Ideas" The paper aimed to critically examine the constructed binaries and explored how these binaries contribute to the perpetuation of oppression and inequality. The second speaker Yashvi Srivastava presented a paper titled "Debunking the Binary of Urban/Rural: Challenges, Intimacy and Alienation in R Raj Rao's Novels *The Boyfriend* and *Hostel Room 131*" The speaker emphasised on the idea of an urban paradise for queer identities and how LGBT exposure is viewed as impractical outside of major cities. The third speaker Alston M., examined the shift in the aesthetics of the genre which led to a reconfiguration of the canons in his paper titled, "Rural Aesthetic in the Modern Novel: A Study of an Interaction" The last speaker of the session Phaguni Bist, presented a paper titled "A Road Less Travelled by the Metropolis: Vindicating the Dichotomy of Center and Margin in Anita Desai's *In Custody*". The paper aimed at tracing the reality of India's provincial past and cultural heritage – sustained through its peculiar rural and small-town expanse. Questions for the presenters followed up the session headed by the Chair Prof. Banibrata Mahanta, who also gave valuable remarks after the presentations.

(Rapporteur: Nikita Yadav, University of Delhi)



**Session 2:****Chair: Prof. Anita Singh**

The first paper “Displaced Migrants across the ‘Chini-dad’: Representation of Peripheral Space and Identity in Peggy Mohan’s *Jahajin*”, presents the issue of indentured labourers, having various contexts shaping their identities in a foreign land. The presenter chose to highlight the life of Indian coolies as living the in-between identity. The second paper “Problematizing Identity and assertion tea estates through Rejina Marandi’s *Becoming Me*” reads about the experiences of Adivasis in India in becoming English educated, while managing their indigenous identity. The paper also put the scope of genres like ‘autofiction’ and ‘bildungsroman’ in manifesting the tribal experiences. The third paper “Relocating the Unitary Space, Self and Consciousness” explores Srilal Shukla’s *Raag Darbari* with a reference to the dichotomy of binaries of the postcolonial India like ‘home’ and ‘community’, ‘rural’ and ‘urban’, etc. The paper extends the idea of physical and metaphorical marginalization projecting the possibility of the ‘two-ness of consciousness’

(Rapporteur: M. Siddique Khan, Department of English and Modern European Languages, Lucknow University)

**Session 3:****Chair: Prof Nishi Pandey**

Tamanna Farooque Arzo commenced the session by introducing the Chair Prof Nishi Pandey. She is currently serving as a Professor of Eminence in the department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Lucknow. Along with being a part of several national level committees of UGC NAAC, ICCR, she has led Indian delegations of Higher Education Academic administrators to international forums and conferences.

The Session’s first participant was Jayasree Mukherjee who presented her paper on “Spurned by the Centre: The Plight of Internal Migrant Labourers during COVID-19 in Puja Changoiwala’s ‘Homebound’”. By delineating the various adverse conditions that the migrant labourers had to undergo at the hands of not only the patrolling policemen but also the various agencies of the society through Puja Changoiwala’s *Homebound* where she shared the story of various migrant labourers who were drastically affected by the COVID-19 lockdowns.

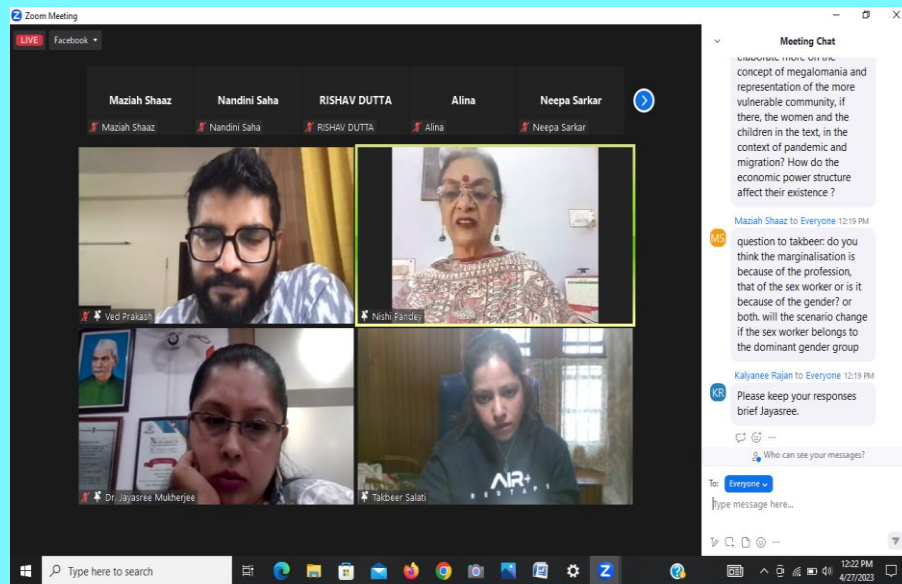
Next in line was Takbeer Salati’s paper on “From Textual Sex-Workers to Films: Revisiting Culture(s) of Sex-Worker(s) and Manto”. Takbeer beautifully juxtaposed Manto’s concept of dignity of sex-workers during the pre-independence era and Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s movie ‘Gangubai Kathiawadi’ where she talks about an alternate space for these ‘tawaifs’ to exist with dignity and agency.

The last paper was presented by Ved Prakash titled “‘Manual Scavenging’ and the Idea of the Metropolis through Bhasha Singh’s *Unseen: The Truth about India’s Manual Scavengers* (2012)”. Ved talked about untouchability within untouchability that exists in the life of manual scavengers and how they are otherised while their mobility is restricted due to the presence of the deep-rooted caste issues.

Prof Nishi Pandey then introduced the questions to each of the presenters and with a very interesting question-answer session that went on for the rest of the session she gave the vote of thanks.

Tamanna Farooque Arzo, Maziah Shaaz and Alina M. Jolly were active volunteers during the session.





(Rapporteur: Tamanna Farooque Arzo, Maziah Shaaz and Alina M. Jolly)

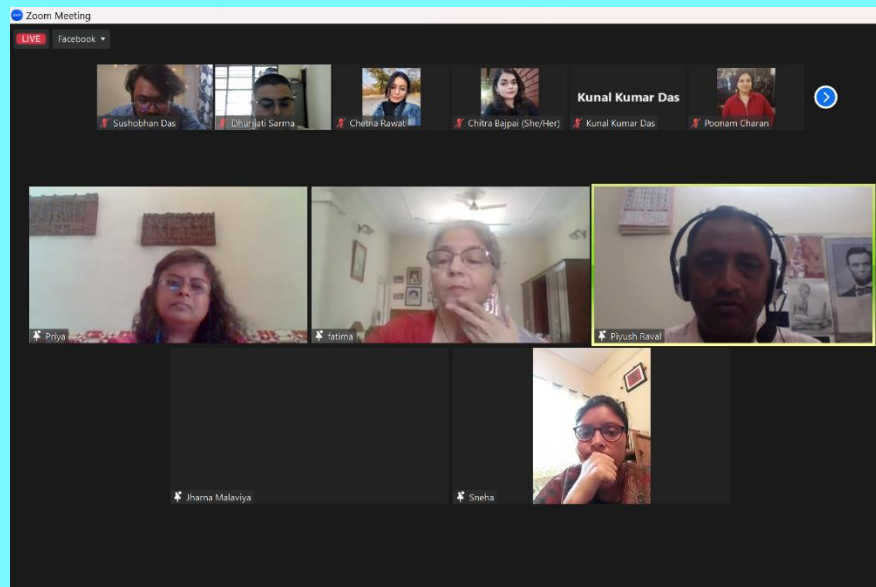
**Session 4:** Chaired by **Prof. Fatima Rizvi**, had four papers centred on depictions of the ‘rural’ in Indian literature.

The first paper, by **Sneha Sharma**, titled “Decolonising the Village: Conceptualising the Anchalik in Phanishwar Nath Renu’s Fiction,” focused on how the *anchalik* has been imagined by colonial and nationalistic discourses. Sharma found that the *anchal* is often pitted against the ‘urban’ city and represented melodramatically as a redemptive space or as a sanctuary—approaches that marginalize its rural population. Intrinsic to this representation is also the trope of gendering this space, as found in the patriarchally patriotic binary images of the *anchal* as Bharat Mata or the body of the victimised woman. However, Phanishwar Nath Renu, as Sharma argues, breaks away from this *anchal*/city polarity to offer a more nuanced view of things.

The second paper, by **Piyush Raval**, and titled “The Complexity of Village Life in Petlikar’s *Janamtip* and *Bharsagar*,” continued the conversation about *anchalik sabhitya* and tried to look at the regional nuances of village life as borne out in the two ‘janapada’ novels of Ishwar Petalika as mentioned in the paper’s title. As Raval observed, these novels do not have traditional anthropic protagonists; rather, the *anchal* itself emerges as the protagonist with its numerous socio-cultural and linguistic nuances. To this extent, both the novels become authentic representations of village life, along with its socio-economic and gendered realities.

The third paper, by **Jharna Malaviya**, and titled “Post-Pandemic Metropolis in Indian Dystopian fiction,” asked the pertinent question: how is the ‘dystopian’ imagined by the rural population who are generally otherised and silenced? As Malaviya found, much of the existing criticism on Indian dystopian fiction is founded on simplistic notions about modernity spreading through the nation and ignores rural and regional complexities; 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian diasporic fiction, on the other hand, by authors like Prayag Akbar, Nayantara Sahgal, and Samit Basu, among others, focus obsessively on the Indian metropolises: both are complicit in relegating the rural to the margin and rendering it voiceless. The final paper of the session, by **Priya Bhattacharyya**, was titled “‘Spaces’ and ‘Identities’ in Bibhutibhushan’s *Pather Panchali* *Song of the Road*,” and attempted to look at the ways in which Bibhutibhushan problematises the idea of the ‘centre’ and the ‘periphery.’ As Bhattacharyya argues, in the novel the ‘centre’ is represented by the upper caste Brahminical population of Nishchindipur, while the ‘periphery’ is composed of its lower caste inhabitants. Yet, these two identity positions are

not absolute, since in their interactions with each other, these identities, along with the value system of vices and virtues that they uphold, often get muddled up, thereby undoing the binary between the 'centre' and the 'periphery.'



(Rapporteurs: Sushovan Das, Chetna Rawat, Kunal Kumar Das)

### Session 5

In this session of IACLALS, four presenters talked extensively about the representations of Dalit condition in literary texts. First presenter Vanya Jaiswal discussed how Varanasi is represented as the sacredpolis of the upper-caste people. She also argues that such image of Varanasi is the result of various performative acts which are ritualistic, literary, spatial and architectural. Varanasi's image as a homogenous sacredpolis makes it an exclusive space by alienating the periphery within the society. Prathama Sarkar's presentation includes the discussion on the politics of literature (minor, Dalit, etc.) in a linguistic society where selective productions of literary texts are made. With reference to Bama's *Karukku* and *Sangati* she shows that it is the task of Dalit writers to destabilize the upper-caste language property. Both the literary texts bear testimony to the self/community and hardship/choice dilemmas. Saundarya elaborates the concept of Dalit realism in Omprakash Valmiki's anthology *Amma and Other Stories*. Here, the narratives unfolding around the Dalit lives confer certain agency to them. This is opposed to the age-old social realism where the Dalit were strategically kept at the margin. Valmiki's narrative brings them to the mainstream by sidelining the voice of the so far mainstream upper-caste people. Talat argues that writing functional as a tool for Dalit women to convey their thoughts and pains which are otherwise probably not possible. The complex class-caste-gender nexus also solidify their social exclusion to the extreme. She discusses the marginalization of Dalit women on the ground of both geographical location and their contemporary social niche.

(Rapporteur: Rupam Malakar)

### Session 6

April 27, the session began at 12:45 p.m with the welcome speech and instructions by Gulbahar Shah. Over 25 participants joined the session. The session was chaired by Dr. Dhurjjati Sarma, Assistant Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary Studies, Gauhati University, Assam. Four papers were presented followed by question-answer session. Each participant had a time



limit of twenty minutes, including one minute for their introduction. The session was live on Facebook. The session was volunteered by Chitra Bajpai, Gulbahar Shah and Papori Haloi.

The first presenter was Kalpana Bora and her topic was, *“Geographies of Nostalgia: A Reading of Jabnabi Barua’s Undertow and Daribha Lyndem’s Name Place Animal Thing”*. Her paper attempts to read “Undertow” and “Name Place Animal Thing” as narratives that locate the urban as central to the comprehension of one’s identity and history. While the former is set in Guwahati and the latter in Shillong, the cities, as spatial locations of nostalgia and remembering in both novels, define the lives of the characters and allows for reconnecting with one’s essential self as the narrators traverse the cities from a more adult point of view.

The second paper was presented by Natasa Thoudam and her topic was, *“Mufidun Nisa’s Wait Flower, Don’t Bloom : The Problematic of the Literary Circles in Manipur”*. The poem discussed in this paper is titled “Wait, Flower, Don’t Bloom” (“Shakhinu Leirang,” translated by Chungkham Sheelaramani, 2009). The paper focuses on politics of inclusion of a text by a Pangal in an anthology dominated by Meitei writers and translators. This paper through this text and its literary context attempts to re-visit and re-interrogate the dynamic configuration and negotiation of the unstable binaries within the state.

The next presenter was Shikha Maharshi and Urmishree Bedamatta and their topic was, *“Devotion, Discourse and the Odia Literary Imagination: Narrativizing the Mukti Mandap in Puri”*. The paper tries to narrativize Mukti Mandap; located in the precincts of the Jagannath Temple in Puri, Odisha, as a socio-cultural space. The paper attempts to look at this shift and consult the old Odia literature as well as historical records to reconstruct the central role Mukti Mandap played in shaping the Odia discourse in Puri’s devotional space in the precolonial period. The last presenter was Pratiksh Pradhan and Vijayalekshmi Ramachandran and their topic was, *“Ecocultural Keystones and Place Centrism in Selected Lepcha Folk Tales”*. Their paper through this text and its literary context attempts to re-visit and re-interrogate the dynamic configuration and negotiation of the unstable binaries.

The session came to an end with question and answer and observations of the chairperson as well as of the different participants and with the hope for meeting in next session.  
(Rapporteur: Papori Haloi)

### Session 7:

This session was chaired by Prof. Saroj Kumar Mahananda. The paper presenters were Rishav Dutta, Paromita Bose, and Raj Gaurav Verma. Kavitha N could not present her paper due to technical difficulties.

The first paper by Rishav Dutta titled, “Reading Tribal Self-fashioning in India through Translation” focused on the role of human agency, social structures, and the state machinery with respect to the violent history of the marginalisation and homogenisation of tribal communities. It investigated the ontological and epistemological complexities of this displacement and highlighted an urgent need to decolonise knowledge-making processes by according greater respect and visibility to these cultures thereby facilitating avenues for a richer self-fashioning within tribal communities. Paromita Bose’s paper, “Speaking from the Margins, of The Marginalized- Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar’s *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*” examined three stories from the book as manifestations of not only subjugation and oppression of the adivasis by a state that facilitates a systematic stripping off of their autonomy, but also reads them as mechanisms of subverting state hegemony and its ideas of development. Thus, the texts also function as sites of resistance and representation by capturing the authenticity of Santhali culture and language by bringing them into the mainstream. Raj Gaurav Verma’s paper, “Margins and Metropolis: Kunwar Narain’s Poetry in English Translation” provided an in-depth analysis of the amorphous and blurry borders between the margin and the metropolis through Hindi poet Kunwar Narain’s expansive work spanning five decades. The paper argued that Narain’s poetry encouraged

poly-ethnic and poly-cultural sensibilities through a “war on dehumanisation.” The discussion ended with an enthusiastic Q&A session.



(Rapporteurs: Aldish Edroos, Sudipta Agarwal, Monib Ahmad)

**Session 8** of the IACLALS Conference was chaired by Prof. Ranu Uniyal. There were four presenters for this session. In the first paper, Vandita Gautam pointed out how the stultifying realities of the mufassil in the fictional works of Anita Desai and Chitra Banerjee offer a sharp contrast to the urban landscapes. Through a close reading of *In Custody* (1984), and *Before We Visit the Goddess* (2016), she argued that the discourse of growth, development, and progress is always treated with a sense of scepticism in these texts even as the small town offers little scope for respite and/or optimism. Alka Vishwakarma approached the question of the metropolis and the margins through a somewhat different lens by examining two short stories, namely Dominic Jeeva’s ‘Enlightenment’ and Ashokamitran’s ‘Mother’s Day’. Here, it is the mufassil which is seen as the source of regional/cultural identity while the metropolis connotes a sense of alienation and loss. Shuby Abidi’s presentation revolved around the question of refugee crisis that one finds in Dina Nayeri’s memoir, *The Ungrateful Refugee*. She examined the ‘metropolis’ as a place that becomes the focal point of the refugee’s desires and the driving force that can ensure upward social mobility even though the initial experiences within the cityscape may not be entirely ideal or encouraging. The final paper by Chaandreyi Mukherjee looked at Perumal Murugan’s short story ‘Shit’ to underscore the inherent dynamics of class consciousness in a suburban area. Outlining the fundamental asymmetry between the underprivileged scavenger in the story and the upper-middle class, educated youth who are completely revolted by his appearance, she unpacks the various layers of cultural and emotional selves through which one could identify the ways in which power operates in seemingly innocuous and de-politicized spaces. The session ended with a vote of thanks from the chair to the presenters but not before a quick question and answer session between the presenters and the participants.

(Rapporteur: Shailendra Kumar Singh)

### Session: 9

The session was chaired by Prof. Nishat Zaidi who is a professor and former head of the Department of English, Jamia Milia Islamia, New Delhi. The session began with Navjot Sandhu’s presentation of the paper titled “Between Longing and Belonging at the Margins: Reading Anuradha Roy’s *The Folded Earth* and Shubhangi Swarup’s *Latitudes of Longing*.” Navjot’s paper was an attempt to look at an

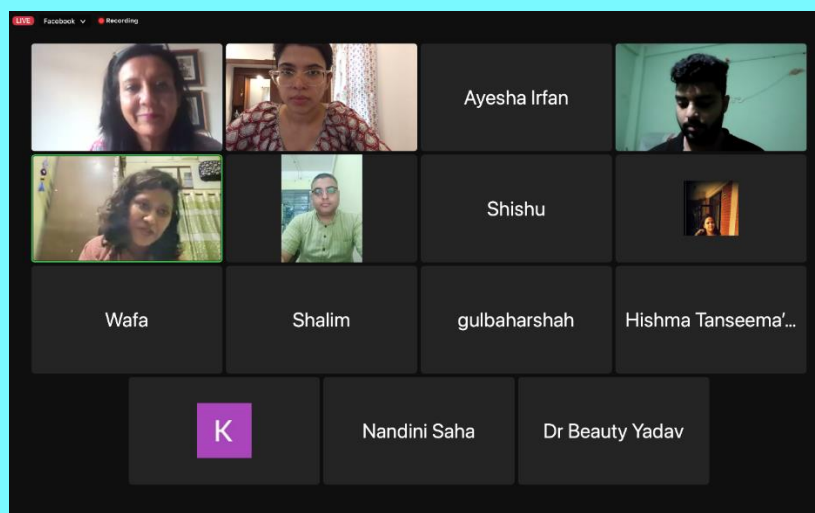
emerging sensibility in contemporary Indian Writing in English that seeks the peripheries/margins for possibility of representation. She talked about spatial movements and what possible implications they mean for the “locals” stationed in her selected narratives. The next paper was presented by Tara Saldanha titled “A Room Not Quite Her Own: Writing and Domestic Work in Baby Halder’s *A Life Less Ordinary*”. In her presentation she examined how the novel reframes the ‘work’ of writing, authorship, and autobiography as a genre, given that it narrates the life of a domestic worker. She examined how Halder’s autobiography interjects into the paratext of her book, which attempts to frame her coming to authorship as a triumph of spirit. The next presentation was by Saparshi Mallick titled “Liberating Victims: A Bengali Gynocritic in Dialogue with Her Daughters”. The next presentation was by Aleem Qureshi of the paper titled ““Gendered Trajectories, Dissident Voice: Re-reading *Libaaf* and *Kagbazi Hai Pairahan* in Postcolonial Context””.

(Rapporteur: Yashvi Srivastava)

### Session 10:

Chair: Prof Simi Malhotra

Ayesha Irfan – “Fort William College and its Contribution to Modern Indian Languages”. Dr Irfan’s paper historically traces the role that the Fort William College played in the dissemination of Indian languages and the philological revolution that happened during the first half of the nineteenth century. The paper studies how colonialism made an intervention into the arts and culture, with the Serampore Printing Press, along with others, working towards publishing critical texts in translation into Indian languages, and how the epicentre for this study, compilation and codification of Indian languages was the Fort William College. Shishu Bala – “Reddening Tree: A Glimpse of Mountain Culture of Western Himalayas”. Ms Bala focuses her paper on the short story Reddening Tree, an English translation by Meenakshi F Paul of the original Hindi short story titled Laal Hota Darakht by S.R. Harnot. In her paper, she looks at the themes that are central to the story, viz, life of the mountain people and its hardships, the challenges faced by a young girl in the India of the 1950s, and the relationship of man with nature. Her paper goes on to comment on the role that translation plays in carrying forth the voices and narratives, of those who would otherwise get obliterated and lost, to the masses. Taniya Roy – “Love and Disparity: Representation of Eroticism in the Compilation of Hala’s *Gāthā Saptaśatī*”. Ms Roy’s paper brings to light a remarkable collection of poems titled *Gāthā Saptaśatī*, compiled by Hala. Speaking about the domain of private space as one that begins at the most personal level, the paper demonstrates, through this collection of poems, how social and gender disparities emanate from this very site. *Gāthā Saptaśatī* stands out as a poetry anthology because its female authorship imbues exceptional gravity to the expression of the female experience.

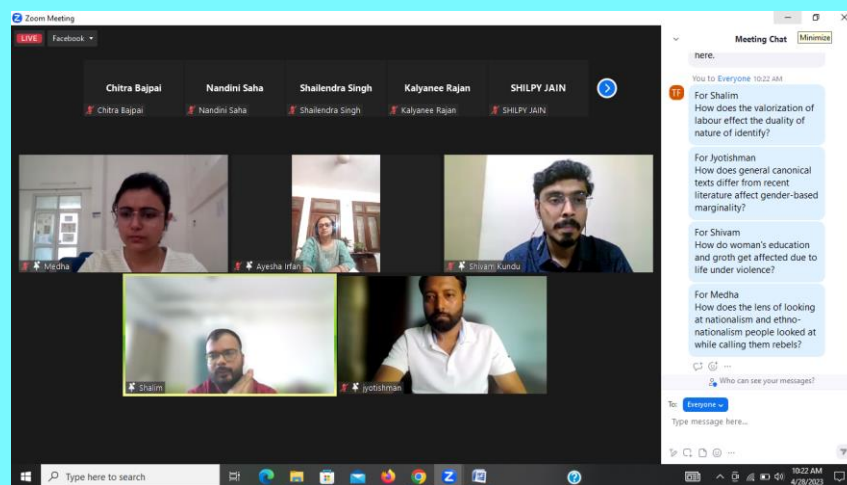


(Rapporteur: Sarah Mariam)

### Session 11

Chair: Dr Ayesha Irfan

Tamanna Farooque Arzo commenced the session by introducing the Chair Dr Ayesha Irfan. She is an Associate Professor at the department of English, Dyal Singh College, University of Delhi. She is currently translating a book of Urdu criticism titled *Urdu Drama and Stage* by Syed Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb, a Sahitya Akademi Award winner. She has published several papers on her area of interest- African-American Literature. The session's first participant was **Shalim Hussain** who presented his paper on "The Post-Colony and Its Intermediaries: Reading History While Translating Kamal Kumar Tanti's Post-Colonial Poems". He brought about a vibrant discussion about the themes of displacement and valorization of labour. He also highlighted the issue of dual nature of identity – Adivasi and Greater Assamese identity. The next paper was by **Jyotishman Kalita & Suman Sigroha** titled "Evolving Nature of 'Centre-Margin' Relationship in New English Short Fiction from Assam". Jyotishman, while reading their paper, discussed the importance of valuing the recent non-canonical texts and journals to identify the issues of the society rather than the age-old canonical texts so as to connect with the gender-based marginality issues haunting the Assamese people. **Shivam Kundu** was next in line with his paper titled "A Disquiet Home: Reading Tamsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*". Through his elaborate description of spine-chilling experiences of women of the North-East India, Shivam showed how rape has been accepted there as a common practice. This is when they are already oppressed by the military.



The last paper was presented by **Medha Devi**. Her paper "Negotiating the Nation, Embracing Ethno-nationalism: A Study of Tamsula Ao's Select Short Stories" depicted how the lens of looking at nationalism and ethno-nationalism affect the people looked at while being termed 'rebels' by the nation-state. Dr Ayesha Irfan then connected with the participants through questions and with a very interesting question-answer session that went on for the rest of the session she gave the vote of thanks.

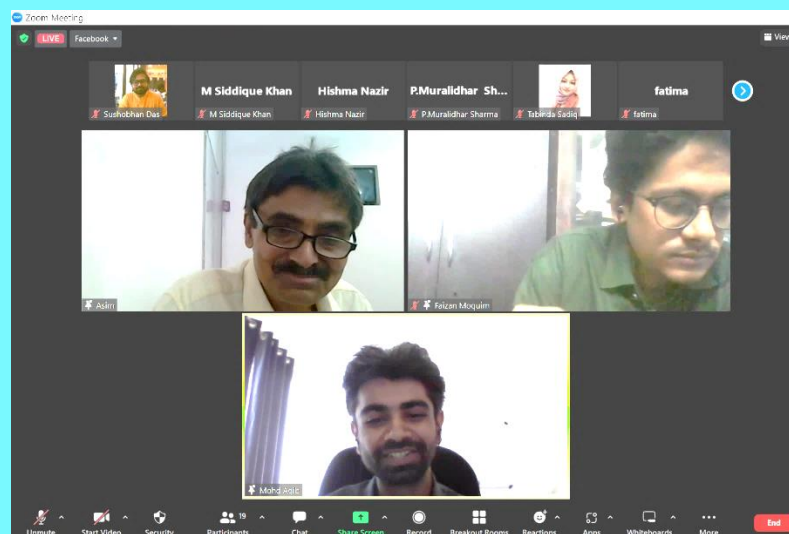
(Rapporteurs: Tamanna Farooque Arzo, Chitra Bajpai and Shailendra Singh)

### Session 12

Session 12 of the IACLALS conference was chaired by Prof. Asim Siddiqui. Session started with welcome and introduction of the chair.



The first speaker, P. Muralidhar Sharma presented a paper titled, “Daughters of Sin: The Courtesan Novel as Micro-History”. In his paper, he analysed K. Shivaram Karanth’s *A Women of Basrur* as a micro-history of community of courtesans and their cultural practices. The second speaker, Hishma Binti Nazir presented a paper titled, “The Discursive Construction of National Identities via Linguistic Discourses; Case of Urdu and Its Neglect”. Her paper aimed at analysing how national and political strategies attempt to de-historicize the role of Urdu and Urdu-speaking communities. The third speaker, M. Siddique Khan, presented a paper titled, “The Curious Case of Urdu in Indian English poetry: From Nativist Assertion to Transatlantic Assimilation: A Study of the Poetry of Agha Shahid Ali”. His paper analysed Agha Shahid Ali’s contribution to both Urdu’s native assertion and its elevation as an important South Asian language. The last paper titled, “Dalit Muslims in Urdu Fiction: New Directions in the Representation of Dalit Question” was presented jointly by Md Faizan Mouqim and Mohd Aqib. Their paper addresses the question of why it is believed that there is not much Dalit literature in Urdu as in other Indian languages. Paper presentations were followed by valuable insights from the chairperson and session ended with a vote of thanks.



(Rapporteur: Tabinda Sadiq)

### Session 13:

Chair: Professor Nandini Saha

First presenter was **Shruti Sareen**, Research Scholar from the Department of English, University of Delhi. Her topic was *Representation of Majuli Island in Assam in Select Literature and Film*. She has taken the depiction of Majuli island in a collection of short stories *My Island, My Majuli* by Monika Rauth, the film *Bornodi Bhotia* directed by Anupam Kaushik Borah, and a short documentary *The Untold Majuli* directed by Vishal P.Chaliha. The Majuli island in Assam is the largest river island in the world. Even though it is one and a half hour's ferry ride away from the mainland, there has been no bridge connecting Majuli to the rest of Assam all these years. She also mentioned about tropophilia and tropophobia insight in people's mind. She mentioned about Srimanta shankardeva, the vaishnava satra dhikara. Also mentioned about the Satras and the different dance performances performed, like satriya, bihu is the prevailing. She also mentioned about social strata and the lives of the women in the society, the gender and class biasness. Lastly, she concluded by addressing Majuli as the unique place, and is filled with calmness. The second paper was presented by **Simran Bedi**, a Master's degree holder in English from Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, New Delhi. She is also a UGC NET holder. Her topic was *"Aamchai Mumbai? To whom does the Metropolis belongs to: A spatial analysis of Bombay/ Mumbai in Zoya Akhtar's Gully Boy"*. The common phrase of Aamchi Mumbai, meaning "Our Bombay/Mumbai" is a ubiquitous expression in this bhelpuri of a city. The phrase is a Marathi

expression, and its linguistics orientation and the politics that surround it usually tend to get be mixed with the sentiment it evokes. For many, especially the Marathi mannos (man) resonates with it. The phrase gives a sense of possession and claim to the city and its spaces. She talked about the places of Bombay. She added gully as the range of ideas for middle class. She talked about the love story lies between upper class and lower. The paper attempts to unravel the space of Gully as a site of subversion in relation to the subculture of Rap in India. By tracing back to the roots of hip-hop in Afro-American ghettos of New York, this chapter will try to understand how the culture of hip-hop alters when it reaches the gullies of Mumbai.

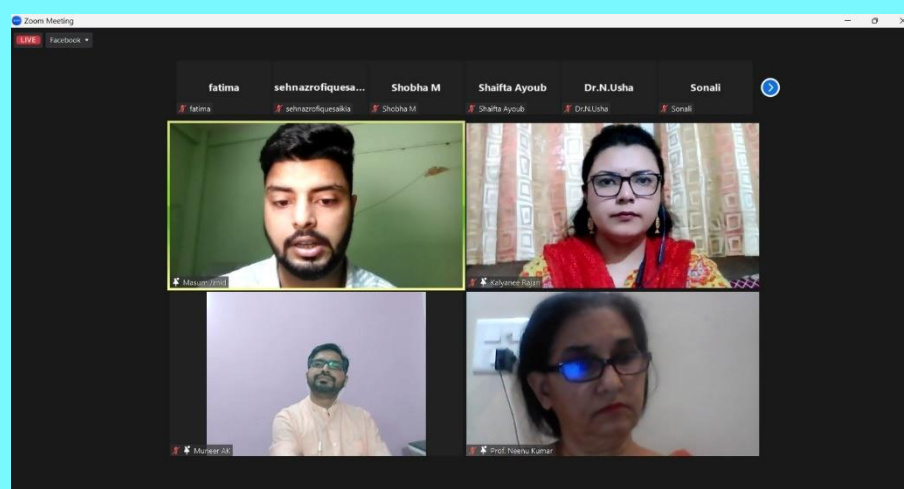
The next presenter was **Pallabee Dasgupta** is an Assistant professor at Department of English, SMT B.D Jain Girls Degree College, Agra. Her paper entitled "*Chronical of a Death in silence: Reading the Enchantment of the Secluded Countryside in Konkona Sen Sharma's A Death in the Gunj*". The countryside including hill stations and forest gateways has often been depicted in fiction and cinematic depictions as a simple, idyllic space, offering a refuge from the corrupts influence of the city. The mystery of nature and natural spaces away from the humdrum, regimented lives in the urban cities have also been explored in Indian cinema, most notably in recent times in Konkona Sen Sharma's directoral venture A Death in Gunj. The paper therefore, attempts to read this change in locale as the characters move away from the repressive environs of Calcutta to the secluded countryside which encourages their instinctual cruelty and locate the disturbed psyche of the central character Shutu as he feels disconnected from both his family and their massive colonial house. The session covered research in various areas like social, economic, political, geographical and demographic configurations or about how do textual dynamics actually provide some of the primary means to active constitute those symmetries.

(Rapporteur: Manisha Das)

#### Session 14:

**Chair: Ms. Kalyanee Rajan**

On April 28<sup>th</sup>, the session began at 11:15 a.m. with the welcome speech and instructions by Masum Janid. Over 15 participants joined the session. The session was chaired by Ms. Kalyanee Rajan, she teaches English language and Literature at Shaheed Bhagat Singh Evening College, University of Delhi. Three papers were presented followed by question-answer session. Each participant had a time limit of twenty minutes, including one minute for their introduction. The session was live on Facebook. The session was volunteered by Masum Janid, Sehnaz Rofique Saikia and Papor Haloi.





The first presenter was **Dr. Muneer Aram Kuzhiyan**, he is an Assistant Professor of English at Aligarh Muslim University, India. His topic was, *"World Literature before World Literature? The Sociality of Literary Circulation and the Example of Mappila Literary Culture from the Malabar Coast"*. The paper used archival/textual resources to reconstruct the history of Arabi Malayalam with a focus on the social production of the culture which was facilitated by literary circulation fostered by a combination of networks, including trade, scholarly, Sufi, and literary, that flourished on the Malabar Coast since at least the thirteenth century. The second paper was presented by **Prof. N. Usha**, she is a Professor at Krishna University, Machilipatnam- AP. Her topic was *"Bangalore as a Cosmopolitan Urban Space: Comparative Study of Select Migrant Discourses"*. Her paper presents a comparative study of Bharti Mukherjee's *Miss New India* and Anjum Hasan's *Neti Neti* as moving tale of two cities: Gauripur, a small mufassil town in Bihar and Bangalore, and the rural-urban divide between these two cities as experienced by Anjali Bose, in her journey from Bihar to Bangalore. The last paper was presented by **Prof. Neenu Kumar**, she is a Professor in English at Aditi Mahavidyalaya, University of Delhi. Her topic was *"Portrayal of Shades of Marginality, the Urbane and Rural through Human Emotions in Paatal Lok"*. The paper attempted to identify the disparities in urban and rural areas; urban and rural changes; attitudes and emotional responses based on these inequities; socio-cultural divide and wild lawlessness; discrimination against the north-eastern and lack of agency; the 'underbelly' with its secrets; and the invisible sections of the society primarily focussing on Paatal Lok. The session came to an end with question and answer and observations of the chairperson as well as of different participants and with the hope for meeting in next session.

(Rapporteur: Papori Haloi)

### MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE MEMORIAL PRIZE SESSION 2023

**IACLALS**

Indian Association for Commonwealth  
Literature and Language Studies  
in collaboration with  
Janki Devi Memorial College  
Presents  
**Annual International Conference 2023 (Online)**

Metropolis and Margins: Shifting Perspectives  
in Literary and Language Studies

**MEENAKSHI MUKHERJEE MEMORIAL  
PRIZE SESSION**

Chair: Prof. M. Asaduddin & Prof. Swati Pal

**Meghal Karki**  
Ph.D. Research Scholar,  
Ambedkar University

"The Changing Cityscape of  
Delhi: A Study of the Protest Art  
and the Site at Jamia Millia  
Islamia and Shaheen Bagh"

in conversation with  
**Prof. Swati Pal**  
Vice Chair, IACLALS

Join us on **zoom**  
Meeting ID: 834 9277 5721  
Password: 112233

**28th April | 12:45 PM (IST)** f live @iaclals

A special session dedicated to the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial prize 2023 was held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2023, the second day of the IACLALS Annual Conference. The award was given to **Meghal Karki**, PhD Research Scholar at Ambedkar University, Delhi for her paper titled 'The changing cityscape of Delhi: A study of the protest art and the site at Jamia Millia Islamia and Shaheen Bagh'. This award is awarded to the best paper published by a member of IACLALS during the previous two years. The

session was chaired by **Prof. M Asaduddin** and **Prof. Swati Pal**. Prof. Asaduddin began the session with an introduction to the life and career of noted litterateur and scholar Prof. Meenakshi Mukherjee. Prof. Swati Pal then explained the rules and selection process for the MMM Prize and read out snippets from the comments of the judges of the prize. She then invited Ms. Karki to make a brief presentation on her paper. Ms. Karki presented her observations on the duality of urban spaces- seen through the lens of policy makers, investors and developers etc. as opposed to the lived experiences of the people residing there. She explained how the perception of Shaheen Bagh changed as a result of the anti-CAA protests of 2019 from a nondescript urban Muslim ghetto to the site of a popular protest. Similarly, the city around Shaheen Bagh was compelled to reorient itself because of the blockade. The session concluded with a discussion between Prof. Swati Pal and Meghal Karki where Ms. Karki answered Prof. Pal's questions on the possibilities of safe spaces of protest, the revolutionary potential of street art and how the subsequent erasure of the graffiti art in Shaheen Bagh/ Jamia Millia Islamia could be understood.

(Rapporteur: Shalim M. Hussain)

### Session 15

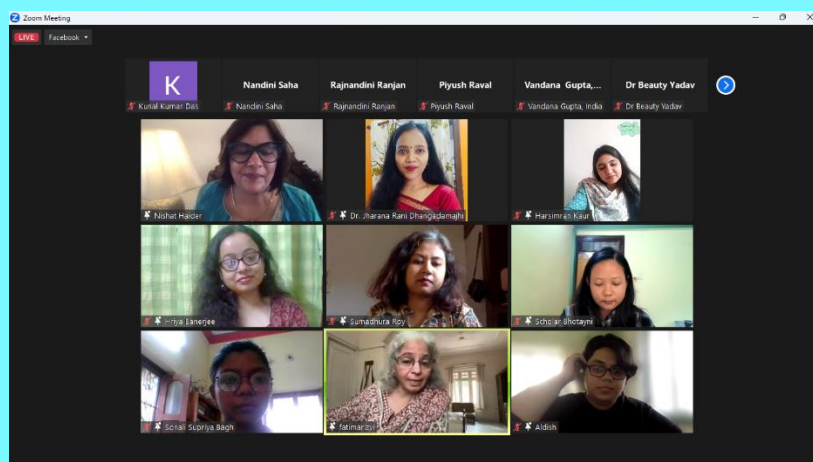
The session was chaired by Dr Anjali Daimari. **Dr. Shailendra Kumar Singh**, the first speaker of the session, presented his paper titled, "Illustrative Paradigms or Representational Dichotomies? The Village and the City in Premchand's Fiction." The paper discusses the rural and urban spaces in Premchand's fiction. It examines the writer's use of country/city to sketch out alternative paradigms and his politics of representation with the portrayal of lower classes. **Neepa Sarkar**, the second speaker, presented her paper titled "Detecting the City and Mediating Conflict: The Flaneur-Bhadralok in Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's *Byomkesh Bakshi*." The paper analyzes select stories of Bandyopadhyay's *Byomkesh Bakshi* while viewing the city as undergoing changes, in colonial and postcolonial contexts. The paper also explores the city of Calcutta depicted as a part of collective memory and identity, and yet as Byomkesh's adversary. The third speaker of the session, **Dr. Jindagi Kumari**, presented her paper titled "From "Imaginary Homelands" to "Shadow Lines": A Comparative Analysis of the City Motifs in the Selected Novels of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, and Amit Chaudhuri." The paper examines the city of Bombay in Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, Calcutta, London and Dhaka in Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines*, and Bombay in Amit Chaudhuri's *Friend of My Youth*, to illustrate the multiple uses of city as foreground and background, as motifs and symbol in Indian English fiction. **Ashish James**, the fourth speaker, presented his paper titled "Cities as Spaces of Interstices: Centres and Peripheries in Lavanya Sankaran's 'The Hope Factory'." His paper analyzes the novel *The Hope Factory* by Lavanya Sankaran through the concepts of core and periphery. The paper showcases how the characters living on the periphery struggle to live through the changing landscape of the city, and analyzes the depiction of economic processes through Arjun Appadurai's idea of 'financescapes'. The fifth and final speaker of the session, **Akash Salim**, presented his paper titled "The Spatial Politics of Knowledge." The paper discusses how knowledge becomes a site of contention in the mapping of centre and margin. The paper also examines the relationship between body and space through an analysis of Madhuri Vijay's novel *The Far Field*, to illustrate periphery in the novel and discuss how space is produced through the body. Question/Answers and Discussions ensued after the paper presentations, and the session concluded with remarks from Prof. Anjali Daimari, the chair of the session.

(Rapporteur: Aqsa Eram, PhD Scholar, Department of English & MEL, University of Lucknow)

### Session 16:

This session was chaired by Prof. Nishat Haider. The paper presenters were Sumadhura Roy, Jharana Rani Dhnagadamajhi and Sonali Supriya Bagh, Hriya Banerjee, Harsimran Kaur, and Tenzin Nyima

Bhutia. **Sumadhura Roy's** paper, "Decentering the Discourses of the Metropole: A Study of the Rajbangsi Community of North Bengal and their Folk Songs" examined the tenuous relationship of the Rajbangsi community with mainstream colonial modernity and how the latter erased and sanitized the former's rich and complex oral history traditions. The paper presented Rajbangsi folk songs of desire as weapons against the mainstream heteronormative and conformist ideas of conjugality as well as sites of protests owing to their non-conformist expressions of desire and sexuality. The second paper by **Jharana Rani Dhnagadamajhi** and **Sonali Supriya Bagh** titled, "From Folk to Pop: Understanding the Poetics and Politics of the 'Remix-Revival' Culture of Select Sambalpuri Folk Songs" charted out the emergence of Sambalpuri folk music as a major part of Dalit cultural capital and its subsequent appropriation by the mainstream leading to an erasure of its Dalit authorship. The paper also critiqued the linguistic hegemony of the Odia language over the Sambalpuri dialect brought about by this appropriation. Carrying this theme forward, **Hriya Banerjee's** paper, "*Amar Shobor* (My City): Exploring the Metropolis and Counterculture in Bangla Band Songs" analysed how mainstream music failed to portray the angst of brought about by the rapid urbanization of Kolkata, which consequently led to the emergence of dissident urban folk bands that were inspired by the rock-band construct of the West. In her paper, "Now, Bulleh Shah Dances from the 'Peripheries' to 'Centre,'" **Harsimran Kaur** analysed the transposition of Sufi poet, Bulleh Shah's poetry onto the Kathak dance form. Using the methodologies of phenomenology and dance ethnography, the paper examined how Shah's aural poetry could effectively be transformed into the visual text of Kathak. **Tenzin Nyima Bhutia's** paper, "Understanding Integrity Norms and Oral Narratives of Sacred Texts: A Comparative Analysis of Transcripts of Buddhist Religious Texts and Translations of the Bible-Quran" argued that the politics of translation of religious texts often led to an erasure of cultural specificity and literary pleasure due to the dissonance between the source language and the target language. The session concluded with a lively Q&A segment.



(Rapporteur: Aldish Edroos, Rajnandini Ranjan, Kunal Kumar Das)

## Session 17

The parallel session17 was Chaired by Prof. Vibha Sharma who is a Professor in the Department of English at Aligarh Muslim University. Four papers were presented in the session, followed by question-answer session with the Chairperson's remarks. Each participant had a time limit of twenty minutes, including one minute for their introduction. Questions were taken via in chatbox of the zoom meeting. The Session was live on Facebook. Conducting of session was done by Mohd. Siddique Khan and the technical part was handled by Darpana Gogoi. Brief insight of their papers is given below.

First presenter was **Dr. Urmi Sengupta**, who is a faculty of Communicative English at the British Institutes, Kolkata. The title of her paper was: *"Mapping the Mystifying Margins": Collective Memory and Eco-feminist Interconnections across indigenous Literatures of North-East India*. In her paper, Dr. Sengupta spoke about strong role that women of the indigenous groups played in the pre-colonial period. She explored the connection between women and Nature and how with colonialism led to disempowerment and subjugation of women by taking control over their body and mind. She looked at two women writers belonging to two different indigenous communities, Temsula Ao (Ao-Naga community) and Esterine Kire (Angami-Naga community) to show the connection between Nature and women. The texts that she discussed in depth are Esterine Kire's *Where the River Sleeps* (2014) and *Son of the Thunderbird* (2016) and Temsula Ao's *Songs that Tell* (1998) and *Oral Traditions* (1999). The second paper was presented by **Nilakshi Moran**, Research Scholar, Delhi University. Her paper entitled, *Understanding 'Violence' and 'Nationalism' through Select Contemporary Assamese Fiction*, dealt with conflict between Assamese and Bengali communities. She focused on issues like the Assam Movement, insurgencies, xenophobia and nationalism. Her selected texts were Jahnabi Barua's *Undertow* and Arupa Patangia Kalita's *Written in Tears*. The next presenter was **Neeharika Haloi**, Research Scholar at Tezpur University. Her paper was titled, *Lost Narratives: Voices from the Forgotten Chinese Assamese Community in India*. Her paper was on Rita Choudhury's novel *Chinatown Days*. In her paper she brought into light the mistreatment and injustice meted upon the indo-Chinese communities of the tea gardens of Assam during and after the Indo-China War of 1962. The last presenter of the session was **Sanjukta Naskar**. Her paper was: *Voices from the Margins: Migration, Memory and the City*. She spoke about the migration of people to the city of Kolkata in search of jobs and how that led to a more secular and liberal acceptance of performance arts like Jatra, shong, tarja etc. Across different classes of the society. The session was an illuminating one. The Chairperson gave insights into the papers.

(Rapporteur: Gargi Gautam)

## Session 18

Chair: Prof M. Sobha

Presenter 1 - H.S. Komalesha

*"Light of the Margin in the Wick of Metropolis: Revisiting the Poetry of Kedarnath Singh"*

The paper explores the aesthetic calibrations of the metropolis and the margins in Kedarnath Singh's poetry. It establishes its argument by tracking a history of how various schools of thought and theoretical frameworks have viewed the metropolis-margins dichotomy, viz- Postcolonial theory, Feminist theory, Critical Race theory, Cultural Studies theory, Marxist theory, and Queer theory. It then goes on to expound, through the poetry of Kedarnath Singh, on how there is to be experienced a creation of new configurations in which new paradigms and shifts in axes of the metropolis-margins relationship is being established.

Presenter 2 - Beauty Yadav

*"Exploring Provincality and Culture in Patna Roughcut and Patna Blues"*

Ms Yadav's paper argues in support of provincial writers who experience excommunication and exclusion, with special focus on two writers- Siddharth Chowdhury and Abdullah Khan, both of whom belong to Bihar and write to own their stats as literary voices from the state of Bihar. These writers' experience of being marginalised within the field of Indian writing in English is the driving force to make their provincality all the more prominent in their writings. The paper argues that aesthetic judgement by the dominant class represented by the metropolis takes on the role of a literary gatekeeper, and is an imbalance that persists because of the hierarchical nature of the metropolis-provincial relationship, and the author makes a case for a "literary rehabilitation".

Presenter 3 - Maziah Shaaz



“Challenging the Norm: Evaluating Kamla and Mrigayaa Against the Centre-Margin Conflict”  
The paper begins by expounding on how the clash between the centre and the margin operates at multiple levels- social, cultural, political, and economic, and arises from conflicts and tussels between those who occupy positions of power and those at the peripheries. Through a detailed analysis of two films- Kamla (1985) and Mrigayaa (1976), the paper makes a case for intersectional meanings of the centre-margin dichotomy that emerge, and the microcosms of this hierarchical structure that highlights the distortions in societal systems. Ms Shaaz in her paper argues that this dichotomy is one that eludes an easy definition, because it cannot be viewed in isolation or in absolute terms; centre and margins are categories that exist in shades of grey.

Presenter 4 - Apoorva Dimri

“The Margins Within the Metropolis: A Reading of Manto’s Representation of Bombay”

The aim of this paper is to explore the representation of Bombay in the stories of Manto as a city divided along the lines of class, where the characters in Manto’s fiction interact with the spaces they occupy and are surrounded by in specific ways. Ms Dimri’s paper focuses on the representation of the city and its discontents or the various contradictory and conflicting aspects of city life, and the way the same shape the lives of its inhabitants, particularly those at the socio-economic and cultural margins of the metropolis, where everyday reality becomes an important means to counter these binaries and hierarchies.

(Rapporteur: Sarah Mariam)

### IACLALS 2023 – Book Launch Session

IACLALS held a Book Launch Session on 28 April 2023, the second day of the 2023 Annual Conference of IACLALS, at 6 PM, online via Zoom and the session was also livestreamed on Facebook. The Session was chaired by **Prof. Swati Pal**, Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College and Vice Chair, IACLALS. She introduced the various books published by the members of IACLALS and invited the authors and editors to speak about their books. Prof. Pal began the session with an introduction to **Prof. Somadatta Mandal’s** works; the first was an edited book *Rituparno Ghosh On/ And Film* (2023) and the second was a translation of Manik Bandyopadhyay’s *The Murder* (2022). Prof. Mandal couldn’t attend the session, so Prof. Pal introduced and discussed the books briefly. The next book was *Literary Representations of Pandemics, Epidemics and Pestilence* (2022) edited by **Nishi Pulugurtha**. Ms. Pulugurtha discussed her book, which is a critical engagement of various narratives of pandemics and epidemics. This was followed by **Saptarshi Mallick’s** edited book *Sudraka’s Mrchakatika: A Reader* (2022), a collection of various critical perspectives on the classical Sanskrit play, *Mrchakatika*. The next book was **Shailendra Kumar Singh’s** *Between Resistance and Conformity: Premchand’s Fiction in Colonial India* (2022) which analyses Premchand’s works through the lens of conformity and resistance in colonial India.

Prof. Pal then introduced **Prof. B. Mangalam** and her edited book, *Dalit Fiction in Tamil 1989 - 2022: Representation of Dalit Women: A Critical Perspective* (2023). This book engages with different Dalit voices in Tamil that have emerged since the late 1980s with a particular focus on the intersections of caste and gender represented within these voices. The next book was *Shyam Selvadurai’s Funny Boy: Critical Essays* (2022) edited by **Simran Chadha and Sureshikha Piyasena**. Dr. Chadha and Dr. Piyasena introduced their book which is a compendium of critical engagements with Selvadurai’s *Funny Boy* and will help to create a nuanced understanding of the novel and the context from which it emerges. This was followed by **Maninder Sidhu’s** *Nayantara Sahgal: A Century of Political Insights* (2023). The book is an engagement with various works by Sahgal and hence fills a lacuna with regard to criticism related to Sahgal’s works.

The next book was *Media and Communication: A Handbook for Students* (2022) edited by **Guntasha Kaur Tuls** and **Nidhi Madan** wherein various concepts and case studies related to different aspects of media were discussed. Then, Prof. Pal introduced **Seema Jain**, a prolific writer, who has published four books in the past year. The first book she discussed was a translation of Ramkishore Mehta's *The Vanquished Queen: The Diary of Kaikeyi* (2022), which is Kaikeyi's reflection on her own life. Next Ms. Jain introduced two edited anthologies of poetry, *Mosaic of Poetic Musings: Contemporary Women Poets from India* (2022) and *Vibrant Voices: An Anthology of 21st Century Indian Women Poets in English* (2022); both of these anthologies include works which deal with themes of gender inequality, patriarchy, voices of resistance, to name a few. The final book Ms. Jain discussed was her translation of Madhu Acharya 'Ashawadi's *Mohalla* (2022), a novel which deals with various aspects of human pain, psyche and emotions. This was followed by **Sapna Sharma's** book *Family in the Novels of Manju Kapur: A Post-Feminist Perspective* (2023) which is an engagement with the representation of family and gender in her novels. The next book was *Mahatma Gandhi: Essays on Life and Literature* edited by **Ranu Uniyal, Nazneen Khan and Raj Gaurav Verma**; Mr. Verma introduced the book to the audience which is a critical engagement with Gandhian thought.

Prof. Pal then introduced the works of two authors who were unable to attend the session. The first book she introduced was **Dr. Urmi Satyan's** *Cultural Sentiments and Diaspora Sensibilities: Reflections on the Select Anthologies of Bharati Mukherjee and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni* (2023). She then introduced two collections of poetry by **Prof. Laksmisree Banerjee**, *Blue Phoenix and other Poems* (2022) and *April is the Kindest Month* (2023), and an edited anthology, *Kaleidoscope: Anthology of International Poets*. The last book of the session was **Prof. Swati Pal's** own collection of poems, *Living On: Poems on Grief and Loss* (2022). Prof. Pal read from the Introduction of her book where she ruminates on grief and loss and she concluded her session by reading one of her poems, "The Irony".

(Rapporteur: Ruchi Kalita, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, JDMC)

### Session 19

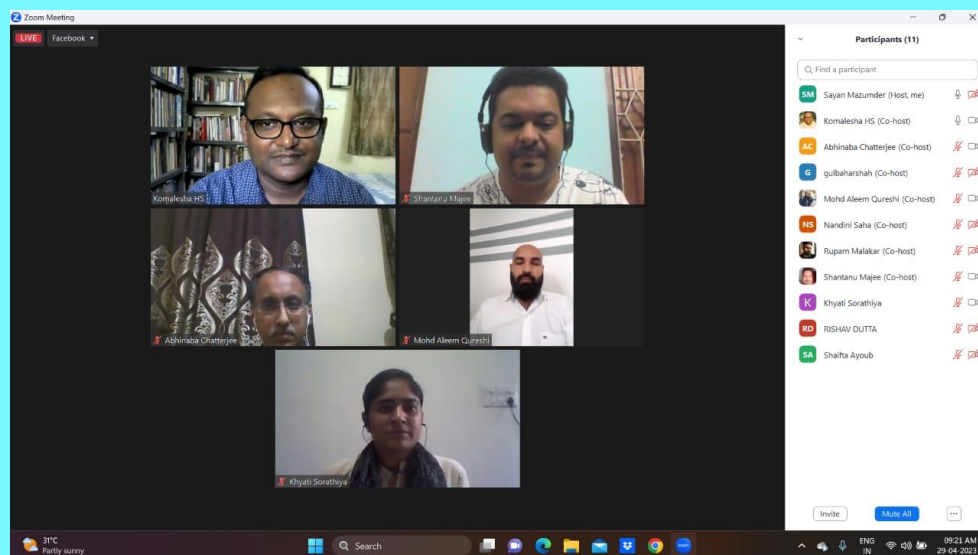
The session was chaired by Prof Albeena Shakil. **Esther Daimari**, the first speaker of the session, presented her paper titled "Climate Writing from the Northeast: Reading Easterine Kire's *The Son of the Thundercloud* as an EcoGothic Cli-fi." The paper discusses Easterine Kire's *The Son of the Thundercloud* as a novel emerging from India's North-East with climate consciousness, which uses the EcoGothic cli-fi mode. The paper also shows Kire's use of elements like uncanny landscapes, famine and tiger to express environmental degradation in Nagaland. **Sadhna Kashyap**, the second speaker, presented her paper titled "Voices From the Margins: A Postcolonial Reading of Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land*." The paper begins by giving a brief overview of North-East India's history and its existence on margins. It continues by discussing the novels by Mamang Dai's *The Legends of Pensam* and Janice Pariat's *Boats on Land*, the impact of colonialism and the struggle of indigenous people to preserve tribal culture. **Vandana Gupta**, the third speaker of the session, presented her paper titled, "Oral, Local, Bioregional: A Study of Pluri-versal Aesthetics of Mamang Dai's *The Legends Of Pensam*." The paper analyzes bioregionalism and power struggles through the novel *The Legends of Pensam* by Mamang Dai. The paper also discusses how the novel offers a counternarrative and pluri-versal aesthetics, and revitalizes the traditional ecological system. The final speaker of the session, **Papia Sengupta**, presented her paper titled, "Breaking the binary between mainstream and the margin: Oral narratives as history." The paper explores orality and oral narratives that emerge from storytelling, folklore and art forms as knowledge. The paper also discusses history taking root in orality through memory and the circular notion of time as understood in the Orient. Question/Answers and Discussions ensued after the paper presentations, and the session concluded with remarks from Prof. Albeena Shakil, the chair of the session.

(Rapporteur: Aqsa Eram, PhD Scholar, Department of English & MEL, University of Lucknow)



## Session 20

This session of the conference was chaired by Prof. H. S. Komalesha. It comprised of four presenters all of whom discussed essentially on the issues of Center and Margin. **Shantanu Majee**, the first presenter, talked about the decolonization of Victorian literature in Indian classrooms. He also argued how the eminent 19<sup>th</sup> century Bengali literary texts could be read with the same importance while reading Victorian writers. Also, he discussed about the practice of critically accessing the British literature in the Department of English, Jadavpur University (JUDE). **Abhinaba Chatterjee** talked about the postcolonial literary canon's trajectory to abrogate the master's tongue. He discussed how the formation of 'alternative cosmopolitanism' in Indian English literature enabled them to image a global community with their ability of acceptance of differences. According to Abhinaba, Amitav Ghosh deployed deconstructive strategy in his writs to marginalize the center. **Aleem Qureshi's** presentation is a rereading of *Lihaaf* and *Kaghazj Hai Pirahan*. He discusses parallelly the representations of Western feminism, which he argues to be monolithic, and the Islamic feminism. The later, Aleem argues, faces more challenges when it comes to any sort of practical solutions though the gender-based marginalization addresses same issues initially in both the West and within South-Asian social context. **Khyati Sorathiya** discusses how the names function as the identity markers of people from hierarchical socio-cultural backgrounds. The argument encompasses Arundhati Roy's novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*.



(Rapporteur: Rupam Malakar)

## C D NARASIMHAIAH PRIZE 2023 SESSION

**Chair: Prof. M. Asaduddin and Prof. Fatima Rizvi**

The IACLALS Showcase of CD Narasimhaiah Prize Session for the best paper presented at the conference, 2023, was chaired by Prof. M. Asaduddin and Prof. Fatima Rizvi. Prof. Asaduddin briefed the audience about the legacy of the C D Narasimhaiah Prize and welcomed Prof. Fatima Rizvi for chairing the session. The session consisted of five presenters who brought into light several new aspects of the theme of the conference. Prof. Asaduddin explained how CDN Prize is different from the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize which is awarded for the efforts in research and writing, while the CDN prize also includes in addition to these the presentation of the ideas and arguments an important criterion for evaluation in the competition. Prof. Rizvi explained the procedure of presentation and parameters of evaluation before inviting the speakers to share their papers. There were five speakers in all who made it to the second round of the

competition. The presenters were Anirban Bhattacharjee, “Dalit Autobiographies and the Politics of Self-worlding”, Arti Mathur, “Deterritorializing Marginalization: Negotiation Difference and Belonging through Literary 'Minorityscapes'”, Diksha Beniwal, “Migration and Modern Utopia of a Colonial City: A Study of Narendra Jadhav's *Untouchables*”, Ishita Sareen, “The Claustropolitan Unmaking of a Nehruvian Metropolis: The Discontents of Chandigarh in Madhur Kapila's *Saamne ka Aasman*”, and Pritha Chakraborty, “Sacrality in Profanity: Defining the Sacred Space of Ganga and Varanasi through Narratives from the Margin.”




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**C. D. NARSIMHAIAH PRIZE SESSION**

Chair: Prof M. Asaduddin & Prof Fatima Rizvi

Anirban Bhattacharjee, “Dalit Autobiographies and the Politics of Self-worlding”

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Join us on **zoom**  
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**29th April | 11:15 AM (IST)**

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After all the panellists had spoken, questions were taken from the audience to which the presenters responded with enthusiasm. The winner was announced after a lunch break from 1:30 pm to 2:00 pm. Before the announcement by Prof. Asaduddin, and the floor judges offered their comments on the presentations admiring that the presenters went beyond the texts covered in the individual papers and made some larger statements important for further research in the area. **Ishita Sareen was judged the winner of the C D Narasimhaiah Prize 2023 and was rewarded with a certificate and a cash prize of INR 5000.** Diksha Beniwal and Arti Mathur were the runners up. The session finally closed at 2:30 pm.

(Rapporteur: Kalyanee Rajan, Treasurer, IACLALS)

## Session 21

The 21<sup>st</sup> session of the IACLALS annual conference was chaired by Prof. Vibha Chauhan, writer, editor and translator and former principal of Kirori Mal College. In her opening comments Prof. Chauhan lauded the variety of themes being touched upon in the session, ranging from theatre and folk arts practices to the contemporary political novel. The first paper presented in the session was **Mitali Bhattacharya's** 'Returning to Roots: Assessing Politics of Postcoloniality in Indian Theatre and Performance'. She deliberated on the conceptualisation of 'Indianness' and rootedness in post-Independent India and how these concepts can potentially break through the center-margin problem of the arts. Gulbahar Shah's 'From Ritual Performances to Satire: The Role of Folk Art in Kashmir' introduced the *band pather* folk performance of Kashmir and how it uses humour, satire and traditional storytelling techniques to comment on the politics of the present. The next paper, **Shibani Phukan's** 'The Othering of the other in the Shillong Novel' detailed the changing rhetoric and landscape of the Shillong novel in tandem with the politics of the day and the changing nature of the city. This was followed by **Gutimali Goswami's** 'How Strange is this Metropolis': A Study Analyzing the Binary of Metropolis/Margin in Moushumi Kandali's 'The Black Magic Women'. It commented on the stereotyping of the North-Eastern women in the mainstream imagination as a wielder of black magic. The final paper **Manish Solanki**, "'Jacinta Kerketta's ईश्वर और बाज़ार (God and Market): Margins Writing Back' studied Kerketta's recent collection of poems as an representing indigenous ways of being and the challenges they face from the onslaught of global capital and 'development'. The session concluded with closing comments by Prof. Vibha Chauhan.

(Rapporteur: Shalim M. Hussain)

## IACLALS 2023: VALEDICTORY SESSION

**Iaclals**

Indian Association for Commonwealth  
Literature and Language Studies  
in collaboration with  
Janki Devi Memorial College  
Presents


**Annual International Conference 2023 (Online)**

Metropolis and Margins: Shifting Perspectives  
in Literary and Language Studies

**VALEDICTORY ADDRESS**

Mechanisms of Marginalisation:  
Indian Literatures in Local and Global Frames Today

**SPEAKER**

  
Prof Vinay Dharwadkar  
University of Wisconsin,  
Madison, USA

**CHAIR**

Prof Malashri Lal

**29th April | 6:30 PM (IST)**

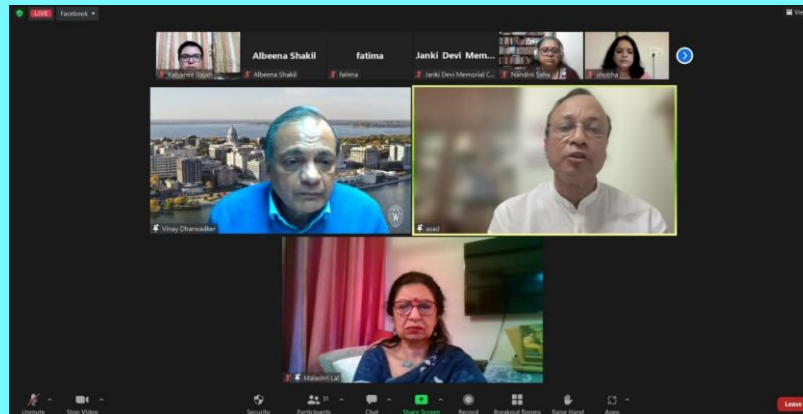
Join us on **ZOOM**  
Meeting ID: 834 9277 5721  
Password: 112233

live @iaclals

The Valedictory Session of the 2023 IACLALS Annual Conference was held on 29 April 2023 at 6:30 PM. The Session was held online via Zoom and was live streamed on Facebook as well. It began with a Welcome Address by **Prof. Albeena Shakil**, Secretary, IACLALS. Prof. Shakil then invited **Prof. M. Asaduddin**, Chair, IACLALS who delivered the Conference Report. Prof. Asaduddin highlighted how this was the most extensive IACLALS Conference till date as it included 22 parallel Sessions with



90 paper presentations. Three special sessions were also conducted; the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize, the C.D. Narasimhaiah Prize and the Book Launch Session, which saw the launch of 19 books published by members in the past year. Prof. Asaduddin congratulated the winners of the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize, Meghal Karki, and the C.D. Narasimhaiah Prize, Ishita Sareen. He then welcomed the Chair of the Valedictory Session, **Prof. Malashri Lal**, Professor (Retd.) Department of English and Former Dean, University of Delhi, and the Speaker of the Valedictory Address, **Prof. Vinay Dharwadker**, Professor of English, World Literature, and South Asian Studies in the Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA.



The Chair of the Session, Prof. Lal, expressed her gratitude for the honour of chairing the session; she then invited Prof. Dharwadker to give his Valedictory Address. Prof. Dharwadker presented his address titled “Mechanisms of Marginalisation: Indian Literatures in Local and Global Frames Today”. In his address, Prof. Dharwadker, highlighted the marginalisation of literature on the basis of the opposition of spaces between the urban and the agrarian. He discussed the various mechanisms that create this form of marginalisation. Prof. Dharwadker demonstrated these through the examples of the two marginalised poets Indira Sant and Amrita Pritam. The Valedictory Address was followed by a discussion and question and answer session initiated by the Chair, Prof. Malashri Lal. Ms. Kalyanee Rajan, Treasurer, IACLALS, read out the questions and comments given by the audience. The discussion was followed by the Vote of Thanks given by Prof. Albeena Shakil, wherein she thanked the paper presenters and chairs of the various sessions, the judges and jury of the two special prizes, and the book editors and authors, whose books were launched in the Conference. She also thanked the organising committee, the team of Janki Devi Memorial College, volunteers and audience for their contribution to make the Conference a resounding success. Finally, Prof. Asaduddin formally closed the Conference by once again thanking the Prof. Dharwadker and Prof. Lal for their presence in the Valedictory Session of the 2023 IACLALS Annual Conference.





(Rapporteur, Valedictory Session: Ruchi Kalita, Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, JDMC)  
Consolidated report edited by: **Kalyanee Rajan**, Treasurer, IACLALS.

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### Symposium on Gendered Journeys at Jadavpur University on 17 January 2023

Jadavpur University, in collaboration with the IIM Calcutta and the University of Glasgow (UK) organized a research symposium on the “Trajectories of STEM Students and Graduates through Higher Education and into Employment”. The event was organized on the 17th of January, 2023 in Committee Room-1 within the University premises. The event is part of the research project ‘Gendered Journeys’ funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, UK). The event started off with the welcome address by Prof. Suchorita Chattopadhyay, Dean, FCA, followed by an introduction to Jadavpur University by Prof. Kunal Chattopadhyay, both being Advisory Board members of the Project. The representatives of University of Glasgow presented the qualitative data from the Project, followed by key research findings from the India team and the Rwanda team. The program ended with a round-table discussion on the presentations where possible solutions to the problems faced by women in STEM were highlighted. The event was well-attended by reputed academics and researchers from various schools and departments of Jadavpur University.



**Debashree Dattaray**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Comparative Literature,  
Jadavpur University

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**14<sup>th</sup> Debrupa Bal Memorial International students' seminar on "Reclamation and rehabilitation: Cultural Imagination across space and time" organised by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University on 1 – 2 February 2023.**

The annual event was attended by national and international students and it is an event that is completely organised by students of the Department with the help of two faculty coordinators. The Conference focussed on ways to critically decipher how even the simplest of non-violent notions like love, dining, and fashion have the potential to qualify as the biggest tools of transgression. A study of reclamation and rehabilitation, on both the individual and collective levels, arms us with the opportunity to challenge the oppressive cultural inscriptions on marginalized bodies, as well as locate the body's potential for resistance.



**Debashree Dattaray**  
Associate Professor  
Department of Comparative Literature,  
Jadavpur University

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**Seminar on International Mother Language Day at JGND PSOU**

**21<sup>st</sup> February 2023**

The School of Languages, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (JGND PSOU) organised seminar on "Punjabi Language: Present and Future" in observance of International Mother Language Day. Prof. Rajinderpal Brar, Dean Languages, Punjabi University, Patiala was the keynote speaker. Mr Darshan Buttar, Sahitya Akademi award winning poet, was the Guest of Honour. Dr Ravinder Singh, Civil Servant, Central Digital and Data Office, London (UK) was special guest on the occasion. Prof Brar emphasized on the need to maintain linguistic diversity. Delving into the present ecology of Punjabi language, he underscored the importance of providing preliminary education in mother tongue. "There is a dire need to eliminate biases attached to language use. Language belongs to speech community and not a particular faith," said Prof Brar.

Elaborating on the role of mother language in enhancing competence, Prof Brar apprised the audience about Punjabipedia. Mr Darshan Buttar drew attention of participants to richness of Punjabi language. Soul-stirring renditions of introspective compositions by Mr Buttar enthralled the audience.





Dr Ravinder Singh spoke about challenges in learning of Mother Language in UK. He also emphasized on the manner in which technology can enable learning of language. Dr Navleen Multani, Head, School of Languages, while extending vote of thanks said, “It is the responsibility of language users to make special efforts for proliferation of Mother Language. Cultures that remain connected to mother language also preserve traditions and practices of their speech community.”

**Dr Navleen Multani**

Head, School of Languages  
& Director, Public Relations  
JGNDPSOU, Patiala

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**Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University, Patiala observes International Women's Day**

The School of Languages and the School of Social Sciences and Liberal Arts, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (JGND PSOU), Patiala organised a seminar to mark International Women's Day. Prof. Sanjukta Das Gupta, Member, General Council and English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi was the resource person on the occasion.

Prof. Dasgupta expanded on United Nations 2023 theme “DigitALL: Innovation and Technology for Gender Equity”. She said, “The theme aims to drive transformations to enable women to be a part of inclusive development. The empowerment of women in conjunction with education, safety and healthcare can accelerate gender equality.” “In order to realize equality, it is important to embrace equity. One must remember that despite the disparities, women have contributed to the digital world,” observed Prof Dasgupta. She also deliberated on the topic "From Myth to Media: The Journey of the Indian Woman".

Tracing the evolution of Indian Woman, Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta alluded to the incongruence in representation of woman in epic and media. She underscored the resilience of Indian women trying to find a meaningful existence.



Dr. Navleen Multani, Head, School of Languages and Director, Public Relations, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University delved into the origins of Women's Day and emphasised on the consequences of international focus on women by United Nations. Citing Simone de Beauvoir, Dr. Multani said, "Congenial social conditions greatly determine development of an individual's talent."

**Dr Navleen Multani**

Head, School of Languages  
& Director, Public Relations  
JGND PSOU, Patiala

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**University Social Responsibility and Academic Social Responsibility: A Discussion  
organised by the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University on 21 March  
2023**

Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University in collaboration with UK India Business Council (UKIBC) and University of East Anglia. The event involved the interdisciplinary participation of international and national delegates working in the field of education, translation, the creative arts, gender, environmental humanities, urban planning and indigenous studies.

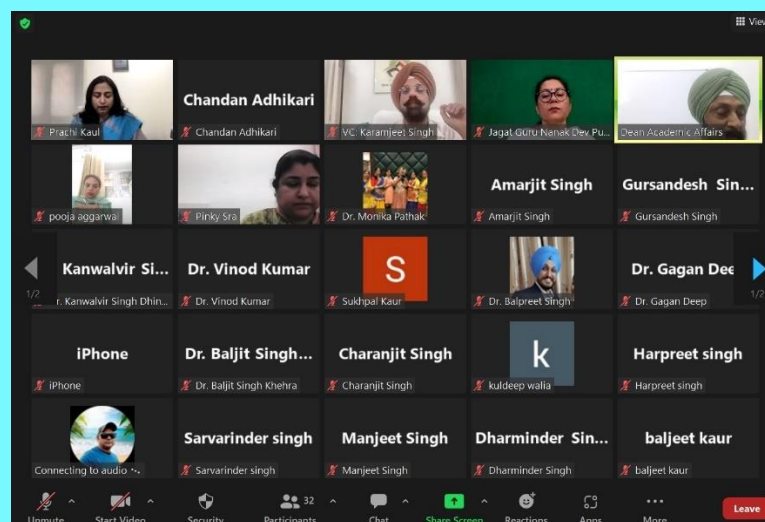


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### JGND PSOU *Discussion Forum*

#### “National Education Policy 2020 and Opportunities with Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute”

The School of Languages and Public Relations, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (JGND PSOU), Patiala organised National Seminar on **National Education Policy 2020 and Opportunities with Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute** (5<sup>th</sup> April 2023). This seminar also launched the maiden session of JGND PSOU Discussion Forum. This event marked *75 years of Indian Independence, Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav*. Dr Prachi Kaul, Director, Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute (SICI) was the resource person for the session. She deliberated on the topic “National Education Policy 2020: Opportunities with Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute.” Dr Prachi Kaul provided insights on the international component of National Education Policy 2020 (NEP 2020). She said, “SICI facilitates capacity building of research scholars and faculty enabling them to contribute to comprehensive framework of the policy that would change the face of education in India. Thematic clusters, multidisciplinary programs, joint degree, fellowships, faculty mobility, research grants and academic collaborations of SICI offer an impetus for holistic development in academic and non-academic spheres.”



Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor, JGND PSOU, eulogised the opportunities provided by Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute for promoting growth of faculty and institutions. Prof. Karamjeet Singh said, “The paradigm shift in education has a special thrust on experiential learning and critical thinking. It is commendable that SICI has played vital role as a mediator in directing new methods of collaboration between students and faculty on an international level with their programmes and grants since its inception.” He observed, “The JGND PSOU *Discussion Forum* will benefit faculty in developing competence. It will also generate negotiated understanding of facts while adding to prior knowledge.”

While introducing the *JGND PSOU Discussion Forum*, Dr. Navleen Multani, Director, Public Relations said, “Conversations, dialogues and discussions are conducive for enhancing understanding and competence of a community. Discussions harness the constructive potential of a group by forming a temporary community around a philosophical inquiry that aims to reach a truth.”





In the welcome address, Prof. Gurdip Singh Batra, Dean Academic Affairs, highlighted the role of SICI in creating opportunities for students and faculty. He said, “SICI has managed to transcend traditional systems of cooperation and their approach will surely continue to reach learners from leading academic institutions.” Dr. Sulakshna Dwivedi, Coordinator, School of Business Management and Commerce, extended a vote of thanks.

**Dr Navleen Multani**

Head, School of Languages  
& Director, Public Relations  
JGND PSOU

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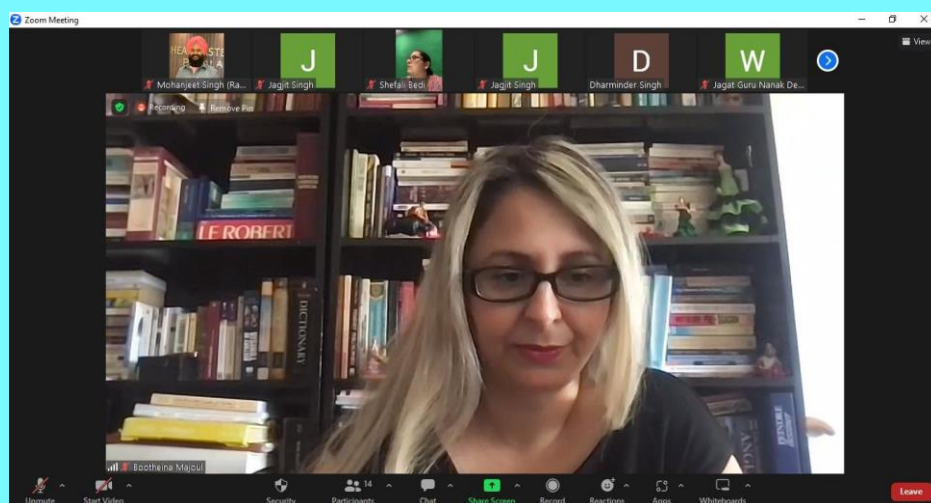
**Posthumanism, Cybernetics and Human Rights: International Conference, 25-26 July 2023**

The School of Languages and Public Relations Cell, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (JGND PSOU), Patiala organized a two-day International Conference on “Posthumanism, Cybernetics and Human Rights” from 25-26 July 2023 to mark commemoration of 75 years of India Independence (Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav) and G20 Presidency of India. The conference commenced with the inaugural session in the administrative block of the university. The inaugural session was presided over by Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor, JGND PSOU, Patiala. In his Presidential address, Prof. Karamjeet Singh talked about the connection between rationality and morality in the technologically advanced times. “The convergence of new technologies and cognitive sciences blurs boundaries between man and machine. The deliberations on Posthumanism, culture and identities will provide insights for ethical ways to manage a balance in societies of the digitalized world,” he said. Dr. Navleen Multani, Head, School of Languages, JGND PSOU and convenor of the conference spoke about the quantum leap of science and technology, denigration of human body, human society and human habitat. “When human beings are simply sublimated into data, identities and rights are lost amid the mega data of the post-human world,” she said





Prof. Nibir K. Ghosh, Chief Editor, *Re-Markings*, delivered the Keynote address titled “Freedom from Fear: Literature and Human Rights”. Alluding to the instances of infringement of human rights, Prof. Ghosh accentuated the role of literature in sensitizing masses about examining life on ethical principles. Prof. Anita Singh, Dept. of English, Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, drew the attention of the participants to the interrelationship of gender, technology and the body. Prof. Parmod Kumar, School of Humanities, IGNOU, New Delhi, deliberated on “Writings from the Margins”. Prof. Desmond Kharmawphlang, North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, presented a discourse on “The Tradition of Khasi Tiger People”. “Tigers occupy a significant role in Khasi mythology. The folklore of Khasis reveals a subtle convergence of several perceptual and emotional features of the relationship between humans and tigers,” he said. He highlighted the socio-cultural and religious aspects of the Khasi community at an intersection with the dynamics of non-technological Posthumanism. Dr. Sangeeta Taak, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab, talked about the threats to the realization of human rights in times of surveillance. She emphasized on the need to evolve policies to protect sensitive information of those using the platforms of Facebook, Twitter, and other social media platforms.



Prof. Tejinder Kaur, RIMT and Dr. Navleen Multani chaired the first Plenary session. Researchers and faculty members from different institutes from India and abroad made presentations during the

technical sessions. The second day of the conference commenced with Plenary session chaired by Dr. Harpreet Vohra, Pondicherry University and Dr. Navleen Multani, Head, School of Languages & Director Public Relations Cell, JGND PSOU. Dr. Rajesh Kumar, IGNOU; Dr. Shveta Dhaliwal, Thapar School of Liberal Arts; Dr. Jasleen Kewlani, Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Punjab and Mr. Saurabh Malik, Deputy Legal Editor, *The Tribune*, shared literary, political, sociological, legal and journalistic perspectives on the exponential technological advancement and myriad interactions between man & machines. While delving into the digital modern, Dr. Rajesh Kumar talked about the open education resources and democratization of knowledge. Dr. Shveta Dhaliwal elaborated on the challenges to Human Rights in the age of Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Jasleen Kewlani explored the socialization and family patterns in the age of burgeoning robotics. She raised a concern regarding the cyberwaste in the years to come and the need to effectuate cyber policing. Mr Saurabh Malik examined the concern for liability of posthuman entities for damages to man. He also dwelled on the transgressions of artificial intelligence that could threaten mankind.

Prof. Bootheina Majoul, University of Carthage, elaborated on the precarious protagonists in Posthuman literature in the valedictory address. She focussed on the crucial role of writers and philosophers in unveiling human subjugation and ethical degradation. "Their faction philosophy about human existence forewarns humanity. As writers use parody and intertextuality, they entail prophecies and revelations," said Prof. Majoul. Dr. Navleen Multani, Head, School of Languages & Director, Public Relations extended a vote of thanks.

A total of 50 papers by academicians, research scholars and professionals were presented during the conference.

**Dr. Navleen Multani**

Head, School of Languages  
& Director, Public Relations  
JGND PSOU

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**JGND PSOU organises Seminar on Role of Media in Digital Era**

**12 September 2023**

Public Relations Cell, Jagat Guru Nanak Dev Punjab State Open University (JGND PSOU), Patiala organised seminar on "Role of Media in Digital Era" in the Academic Block of the University to mark India's successful G20 Presidency. Sh. Baltej Pannu, Director, Media Relations, Chief Minister Office, Punjab was the Chief Guest. Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor, JGND PSOU presided over the seminar. Mrs. Renuka Salwan, Former Director, Public Relations, Panjab University, Chandigarh delivered the keynote address.

Prof. Karamjeet Singh, Vice-Chancellor, JGND PSOU, talked about the power of media in his opening remarks. Prof. Karamjeet Singh cited Zafarnama for alluding to the power of writing. He emphasized on observing an objective approach while creating and consuming of content on the digitized media platforms.



Sh. Baltej Pannu, Director Media Relations, CMO Punjab, with reference to “Jab Lag Duniya Rahiye Nanak Kichhu Suniya Kichhu Kahiye” said that media is a communication medium which connects human life with positive dialogue. He underscored the importance of language usage on online platforms. He said, “Content creators must deliver information in the best language expression.” Sh. Pannu accentuated the role of women in playing a productive and constructive role in the new age media.

Mrs. Renuka Salwan spoke about disruption of attention span by constant exposure to digital devices. “Digitisation has changed the ecosystem of broadcasting. Users and consumers want real-time updates. As the new age media has grown by leaps and bounds, people want information in real-time. This poses the biggest challenge to media industry because skilled professionals are required for managing the demands of new age consumers,” she said.

Dr. Navleen Multani, Director, Public Relations, JGND PSOU spoke about the rise of digital and computer-based technologies, and how media content whether text, audio or video has undergone dramatic changes. “Content is the core component of all media, regardless of the form. A wide range of digital devices have given consumers and content creators alike, increasingly powerful, portable and productive tools for producing and experiencing media in the digital age,” she said. Prof. GS Batra, Dean Academic Affairs, JGND PSOU extended the vote of thanks.

#### **Dr Navleen Multani**

Associate Professor in English  
Director, Public Relations  
JGND PSOU, Patiala

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## CREATIVE WRITING

## POEMS/ SHORT STORIES/ TRANSLATIONS



**Bhaskar Roy Barman** is an internationally published poet, story writer, novelist, editor, critic translator, reviewer, folklorist and organizer. His poems, stories and critical articles get published in India and abroad. He has authored nine books out of which *Gateway to Heaven*, novel, *The Trap & Other Stories*, a short story collection, *Folktales of Northeast India*, *El Dorado*, an anthology on world literature (edited) and *South-Asian Literature: Criticism and Poetry* (edited) have been published. He is recipient of many national and international awards, including Swami Vivekananda Award in commemoration of his 150th birth anniversary 2013 and Life-time Achievement Award at the 2013 International Conference on Oriental Heritage held at Kolkata. He was felicitated with, 'Tripura Ratna' and 'Bhasa Ratna' by Gemini Academy, Panipat, India. He presented papers at national and international seminars and conferences including the 20th Congress of the International Comparative Literature Association in 2013 in Paris. He was nominated by the International Friendship Society, New Delhi for the 'Glory of India' award at the Friendship Banquet held on 19 June 2013 in Bangkok, Thailand. He has fathered 'World Literature Society', 'Tripura Poetry Society' 'Sahitya Adda' Folklore Society, Agartala, Children's Literature Research Centre Agartala. He is associated with Arts & Social Sciences Forum of North-East. He is founder-president of Bangla Academy Agartala, Tripura, a government-registered organization. He is working on a collection of essays for Cambridge Scholars Publishers, UK and an article on Christopher Ricks for Oxford University Press

**Imagination**

Bhaskar Roy Barman

When I day-dream of dew yonder falling  
and visualize the sky, crimson with the last phase of the day,  
I imagine myself a bird through its rosy depths flying  
along a solitary, nay, a milky way.

I dread riveted on my upward flight the fowler's eye,  
Intent on doing me a harm,  
as my figure is painted dark on the crimson sky  
and him does my flight charm.



Sometimes I imagine myself standing on the flashy brink  
of a weedy lake or on the marge of a river wide  
and watching soft waves rise and sink  
forgetting and leaving worldly anxieties aside.

I imagine myself flying up to a great height  
with my wings to fan the atmosphere lean and thin,  
far above the scene of the madding crowd's eternal strife  
and hate to have my trance broken to my chagrin.

The bird I imagine is possessed of a power idyllic  
to probe the abyss of the heaven bathed in sunlight,  
flapping its wings, unfatigued, for love angelic  
through illimitable air, though not out of sight

### **Drops of a Stream**

Bhaskar Roy Barman

As does the Great River  
on to the sea and back  
to the matted hair of Lord Shiva,  
on flows the life-stream  
adorned with ornaments,  
as is a newly-wed couple.

Following on the footprints of the Great River  
that leaves nonchalantly behind  
a good many water-drops  
evaporating midway through  
and mingling with the clouds,  
the life-stream does not mind  
about as many human drops bowing out,  
stripped of their embellishments  
they once prided themselves on.

One of the human drops bowing out  
was a friend of mine, succumbing  
to the excessive love of his wife  
and to his in-laws feigning it.

His father, as if to mock his son,  
sustained himself much farther in the flow  
less loved by his wife  
by his in-law the least.

## **The Accursed House**

Bhaskar Roy Barman

Mr Rebati Das heaved a deep sigh as he stared at the house that stood across the dense thicket, looking forlorn and accursed. People avoided passing it, scared of its malignant influence. The malignity clinging about it compelled its proprietor Ashoke Mitra to depreciate its value, its funeral reputation spreading far and wide beyond the village. He and his family left the house to live in Kolkata, enjoining upon Rebati Das, once the janitor of the house, the impossible task of looking for a possible buyer, with promise that he would continue remitting him the money he would get when working as janitor of the house.

Beside him was standing a youth, twenty-five years old, staring bemused at the top of the house that jutted above the thicket, the other parts hidden behind the thick foliage. He had told Rebati Das, when introducing himself, that he was working with a famous newspaper, and had been sent by the editor to write a story on this accursed house because readers liked such stories. He was jerked out of the trance by Rebati Das' loud sigh and nudged and out of his musings.

"What are you thinking of, Rebati Babu?" he asked.

"I'm thinking, Samir Babu, of the long-lost glory of the house over there" Rebati Das replied.

"I have come a long way down here from Kolkata to hear about it from you," said Samir. "Let's walk over to the clearing beneath that tree and I'll listen to your story while we sit there."

'If you do not mind, first, I want to ask you a simple question,' Samir said, as they had sat on the place beneath the tree.

"Why should I mind," asked Rebati Das.

"I saw you alone in your house, when I came over to see you," Samir said. "Do you live by yourself?"

Rebati Das did not reply forthwith; he remained silent. Samir heard him heave another deep sigh.

"Do you live by yourself?" Samir repeated, to rouse him from his reverie.

"I have no family, no relative to reckon with," said Rebati Das.

"How come?" Samir asked.

"Your curiosity is intense!" Rebati Das said, matter-of-factly.

Samir could not understand whether Rabati Das was annoyed by his question. He conjured up a smile in his face and said: "The question I've asked is one that reporters usually ask! I'll have to write something about you when I write a story around this house. Otherwise, the story will seem shallow," said Samir.

Rebati Das smiled a sad smile. 'It doesn't matter whether or not you write anything about me in your story. But since you want to know something about me, listen! I have been looking after the house as the janitor since the time of Jagannath Mitra, father of the present proprietor Ashoke Mitra. Jagannath Mitra who had had this house built, gifted me the house I am presently living in, owing to my sincerity and honesty. I was so absorbed in looking after the house that I forgot about my marriage. Besides, I have no kith or kin who would think about my marriage. In fact, Jagannath Mitra brought me to the house literally from the street and made me janitor, putting me in the charge of loo the house.' He paused to take in a breath and continued, "It's a personal matter; I don't relish discussing it. Tell me what you want to know about the house."

"I know now, what I wanted to know about you; I've heard this house is haunted," said Samir.

"That's not true!" Rebati Das said firmly. "It's not haunted. It is accursed by the generosity of the present proprietor Ashoke Mitra."

Samir looked extremely surprised. “You mean the house is accursed because of the generosity of Ashoke Mitra!” he twanged.

“Yes, that’s what I mean,” said Rebati Das, his voice firm.

“It is difficult to believe!”

“Many things happen that are beyond our understanding. Please listen carefully,” continued Rebati Das.

“Please tell me,” urged Samir.

“After the death of Jagannath Mitra, Ashoke Mitra inherited this huge five-storey, palatial house and vast property along with it. More than fifty lac rupees remain deposited with different banks. He also inherited a flourishing cloth business in the heart of Kolkata. When reading through the documents relating to his inheritance, Ashoke Mitra learnt that the house had been built in 1950 at the cost of five lac rupees. It was now fetching more than thirty thousand rupees a month by way of rent. He was also earning, no less than fifty thousand rupees from the cloth business. He was then an enterprising youth with a generous bent of mind. He was ashamed at the miserliness of his father and spent money lavishly to his chagrin. He is the only child and his mother had died when he was a child. Jagannath Mitra had brought him up with motherly and fatherly care. He could not bring himself to deny Ashoke Babu whatever he wanted and even could not stop him spending money lavishly. However, he often grumbled at his spending money lavishly. Ashoke Mitra had associated himself with a charitable club that was devoted to uplifting the downtrodden. Since Ashoke Mitra was the scion of the richest family of the locality, the club hinged upon him for money. The charitable activity that Ashoke Mitra had taken on as his pastime brought him in close contact with politically-minded and influential people. Gradually of some influential leaders assured him that they would ensure he got a party-ticket in next election.

As soon as the large property passed on to him, he summoned me. As I presented myself, he said, ‘Rebati Babu, I’ve decided to lower the rents by one-third with effect from the next month. I think my father fixed a preposterous rent on each room. I can’t help feeling ashamed at his inordinate craving for money.’”

“Hearing this, I stood perplexed and confused. I thought I had heard wrong. “Lower the rents!” I stammered. “Perhaps – er –you meant, raise the rents.”

“You’ve heard me right, Rebati Babu,” he sort of shrieked, “I repeat, I’ve decided to lower the rents by one-third. Go right away to notify all the tenants of my decision!”

“I stood there flabbergasted, staring into Ashoke Mitra’s face. He seemed to be ruining himself. I had been the janitor of this house since his father’s time. I thought I ought to save him from the possible ruination. I summoned up courage and said, ‘if you permit me, I venture to say you’ve not reflected upon the consequences of your hasty decision. If I should tell the tenants of your decision, what would they think of you? What would your neighbors think of you, Sir?’ Besides...’ He stopped me short. ‘I’ve not summoned you to offer this unwarranted piece of advice, Have I? I’ve summoned you to execute my orders. I hope I have made myself clear.’ I nodded and Ashoke Babu gestured me to leave.”

“The next morning, as they learned about lowering of the rents by one-third, all the tenants abandoned themselves to conjecturing. I could not explain Ashoke Mitra’s decision. The tenants who had never exchanged formal greetings when they bumped into one another found themselves drawn together to solve the conundrum that had presented itself to them. Bidding adieu to their own self-conceit, they congregated at a tea-shop known as Chhanu’s tea stall which they had previously avoided. Chhanu’s tea-shop leaped up into a flourishing business. The tenants were chatting to find a solution, but they could arrive at none. One of them opined that the present

proprietor had lost his head; another attributed the decision to some criminal activity which Ashoke Mitra wanted to hide by keeping the tenants pleased. But no consensus came about. Finding no solution to the conundrum, the tenants authorized Mr Shome and Mr Bose to go see Ashoke Mitra and ask him why he had lowered the rents and report the outcome of the meeting next morning at this shop.”

Rebati Das paused from the long narration and said to Samir: “This was the conundrum to me, too. I was present during their discussions. They did not object to my presence. I decided to join in their conversation the next morning.

The next morning, we gathered at Chhanu’s tea-stall, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Mr Shome to tell us what the proprietor had said. Mr Shome came and observed that what I had said was absolutely right. Mr Kar asked Mr Shome why the proprietor had lowered the rents. Mr Shome confessed he could not understand why Ashoke Mitra, a man of commonsense, would delight in the pleasure of depriving himself of good revenue. Another tenant hazarded the hypothesis that Ashoke Mitra might have committed some crime and his desire to atone for it must have driven him to this act of munificence. His hypothesis was laughed down. The proprietor-tenants relation had not reached such a stage that the proprietor would have tested his bouts of munificence upon the tenants, they said. Another idea floated was that the proprietor had lodged some spies on the top floor, and at their advice had lowered the rents. In fact, no one could give any plausible solution. The gathering dispersed; it was time to prepare to go to office. The following day the whole house was agog with commotion. The previous night when the wife of Mr Bose lodging on the third floor was going to the lavatory at the corner of the terrace she met the late Jagannath Mitra, a receipt book in his hand. Frightened out of wits, she rushed back to her room and swooned. Mr. Bose decided to leave the house for another. When Mr Bose’s decision was reported at the morning gathering of the tenants, they took it lightly; their conversation was wobbling on irrelevant matters. The same thing happened to Mr. Dhar who lived on the second floor. The following morning the house was fraught with terror. Since Mr Dhar was a god-fearing man, no one disbelieved him. One by one, all the tenants left the house in fear of seeing the apparition of the late Jagannath Mitra, a receipt book in hand. I had tried my best to persuade Ashoke Mitra to rescind his decision. But Ashoke Mitra paid no heed. He said there would be no dearth of people willing to rent the rooms at the lowered rents. Yes, there was no dearth of people willing to rent the rooms. But when they had heard the house was haunted by the apparition of the dead father of Ashoke Mitra, they were frightened out of their desire to rent the rooms.’

Rebati Das paused and watched for Samir’s reaction.

“Your story is really interesting. ‘Please tell me what happened next,” said Samir.

“Even the terror gripped us, every night, we heard howling and sinister murmuring. The nightly howling and sinister murmuring scared the people from the house. But I stayed on. Ashoke Mitra left me duty-bound to look after the house. Besides, I have nowhere else to go,” said Rebati Das. He paused for a while, took a deep breath, then continued: “That house got accursed because of Mr Ashoke Mitra’s generosity. Hasn’t it, Samir Babu?”

“No, Rebati Babu, no. It’s not his generosity that has accursed the house. It is only his craving that has accursed it.

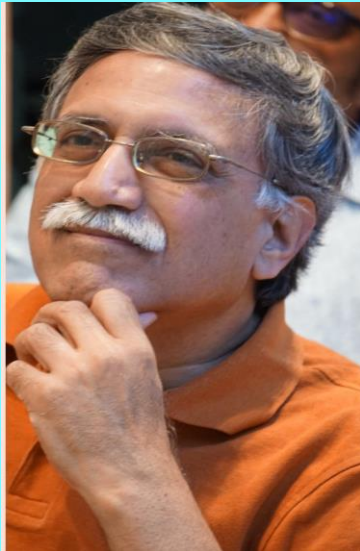
“His craving?” Rebati Das asked, completely bewildered.

“Yes, it’s his craving for something he had no capacity to achieve,” said Samir.

Rebati Das stood there staring bewildered into the eyes of the young man from Kolkata.

\*\*\*





**GJV Prasad** is a writer, critic, and translator. He has two books of poems, *In Delhi Without a Visa* and *This World of Mine*. He has translated two books from Tamil to English – Ambai's *A Red-necked Green Bird* (2021), and Imayam's *Sellatha Panam*, which in English is titled *A Woman Burnt* (2023).

### India

GJV Prasad

As the Mahatma knew  
 You were born in violence  
 No personal acts  
 Of penance  
 Could wash the blood away

Blood shed at the parting  
 Would be joined by the blood  
 Shed to keep us together  
 By force to pool around us

Freedom sings the blues  
 Tying us to the wheel  
 Within the tricolour  
 What else can we do  
 But bear the blood

Soon it will be  
 Seventy-five years  
 Since we killed the Mahatma  
 Who died before  
 He was killed

When you were born  
 In blood  
 Seventy-five years ago

**In one Voice**

GJV Prasad

All he did  
Was to fondle  
The boy  
Kiss him  
Hold him tight  
How

is showing your love  
Bestial

He touched her  
To show appreciation  
Groping her  
Over her clothes  
Not skin on skin  
He is a man  
Admiring  
How is this  
Delicate expression  
Sexual Assault

Why don't you marry  
The man your rapist  
It will be worse for him  
Than any punishment  
I could give  
Hahahaha  
And he could then  
Rape you every day  
Be your dutiful husband  
And you the good wife

All he did  
Was to show his love  
To his wife  
A good Indian woman  
Raised to show  
No  
Interest  
In such things  
Or so she should be  
How is it rape  
When an Indian man  
Does it to his Indian wife

\*\*\*



**Jaydeep Sarangi** is a bilingual poet with ten collections of poems, the latest being “Memories of Words” (2023). With Basudhara Roy, he has edited “Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map: An Anthology of Twenty Poets”, Sahitya Akademi (2023). Sarangi has read his poems in different continents.

### **The Walls of Time**

Jaydeep Sarangi

Somewhere, this Chilkigarh Rajbari,  
holding my father's hand  
Crossed time's bed with a boat  
I still think they are so, walls with doors.

Perhaps, several years from today,  
my daughter, holding her son's hand  
longing to go back in time, hands separated  
by the shrill noises of the stone, panel of dark.

### **Sleep-habit**

Jaydeep Sarangi

*for Jayanta Mahapatra*

Hold me to your spaces  
not as a tourist,  
to ancient stones and pebbles.  
Memories of silence is a habit  
with the heart of a plundered acre of green.  
Water underneath is a lover  
waiting for a full moon. My desire  
is a magic box you keep open at night.

I stand among these ruins  
of my silent prayers and passages.  
This sweet sleep is needed for dreams  
where you hold me tight, through this door  
I never experimented in relationships.

Tell me your good names. Make me  
your own before I go to a sleep-habit.

\*\*\*





**Laksmisree Banerjee** is a multiple award-winning poet /author, literary critic, educationist, editor and practicing radio and TV vocalist with several national and international publications, assignments & awards to her credit. she is an internationally recognized poet, Senior Fulbright Scholar, Commonwealth Scholar and National Scholar from Calcutta University, a UGC Post-Doctoral Research Awardee and former Vice Chancellor & Pro-vice Chancellor of Kolhan University, Eastern India. As a university professor of English & Cultural Studies, Dr. Banerjee has lectured and recited in premier universities across the world. She has ten books of Indian-English poetry (with two more forthcoming) and one hundred twenty academic publications including books. Among her several awards, a few needs special mention. She is the recipient of two International Awards for Lifetime Achievement in Art & Literature, International Panorama Award for Poetry, Kala Ratnam Award, Asian Literary Society Women Achievers' Award, Connoisseur of Literary Arts of Asia & Tunisia Award, Literoma Laureate Award for Lifetime Achievement in Poetry, Sahitya Akademi's Avishkar Award as "a Scholar-Artiste & Poet Musician", the prestigious UGC Postdoctoral Research Award for her path-breaking Work on Comparative Studies of World Women Poets. An active Rotarian (Multiple Paul Harris Fellow) and a former nominee of the Indian Rashtrapati on several Central University Boards, Dr. Banerjee is passionate about using the potency of her pen and voice for social transformations and international peace/good will.

### **People's Poet Jayanta Mahapatra: A Tribute**

Laksmisree Banerjee

Jayanta Da ---  
 you carried the human soul tenderly  
 on your back like a fond father  
 your arms cradling the body of life  
 the softness of smiles and aches  
 with your ever moist love ---

You made nothing of nothingness  
 encased sorrows in coffers  
 of blazing vermillion sunshine  
 your scorched self could still  
 hold the incandescence  
 of a thousand lamps ---

Your memories heave  
deep within our interstices  
lighthouses of the sea of being  
spirals of holy incense  
rising slowly in upward motion  
to your milky translucence  
of a child-blessed sagacity ---

Hunger in the whiteness of bones  
the famished fishermen caught  
in nets of the Odisha seas

helpless puberty sold  
for morsels of bread  
blessed through the sieve of your heart ---

Woes your meta-morphed poetic floods  
under-currents tranquil in ocean floors  
awaken our slumbering selves  
so much of you and your poetry  
your vision and effusion  
still to be nurtured ---

The wild search for anchor  
those dim lights you chose  
sitting in a nook of the amphitheatre  
to avoid meaningless glitz  
the speaking silence of your  
self-chosen dignity of darkness ---

All of it your treasure troves  
burning inside so often  
in the calm of your cherry pain  
leavening our shredded soul  
your wincing butterflies wing  
through our ambrosial manna ---

those we can hardly catch or know  
though your cataracts flow  
so much of you remains unknown  
in your abode of peace  
shorn of the frills and trappings  
you so shunned and spurned  
you carry breezily your knapsack  
into the silence of eternity  
rest dear our People's Poet  
in *Tinkonia Bagicha* of Cuttack  
our shrine where we still find you ---

**On a Greyhound from London to Northampton**

Laksmisree Banerjee

On a cold pallid morning  
when the gardens became nettles  
blooms in trodden disarray  
when desiccated shells of oysters  
and dead corals blackened the aquamarine,  
I set out on a Greyhound bus  
from London to Northampton  
while I felt the claws of the storm  
in people seated with frozen faces  
calcified whiteness without smiles  
splintered humanity travelling together  
to the margins from the metropolitan  
as I set out from London to Northampton ---

That was an eye-opening day though  
with squally skies and a blurred vision  
when the cosmic lights went off  
darkness prevailed more within  
than in the arrogant winds outside,  
the usual crowd of white predominance  
with a minuscule of blacks and browns,  
a thick smoke of supremacy clogged  
the free-flowing air with spurts in frowns  
a hefty man asked peremptorily for tickets  
as if he was a gate keeper to the heavens  
while I kept tightly seated  
and he felt his battle was won  
on my way from London to Northampton ---

While the icy-ness prevailed in full sway  
the bus stopped with a jolt on the way  
when two poor Jamaican students  
and an Islamic old lady asked  
for some small benevolence  
of pardoning an extra illicit charge,  
the flabby swine-coloured pink driver  
threw their baggage out on the street  
and pushed them off like street dogs,  
beauty of multi-hues and kaleidoscopes  
of cultures lost on ignorant minds,  
a soporific air of smugness persisted  
a deafening silence in absence of the sun  
as I made my way from London to Northampton ---

Not a single finger or voice was raised  
while the white man roared in wintry fury

as this twenty first century bus moved on  
he threatened with “no more conversation”,  
when I thought it was time for a small rebellion,  
I picked up my bag and disembarked  
when humanity was shamelessly lanced  
beyond the margins to the metropolitan  
on my way from London to Northampton ---

\*\*\*





**Madhumita Roy** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, Adamas University, West Bengal. Apart from her research interest in Tagore Literature and Bengal Renaissance, she loves to translate her feelings into poetry. She loves to explore new places and meet people. Her hobbies include writing, and finding texts beyond text books.

### **Baking a Christmas Cake**

Madhumita Roy

“Before you bake a Christmas cake  
Soak all the dry fruits in rum for days”  
My grandmother used to say.  
Baking is an art  
So is life.  
Before you make up your mind  
Soak your decisions and indecisions in deeper thoughts for years.  
This is the most sensitive stage  
Mixing, soaking, thinking, considering, eliminating...  
It takes time.

The second stage is simple.  
On a baking tray  
Prepare a viscose batter  
Mix right ingredients in perfect proportion  
And put it inside a pre heated oven  
With care and affection.  
Then there is a prolonged wait.  
Inside the oven, life changes altogether.  
The semi liquid batter undergoes transformation;  
As it swells, life takes new turn.

The final stage is only for designing and decoration  
White cream, chocolate chips, and cherries become its ornaments  
The cake looks beautiful  
Just like life lying on sheets of white  
Adorned with white garlands  
The dirge has already been sung

And then...  
Then, the wait is endless.

Hollow  
Madhumita Roy

There is a cavern deep inside,  
Hollow and void,  
Everyday I try to fill it up  
With faces I meet,  
Stories I grasp,  
Happiness I absorb,  
And memories I recollect.

Everyday I feel  
Its darkness churning inside me.  
I try to reduce the dark  
With light and colours of life.

Everyday I perceive  
An eerie stillness inside my cavern,  
I try and try and try  
But words are hard to find.  
Even if they come, they are not at place.  
Scattered light, incomplete words, half-faded memories,  
Fill my cavern day by day.

I continue to bear it;  
My umbilical cord protects it,  
My blood gives it sustenance,  
Day by day it grows inside me,  
I often feel threatened by its presence,  
Yet cannot abort it;  
It clings onto me  
Like an inescapable destiny  
I feel trapped, yet cannot move an inch  
Cannot dismiss the void altogether  
For it has become me.

\*\*\*



**Masum Ahmed**, alumnus, Department of English, AMU, works at Trivium Education Services, providing his professional services to various universities and colleges across the United States of America. His recently published poetry collection is “*A Buzkashi of Feelings and Philosophy*” and his poetry has appeared in various reputed anthologies, journals, and magazines including The Aligarh Magazine, The Criterion, Raleigh Literary Society and others. He is Life Member of Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (IACLALS) and Member of Digital Humanities Alliance for Research and Teaching Innovations (DHARTI). He may be contacted at [marcoramairo@gmail.com](mailto:marcoramairo@gmail.com).

### **Let us overcome ourselves**

Masum Ahmed

*(Dedicated to Khwaja Baqi Billah Berang)*

Let us overcome ourselves; this soil that is a pot is a long story of overcoming its profound legacy;  
 from our insides, let us pity;  
     for ourselves and the pot that has allowed us to bring forth our unique poetry;  
 from our roots to the entire organic tapestry;  
 let us overcome ourselves;  
     of our limits in becoming witness and witnessing pity;  
 from our bodies on our bodies, let us behold the nasty bravery;  
 for ourselves and the pot that has restricted us to become what we ought to be;  
     let us unbecome as ourselves;  
 to behold a confusion taking a ride of an unyielding clarity, let us gather;  
 from our names, builds, appearances, and beauty;  
 let us overcome ourselves;  
     from the clouds of time, as the moments shower upon the pot that has been  
     overcoming its legacy;  
 let us overcome ourselves;  
 from our rotten trunks, let us give shade to the saplings of our poetry;  
     from our hands, mouths, feet, and promises;  
     let us overcome ourselves;

**To the antlers of an elk**

Masum Ahmed

*(Dedicated to Thomas Hardy)*

Dear limbs,  
Thou beloved tools of time;  
Pulling in and out  
thy sharp strands through me—  
On the sloppy altar of time  
Dost thou wait on mine transcendence;

like the longing old winds  
Awaiting  
the songs of the forest  
to transcend along the new moonshine,  
Cruising through our hearts,  
What crime  
Do you thinkest the new winds commit  
by charging our insides with goosebumps?

The winds of time  
*across the completest silence of lone gardens  
and trackless plantations,*  
And our wise steps  
Impressed  
upon the rotten petals of fallen compassions;  
Aren't these all enough to say  
All is fine?

\*\*\*





**Sagar Mal Gupta** is a UK and the USA educated , retired Professor of English with fifty-six years experience of teaching English at various colleges and universities in India and abroad. He has authored 12 books on Linguistics, Communication and Critical Theories. His four collections of poems have come out and received good reviews. His poems have been published in various national and international journals. Just to name a few: Poetcrit, Muse India, Teesta Review , IJML, WEC, The New Ink Review, The Ghazal Page , Café Dissensus, Borderless Journal, Metverse Muse, and Creative Flight.

### **Climate Change**

Sagar Mal Gupta

God created butter  
 Man created peanut butter  
 God created milk  
 Man created soya-milk  
 One real  
 Another unreal  
 Real becomes unreal  
 Unreal becomes real.  
 Jungle geranium emanates  
 The fragrance of jasmine and vanilla  
 Though it is neither  
 Difficult it has become  
 to recognize the species of a flower  
 through its fragrance  
 because of climate change.  
 Increasing cold temperature  
 Product of ecosystem  
 Quality of flowers affected  
 A change occurred  
 in the phenology of several plants.  
 Buds have started snapping  
 The time of the arrival of  
 leaves, flowers and seeds  
 has seen a change.

No wonder  
 Perfume industries  
 have switched over  
 to the growing of jungle geranium.  
 You are advised:  
 If you come across some real flowers  
 Smell them well  
 and keep their fragrance  
 in your cortex securely,  
 Frifuftsliv<sup>1</sup>  
 I saw helpless goats  
 Tied to an improvised post  
 Looking wistfully at the passers-by  
 Looking at the birds  
 Flying in the sky  
 They think ruefully:  
 Why can't we fly like birds?  
 Why can't we walk like man on the roads?  
 Why can't we go around  
 like dogs here and there?  
 'Who is responsible for or plight?', asked the kid  
 from his father.  
 certainly man,  
 the most selfish species on the earth.  
 We fulfill his needs  
 but he ignores ours.  
 We give him meat,  
 milk, fur and skin  
 but he gives us  
 whips, shackles and slavery.  
 We don't know how to revolt  
 We don't know how to take revenge  
 We don't know how to punish.  
 We can simply pray to God  
 to endow man with kindly feeling  
 and follow the dictum:  
 'Live and let others live.'  
 Sheng—nu<sup>2</sup>  
 Remaining single  
 is a woman's choice  
 But social and governmental pressure  
 assaults their singlehood.  
 Their education  
 Their work experiences  
 Their upbringing  
 Falls prostrate

---

<sup>1</sup> Danish for to breathe in free air

<sup>2</sup> Chinese for residual or remnant

before match making programmes  
of the government.  
Gender imbalance  
Security of gene quality  
is the concern of humanity  
Ignores the freedom of choice  
of women,  
Their birth right  
Their breaking  
the shackles of traditions.  
Remember the men of the world!  
Single women:  
are not sheng-nu  
or rejected stuff  
or residual or remnant  
But precious assets  
Who would enrich the world  
through their freedom of choice.

### **Everything.....**

Sagar Mal Gupta

Everything that shines  
may not be gold.  
Every piece of ginger  
that glistens  
may not be wholesome  
may be acid bathed.  
Every drink that fizzes  
may not be healthy  
may be sugar loaded.  
Every person that sweet talks  
may not be a gentleman  
may be a swindler.  
Every person that looks ugly  
may not be bad  
may be a man of sterling virtues.  
Every clump of grass  
may look green and friendly  
but may hide  
a snake inside it.

\*\*\*



**Sanjukta Dasgupta**, Professor and Former Head, Department of English and Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Calcutta University and Fulbright Fellow, is a poet, short story writer, critic and translator. She was a member of the General Council of Sahitya Akademi New Delhi and Convenor, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. She is the President of the Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata. She received the WEI Kamala Das Poetry Award in 2020 and the ETHOS Literary Award in 2022. Dasgupta has 27 published books. Her nine published books of poetry are *Snapshots* (1997), *Dilemma* (2002), *First Language* (2005), *More Light* (2009), *Lakshmi Unbound* (2017) *Sita's Sisters* (2019) *Unbound: New and Selected Poems* edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Sanghita Sanyal (2021), *Indomitable Draupadi* (2022), and *Ekalavya Speaks* (2023). Her poems have been translated in German, Serbian, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Tamil.

### **Manipur**

Sanjukta Dasgupta

He mourns again  
The Sacred Heart  
Sheds tears of blood  
For they yet again  
Know not what they do  
He mourns again  
As the barbarians  
Bare their canine teeth

Cry bejeweled Manipur  
Cry, beloved land  
Your innocent people  
Denuded, devastated  
Ravished, abused  
Drenched in blood  
Branded blood groups



In a killing spree  
All in the name of God.

Structures with Spires  
Structures with Domes  
Structures with Symbols  
Stone deaf to prayers  
Blind and Dumb  
As rivers of innocent blood  
Flow into the sea of woe.

Cries, screams, tears  
Drown in the ferocious fury  
Bullets spit death  
Knives drip blood  
Ballots are absurd  
Stripped and raped  
They still walk on  
They walk on, they walk  
Into our hearts and minds  
As we are now all in one

From Chanu Sharmila  
Thangjam Monarama Devi  
Haunt the air  
Of bejeweled Manipur  
Are you listening?

Land of Jewels  
Mourning Manipur  
Has lost count of the bodies  
Lying lifeless everywhere  
Maniacs and murderers  
Mutilate Manipur

Manipur is burning  
Manipur is weeping  
Manipur is torn apart  
The displaced homeless  
Shiver and tremble  
In makeshift tents  
Under gloomy skies  
Are you listening?

The silence of India  
Often more ear-splitting  
Than speech  
Are you listening?

**The Curse of Joshimath**

Sanjukta Dasgupta

And now the curse of Joshimath  
In serpentine gyrations has  
Crept into Kulu, Manali, Kinnor  
The Himalayan resorts  
Flooded, fractured  
Spine chilling landslides  
Marooned they cry out  
As Nature rages and fumes

What happened in Joshimath  
Who unleashed the furious flash floods  
That hungrily plundered and swallowed  
All that innocently stood in its path-

This humble Himalayan town  
Trembles in terror every night  
Fissures and cracks snarl  
The gaping earth  
A demon's open mouth

Hearts sink faster than houses  
As Joshimath sinks again  
The Gateway to God's domain  
In helpless quandary  
Entry and exit more  
Slippery than black ice

Pilgrims pour through  
The archway of Joshimath  
The Temple of Badrinath  
Awaits their homage  
Their return beyond prayers

'Enough' they commanded  
Even geologists err  
We can't have the silly  
Dissident nincompoops  
Play alarmists

Slowly but steadily at Joshimath  
The ground beneath the feet  
Sinks in silence  
Stealthily caving in  
Cruel cracks  
Like bleeding wounds  
On floors and walls  
Till not to look

Is safer than looking.

But the hotels buzz  
Brittle new homes dazzle  
The hydropower thunders  
Inroads of new roads  
Carcinogenic networks  
The glory of greed

Joshimath sighs  
Splits, sinks  
Heaves, splinters  
In silence  
In absolute silence

Joshimath  
A signpost in history  
Writhes in the clutches  
Of death and destruction  
In this 21<sup>st</sup> century  
As the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial Revolution  
Unfurls its consume-all banner  
The sure and stealthy carcinogenic net  
Landslides and flash floods crash and kill  
Grab and gobble homes and hopes  
As the glee of greed glitters,

Located at a height of 6,150 feet (1,875 m), Joshimath is a gateway to several Himalayan mountain climbing expeditions, trekking trails and pilgrim centres like Badrinath. It is home to one of the four cardinal pīthas established by Adi Shankara. It is not a natural disaster but a manufactured environmental one. Its sinking has been triggered by numerous hydropower projects, large-scale hotel construction, and road-building projects, which ignored the load-bearing capacity of the region and the views of geologists and environmental experts.

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**Swati Pal**, Professor and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, has been a Charles Wallace scholar and the first Asian to receive the John McGrath Theatre Studies Scholarship. She is the author of several books on Theatre, creative and academic writing. Her newspaper articles articulate her views on education. Her areas of research interest include performance studies and cultural history. She translates and writes poetry. Her poems appear in several anthologies; she also has a collection of poems entitled 'In Absentia' and a curated collection called 'Living On'. She is the Vice Chair of the IACLALS.

### **Night and Day**

Swati Pal

Night  
And day  
Fought  
Over ownership  
Of me.

Night said,  
"Look  
At her life,  
It is shrouded  
In darkness.  
She awakens  
With the fog  
In her eyes.  
All has shrivelled  
Within her  
As there's  
No light".

Day said,  
"Look  
Into her heart,  
And find  
The light  
Of love



That spreads  
Through her veins  
Into her limbs  
And makes  
Her smile,  
And breaks  
The darkness'.

Night argued,  
"But she  
Wants out.  
With every breath  
She prays  
It be  
The last.  
The smile  
Cannot hide  
The deadness  
In her eyes".

Day smiled,  
"Yes,  
She wants out.  
Yes,  
She stays dead.  
And yet  
She carries  
The day  
To others  
So that  
You may not  
Enter their lives.  
So still  
I rule her"

Night sighed,  
"Yes, my friend,  
I try hard  
To step  
Into her mind  
And stop her  
When she thinks  
Of others.  
But you win.  
I lose".

Day consoled,  
"Take heart  
My friend.  
For even

As she carries me  
To others  
In her arms  
She carries  
You  
On her back,  
She finds comfort  
In knowing  
That one day  
She will sink  
Into your arms.  
I am  
Because  
You are.  
Let's rule her  
Together  
Till the end  
Of her days".

Night  
And day  
Embraced each other  
As I wept  
And smiled  
At their conversation.

**In-Boxed**  
Swati Pal

We spend  
A good part  
Of our lives  
In filling up  
Boxes.

The Pencil box  
With pen pencil  
Sharpener eraser,  
Eager to write  
In the book  
Of life,  
A history  
Or more.

The geometry box  
With its many  
Instruments  
To compass  
Out  
The direction

Of our lives  
With precision.

The box  
Of crayons  
Or colour pencils  
Or paints  
To  
Fill our blacks  
And whites and greys  
With the pinks  
The crimsons  
And the greens.

The tiffin box  
Filled with  
Tasty tidbits  
Mostly,  
To thrill  
The body  
And the soul,  
But sometimes also  
With  
The simple fare  
That keeps us  
Whole.

And we pack  
People too,  
Into boxes,  
Friend and foe  
Establishment or no,  
Intelligent and stupid  
Ugly and beautiful

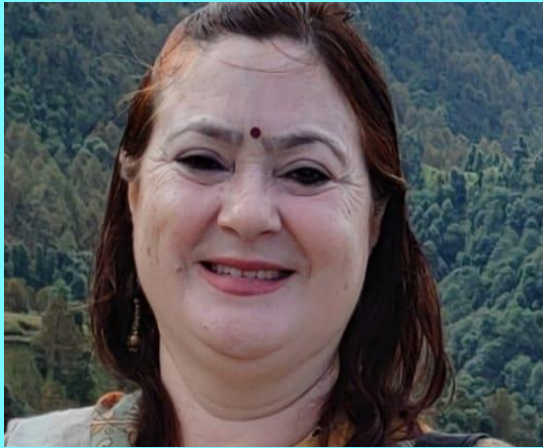
Dead and alive.

But here lies  
A difference:

You can unbox  
All  
But the dead

And no,  
I talk  
Not of anyone else,  
But me.

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**Ranu Uniyal** is a bi-lingual Poet and Professor of English, University of Lucknow. She did her doctoral studies from University of Hull, UK. Her poetry has appeared in *Cha An Asian Literary Journal*, *Asia Literary Review* (Hong Kong), *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Mascara Literary Review* (Australia), *Jaggery*, *Medulla Review*, *Sketch Book*, *Twenty 20*, *Whispers* (USA), *Littlewood Press* (UK), *Bengal Lights* (Bangladesh), *Dhauri Review*, *Madras Courier*, *Muse India*, *Kavya Bharati*, *Femina*, *Manushi*, *Indian Literature*, *Spark*, *The Enchanting Verses Literary Review*, *Ethos Journal* and several anthologies (such as *The Yearbook of Indian Poetry in English 2021*, *The Red River Book of Poetry of Dissent*, *Shimmer Spring*, *Still We Sing Voices on Violence against Women*, *Cuckoo in Crisis*, *The Dance of the Peacock*, *Building Bridges: Poems from Australia and India*, *Suvarnarekha: An Anthology of Indian Women Poets in English*). She has published four poetry collections: **Across the Divide** (2006), **December Poems** (2012) and **The Day We Went Strawberry Picking in Scarborough** (2018) translated in Spanish in (2020) and **Saeeda Ke Ghar** (Hindi Poems 2021). Her poems have been translated into German, Hindi, Oriya, Marathi, Malayalam, Spanish, Urdu, and Uzbek languages. She was on a writer's residency in 2019 at Uzbekistan. She is a founding member of **PYSSUM**, a centre for people with special needs in Lucknow. She can be reached at [ranuuniyalpant@gmail.com](mailto:ranuuniyalpant@gmail.com). Her website is: [ranuuniyal.com](http://ranuuniyal.com)

### **After the Loss**

Ranu Uniyal

(For Mohini Mangalik)

The wind is on a familiar terrain  
standing aloof, for a road to open,  
for a corridor to bristle, for a  
night to welcome the roadside

vendors, the smell of chowmein  
with sautéed spring onions  
and cabbage, the milk tea and samosas  
elusive, like the fists of privilege.

The birds are warm, the frills  
of lips dry. Street dogs craning,  
the old man is nowhere to be  
seen. Except for the fastidious

sky, no one is smiling. Days

stretch low, an eyesore opens,  
a memory stands, an invisible hand  
breaks even, table is stripped bare.

I rummage through her letters.  
Sniff her words, feel the flesh.  
It is true she said goodbye on  
a cold February night.

**Plums versus *Pullum***

Ranu Uniyal  
(For S. A. Hamid)

My mornings have a taste of  
plums from Ranikhet  
*Aha Pullum* – the children  
toss and twang.

On the streets of Almora  
I would buy them in kilos  
and distribute to  
my friends in town.

Red and juicy, at times sour  
they ended up as jam  
in my mother's kitchen.  
Often the colours trail

a mark on my kurta.  
I know you have just had plums  
You sniff and disapprove.  
*Pullums* and not plums, my heart

fusses. I do not look at you.  
I guess you have noticed  
my fist hides a few and  
the juice is trickling down.

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**Wajid Ali Shah**, the last king of Awadh, (1847 – 1856) was a patron of the arts. He is known for his passionate interest in, and promotion of the arts, aesthetics, culture and literature. He was himself, a talented poet and writer. Under the pen-name ‘Akhtar,’ he published about six-collections of ghazals, three volumes of masnavis<sup>3</sup> and qasidas<sup>4</sup>, besides a treatise of music called, Sant-e Mubarak (holy greetings). His passion for dance and drama is evident in the patronage he offered to dancers and musicians and the great pains he took to master these arts. He scripted the first Urdu drama and also dramatized it for the purpose of the stage. He also constructed the first theatre for Urdu drama, “Rahasya Manzil.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> A masnavi is a poetic collection of anecdotes and stories derived from the Quran, hadith sources and everyday tales. Stories are told to illustrate a point and each moral is discussed in detail. It primarily focuses on emphasising inward personal Sufi interpretation.

<sup>4</sup> Similar to an English ode.

<sup>5</sup> Prof. Rizvi writes that details of the stage equipment are missing. Pp. 170.

### The Royal Stage of Lucknow: Masnavi Afsana-e-Ishq (story of love)

*Professor Masud Hasan Rizvi, Adeeb's, Urdu Drama aur Stage, (1957, Urdu drama and the stage) running into two volumes – Lucknow ka Shahi Stage (the royal stage of Lucknow) and Lucknow ka Awami Stage (the popular stage of Lucknow) – won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1959. He writes that though the history of Urdu theatre begins with Amanat's Indar Sabha, (1853) it was Wajid Ali Shah who lay down the foundations of the Urdu Stage. Critics like Hansen believe that he must have commissioned Amanat to write this play, and provided a congenial ambience for its performance. Wajid Ali Shah's play Radha Kanhayya ka Qissa (1843), is included in the first volume of Rizvi's book and Amanat's Indar Sabha in the second.*

*In the 1850's Wajid Ali Shah composed three masnavis for theatrical presentation. While the original Persian texts of these fairy tale romances are extant, no scripts and production directions for these theatrical presentations have survived. A few illustrations of these entertainment extravaganza in the words of commentators who witnessed these magnificent jalsas (stage performances) have survived. One of the accounts is by Iqtidar-ud Daulah (Wajid Ali Shah's uncle), in Tarikh-e Iqtidariyah (history of this period). According to this account, Shah's staging of his plays was very grandiose and the whole play took more than one month to perform. These performances were staged in fourteen sessions and Shah spent extravagantly on the dramatization. According to Professor Rizvi, this was perhaps the costliest stage in history.<sup>6</sup>*

*The word Rahasya has been used for the dramatization and performance of the masnavis of Wajid Ali Shah. It is pertinent to point that Wajid Ali Shah has used the term Rahasya for both his Ras Lilas, based upon the life of Sri Krishna and also for the dramatization of his masnavis. He has given the heading "Preparations of Rahasya Mubarak" to the dramatization of his masnavi Darya-e-Ta'shuq, in his book Ishq-Nama-Manzoom.*

*Professor Rizvi has referred to the Indian theatrical tradition of Sanskrit drama upon which Wajid Ali Shah draws, the Drishya Kavya or Natya. 'Drishya Kavya' implies poetic verse that is meant to be enjoyed on stage. The essence of Sanskrit drama is 'Nirtya' or dance. This implies that the element of dance or performance takes precedence over the element of action or natak. Wajid Ali Shah's dance-dramas, borrowed from this ancient Sanskritic tradition, were a combination of dance, music and play-acting. The account of the jalsas rendered below suggests that the masnavis of Shah were dramatized according to the ancient Sanskritic dramatic tradition.*

*The three eloquent romantic poems or masnavis composed by him are called Darya-e-Ta'shuq (river of love), Afsana-e Ishq (story of love), Behr-e Ulfat (ocean of love). Their dramatization marked a significant development in the Urdu theatre. Shah created a fantastical world of paristan (fairyland), in which devs (giants), djinns and fairies coexisted in the world of humans; their amorous intrigues, became extremely popular among the viewing public. Syed Agha Hasan Ali Amanat, drew upon them for the plot of his Indar Sabha, and plays based on similar plots were scripted by other dramatists of his time as well. During the nine years of his reign, Wajid Ali Shah did much to enhance the reputation of Lucknow as the leading cultural centre. Rizvi gives the credit of providing a permanent stage for Urdu Drama to Wajid Ali Shah. Urdu Drama and the Stage has compiled the accounts of the three masnavis of Wajid Ali Shah, and I have translated here the account of the second masnavi, Afsana-e Ishq, available in the words of the commentators Saroor, Nami and Khayyas who witnessed it.*

<sup>6</sup> In "Shahi Rahasya Ka Saz-o-Saman", Rizvi elaborates on the costly stage equipment and costumes that were made of pure gold and silver. He notes that the cost of this theatre ran into several lakhs.

### **The Second Drama of the Royal Stage: Based on *Masnavi Afsana-e-Ishq: The Story of Seemtan and Mahpeekar***

Details regarding the preparation of this jalsa of *Afsana-e Ishq*:

This account rendered by Saroor and Sagheer (of the masnawi *Afsana-e-Ishq*) indicates that this second jalsa was prepared shortly after the first jalsa of rahasya, that is, the performance of *Darya-e-Ta'shuq*<sup>7</sup> in the 1850's. Within a span of one year, this second masnawi of rahasya too was adapted into a dramatic performance by Wajid Ali Shah. Sagheer writes:

"The two jalsa's were completed by Shah/ the two stories were dramatized for the audiences."<sup>8</sup>

Saroor writes about the Shahi Rahasya:

Hazrat scripted a masnawi and subsequently he adapted this masnawi into a drama, to entertain his dear ones .... Such a soul stirring song and dancing style. The most popular dances and their various dancing styles. There were new contrivances in the dancing fashions. Names here are so beautiful and mellifluous, they complement the faces (that one sees upon stage); one would relish them. The fairies on stage are adorned with beautiful jewellery and colourful dresses, meant to bewitch the eye.<sup>9</sup>

Nami too has also narrated the abstract of the story while referring to the dramatization of the masnawi. According to, Nami, *Masnawi Afsana-e-Ishq* was completed and played in 1268 Hijri<sup>10</sup> (1852). But there are contradictions for a few other credible sources give that this Jalsa was completed in 1267 Hijri<sup>11</sup> (1850-51). It was in this year that three princesses were married off with much pomp and splendour. Khayas narrates that a special program of rahasya was organised at their wedding, and this masnawi was dramatized and played.

*Masnawi Afsana-e Ishq* comprises of long narrative poem of several thousand couplets, narrated in a highly versified form. Saroor and Nami have given a summary of parts of this story. A brief description of the story is rendered below:<sup>12</sup>

Long ago, there was a King called Shahezaman. His Chief Minister Badrudduja was blessed with a son, Mahepeekar. At the age of fourteen, he set out for a hunting expedition in the jungles outside the city, and after hunting birds and animals he lay down to rest. It was then, that he heard a voice that seemed full of agony. The prince sent a few people to inquire about the state of affairs. They returned with the news that a young man lay at the foot of the mountain in tremendous pain. On hearing this, Mahepeekar mounted his horse, approached the young man and inquired about his condition. The young man informed that his name was Mushtari, and he was a citizen of the town of Taba. On one occasion, while hunting he chased a deer on horseback, and having covered a distance of few miles he shot and injured it with his arrow. When he approached the deer in order to slaughter it, the deer vanished. He was overwhelmed and afraid when a magician by the name of Ghufuran Jadoo came that way, and told him that the area was under the magical spell of his sister Gubran Jadoo. Anyone arrested in its magic spell couldn't ever escape it. With Ghufuran Jadoo's help, he was able to escape the magical spell. He had covered a distance of few miles, when he reached the doorway to the Kingdom of Khursheed Shah, the city of Mahar Anjla and saw scores of people moving in one direction. He joined them. The crowd halted at the window of a magnificent palace. At sunset, the blinds covering the windows opened, and the crowd caught a glimpse of the most beautiful princess called Seemtan. Like most of the people

<sup>7</sup> Dary-e Ta'shuq was played for the first time in 1850-51.

<sup>8</sup> *Aayin Akhtar*, pp. 45

<sup>9</sup> *Fasana-e-Ibrat*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>10</sup> *Ishq Nama Manzom*, pg 681-686.

<sup>11</sup> *Maqbal*, pg-142.

<sup>12</sup> As recollected by Masud Hasan Rizvi Adeeb from the accounts of Saroor and Nami.

there, he too fell in love with this beautiful woman. She had preconditioned that she would marry the man who was courageous enough to bring to safety, a young man trapped in a well. Many young men tried to accomplish this, in order to marry her, but they never reached this well located in fairyland. He took two paintings of Princess Seemtan and then set out to look for this well. He searched for years but could not find the way to this fairyland. At last, wearying of life, he dived into a cave. He was tired of existing in despondency, and would not even die. When stricken with extreme anxiety, he looked at the paintings of Seemtan in the box and felt relieved.

When Mahepeekar learnt of this, he expressed a desire to see these paintings. After a lot of persistence from his side, Mushtari showed them to him. On seeing them Mahepeekar, struck by the arrow of love, swooned. After a lot of persuasion, he took a painting of Seemtan from Mushtari, and holding it close to his heart, he departed on a swift horse in search of her. His army and all his fellow travellers were left behind. They wandered about searching for the prince but could not find him, then, full of despair the caravan returned. On learning of the disappearance of Mahepeekar, his parents too despaired, and the royal palace was reduced to a house of mourning.

Mahepeekar in his madness roamed the jungles. He asked the animals and the trees about the whereabouts of Seemtan. He talked to the stones about Seemtan and showed the painting, and inquired about the city of Mehar Anjla. He continued his journey, facing trials and tribulations and finally arrived at a flowery patch of green. Here in the shade of trees he saw a clear and transparent spring. Near this spring, were colourful birds, swans and skylarks. Thirsty as he was, he thought of drinking from the spring. The birds cried out to caution him that this was a magical spring, and whoever drank from it would forfeit his life. In the meantime, a beautiful peacock appeared, twisted and twirled, and transformed into a man. He said to Mahepeekar: "This is the land of magicians. The king of this country is called Sultan-Jadoo and my name is Taoos-Jadoo and I am the caretaker of this country and a thousand magicians work under me. There is a magical spell all around over here; these skylarks and swans are a work of magic too". Then he took a little water from the spring, blew an incantation over it, and gave it to Mahepeekar to minimize the magical spell. Mahepeekar drank the water and as advised by Taoos-Jadoo, he rode in the direction of the east, and by the time it was evening, he had left this land that was under a magic spell. When noon gave way to night, Mahepeekar descended from his horse and sat under a tree. Full of despair, he broke down and cried, till he tired and fell asleep. He was overwhelmed when he dreamed of Seemtan.

While Mahepeekar was in this restless state, something seemed to be twitching at Seemtan's conscience too, and she was quite anxious. She confided in her companion and lady-minister, Dilpazir, of her condition, and went out with her for a stroll in the garden to entertain herself, and lift her spirits. Here the singers and the dancers entertained them, but Seemtan was inconsolable. When half the night had elapsed in this distress, Seemtan eventually fell asleep. She dreamt of a frightful desert, where from under a lone tree, a young and a handsome man was addressing her and narrating the woeful state of his heart. With feelings of fear and tenderness, she approached him, seeing his handsome face, she fell in love with him. She was so stirred by this dream, that she awoke, sobbing bitterly, making her companions very anxious. At the earnest requests of Dilpazir, she narrated her dream. Dilpazir consoled her and promised to find Mahepeekar for her.

Coincidentally, Mahepeekar also saw a similar dream. When he awoke, he too was overwhelmed with the pain of separation from Seemtan. He climbed a tree and thought of ending his life by jumping to his death. Just then a lion emerged from the wilderness and attacked his horse, and started tearing at its flesh. Mahepeekar jumped from the tree in a bid to kill the lion but it began flinching its tail and walking around him in a friendly manner. Mahepeekar proceeded on foot to look for his beloved. One day, tired, he rested under a tree, when a pair of birds descended on the branch above him and started talking to one another. Listening to them, Mahepeekar thought he could reach out to them for help, and hoped that they would help him in secure his beloved. At



his request they introduced him to Dawood Djinn, who, seeing Mahepeekar's condition, promised that he would fulfil his wish. Before leaving, he gave Mahepeekar a ring, that this would protect him from the spell of magic. The Djinn transformed into a peacock, flew into the garden of Seemtan, and without naming Mahepeekar, talked about his deep love for Seemtan and flew back to Mahepeekar and informed that Seemtan loved him much more than he loved her. The following day, again at the persistence of Mahepeekar, he paid a visit to Seemtan in the guise of a peacock, and after narrating Mahepeekar's state of mind, he asked her to write a letter, expressing her love for him. He next returned to Seemtan with a reply. On reading this letter Seemtan fell even more deeply in love with Mahepeekar. She pleaded with the Djinn, and he left with a promise to return with Mahepeekar. In the evening, Dawood Djinn flew back carrying Mahepeekar on his back to the garden of Seemtan, who was crying for him while reciting a ghazal. She met Mahepeekar in the quiet solitude of the house in her garden.

Dilpazir informed Seemtan's mother about her love for Mahepeekar, and the visits of Dawood Djinn. Her mother had Dawood Djinn arrested, and summoned a 'Shah Sahib' who had mastered the art of subjugating djinns. Dilpazeer, constantly on the lookout for Dawood Djinn, informed her of Dawood Djinn's arrival at Seemtan's abode, and added that Seemtan was resting with her lover in the garden, and that Dawood Djinn too was there with them. Seemtan's father, Khursheed Shah narrated this to Shah Saheb, and expressed his desire to have Dawood Djinn arrested. Shah Saheb sent an arial message, meant for the King of Djinns, that reached him within moments. The King of Djinns accompanied by a number of djinns immediately arrived in the service of Shah Saheb, and arrested Dawood Djinn.

Mahepeekar and Seemtan were dismayed at his arrest. Suddenly there was a shrill sound followed by a tremor, and the earth shook, and Safed Dev (white giant) descended, and flew away with Seemtan. Mahepeekar was full of anguish and he took to the jungles; there was commotion at Seemtan's palace. Mahepeekar while travelling the jungles came across a verdant garden. This garden was under a magical spell; on entering this garden, he was transformed to stone. Six months lapsed in this state. One day the daughter of the king of magicians, Surosahi, (also a master magician) came to this garden for a stroll. She saw this exceptionally handsome man who had been transformed into stone and instantly fell in love with him. Nullifying the spell of magic she brought him back to life, and asked him his name, and the purpose of his visit to the garden. He gave his name and added: "I am in love with Seemtan, and have been traversing the jungles in search of her. My fate brought me to this garden, and a magician transformed me into a stone." Surosahi flew with him past several magical deserts, descended into a bungalow, and lay him down on a wooden, canopied bed.

Surosahi had fallen in love with Mahepeekar, and was so overwhelmed that she fell on her knees and pleaded: "You are thinking only about Seemtan, and I am so distressed in my love for you. Think of me as well, tell me how I can find a place in your heart". Mahepeekar replied: "The only way you can achieve this is by finding Seemtan for me". In turn, I will fulfil whatever you desire from me." Surosahi wrote a brief script of this episode, and presented herself in the service of her father, Badshah-e Tilism (King of Magicians) and told him that a human being has come to him with a summon that a Safed Dev had flown away his beloved Seemtan. The King heard the story from Mahepeekar himself, and then he directed one of the dev's to go and fetch Safed Dev, but he refused to come. Instead, he uttered some insolent comments against the King, who then imprisoned this Dev who had come as a messenger from a deep well. The King now marched with his army against Safed Dev. The Dev too, summoned his forces for battle, and a fearsome fight ensued. In addition to the use of weapons made of stone and iron, there was a show of daring magical tricks. Thousands of dev's were killed, the army of Safed Dev was vanquished, when Mahepeekar recalled the ring given by Dawood Djinn, on the stone of which was inscribed *Ism-e Azam* (the name of God). With the help of this magical ring, he now nullified the effect of magic, and defeated the army of Safed Dev. Safed Dev was presented before the King, and asked to



disclose the address of Seemtan. The King then marched his forces along with Mahepeekar, and reached the mountain top that was the abode of Safed Dev. Here, Seemtan was found entrapped in a box that has been locked. Mahepeekar, with the help of Ism-e Azam broke this lock, and rescued Seemtan from her captivity. She had grown very weak; therefore, they now stayed at the mountain for a week, and then this caravan returned.

The King was delighted with Prince Mahepeekar. It was only with his help that he could defeat the forces of Safed Dev, therefore, he married his daughter Surosahi to him. After staying here for two months, and then accompanied by Surosahi and Seemtan, he departed for Seemtan's country Mehar Anjla in all his royal magnificence. He received a royal welcome here. Seemtan's parents were overjoyed to see them. Khursheed Shah was delighted to learn that in the great battle, it was Mahepeekar who had released Seemtan from captivity. Thereafter, at the request of Seemtan, her parents put the lady-minister in captivity. A few days later, at the request of Seemtan, Khursheed Shah invited the master magician, Shah Saheb, who set Dawood Djinn free from captivity. At the request of Mahepeekar, Shah Saheb urged Seemtan and Surosahi to be friends with each other. Seemtan kept Surosahi as her guest for eight days, and then built another palace for her next to her own.

Mahepeekar while sleeping in the royal palace of Seemtan dreamt, that his own royal palace was looking deserted, and his parents were unhappy in his absence. On waking up he wept for his parents, and took leave of Khursheed Shah, to return to his country, accompanied by Seemtan. Khursheed Shah ordered his army to walk ahead of them, and this militia comprising nearly 80,000 foot-soldiers, 16,000 cavalry, 4000 learners, and collectively around one lakh people accompanied Mahepeekar's entourage. While the preparations for this journey were being undertaken, Surosahi too wrote a letter to her father Shah-e Jinnat informing him of this expedition. He came riding on his wooden flying throne, and greeted his daughter and son-in-law, and also met Khursheed Shah. When the day of their departure arrived, Khursheed Shah and Shah-e Jinnat, along with their fortifications accompanied Mahepeekar. When Mahepeekar's country was just five miles away, then he wrote to inform his father Badrudduja of his arrival, through the help of Dawood Djinn. On hearing the news of the arrival of the prince, the entire town was overjoyed. People adorned themselves in their best attire, shopkeepers decorated their shops, and the whole town was illuminated. Badrudduja came out in order to welcome his son, while his mother fainted with happiness on seeing him after such a long time. Mahepeekar introduced Seemtan and Surosahi first to his mother, and then to his father, and they were delighted to meet them. They were welcomed with traditional rituals and grand celebrations, and lived happily ever after.

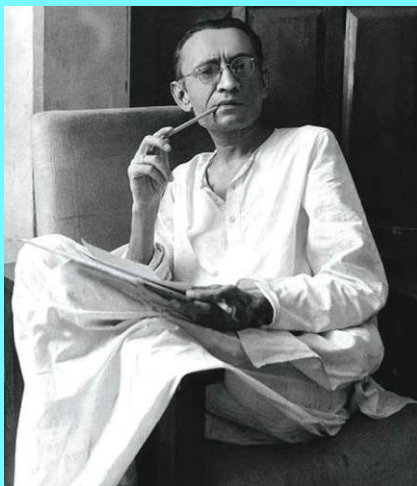
Badrudduja met Khursheed Shah and made a proposal for the wedding of his son with Seemtan and this was accepted wholeheartedly. The wedding was conducted with much festivity and extravagance. The bride and groom lived happily forever in splendour and happiness.

*Translated from the Urdu by Ayesha Irfan*

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**Sa'adat Hasan Manto** (1912-1955) is an ever-shining star in the firmament of world literature, a powerful writer from South Asia. Born in undivided, colonial India, he spent the last seven years of his life in Pakistan where he migrated after the Partition in 1947. Manto was a prolific writer. His writings on the Partition are generally believed to be his masterpieces. The short story “Tamasha” translated here as “The Spectacle” is set against the backdrop of the Jallianwala Bagh Massacre of 1919. The story expresses Manto’s pain over the deadly Massacre. It is a powerful expression of his anti-colonial stance and asserts that his ideas were radical by contrast with the Gandhian ideology of non-violence. Manto favored the revolutionary Bhagat Singh’s ways for securing freedom.

## **“Tamasha”**

**Sa’adat Hasan Manto**

For a few days, planes had been patrolling in the quiet sky like black eagles in search of their prey. The occasional red storms were harbingers of the upcoming bloody event. In the deserted bazaars, the police patrol created an eerie atmosphere. Usually crowded with people till the wee hours, the bazaars were now totally deserted, as if afraid of something. An incomprehensible silence hung heavy on the heart of the city and a sense of fear loomed large. Terrified of the silence of his home, Khalid said to his father: “Abba, why don’t you let me go school today?”

“Today, your school . . . is closed.”

“But our teacher didn’t tell us anything. In fact, yesterday he said that if anyone did not get his copy checked after finishing his school-work, he would be punished severely!”

“He must have forgotten to inform you about it.”

“Your office is also closed today?”

“Yes, our office is also closed.”

“Great! Then today you will have to tell me a nice story.”

Meanwhile, three planes flew past, making a deafening noise. Khalid was frightened. For a few days, he had been observing these planes but could not make anything of them. He wondered why these planes kept flying in the sky all day long. Frightened of their daily sorties, he said:

“Abba, I’m terrified of these planes. Please tell them not to fly over our house.”

“Afraid? What are you saying Khalid?”

“Abba, these planes are very frightening. You don’t know, one day they will throw a bomb on our house. Yesterday morning, the maid was telling Ammi Jan that these planes carry many bombs. If they make any such mischief, remember, I have a gun which you gave me last Eid.”

Khalid’s father laughed at his son’s extraordinary courage, “That maid is stupid; just ignore her. I will tell her not to talk like this. Don’t worry, they will do no such thing.”

Khalid took leave of his father and went to his room. Taking out his air-gun, he began practising shooting with it, so that when the planes bombed his house, he would not miss his target and avenge them fully. If only such feelings of revenge could be distributed equitably among everyone!

While young Khalid was making his tender plans of revenge, in another part of the house, his father sat beside his mother, telling the maid not to say anything which might frighten Khalid, in future. Having advised his wife and the maid, as he was going outside, another servant brought the terrible news that despite the King’s forbidding it, people had got together and organised a public gathering that evening. Hence, some backlash was expected.

Khalid’s father was afraid. Now he understood that the unusual silence, the patrolling planes, the police in the bazaars, the grief-stricken faces of people and the red storms were all foreboding something horrid. But he had no clue about the nature of that terrible event. The entire city was engulfed in an unknown fear. Having put off the idea of going out, Khalid’s father had not even changed his clothes when he heard the planes again. It was a frightening sound – as if hundreds of people were groaning in immense pain. Hearing the noise of the planes, Khalid also came running out of his room carrying his air-gun. He looked at them intently so that when they started bombing,

he would retaliate with his gun. At that time, the iron-determination and grit on the face of a six-year-old with his fake gun was enough to put a valiant soldier to shame. It was as if today he was hell-bent on destroying the thing which had been troubling him for so many days. Suddenly something fell from one of the planes. They were small pieces of paper which started floating in the sky like kites. Some of the papers fell on the roof of Khalid's house also. Khalid ran up and picked up the papers.

"Abbaji, the maid was really talkking nonsense. Look, they have thrown papers and not bombs."

When Khalid's father read the paper, he turned a pale yellow. Now he understood clearly what was going to happen. On the pamphlet, was clearly stated that the King had forbidden any kind of public gathering and if the subjects disobeyed, they would be responsible for the consequences.

Seeing his father's tense appearance, Khalid asked anxiously: "Are they going to throw a bomb on our house? Is that what is written here?"

"Khalid, go along and play with your gun."

"But what is written there?"

"It says that there is going to be a tamasha this evening", Khalid's father lied to cut short the conversation.

"There will be a tamasha? Then we will go and watch it too."

"What did you say?"

"Won't you take me to watch this tamasha?"

"Yes, I'll take you. Now go and play."

"But where should I go to play? You don't let me go outside, the maid does not play with me, my classmate Tufail is also not coming here these days. I have no one to play with. But we will go to watch the tamasha in the evening, won't we?"

Without waiting for an answer, Khalid ran out of the room. Having roamed about here and there, he went to his father's sitting room where the windows overlooked the bazaar. He sat near a window and began looking out. And what did he see?

All the shops in the bazaar were closed, but people were moving about – they were going to attend the public gathering. He had been wondering why the shops had been closed since the past few days. He thought and thought but could not find any answer. Eventually he concluded that the shops must be closed because people were going to watch that tamasha. He thought it must be a very interesting tamasha owing to which the whole market is closed. He became impatient to watch it and began looking forward to it eagerly. The clock kept ticking and nearing the bloody moment.

It was afternoon. Khalid, his father and mother were sitting silently on the lawn, looking at one another. The winds sobbed as they blew.

Tad, tad, tad, tad . . .

Khalid's father's face turned papery white. "Firing" he uttered with difficulty. Khalid's mother, overcome with fear, couldn't utter a single word. She felt as if they were firing bullets in her chest. Hearing the sound of firing, Khalid held his father's finger and urged:

"Abbaji, let's go. The tamasha has started."

“What tamasha?” asked Khalid’s father, concealing his fear.

“The tamasha about which we read in that paper. It has started. That’s why they are firing so many crackers.”

“There’s plenty of time yet. Please don’t make noise. For God’s sake, go and play with the maid!” Khalid ran towards the kitchen but not finding the maid there, he went back to his father’s sitting room and peered out of the window. The bazaar was silent – absolutely deserted. Far away, one could hear the painful crying of the dogs. After a few moments, the heart-wrenching cries of human beings got mixed with it.

Khalid got very anxious when he heard a groaning sound coming from somewhere. He was still trying to fathom where the sound was coming from when he saw a boy crying and shouting as he ran from the direction of the chowk in the bazaar, then stumbled and fell right in front of Khalid’s house – and fainted. Blood spurted like a fountain from a wound in his leg. Khalid was terrified to see this. He ran to his father and said: “Abba, Abba, a boy has fallen down in the bazaar. His leg is bleeding.”

Hearing this, Khalid’s father immediately rushed to the window and looked outside. A young boy lay there, his face to the ground. Out of the fear of the King, he could not even dare to step out and help the boy, pick him up and lay him on the plank of wood outside the nearby shop. The government had its vans to help and pick up helpless people but now the body of that young boy, victim of their gun-shots, the sapling which they had crushed, the bud which they had scorched before it could bloom, the peace of someone’s heart which had been snatched away by their barbarity—now lay in the street they had laid. Ah! Death is horrible but cruelty is far more horrible.

“Abba, has someone beaten this boy?”

Khalid’s father nodded his head and went out of the room. Left alone in the room, Khalid started thinking about how much pain the boy must have felt since his wound was big and deep. He recalled that once when he had hurt himself with a knife meant to sharpen the nibs of his wooden pens, he had stayed up practically all night, and even his parents hadn’t slept. Suddenly he felt a tremendous pain in his own leg like that of that boy’s wound. He began to cry.

His mother came running and took him in her lap: “Why are you crying, my child?”

“Ammi, has someone beaten that boy?”

“He must have done some mischief.”

She had heard the whole story of the wounded boy from her husband.

“But in school they beat with a stick which does not make us bleed,” Khalid wept.

“The stick must have hit him hard.”

“Then, will his father not complain to the teacher who beat him so mercilessly? Hadn’t Abbaji once complained to the Head Master when Master Saheb had boxed my ear so hard that it had become red?”

“That boy’s master is a big man.”

“Bigger than even Allah?”

“No, lesser than Him.”



“Then he should complain to Allah.”

“Khalid, go to sleep now.”

“Allah, please punish the master who beat this boy so cruelly and snatch away the stick which makes boys bleed. I haven’t memorised my tables. Perhaps my teacher will also beat me with a stick. Allah, if you don’t listen to me, I’ll never talk to you,” Khalid prayed as he lay down to sleep.

*Translated from the Urdu by Sumbul Nasim*

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**Shubha Dwivedi** is a poet and translator. She is Assistant Professor at Department of English, at Atma Ram Sanatan Dharma College, University of Delhi, India. She teaches English Literature. She has translated the following poems from *Tumdi ke Shabd* by Badri Narayan. (Delhi: Rajkamal Paperbacks, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2019).



**Badri Narayan** is a distinguished Hindi poet, bilingual author, social scientist and cultural anthropologist. Recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Award 2022 for his highly acclaimed anthology, *Tumdi Ke Shabd*, Prof. Narayan is a significant literary voice of the twenty-first century and his poetry reverberates with the enchanting sounds of birds, trees, musical instruments, folk tales and earthy melodies that encapsulate the very essence of rural India. The poems in *Tumdi Ke Shabd* expound the perpetual discourse surrounding the inclusion or exclusion of the ordinary individual within the polarizing socio-political frameworks of our society. His verses sensitively document the pain and suffering of those on its fringes; who are on the verge of being forgotten by the powerful. He endeavors to uphold the cultural polyphony by intricately interweaving concerns of ecology, the precariat, women, and Dalits. As a “critical insider” he writes from the perspective of those who have been historically silenced and tirelessly endeavors to dismantle the barriers of inequity and disparities through his ostensibly unassuming, lyrical, graceful, yet impactful verses.

**Why don't you get this?**

Badri Narayan

In the pursuit of bliss, glory and happiness  
Meandering past malls, highways and flyovers  
You are headed to a hypermarket,  
And right next to the same market  
Opens a massive portal to the realm of death  
Why don't you get this?

Why don't you get this?  
That amidst the mirth and merriment of life  
This world is a vast graveyard  
Even a diamond is a stone, why can't you perceive it?  
While perched on a bubble of water  
To what end do you take satisfaction  
In counting pennies and nickels?

Why don't you get this?  
That this civilization  
Once again, is in need of a Kabir like persona  
Because there's a pressing need  
To imbue the ancient diction with a novel perspective

Why don't you get this?  
that love is not mere pleasure  
As there lies infinite suffering beneath love  
Why don't you recall the Buddha?

It's accepted that this life is quite wonderful  
and that attaining a human form  
after 8.4 million types of lifeforms,  
You wish to revel in all of life's pleasures  
But why don't you see,  
How miserable Charvak is even after experiencing life's supreme delights in Delhi  
And seated somewhere in some lane of Shahdara is crying bitterly

Why don't you recall that swan  
that has been waiting patiently  
to soar through the verdant meadows  
I'm not sure, since when?

*Translated from the Hindi by Shubha Dwivedi*

**Your Own Poem**

Badri Narayan

With a borrowed piece of paper,  
Borrowed pen,  
How would you compose  
Your own poem?

With someone else's idea  
With someone else's agenda  
How would you compose your own poem?

Quite possible, when you compose your poem  
Maybe the birds will alight and utter their thoughts therein.  
Even in the midst of the cacophony of power, some chorus of dissent may resound  
And that chorus shouldn't prove to be a fake protest later on.  
Somewhere in the midst of the rap of the middle class,  
The voices of the poor  
May also be heard  
Let the face of the common man emerge above the web of statistics  
Only if you compose your poem,  
Will you be able to make a difference  
In this democracy.

*Translated from the Hindi by Shubha Dwivedi*



**Seema Jain** is a bilingual poet, short story writer, translator, editor, critic and reviewer. Ex-Vice Principal and Head, P G Dept of English, KMV Jalandhar, she has fourteen published books (two by Sahitya Akademi) including five English/Hindi poetry collections, two edited poetry anthologies, five books of translated novels and poems and two edited books of research articles. Her poems have been published in over hundred international and national anthologies and journals. They have been recited for Sahitya Akademi's Sahityotsav, FOSWAL 2023, Washington DC South Asian Literature Festival 2023, and at various platforms nationally and globally. She is a recipient of many prestigious awards.



**Dr. Vanita** is a Punjabi poet, academic, translator and critic, who teaches Punjabi at Khalsa College, University of Delhi. She is a Sahitya Akademi award winner for her collection of poems Kaal, Pehar, Gharian. Previously, she was bestowed with the Punjabi Sahitya Akademi award for this collection. Dr Vanita is also the recipient of Shiromani Punjabi Sahitykar Award.

### **Melancholy ("Udaasi")**

Dr. Vanita

In the school compound  
With folded hands and closed eyes



Every morning we used to pray:  
“Oh Lord! We all are your beings  
Let our deeds be such  
That we tread the path of goodness  
And shun all evil!”

Prior to the lessons in class  
These words became life’s ideal,  
We moved forth treading these paths,  
Wasted so many years in fond hopes  
And descended into depths of melancholy.

All endeavors proved futile  
Heart’s desires remained puerile  
Deep sadness did beguile.

We are left deeply saddened  
Our belief in patriotic love,  
Our passion to die for the nation,  
Our passion for religious faith  
And the hypnotic traps of preachers  
Plunged us in deep sadness

Hollow kinships and human dealings  
The power corridors with their scheming  
Dreams of jobs falsely alluring  
Unemployed youths in queues standing  
Plunged us in deep sadness

The crass commercialization of education  
The costly “treatment” of ailing patients  
The sad reality of different departments  
The layers of masks worn by friendships  
Plunged us in deep sadness

The hollow claims of progress  
The suicides of hapless farmers  
Society’s evil practices  
The everyday changing policies  
Plunged us in deep sadness

The flesh-trading bazaars  
The dictates of the mighty  
The stark arrogance of power  
Plunged us in deep sadness

The contaminated waters we drink  
The poisonous food grains we eat  
The polluted air we breathe in  
The drying up of our rivers

Plunged us in deep sadness

The daily news of violent terror  
 The murderous assault on the 'pen'  
 The obstinacy of those in power  
 The tolerance of the hapless masses  
 The poverty-stricken families  
 Plunged us in deep sadness

Still from this sadness, like every year  
 Like the Morning Prayer, like the daily ritual  
 With folded hands and closed eyes  
 Emanates a prayer: Maybe this year,  
 Maybe this year; Maybe this year!!

My Lord! Will the season change?  
 Shall we see a different time?  
 My Lord! With your miraculous powers,  
 Please change all this, please change all this!

*Translated from the Punjabi by Seema Jain*

### **Women Poets** **("Shayar Aurtan")**

Dr. Vanita

Yes! We, the women poets,  
 Do not write from the intellect;  
 We write of knowledge from the heart,  
 And thereby touch hearts.  
 We do not flaunt our knowledge  
 After reading tons of volumes;  
 While we cook *saag*, or churn butter,  
 We, the hard-working, laboring women,  
 The housewives or the working women,  
 We feel, we recite,  
 We read, we write about  
 The eternal book of this world

Passing through tradition's needle-eye,  
 We bear the yoke of domesticity,  
 Treasuring and nurturing relationships,  
 Caressing maternal love, weeding out odium,  
 And spreading love,  
 We are the fountainhead of all such 'knowledge.'

We, the foolish, illiterate women!  
 What can we speak about

History, Geography, Sociology, Philosophy,  
Economics or even ethics!  
But we have lived them all;  
Suffered due to 'impoverished hearts,'  
Sunk in their mire  
What shall we speak of all these?  
And yet, lotus-like we bloom  
In the midst of mounds of mud  
Our anguished cry is our verse  
Our muffled moans are our song.

Throughout life, for centuries  
We have endured all dictates;  
Now, we mould and embroider  
Our woeful tale into words  
As we build happy homes  
Saving every single penny  
We shall weave into words  
Our heart's pure sentiments,  
While stealing moments from domestic chores

We know not about language and style,  
Beauty and technique, or even genre  
O intellectuals! Read, if you can  
In the expression of 'Woman'  
All that is 'unarticulated;'  
If you boast of being a scholar,  
Read the hidden emotions  
Of woman, bruised, isolated, neglected,  
And suppressed through the ages,  
In her 'unwritten history,'

Woman knows all too well  
Your pride in your knowledge  
If she wants, she can become the fiery '*Chandi*,'  
She very well knows the difference  
In the writings of the 'heart' and the 'mind'

You are safe only as long as  
She remains '*Saraswati*,'  
Pretending to be ignorant,  
Though knowing all,  
Speaking from her wisdom  
She warns you:  
"Beware! You men, born out of my womb!  
Learn to talk of what is right and fair!"

*Translated from the Punjabi by Seema Jain*

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**Dr. Prabha Mujumdar** is a Ph.D in Mathematics, has worked as a Geo-Scientist for thirty-five years in ONGC and has retired as Deputy General Manager (Reservoir). Her works have been published in prestigious Hindi magazines like *Samakalin Bhartiya Sahitya*, *Vagarth*, *Navneet*, *Madhumati*, *Janmat* etc. She has published four poetry anthologies besides prose works and short stories. In addition to Hindi literature, she likes to read English and Marathi literature.

### Hope

(Ummeed)

Prabha Majumdar

Some words, lost in silence  
 scared, helpless,  
 tired, sad and hurt,  
 trying to search for their existence  
 In utter darkness  
 Trying to protect themselves  
 against getting charred  
 with the cinders  
 raining from the eyes  
 of vitriolic faces;  
 fear-struck  
 in the midst of violent roars  
 of ferocious animals,  
 ugly laughter, obscene jokes,  
 abuses and threats.  
 They watch  
 the frenzied mob's  
 celebrations with claps and cheer,  
 and try to feel  
 the pulse of the times  
 as they watch berserk armies  
 turn the right to live  
 into a synonym for some race  
 and deliver instant justice.  
 Words are trying to explore  
 the options to safeguard

their flowerbeds  
from getting scorched,  
when they see  
the currents of civilization  
getting bogged down  
in the thorny cacti of desert sands  
or turn into the stinking sewers.

They believe that  
inside the deeper layers  
of the flowerbeds  
filled with the air of odium,  
contaminated water  
and poisonous chemicals  
in the name of manure,  
there still must be secure  
somewhere  
the taste, the color  
and the fragrance  
of their own soil.

*Translated from the Hindi by Seema Jain*

**Strength**  
**(Sambal)**  
Prabha Majumdar

No defeat is the final one;  
even in the melancholy corners of  
darkness, suffocation and insult,  
there always lies hidden  
a faint ray of possibilities,  
a glimmering light  
like the flicker of a lamp.  
After the deepening, scary,  
long, dense dark nights  
of *amavas*,  
there always is  
a stirring in the east;  
the chirpy songs  
of the feathered species  
pierce the still silence;  
the vibrant shades of petals  
that bloom, welcome  
the rays of the rising sun;  
the leaves, embracing  
the dew drops in their palms,  
glisten

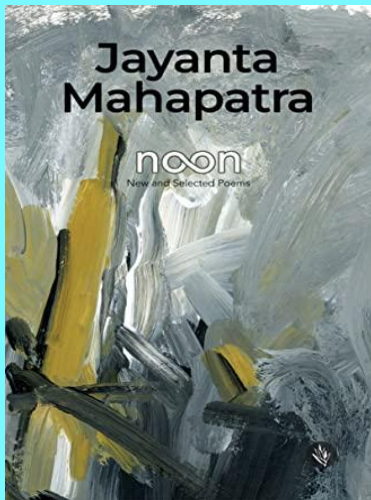


and this halted world,  
comes back to life again.  
When the earth is parched  
with the sweltering heat of the sun,  
and the ever-chirpy birds  
pine for drops of water  
in the cracked earth's crevices;  
when the woods offering them shelter  
feel burnt and singed;  
when the rivers, ponds and wells  
evaporate into the air;  
just then, the sky  
in collusion with the clouds,  
is weaving a dream;  
and joys in a spate  
begin to flow.  
Whenever I feel  
the flowerbeds of poems  
have withered and shriveled,  
the ink of the pen has dried up,  
and the ground of sensibility  
has turned barren;  
in those moments  
words sprout like seeds  
from the dark wet corners  
of feelings  
and breaking all barriers  
begin to flow on pages  
And after a long time  
I complete my poem.

*Translated from the Hindi by Seema Jain*

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## BOOK REVIEWS



***Noon: New and Selected Poems.* By Jayanta Mahapatra. Bhubaneswar: Ketaki Foundation Trust, 2023. ISBN 978-81-958050-9-9. Pp 71, Rs. 299/-**

Many poems in *Noon: New and Selected Poems* remind us of the Chilean poet-diplomat Pablo Neruda, who made the sonnets out of plain and ordinary. Two things are distinctly common between Neruda and Mahapatra; their ever-present attention to details of daily life and their love of things made or grown by human hands. Both of them write about the sense of something missing. Mahapatra gives voice to opaque substances and rejuvenates the past relics of culture, tradition and religion in a language that is his own. The present appearance, according to Mahapatra, contains a shadow of the glorious past. He explores his identity as a poet in ruins of temples, old memories of words and habitation within the landscape of his state and beyond. He is a poet of the relic of the colonial past, silent watcher on the fringes of life, “Only the past leans out. What else is there?” (‘Story’, p. 28) But, unlike Neruda who penned poems from the age of ten, Mahapatra started writing poetry at the age of thirty-eight.

For Mahapatra, a good poem is reflection of life; and a "good" poem will always try to reach the condition of music. Plainly speaking, it takes the readers from the ordinary level to a higher plane, like music:

“Another day of waiting out, wondering  
About our poets and what they are  
Going to say about us (.)” (‘Possessions,’ p.59)

Mahapatra taught Physics in different Government colleges in Odisha. His training in Physics made him logical, law-bound, specific, precise, cryptic and terse. He writes poetry that is intensely personal and fits in the parameters of contemporary world poetry written in different cultures. Some poems in *Noon: New and Selected Poems* allude to a society characterized by low employment rates, poorly distributed economies and weak public sector capacity. He always wants a better society—equal opportunity and equity for all. As a committed artist his views are thoroughly anthropocentric and hugely progressive.

Mahapatra breaks cultural stereotypes at several levels. Many of his iconic poems speak for the peripheral, the destitute and knock down the privileged centre of control and authority through

his hard hitting images and symbols. He is a poet of small towns and villages, rivers passing by. All these are his 'uneven catalogue' of poetry. The veteran poet makes his choices and inscriptions clear:

“Another morning breaks, a white water  
moves under my sleep where I’ve walked for over  
two thousand years (.)” (‘Inscriptions’, p. 40)

Even though ‘crow’ symbol is not a stock symbol in *Noon: New and Selected Poems* his ‘crow noises’ is a postcolonial replacement for any white bird chirping of the West. Mahapatra says, “It’s here I live, in the unseeing heart.” When dawn arrives in this part of the country, crows produce endless noise and people become active. Mahanadi delta is an unassuming beauty Mahapatra engages with wherein his voice is confident, stubborn and refusing to die. He walks through the river. His Mahanadi is an inspiration, a map maker for the poet.

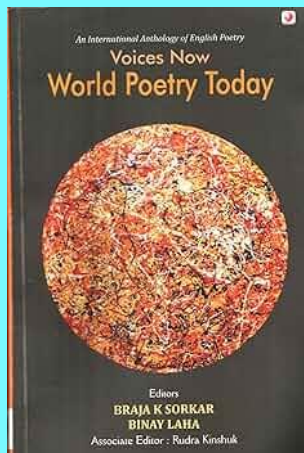
With this collection Mahapatra proves that the pride of writing has ‘no fear of passing’. Some poems in *Noon: New and Selected Poems* are culture specific, conjuring up intense longings and sensibilities. There is always a hint of revisiting the past in his poetry. Glorious past is India’s strength and legacy. Mahapatra’s corpus explores Indian’s rich cultural tradition and history through subtle images and idioms.

**Jaydeep Sarangi**

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***Voices Now: World Poetry Today.* Edited by Braja K. Sorkar, Binay Laha and Rudra Kinshuk. Durgapur, West Bengal: Tristoop Books. ISBN; 978-81-955027-1-4. Pages 352. Rs. 599.00. USD: \$. 6.70; 2022.**

The anthology I set out to review houses poems of as many as eighty national and international poets. Three or more poems are allotted to each poet and his or her poems are preceded by biographical details. The biographical details that forerun the poems of each of the poets enshrined in the anthology help the readers to interpret their poems by and for themselves. I take the liberty of fore-warning the readers that they will read discussion of a random selection of the poems and the poems discussed are but a sampling of the gamut of the kind of poetry that this anthology has put together. In the editorial, captioned ‘An (sic) Introduction to World Englishes and World English Poetry’, the three editors opine that “The term ‘world Englishes,’ formally introduced by Kachru at (a) Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) Conference along with the global profile of English’ points to ‘the differences in the English Language...used in various contexts across the world.” The editors point out that Kachru stresses the importance of ‘viewing each variety as English in its own historical, political, sociolinguistic, and literary contexts.’ Further down the same page (P. 9), they concur that the way in the twenty-first century the world is ‘growing accessible, sharable for all the people living on this earth’ necessitates English being used as ‘common language,’ allowing for the ‘variations in habits, cultures, traditions [and] regional and idiosyncratic aspects.’ They have elaborated on this thesis in course of their discussion.

This anthology begins with four poems by Shanta Acharya. In the first poem titled ‘Spring in New Gardens,’ the poet describes the effect of spring on her in ‘the Royal Botanic Gardens’. She purports to have composed this poem, exposed to the cooling effect of spring, with loneliness hovering around her. She compares her loneliness to ‘particles of dust’ that scatter in light. She feels herself carried home by the ‘ecstatic call of a cuckoo,’ lifted ‘on the wings of a warbler’s song,’ to speak to her mother who, on ‘recovering from her fall,’ ‘calibrates her voice against the koel’s song, ‘full-throated [and] unseen’, guarded by ‘the trees in her courtyard.’ At the end of the poem, she portrays the tranquility of the village cradled on Nature’s lap against the backdrop of the din and bustle of cities. She takes a Keatsian approach to nature.

Ananya S. Guha has his four poems incorporated into this anthology. He addresses his first poem titled ‘I am Wayward’ to his lover. The poet describes himself in the first four-line stanza as ‘wayward as the sun,’ hallucinating, then carving ‘smoked dreams’, while dancing ‘in its bosom’; in the second stanza, as ‘wayward as (the) monsoon rains’, ‘plucking out a song ‘to engrave in your hair’; and in the last two-line stanza, as ‘wayward as your moonlit eyes like this poem.’

Four poems of Kaiser Haq are included in the anthology. His first poem titled ‘Old Citizen’ speaks, as the title itself suggests, of old age. He is conscious of his age (sixty years), but his friends assure him by saying that age is nothing to grieve over, if he thinks of himself, as young as a man of forty. He then remembers that he had sustained an injury when he was forty-years old. He decides to take everything in its stride and to not mind if he forgets ‘to zip up after a pee’ and ‘wear [a] red underwear on [the] Valentine’s Day’. He feels like living an ‘exceptional life’, as did Nietzsche, ‘over and over all eternity’.

Rudra Kingshuk has contributed one long poem, ‘For Isuelt Gonne’, divided into four parts, to compensate for three other poems not included. ‘Isuelt’ in the title ought to have been spelt ‘Iseult’. Iseult Bonne was born on 6 August 1894 and died on 22 March 1954. She was the daughter of Maud Gonne, Irish Republican Revolutionary and Lucien Millevoe, French politician and journalist. She married the notable novelist Francis Stuart in 1920. It was in 1913 that Iseult Bonne met Rabindranath Tagore, and was inspired by his poetic vision. Her meeting with Tagore has a reference in the poem in which Tagore (the poet) abandons himself to a spree of romancing with her.

Out of the three poems by P. Laxminarayana that appear in the anthology, in the first poem, ‘This is the Moment,’ the poet exhorts the readers to enjoy to the fullest the moment that is at his disposal before it flits away, and ‘explore the essence of existence’ in the moment. The poet’s utterance of this truth reverberates through the poem.

Jayanta Mahapatra has contributed three poems to this anthology. The first poem, ‘The Weight of Yesterday’ strikes a melancholy note. ‘Memory deserts me today,’ the poet says, though a rose ‘still blooms in silence’ to remind him of his yesterday and there are no letters reminiscent of his past left ‘to burn’. Further, he says, ‘Memories have left no tracks,’ for ‘they beat, far beyond’ the poet’s prisons’ windows ‘with their homesick, remorseless rhythms’. He concludes the poem by declaring that nothing, nor ‘even the wet night’ that keeps burning into his skin ‘touches me now’.

I shall conclude by the first of the three poems by Jen Webb, ‘Written in Skin’. The poem speaks of the effects of memory. She entreats the readers to fold anything that ‘doubles as a page’. As for herself she says she turns ‘my hand, my arm, reading lines of thought, inscribed there, scenting memory.’ Once you write anything in your skin, the poet says, your skin will recycle it over and over again,

**Bhaskar Roy Barman**

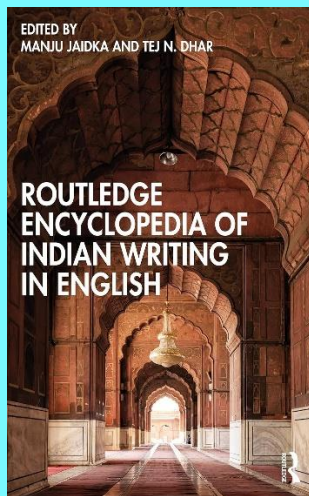
Founding President

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## The Burgeoning Field of Indian English Writing



***The Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Writing in English.* Edited by Manju Jaidka and Tej N. Dhar. New York and London: Routledge, 2023. viii+ 476pp. Hb £130.00, \$165.00. eBook £48.99, \$64.95.**

Indian Writing in English has been a contested zone since its inception. Critics have often raised the question of the relevance of literature in a language that has been a colonial imposition. The infamous comment by Lord Macaulay in 1835 privileged literature in English language over all other Indian languages. But the terrain for the development of Indian English writing has been rather rocky. Mired in the debate regarding the relevance and finesse of literature in a language not inherently Indian, critics at times ignored the writings of Indian English writers and at other times, swung to the other extreme of praising a few select ones. Criticism on Indian English writing was beset by these polar arguments. Despite all odds, it must be underscored how from the pre- to the post-independence period, English has lived, breathed and matured in India, beyond its stipulated fifteen years as decided in the official jargon. The malleability of languages has allowed for English too to include words from Indian languages to form a separate category of literature, Indian Writing in English.

Several anthologies over the years have focused on Indian Writing in English (IWE) in a piecemeal manner. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Writing in English* makes an important intervention as it covers more than 200 writers who have made a seminal contribution to the field of IWE. The encyclopedia documents the work of poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists and literary critics from its beginnings with Dean Mahomet (1759-1851) to the present day. Indian English writing is traced from the work of nineteenth century writers such as Henry Louis Vivian Derozio and Toru Dutt, iconic writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K.Narayan, to the nation building years of the twentieth century with writers such as K.A. Abbas, Girish Karnad, Nayantara Sahgal, Adil Jussawalla, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Tamsila Ao, to literature by contemporary writers such as Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Easterine Kire, Poile Sengupta, Mahesh Dattani, Shashi Tharoor, and Shashi Deshpande. Several young writers such as Meena Kandasamy, Altaf Tyrewala, Akhil Katyal, Siddhartha Gigoo, Manu Joseph, Rahul Pandita, Manu Pillai, Janice Pariat and Anindita Sengupta find an apt representation in this encyclopedia; popular writers such as Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathi have also been included. There are entries on critics such as C.D. Narasimahiah, M.K.Naik and Meenakshi Mukherjee. This mammoth work carries contributions from 134 scholars from India and abroad. As the contributors are from different countries, the encyclopedia provides a global perspective to the reader.

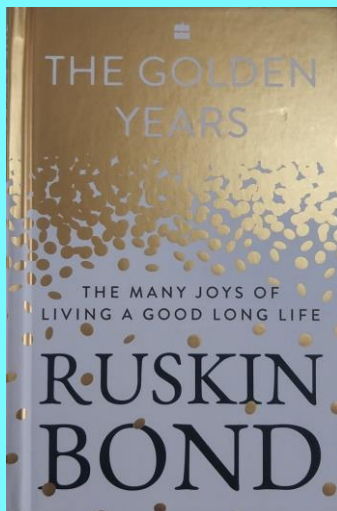
The writers included in this encyclopedia are those of Indian origin who might be located in India or in other countries. The entries provide brief biographical information about the writers and concentrate on their oeuvre along with an objective discussion of their literary works. A distinctive aspect of this book is a list of “further reading” on the Indian English authors provided at the end of each note. The entries under this category include significant secondary readings on the work of the above authors. The inclusions expand the boundaries of Indian English Writing to give criticism its unique place in this domain. This solidifies Indian English writing as a genre with its own density of work. The encyclopedia addresses the requirements of both the inquisitive undergraduate student and the researcher who would want to understand the warp and weft of this field. The encyclopedia thus functions both as a reference book as well as a source book documenting the evolution of the category of IWE.

Another significant aspect of the encyclopedia is that it features entries on 103 prominent works by Indian writers. The note on the specific text will help the reader understand the writer’s position within Indian English writing and their pivotal contribution to the area. Bharati Sarabhai’s play *Two Women*, G.V. Desani’s single novel *All About H. Hatterr*, Ahmed Ali’s novel *Twilight in Delhi*, Arundhati Roy’s first essay collection, *Algebra of Infinite Justice*, Neelum Saran Gour’s novel *Requiem in Raga in Janki* based on the life of the Hindustani singer Janki Bai Illahabaadi, Nisha Da Cunha’s short story collection, *The Quiet of the Birds*, Anita Desai’s *Artist of Disappearance* and other literary works that have determined and altered the course of IWE fall in this category. The encyclopedia therefore goes beyond a mere compilation of the writer’s work to chart the evolution of Indian English writing. Aptly titled, *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Writing in English*, the focus remains on both the literary works and the writers. At the same time, the encyclopedia does complete justice to its contributors by providing a brief note about their work. It further extends the scope of the book as it encourages the alert reader to scan these notes to look at the work done by contemporary writers in India and abroad.

In the Preface, the editors emphasize how publishing in Indian English writing completely transformed when some of the Indian English writers became the recipient of several prestigious awards. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things* turned the spotlight on Indian English writing and resulted in a phenomenal increase in publications in the field. This change in IWE was accompanied with a demand to capture the developments in this category. *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Indian Writing in English* addresses the need to concretize the history of the genre through the efforts of its writers who struggled against all odds to Indianize the language and develop it in the context of their own cultural milieu.

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***The Golden Years: The Many Joys of Living a Good Long Life.* By Ruskin Bond. India: HarperCollins Publishers, 2023. Price. Rs. 399/-. Pages, 153.**

Ruskin Bond, universally acclaimed and internationally known Indian writer in English, is credited with numerous writings in different genres of fiction and non-fiction. Born in Kasauli in 1934, living in Mussoorie since 1963, and immensely influenced by hill station, he has been writing to tell tales of his own life experiences, largely from his childhood. His stories for children have made him one of the most significant writers in children's literature because his lonely childhood, as he claims, has brought him close to children's psyche placing him in a better position to explore it.

*The Golden Years*, his most recent publication, is a work of non-fiction and is different from his previous literary exploration. Through this book, the ageing Bond has recorded his experiences in the later period of his life-span. The 89-year-old Bond believes that his years in sixties, seventies, and eighties have brought him more stories to share with his readers. In this book, he narrates his journey as a writer or more specifically, as a growing writer. "For writers," he says, "the nice thing about growing old is that it gives us more time to write about all those years of love, friendship, adventure, achievements, a changing country, a changing world, changing ways of life, history in the making" (p. 1). He is of the view that writers should not stop writing when they are growing old, as an ageing writer has a good collection of stories to tell. He shares that there is a ten-year gap in his writing career, because he started writing at a very early stage in his life, and his first book, *A Room on The Roof*, was written and published when he was still in his teens. After that, there was a long gap in his creative career but he picked it up again; he says, "in my thirties, I recovered from this period of stagnation. Life flowed on, my stories flowed on. And now, in my eighties, I still have stories" (p. 2).

Divided into sixty chapters, Bond reflects upon the delicate issue of writers growing old, and the propensity of the age that propels the writers to curb their creativity. There could be health issues due to aging body but the writers' creativity must not be abandoned; he says, "the body might falter, but the brain keeps ticking away" (p. 5). He refers to writers such as Agatha Christie, P.G. Wodehouse, G.B. Shaw, Somerset Maugham, Edith Sitwell, and Compton Mackenzie who continue their creative quest in their eighties and nineties. He also mentions Indian writers writing in English like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Khushwant Singh. However, he finds himself in a difficult position while referring to writers in Indian languages because some of them were gone before their writings bloomed in translations. It is interesting to note that Bond is not only concerned about the predicament of ageing writers, but is also sensitive towards the unnoticed or the less known writers in Indian languages.

A considerable space in the book is overshadowed by an exploration of emptiness and solitude in his life. Loneliness that caught him at a very early stage perhaps has made him to hold the pen at the prime of his age. He believes that loneliness can strike us at any stage and speculates, “loneliness is hard to deal with because we have no control over the circumstances that have brought it about” (p. 55). Bond admits that he combated the loneliness in his life through writing; reading offered him “an ageless joy.” As he says, “in the long periods of my lonely life I had to resort to two different ways of dealing with my loneliness: one to go for long walks, without any particular destination in mind; the other, to settle down in a quiet corner and read a book—any book that I could find” (p. 63). His solitude turns into loneliness which eventually leads to sleepless night, “some of us have difficulty falling asleep at night. I am one of them. We are referred to as ‘insomniacs’, which sounds rather rude, as though we are ‘maniacs’ of some sort—related to kleptomaniacs and megalomaniacs” (p. 82). His sleepless night makes him more active: “lying there in the dark, the mind, if not the body, starts buzzing with activity, and all the day’s worries and problems and problems come to the fore. Domestic problems, family problems, financial problems, work problems ...” (p. 83).

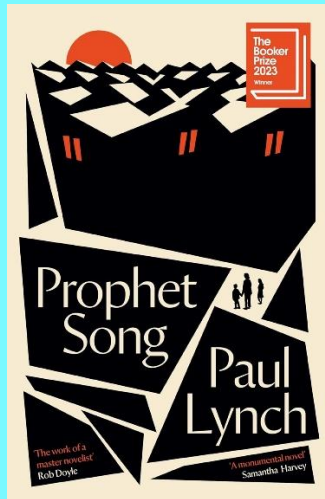
The book, in brief, is an appeal to the writers who are ageing and are encountering difficulty in creative exploration. By sharing his loneliness, emptiness, different pursuits, and difficulties, Bond encourages his fellow writers to continue with creative activity. His hatred for words like insomnia or alopecia makes him more vibrant in exploring burgeoning intellectual growth in those people. In the chapter titled “Bald and Sexy”, he says, “baldness is not a disease, it is a natural condition, and often accompanies intellectual qualities. Shakespeare was bald, and so was P.G. Wodehouse. Both great men” (p. 128). At last, he makes an ultimate claim, “it’s *go* with the wind and not ‘gone with the wind’; .... Better to welcome the approaching wind, become one with it, and allow it to take you where it will—to great heights or through winding valleys or across plains” (p. 141).

Structured in concise essays and narrated in a subjective-cum-retrospective style, Bond’s *The Golden Years* offers a speculative salad bowl to its readers. It highlights creativity in the ever-growing minds of writers irrespective of their age.

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***Prophet Song*. By Paul Lynch. London: One World, 2023. Rs. 389**

2023 Booker Prize winner Paul Lynch’s phenomenal novel *Prophet Song* is a caveat placed between the two epigraphs that precede the opening page of the novel— ‘The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done; and there is no new thing under the sun’. These oft-quoted lines from the Ecclesiastes is followed by Bertolt Brecht’s stanza that has often heralded a release from an overpowering feeling of nihilism— ‘In the dark times will there also be singing? Yes, there will also be singing. About the dark times.’ So what are the defining parameters that make Lynch’s novel seem to be a novel apart? Though the location is Dublin, Ireland, Lynch’s novel is not Ireland-centric. Nor is it about Irish civil strife or its conflict with England. Instead *Prophet Song* is a novel that addresses the turmoil and trauma that ordinary people are compelled to experience in times of war, conflict, strife, ethnic cleansing and genocide, among others. The victimization of the ordinary people whose sole desire is to lead a secure life with loved ones, friends and family receives a severe jolt, a sense of uprooting from all positive emotions, values and beliefs, that are reduced to mockery, redundancy and absurdity. The authoritarian regime emerges supreme and supercilious; the rebel groups learn to weaponize themselves. But their weapons are no match for the high caliber guns and aircrafts that flatten houses and their inmates. Wars have always shrugged at casualties and collateral damage as inevitable. Mass murder impersonalized.

Yet the innate urge to survive, the irrepressible urge of hope and the indomitable life force, makes Eilish the mother figure of epics of all cultures stand out as a warrior who just demands safety and security for her children. Eilish the career scientist transforms into a heroic mother, resolute in her tenacity and her vow to herself that she needs to protect her children. Despite the obvious variables the novel reminds informed readers about Gorky’s Mother, the mother in Henry Lawson’s short story *Drover’s Wife*, Brecht’s Mother Courage, Synge’s Maurya, Steinbeck’s Ma Joad, the mothers Kunti and Gandhari in the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, respectively, among many others. The primal protective instinct of the mother as the preserver of her children, family and home, her astounding capacity of enduring and overcoming all life-threatening challenges is truly outstanding. When an educated, cultured high professional representative of a middle-class family in the global North is forced to endure such excruciating and humiliating experiences for no fault of hers, it seems that all such achievements to make a mark in the world and construct one’s identity is utterly futile.

The power mongers subject the majority of the people to inhuman sufferings that cannot be ignored as collateral damage. The novel asserts in a subtle yet firm manner Lynch’s purpose as stated in his Booker Prize interview: ‘*I was trying to see into the modern chaos. The unrest in Western democracies. The problem of Syria—the implosion of an entire nation, the scale of its refugee crisis and the West’s indifference. The*



*invasion of Ukraine had not even begun. I couldn't write directly about Syria, so I brought the problem to Ireland as a simulation.*' Eilish's telepathic conversation with her missing husband Larry as well as her sons Mark and Bailey, create the impression that the dead and the lost family members are with her and within her.

The breathlessness in the narrative that the avoidance of paragraph breaks creates is sublimated by the use of poetic images and phrases, that are redolent of an elegiac tone, or a reaching out to a verbal healing in the claustrophobic ecosystem when the time is out of joint and no one can set it right despite the heroic resilience of Eilish and her daughter Molly, and even the toddler, a symbol of blissful ignorance. Lynch states elsewhere that his purpose has been to represent grief not grievances, he did not opt for cant and certitude in his narrative, which could well be a social novel.

*Prophet Song* narrates the harrowing experiences of a middle class, cultured, educated family in a strife-torn location, where unreason, authoritarianism, fascism, totalitarianism and other such synonyms define the collective misery and torture of the ordinary people who are at the receiving end of such mindless violence and corruption. Though it is a devastating narrative of a family that is torn apart without any explanation, *Prophet Song* is a searing novel about the intrepid role of E, mother of four children, who suddenly finds that her entire family has splintered, her husband and her eldest son both disappearing without any means of contacting them ever again. Her father who lived elsewhere in the same neighborhood who was presumably a scientist like his trained microbiologist daughter, tells Eilish that their home and homeland had receded from them. Like many others, Eilish and her family should move out to Canada, Australia or anywhere considered safe, by taking bus journeys, journeys through the night in locked goods containers, crossing seas to reach the safer borders.

Such descriptions of forced migration, distressing and humiliating evacuation is not just restricted to the refugee exodus in Syria in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This despicable phenomenon of men, women and children being forced to vacate their homes and homeland, carrying some essential possessions in bundles and walking towards the unknown creates a terrifying traumatic impact. The global South has been a witness to this mass humiliation for decades now. The mass movement of displaced people crossing the India-Pakistan borders during the Partition in 1947, the Bangladesh war in 1971, the displaced people of Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine and most recently Palestinians in the Gaza strip, vindicate Lynch's observation that his novel can be read as a warning as it can be read as a simulation of events that are happening in the world right now.

Lynch claims that *Prophet Song* is more a metaphysical novel rather than a political one. Lynch thereby broadens the span and perspectives of this powerful fictional narrative that prophetically envisages that the nightmare of dystopia can well haunt us in the real universe if the world chooses to look the other way. Lynch's song of the Prophet emphatically and urgently claims that compassion fatigue dehumanizes the world. It is the need of the hour to ignite collective compassion in the hearts of people irrespective of location, race, religion and gender. Paul Lynch highlights the need for radical empathy. *Prophet Song* is a must read for informed readers, for its stylized use of language and its incisive and insightful use of content triggers introspection, resistance and resilience. As Paul Lynch comments, "*Prophet Song is partly an attempt at radical empathy. To understand better, we must first experience the problem for ourselves. And so I sought to deepen the dystopian by bringing to it a high degree of realism. I wanted to deepen the reader's immersion to such a degree that by the end of the book, they would not just know, but feel this problem for themselves.*"

**Sanjukta Dasgupta**

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**NEW PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS**

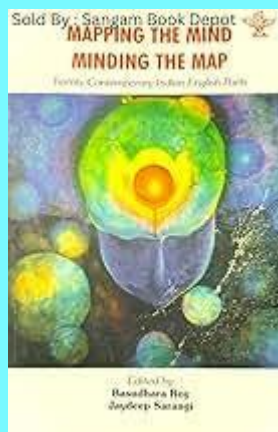
**ANGELIE MULTANI, SWATI PAL, NANDINI SAHA, ALBEENA SHAKIL, ARJUN GHOSH**



***From Canon to Covid Transforming English Literary Studies in India: Essays in Honor of GJV Prasad*; Edited by Angelie Multani, Swati Pal, Nandini Saha, Albeena Shakil, Arjun Ghosh, Routledge India, ISBN 9781032508436, August 31, 2023, 278 pages, Rs. 3,594/- (paperback)**

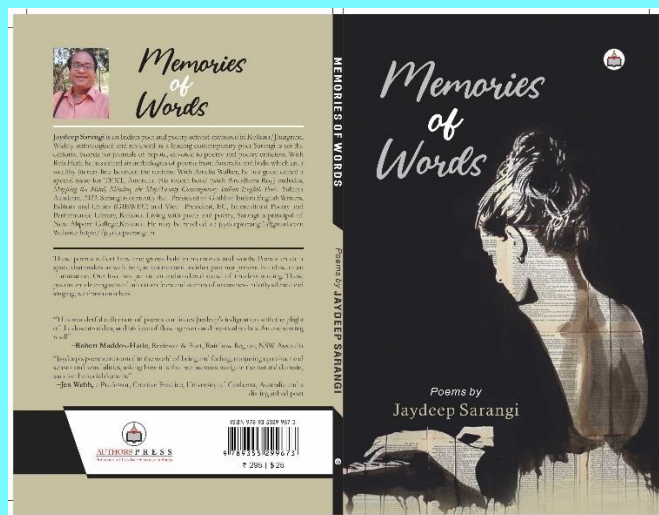
This book was a labor of love for both, the editors as well as the contributors, for it was a tribute to a much-loved teacher, GJV Prasad, who taught across and beyond genres, language, regions and cultures. The diverse nature of his interests as an academic is reflected in the sub themes into which the book is divided. From the introductory mapping of literary studies in India to a sub section on drama, moving on to poetry and thereon to translation and trans creation and finally to fiction, language and context, the book is of interest to academics and general readers across disciplines. The list of contributors includes well-known names from the world of English literature studies in India: M. Asaduddin; Rukmini Bhaya Nair; Meena T. Pillai; Mala Pandurang; Angelie Multani; B. Mangalam; Anuradha Marwah; Keki N. Daruwalla; Udaya Kumar; Santosh K. Sareen; C.S. Lakshmi; Somdatta Mandal; Radha Chakravarty; Tabish Khair; Meenakshi Bharat; Jisha Menon and K.B. Veio Pou and Achingliu Kamei. This is not a book meant to be kept on a dusty shelf; it is a book to be delighted over as every chapter carries a weight of interesting knowledge. Do get a copy and read it!

## JAYDEEP SARANGI



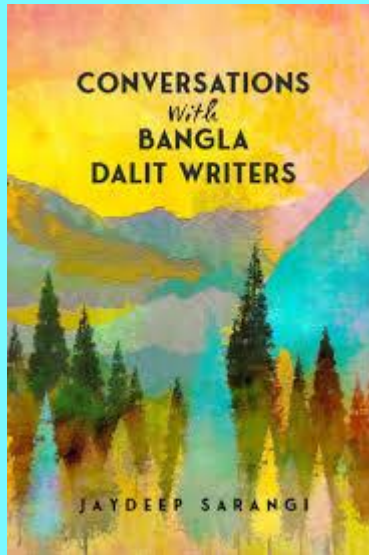
1. *Mapping the Mind, Minding the Map: Twenty Contemporary Indian English Poets*, Edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Basudhara Roy, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, ISBN 978-93-5548-513-7, 2023, Pages: 363, Rs. 400/-

**About the book:** This is a trendsetting anthology of twenty canon making poets with ten poems by each poet. These poets come from different backgrounds. Daruwalla was a police officer, Mahapatra taught physics in colleges in Odisha, Mamang Dai worked as a journalist, Robin teaches at NEHU while Ashwani Kumar is a professor at Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. The poets have a variety of concerns. The selection of a mere twenty poets from the rich present when there is an astonishing number of them writing with remarkable felicity and resplendent grace, can only be an extremely difficult task and riddled with its own limitations and injustices.



2. *Memories of Words*, Jaydeep Sarangi, Authorspress, New Delhi, ISBN 978-93-5529-967-3, 2023, Pages: 76, Rs. 295/-

**About the book:** This book reflects how one grows old in memories and words. Poems create a space that makes us walk into, into a moment neither past nor present but close to an illumination. Our love has put on an embroidered shawl of timeless waiting. These poems are clearing acts of uncertain fears and storms of uneasiness in lofty silence and singing, we draw ourselves.

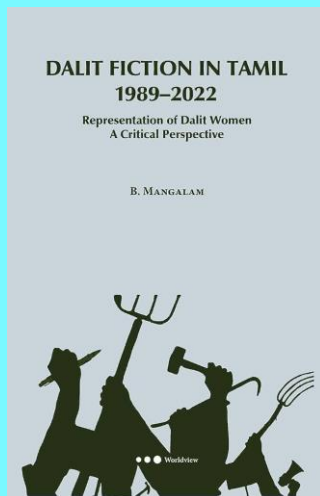


**3. *Conversation with Bangla Dalit Writers*, Jaydeep Sarangi, New Alipore College Publishing, Kolkata, 2023, ISBN 978-81-955507-1-5, Pages 116, Rs. 100/-**

**About the book:** This is a collection of interviews of Bangla Dalit writers conducted by Jaydeep Sarangi. This book is an attempt to read the Bengali Dalit contexts as a repository of personal information about the writers; their collective narratives of Dalits in Bengal; and how social changes, historical events, and cultural movements have influenced the Dalit literary movement in Bengal.

#### **Bio Note**

**Jaydeep Sarangi** is a widely anthologized bilingual poet, poetry-activist and scholar of Dalit Studies and Postcolonial Discourse. He has been dubbed as “Bard on the Banks of Dulung.” He is the President, Guild of Indian English Writers, Editors and Critics (GIEWEC). He is Principal of New Alipore College, Kolkata. Website: <https://jaydeepsarangi.in/>

**B. MANGALAM**

Title: ***Dalit Fiction in Tamil 1989--2022***

*Representation of Dalit Women, A Critical Perspective*

Author: B.Mangalam

Delhi: Worldview, 2023; pages 283, Price Rs.595

ISBN 978-82267-75-1

**About the Book:**

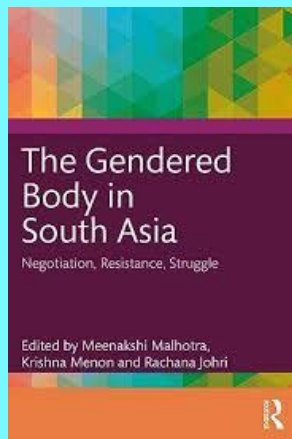
*Dalit Fiction in Tamil 1989--2022* offers a critique and a survey of representation of Dalit women in Dalit literary discourse. It offers incisive insights on the writings of Sivakami, Bama, Imayam, Sukirtarani, K.A. Gunasekaran and other contemporary writers. Their standpoint on the intersectionality of caste and gender is analysed through a close reading of their fiction, poetry and plays. The book also examines the gender-caste interface in short fiction, theatre, folk songs, digital media and in recent Tamil movies. The book should be of interest to students, research scholars, critics, feminists and Dalit activists.

GJV Prasad in his *Foreword* observes that "This is a book that should give rise to many more; it is a foundational work for future scholarship."

**Bio Note**

**B. Mangalam** is Professor, Department of English at Aryabhata College, University of Delhi. She translates from Tamil and Hindi to English. Her recent publications include, Ilango *Atikal The Book of Vanci*, Worldview, 2023.

## MEENAKSHI MALHOTRA

***The Gendered Body in South Asia: Negotiation, Resistance, Struggle***

Eds Meenakshi Malhotra (IACLALS member) et al,

Routledge 2023

ISBN 978-1-032-70228-5

pp 356

Keywords: Gender, Multiple bodies, Protest, Violence, Transgression, Veil

**About the book:** The book locates the discourse on the gendered body within the rapidly transitioning South Asian landscape. It critically analyses the politics of the gender body through different inter and transdisciplinary lenses, including psychoanalysis, poststructuralism and literature. Featuring twenty-two writers, the book concerns itself with a spectrum of issues faced by women in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The implementation of the *Hudood* ordinances in Pakistan is discussed by writer-journalist Aysha Baqir, while Anu Aneja discusses the subversion /appropriation of male-only art forms in her essay on *Inside Girls* (an anthology of Pakistani women's poetry). The narrative of the "birangonas"- or war-heroines as the raped women of the Bangladeshi liberation war were referred to, is discussed by Sohana Manzoor through her discussion of Razia Rahman's novel, "Rokter Okshor" (1978) written about the many women who were driven to sex-work and prostitution. Simran Chaddha, another IACLALS member, has explored the militarisation of women in the LTTE in Sri Lanka. Disciplining of girl students' bodies in a convent school in Delhi uses a Foucauldian paradigm to give a gendered perspective of education. The book offers a unique take on the new realities of mall-multiplex inundated urban landscapes where many women literary perform a literal border-crossing on an everyday basis as they negotiate their lives between urban slums and hyperreal sites of the glamorous malls dotting the city. Dotted with women's responses to a variety of contemporary and current issues which include the anti CAA-NRC campus protests (by Tamannna Basu) Shaheen Bagh (Meenakshi Gopinath, Krishna Menon, Rukmini Sen and Niharika Banerjea) and the pandemic (Krishna Menon, Deepti Sachdev and Rukmini Sen) the book engages in varying registers with everyday embodiments and lived realities. The relation of the psyche and the somatic are discussed by practising psychoanalysts Nilofer Kaul and Shalini Masih, even as cultural practices of veiling and female genital mutilation among specific communities are analysed. The memorialising of bodies in the form of museum artefacts is dealt with by Shuchi Kapila as she discusses the Partition Museum in Amritsar. The disabled body (discussed by Anita Ghai), the marginalised and transgressive body (Meenakshi Malhotra, Jaya Sharma) adumbrate the complex coordinates of the gendered body in the global South.

Going beyond the stylistic economy of academic writing, for instance in the impassioned opening lines of Giti Chandra's essay where she deconstructs the binaries of victim-survivor: "A woman's body

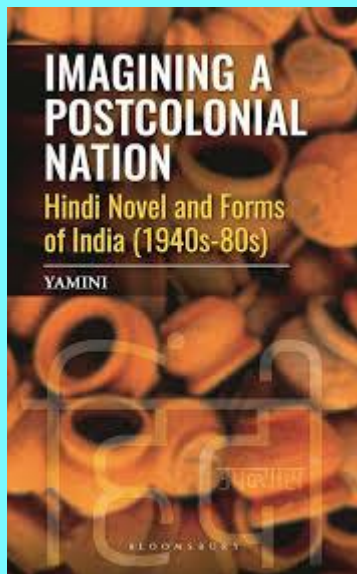


is a story that men tell each other. When it is full-hipped, it is a tale of their healthy children; when it is fair, it speaks of their wealth; when it is narrow, it proclaims their access to gyms; and when it is tanned, it flaunts their ability to vacation on sunny isles," the book offers a rich glimpse of the everyday corporealities of South Asia.

**Bio Note**

**Dr Meenakshi Malhotra**, Department of English, Hansraj College, Delhi University has edited two textbooks on life narratives. Her most recent work is a co-edited book on *The Gendered Body in South Asia: Negotiation, Resistance, Struggle* (2024). Her other publications include articles in international journals like JIWS (Journal of International Women's Studies) and Indialogs, in books like *Making the Woman* (Routledge 2023), *WGS in India: Crossings* (Routledge, 2019), on "Subjugated Knowledges and Emergent Voices" in *Revolving around Indias* (Cambridge Publishers 2020), on *Kali in Unveiling Desire*, (Rutgers University Press, 2018). She has been part of curriculum development with several universities, a consultant for school textbooks, a short-term Charles Wallace Fellow, visiting faculty at Grinnell College, Iowa and University of Minnesota at Duluth and a Nalanda Studies Fellow.

YAMINI



Title: *Imagining a Postcolonial Nation: Hindi Novels and Forms of India (1940s-80s)*

Author: Yamini

ISBN: 9789356400221

Pages: 284

Publisher: Bloomsbury

Year: 2023

Key-Words: Hindi novel, Nationalism, Formalistic Experiments, Realism, Idealism

***Imagining a Postcolonial Nation: Hindi Novels and Forms of India (1940s-80s)***

**About the book:** Analysing processes of nation-formation and nationalism(s) via experiments with the novel form and versions of realism in Hindi, conversations between the political and the cultural, rural/borders and the urban/central spaces, individual subjectivity and social structures, and the challenges Hindi novels' internal linguistic diversity poses to formalised Hindi's hegemony, *Imagining a Postcolonial Nation: Hindi Novels and Forms of India (1940s-80s)* traces Hindi fiction's history of postcolonial India. The multiplicity of realisms indicates significant responses to postcolonial nationalism, idealistic, critical, regional, satirical and psychological.

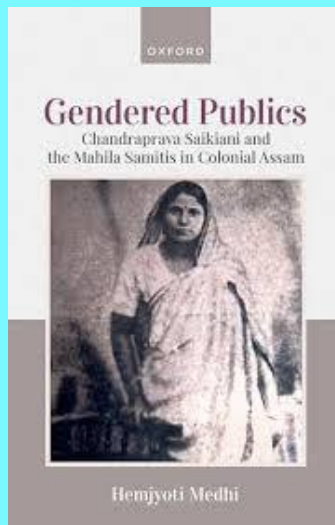
Looking at indigenous narrative methods employed by authors to critically evolve Western ideas of the nation and novel, the book explores the simultaneous convergences and divergences between literary and political understandings of ideological, religious and linguistic nationalisms. Surveying the broad sentiments of idealism, enchantment and disenchantment with freedom and postcoloniality, it studies the possibilities of fiction embodying national history without an outright commitment to mainstream nationalism or nationalist literary canon formation.

It also briefly tries to understand the repercussions of nationalism as a masculinist project and its gendered nature affecting a section of writing, novels by women authors, to present counter-narratives to both national and literary canons. Choosing a fairly broad historical timeframe, the book reveals the radical potential of narratives that have over the years been critically categorised as canonical. It reopens discussions around nationalism within novels that have been often canonised as apparently uncritically nationalist.

**Bio Note**

**Dr Yamini** teaches English language and literatures at Dyal Singh College (M), University of Delhi. She completed her doctoral research from the Department of English, University of Delhi, in 2016

in the area of postcolonial Indian literature. Her areas of interest include Indian literatures, theories of nationalism, postcolonial literatures and theory and gender studies. She has been an associate at Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, in 2015 and 2016. She has also presented papers at a number of national and international conferences and seminars. She resides in Delhi and writes on literature, cinema, social media and popular culture. She has published academic and opinion pieces in Muse India, The Book Review, Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences, DailyO and more.

**HEMJYOTI MEDHI*****Gendered Publics: Chandraprava Saikiani and the Mahila Samitis in Colonial Assam***

Author: Hemjyoti Medhi

ISBN: 978-0-19-948290-0

Total Number of Pages: 352

Published by: Oxford University Press India

Year: December, 2023

Keywords: Chandraprava Saikiani, Assam Mahila Samiti, Women's Studies, Vernacular Public Sphere, South Asian Studies

The book *Gendered Publics: Chandraprava Saikiani and the Mahila Samitis in Colonial Assam* (Oxford University Press, 2023) is a first of its kind comprehensive appraisal of the relatively unexplored but highly impactful women's association, the Assam Mahila Samiti (1926 cont.) which led one of the most remarkable women's movements in colonial India; Sucheta Kripalani praised it as the 'largest democratic women's association in India' in 1949. Central to the Assam Mahila Samiti story is its founding Secretary, the firebrand feminist Chandraprava Saikiani (1901–72), who despite being an unwed mother and belonging to a 'lower caste', was a celebrated writer, mobilizer, and publisher. The book traverses these individual and collective journeys from the 1920s to the 1950s and explores how women's movements evolve in conversation/contestation with both traditional spaces such as *naam kirtan* and contemporary ones of tribal-caste associations, anti-colonial movements, and international ideological paradigms such as the Bolshevik Revolution. This study uncovers crucial moments, such as the controversy when the Samiti served a legal notice to a groom in 1934 to stop a child marriage, to argue that gender may not function merely as constitutive of the public; women's collectives may shape, transform, and orchestrate a veritable gendered public, resistant to both native patriarchy and sometimes to colonial authority. The book makes significant methodological intervention by navigating disciplinary borders through a constant juxtaposition of print sources with handwritten minutes of early mahila samiti meetings, performative spaces such as women's singing of *naam kirtan*, women's weaving, and women's memory (recorded as part of a digital archive of the mahila samitis in Assam). It provides insights into issues related to history and memory, literary studies, nascent vernacular publics in South Asia, and interdisciplinary women's studies.

**Bio Note**

**Hemjyoti Medhi** is Associate Professor, Department of English, Tezpur University. She coordinated a project under the Sephis Programme, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, to create a digital archive of select mahila samitis in Assam and has been working to take these stories to a

larger audience through publication, exhibitions, media, and a short documentary film *Xeito Monot Assey* (That, I Remember). Her recent publication is *Gendered Publics: Chandraprava Saikiani and the Mahila Samitis in Colonial Assam* (Oxford University Press, 2023).

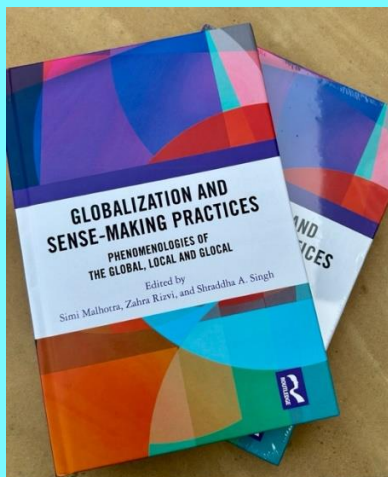
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## SHRADDHA A. SINGH AND ZAHRA RIZVI



### 1. *Globalization and Planetary Ethics: New Terrains of Consciousness.*

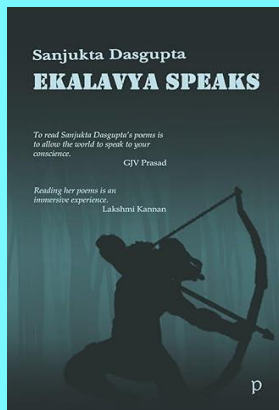
- Co-authored with Simi Malhotra. Publisher: Routledge
- Year of Publication: 2023
- ISBN: 978-1-032-22276-9
- Pages: 210
- **Keywords:** Planetary ethics, dystopia, utopia, posthumanism, Anthropocene



### 2. *Globalization and Sense-Making Practices: Phenomenologies of the Global/ Local/ Glocal.*

- Co-authored with Simi Malhotra. Publisher: Routledge
- Year of Publication: 2023
- ISBN: 978-1-03222281-3
- Pages: 296
- **Keywords:** digital, spatial, creative, sense-making, phenomenology

## SANJUKTA DASGUPTA



### New Book: *Ekalavya Speaks*

- **Publisher** : PENPRINTS; First Edition (17 December 2023)
- **ISBN-13** : 978-8196657796

About the book: ‘The myth of the weavers’ thumbs may also have grown out of the famous Mahabharata story of Ekalavya, a dark-skinned, low-caste boy whose skill at archery rivalled that of the noble heroes, the Pandavas; to maintain the Pandavas’ supremacy as archers, their teacher demanded that Ekalavya cut off his right thumb.’ ‘An interesting parallel between Ekalavya and Karna, an illegitimate child abandoned by his Kshatriya mother and brought up by a charioteer. Like Ekalavya, Karna finds that his lower caste disqualifies him from an archery contest with Arjuna, again under Drona’s aegis;...’ The poem ‘Ekalavya Speaks’ perhaps defines the purpose, perspectives, resilience and relevance of Ekalavya in our times. Many of the poems in this volume address the deep-rooted prevalence of systemic marginalization of citizens of our country, on the basis of caste, class, gender and religion, among others. Othering is the unifying theme in this volume of 100 poems, though some of the poems do not typically focus on issues of discrimination and ostracism.

### Bio Note

**Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta**, Professor and Former Head, Department of English and Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Calcutta University and Fulbright Fellow, is a poet, short story writer, critic and translator. She was a member of the General Council of Sahitya Akademi New Delhi and Convenor, English Advisory Board, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi. She is the President of the Intercultural Poetry and Performance Library, Kolkata. She received the WEI Kamala Das Poetry Award in 2020 and the ETHOS Literary Award in 2022. Dasgupta has 27 published books. Her nine published books of poetry are Snapshots (1997), Dilemma (2002), First Language (2005), More Light (2009), Lakshmi Unbound (2017) Sita’s Sisters (2019) Unbound: New and Selected Poems edited by Jaydeep Sarangi and Sanghita Sanyal (2021), Indomitable Draupadi (2022), and Ekalavya Speaks (2023). Her poems have been translated in German, Serbian, Bengali, Hindi, Punjabi, Kashmiri and Tamil.



## TRIBUTES / OBITUARIES

### REHMAN RAHI

(1925 – 2023)



Rehman Rahi was a Kashmiri poet, critic and translator who has several poetry anthologies of poetry to his credit. He has also translated a number of poets into the Kashmiri language. In his decades-long career, he received numerous recognitions, including the Padma Shri (2000) and the Jnanpith Award (2007), India's highest literary honor, for his collection *Siyah Rood Jaeren Manz* (*In Black Drizzle*), making him the first Kashmiri to receive this recognition. He also received the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1961 for his poetry collection *Nawroz-i-Saba* (*Advent of the Spring Breeze*).

The unofficial poet laureate of Kashmir, Rahi, was born Abdul Rehman Mir on 6th May 1925 in the Wazpora area of Srinagar in a financially weak family. Enrolled in Islamia High School at Rajouri Kadal, Srinagar, he would regularly visit a bookseller nearby, where perhaps his literary grooming began. Seeing Rahi's enthusiasm and interest in literature, the bookseller ordered the complete works of Iqbal from Lahore for Rahi.

Rahi earned his master's degree in Persian from Sri Pratap College, and in English from the University of Kashmir, in Srinagar. In his college days, he started writing and adopted the pen-name Rehman Rahi. Rahi began his professional career as a clerk in a government department, after which he joined a regional Urdu newspaper, *Khidmat*, as an opinion writer. His writings in the newspaper mainly focused on the partition of the subcontinent and the misery it caused to the people of Kashmir. In 1964, he joined the Department of Persian, University of Kashmir as a lecturer and switched to the Department of Kashmiri as its first Head of the Department in 1979. He retired from the university in 1985. The university taraana (anthem) "Yee Mouj Kasheeri," is authored by Rahi.

Rahi joined the Progressive Writers' Association, affiliated with the Communist Party of India. He also edited the literary journal of the Progressive Writers Association, *Kwang Posh* (Saffron flower), for a brief period. Later, having denounced Communism, he became more guarded about his political ideology. Around 1989, as Kashmir plunged deeper into political turmoil and violence, Rahi's poems grew grimmer, yet he continued to avoid addressing the politics around them. However, in *The New*

*York Times* interview in 2022, he expressed regret at his own, and other poets' failure to adequately address the harsh realities of his land, saying, "We stood with pen and paper on the banks of a river filled with blood and chose not to see that the pristine water had turned red."

Rahi faced both, criticism and accolades for his neutrality on the situation in Kashmir. His famous song and my personal favourite, "Zindeh rouzneh baapat loukh cheh maraan, tche marakhna" ("To live, people die, won't you die; will you drink this cup of poison in silence, won't you even cry?") was broadcast by the former Radio Kashmir Srinagar frequently during the early days of the insurgency. It aptly depicted the situation on the ground and was hugely popular among the masses.

Rahi published dozens of poetry and prose anthologies in the Kashmiri language and is widely credited with restoring the glory of the language. Some of his important works include *Sana-Wani Saaz*, *Sukbok Soda*, *Kalam-e-Rahi*, and prose including literary criticism *Kahwat*, *Kashir Shara Sombran*, *Azich Kashir Shayiri*, *Kashir Naghmati Shayiri*, *Saba Moallaqat*, and *Farmove Zartushtadia*. His decision to switch from Urdu to Kashmiri was the result of a *musbaira* (poetic symposium) in which he participated in Raithan, Budgam, in the 1950s. Literary doyens couldn't understand his Urdu poetry while his Kashmiri poems received resounding applause. Thus began his long love affair with the Kashmiri language.

Rahi strongly advocated freeing the Kashmiri language from the clutches of Urdu and Persian, which hugely dominated the literary scene of the valley at the time. In his 1966 poem, "Jalveh tei Zabur" ("Hymn to a Language"), he writes:

Oh Kashmiri language! I swear by you,  
You are my awareness, my vision too  
The radiant ray of my perception  
The whirling violin of my conscience! (Translated by Ashaq Hussain Parray)

Rahi also championed the Kashmiri language in more concrete ways. He was one of the greatest advocates of the campaign to restore the language in school curricula, which finally came through in 2000. He also actively helped recruit teachers and scholars to teach Kashmiri and designed courses for the students.

Rahi said that the Kashmiri language is a nation in itself, having its own civilization and culture. He strongly believed that the language was essential for preserving the Kashmiri identity, ensnared in complexities and disputes. "If there's no Kashmiri language, there will be no Kashmiri, and hence there will be no Kashmir", said Rahi.

Undoubtedly, Rahi has had a lasting impact on Kashmiri culture and literature as a poet, critic and literary theorist. He stands out for the legacy of nurturing his vernacular language. Rahi completely transformed the poetic idiom of Kashmiri poetry by freeing it from the effects of Persian motifs. The grandeur and artistry of his writings remain unparalleled.

Rahi had a poetic way of speaking. Majid Maqbool, Rahi's interviewer, observes he spoke in such an "animated voice as if he was speaking in front of an audience . . . his eyes lit up like those of a child whenever he spoke about the Kashmiri language and literature" (Kashmir Lit).

In the eminent Rahi's demise, barely a few months away from his 98<sup>th</sup> birthday, we have lost a poet of global caliber. He was condoled widely and deeply by literary personalities and by the general public. He died peacefully in his sleep and was laid to rest in his ancestral graveyard in the Vichar Nag area of Srinagar.

“If (Kashmiri) language lives on, Rahi also lives on,” said Rehman Rahi while speaking with Majid Maqbool, smiling (Kashmir Lit).

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**MILAN KUNDERA****(1929 – 2023)**

The novelist destroys the house of his life and uses its stones to build the house of his novel.  
<sup>1</sup> (Kundera, 1986)

Milan Kundera was a man trapped in his own struggles with memory and forgetting, a profound Novelist, an exiled writer, admirer of music and existential philosophy. He was born on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1929 in Královo Pole, Czechoslovakia (now Czech Republic) to Ludvik Kundera and Milada Kunderová. His father was a musicologist and his mother was a teacher. From a very young age, he became fond of music through his father's influence. Many of his later writings reflected the notes of his deep knowledge in music and musical instruments. Kundera joined the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (FAMU) to study film in his early life. In the same place, he was offered a lecturing position in world literature after he completed his graduation. In 1947 he became a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Grappling with influential leaders at an ideological level led to his expulsion from the Party in 1950. He was readmitted in 1956 and again expelled in 1970 for his reformist activism. This event also became the main inspiration for his first novel *The Joke* that was published in 1967. The book had strong opinions about the totalitarianism of the Communist party and its policies. The book was banned soon after its publication. The following year was very significant for Kundera and his homeland. 1968 marked the reforms led by Dubček also famous as the 'Prague Spring' (5<sup>th</sup> Jan to 21<sup>st</sup> August 1968). The brief period of reform came to an end after the Russian troops and Warsaw Pact members invaded the country. Kundera's personal experience of that time can be witnessed through his loosely attached novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (published in 1975). Kundera's employment of dark humour, history intertwined with art, politics and creative storytelling makes a deep impression on the reader's mind.

His first published work was a long epic poem titled *Man: A Wide Garden*<sup>2</sup> in 1953. He became internationally recognised after the publication of his play *The Owners of the Keys*<sup>3</sup> in 1962. After his books got banned in 1968, he went to France for the first time. Soon he emigrated to France and was offered a job as a lecturer in 1975 in the University of Rennes. The manuscript of his second novel *Life Is Elsewhere* was smuggled beyond the borders with the help of his friend Claude Gallimard. This

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<sup>1</sup> Kundera, Milan, and Linda Asher. *The Art of the Novel*. New York Etc., Harper Perennial, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Culik (January 2007). "[Man, a wide garden: Milan Kundera as a young Stalinist](#)" (PDF). University of Glasgow. [Archived](#) (PDF) from the original on 9 October 2022. Retrieved 19 November 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Day, Barbara. *Trial by Theatre*. Karolinum, Nakladatelství Univerzity Karlovy, Czech, 2020.

was published in French. He was disappointed with the kind of censorship his works received by the major European translators and even in his own country. He took it upon himself to closely work with the translators for his later works. *Life is Elsewhere*<sup>4</sup> was re-translated with help of Aaron Asher into English in 2000. This book won the Prix Médicis prize in 1973. Kundera's most famous work is probably *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* published in 1984. A novel about a surgeon's life, two women and the in-betweenness of the 'eternal recurrence'. His scepticism intermingled with humour connecting distant locations, twitches of exile, nostalgia and philosophical musings enhanced Kundera's reputation as a novelist. As he writes,

The heaviest of burdens crushes us, we sink beneath it, it pins us to the ground. But in love poetry of every age, the woman longs to be weighed down by the man's body. The heaviest of burdens is therefore simultaneously an image of life's most intense fulfilment. The heavier the burden, the closer our lives come to the earth, the more real and truthful they become. Conversely, the absolute absence of burden causes man to be lighter than air, to soar into heights, take leave of the earth and his earthly being, and become only half real, his movements as free as they are insignificant. What then shall we choose? Weight or lightness?<sup>5</sup> (Kundera, 1984)

His work has direct influences from the writings of Boccaccio, François Rabelais, Franz Kafka and Friedrich Nietzsche. For Kundera, the underpinning of humour, history and philosophy gives European novel its distinct flavour. Philip Kaufman made a film adapting this book in 1988, which was disliked by Kundera. His other novels include *Immortality* (1988), *Slowness* (1995), *Identity* (1998), *Ignorance* (2000), *The Festival of Insignificance* (2014). He also has a short story collection titled *Laughable Loves* (1969), numerous other collections of essays, poetry and plays. In 1985, Kundera received the Jerusalem Prize. His acceptance speech has now become one of the essays collected in *The Art of the Novel* (1986). He received the Austrian State Prize for European Literature in 1987. In 2000, he was awarded the international Herder Prize. In 2007, he was awarded the Czech State Literature Prize. In 2009, he was awarded the Prix Mondial Cino Del Duca. In Brno, his homeland, he was awarded honorary citizenship in 2010. In 2011, he was bestowed the Ovid prize and in 2020, he received the Franz Kafka literary prize. On 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2023 after a prolonged illness, Kundera died in Paris.

The novelist makes no great issue of his ideas. He is an explorer feeling his way in an effort to reveal some unknown aspect of existence. He is fascinated not by his voice but by a form he is seeking, and only those forms that meet the demands of his dream become part of his work. Fielding, Sterne, Flaubert, Proust, Faulkner, Celine, Calvino. The writer inscribes himself on the spiritual map of his time, of his country, on the map of the history of ideas.<sup>6</sup> (Kundera, 1986)

Kundera always preferred himself as a novelist, maintaining a position of moral ambiguity. His hedonist attitudes, juxtaposition of perspectives, the polyphonic voices through critical discourses of political and historical markers, makes his work that much more intriguing. As he explains the comedy(humour) should help to reveal some previously unexplored truth and the writers who succeed in doing that are true masters and not the ones who make us laugh without purpose. He elaborates that history has long been considered a field dedicated only to serious research. However, it also has an uncharted humorous side. Just like sexuality also has a humorous side. Troubled by controversy, curated in the time of political upheaval, playfully cajoled with dark comedy with a novelist's touch, Milan Kundera remains one of the most sought-after authors in the last hundred years. In

<sup>4</sup> Kundera, Milan, and Aaron Asher. *Life Is Elsewhere*. London, Faber And Faber, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Kundera, Milan. *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*. London, Faber And Faber, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> "The New York Times: Book Review Search Article." Archive.nytimes.com, archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/98/05/17/specials/kundera-words.html. Accessed 13 June 2024.

Immortality, he said, "Living, there is no happiness in that. Living: carrying one's painful self through the world. But being, being is happiness. Being: becoming a fountain on which the universe falls like warm rain."<sup>7</sup> As Kundera shifts into a state of being, his works remain as the fountain of passion, resistance, and remembrance in the ever-evolving realm of literature.

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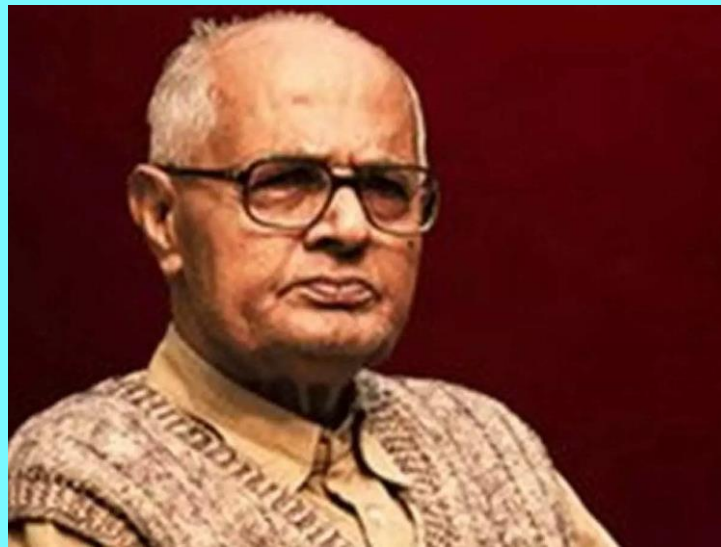
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<sup>7</sup> Kundera, Milan and Peter Kussi. *Immortality*. Czech Republic, 1988.



**NILMANI PHOOKAN****(1933 – 2023)****In Memory of Nilmani Phookan: Assam's Beloved Poet and Thinker**

Nilmani Phookan (also known as Nilmani Phookan Jr.) a renowned Assamese poet and a legend of Assamese literature, passed away at the ripe old age of 89 on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2023. A beacon of contemporary Assamese Literature, his demise marks the end of an era leaving behind a rich literary tapestry that continues to enthrall the world and resonate within minds.

Born on September 10<sup>th</sup> 1933 to Kirtinath Phookan and Bardabala Phookan at Dergaon in Golaghat district; he had to experience the loss of his mother at an early age. His childhood was surrounded by Assam's lush green landscapes and intricate cultural vividity, which influenced his poetic sensibilities. This influence is apparent in his poems that beautifully portray these themes. He completed his schooling at Dergaon High School and pursued higher education at Cotton College, Guwahati graduating in 1957. After this, he received his Master's degree in History from Gauhati University in 1960.

He began to write poetry during his college years, heavily inspired by great literary personalities like Hem Barua and Lakshminath Bezbaroa. His poems were published in Assamese magazines and soon gained a loyal readership that appreciated the profound depth of his themes and their lyrical rhythm. His first poetry collection "*Surya Heno Nami Abe Ei Nadiyedi*" was published in 1959 and thus began his prolific literary career. This collection gained wide appreciation and acceptance; heavily lauded for the innovative use of language and the beautiful exploration of human emotions. Successive works soon established Nilmani Phookan as a man of fame in the circles of Assamese Literature.

He began his teaching career after completing his education in 1961 when he joined as a teacher for six months at Dergaon Girls High School. After that, he began teaching at Arya Vidyapeeth Higher Secondary School as a subject teacher for three years. In 1964, he joined Arya Vidyapeeth College as a lecturer of History and retired from the College as the Head of the Dept of History in 1992. An accomplished academic; he considered teaching a powerful way to contribute to the betterment of society and inspired multiple generations of students with his passion and in-depth knowledge of History and Literature. His ability to nurture young minds gained him great respect in academic circles.

A prolific creative writer; his poetry was characterised by its simplicity of language and thematic depth as it delved into the human psyche highlighting themes related to nature, love, and loss as well as the existential quest for meaning. His well-known poetry compilations include *"Aru Ki Noi Habda"* (1968), *"Gulapi Jamur Lagna"* (1977), *"Kavita"* (1981), *"Nriyatarata"* (1985), *"Sampurna Kavita"* (2003), *"Selected poems"* (2009), *"Nilmani Phookan's Rachanavali"* (2012) etc. He also published another collection titled *"Saagar Talit Shankha"* in 1994 which was edited by Dr Hiren Gohain.

His poetry has been translated into Bengali, Oriya, Gujarati, English and German. He engaged in various translation projects focusing on works like "Japanese Poetry" (1971), "Garthia L'Orkar Kavita" (1981), "Aotranya Gaan" (1993), "Chinese Poetry" (1996) and 'Anuhrishti' (2014). Beyond poetry, he also published autobiographies titled *"Pati Sonaru Phool"* in 2006 and *"Paboriba Nuenvarilu Ge"* in 2018. He published various articles including "Lok Kalpa Drishti" (1987), "Roop Varna Bak" (1988), "Realization and Joy of Art" (1988), "Art Philosophy" (1998), "Bichitra Likha" (2010), and "Kavita's Background" (2016). Furthermore, he also edited *Manideep* published in 1966 and *Assamese Poetry of the Twentieth Century* published in 1977 which are considered important works of Assamese Literature.

Nilmani Phookan's literary genius lay in his ability to entwine the personal with the universal and his intricate use of symbolism. His poems are powerfully subjective with a reflection of his own experiences and yet a broad readership can easily connect to them due to their universal themes. One such work "Gulapi Jamur Lagna," reflects themes of love and pining. The evocative imagery, emotive language and symbolism essentially captured the essence of human desire, pining for lost love, the anguish of separation etc. giving it a universal meaning. His mythopoeic imagination evoked epic and elemental images of fire and water, man and rock, time and space, etc. in his poetry; his concerns encompassing all from the contemporary to the primaeval. Furthermore, he speaks eloquently of the countryside of Assam, highlighting the rich heritage of tribal folklore. His deep reverence for nature is also evident in his works like "Jatiya Abhiman" and "Mor Aru Prithivir" which celebrate the majestic beauty of nature while deliberating on the human impact on the environment. His works thereby carry environmental consciousness which continues to inspire readers.

Throughout his successful career, Nilmani Phookan has been awarded numerous accolades and awards like the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1981 for his poetry collection *"Kavita"*. In 1982, he attended the Struga Poetry Festival as the representative from India. His contributions to literature were further recognised with the Padma Shri in 1990, one of India's highest civilian honours. Furthermore, he was conferred the Assam Valley Literature Award in 1997. He was also granted the 56th Jnanpith Award which is the highest literary award in India for the year 2021 due to his significant literary contribution that created a new image of Assamese poetry.

Phookan's influence went much beyond the literary and academic sphere. He was an active figure in cultural and social movements in Assam, relentlessly advocating for the preservation and promotion of Assamese culture and language; playing a crucial role in promoting Assamese literature and culture on national and international forums. Despite his great accomplishments, he was forever a humble and approachable figure whose warmth endeared him to both his readers and the people who knew him. He was an ideal, a mentor and a guide to many aspiring poets and writers; forever emphasizing the importance of staying true to one's roots.

Even in his later years, with a decline in his health, he continued to write for the literary community. Unwavering and dedicated, his craft and passion fuelled in him the zeal to write which inspired many and will continue to do so in years to come. These poems also reflect on themes of life, ageing and the inevitability of death seemingly in line with his worsening health.

A true literary giant in all senses, Phookan's contribution to Indian literature has been immense, and this will continue to be studied for generations to come, influencing various minds and perspectives. His profound understanding of the human experience leaves an irreplaceable mark on the literary landscape of Assamese Literature. This illustrious figure may have passed from the mortal realm but his words continue to reverberate in the minds and hearts of readers; thus, immortalising his rich legacy that is a testament to his literary genius.

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## SARA THOMAS

(1934-2023)

**In Memoriam: Sara Thomas – Illuminating Paths of Justice through Pen and Prose**

The demise of Sara Thomas reverberates as a seismic tremor throughout the annals of Malayalam literature, casting a shadow of profound lamentation over its expanse. Her departure marks the conclusion of an epoch characterized by the resonant cadence of her narrative voice and the profound depths of her thematic explorations. Within the crucible of Malayalam literary evolution, Thomas's legacy stands as a monument to her indelible contributions, particularly amid the embryonic stages of what would later be hailed as the "golden age" of Malayalam literature. In challenging the established bastions of male literary hegemony, Thomas emerged as a vanguard, carving out a space for her distinctive voice and heralding a transformative era in the trajectory of Malayalam literary tradition.

The corpus of Thomas's literary endeavors, spanning a diverse array of themes and stylistic expressions, serves as a testament to her discerning engagement with the variegated tapestry of human existence. From the inception of her literary journey with *Jeevithamenna Nadi* to the zenith of her creative prowess with later magnum opuses, Thomas exhibited an unwavering dedication to excavating the nuances of the human condition. *Murippadukal* (1971), a seminal work in her repertoire, stands as a towering edifice of thematic complexity, deftly navigating the existential quandaries of a protagonist ensnared within the labyrinthine intersections of cultural and religious landscapes. The subsequent cinematic adaptation of this seminal novel, *Manimuzhakkam*, catapulted Thomas into the echelons of literary eminence, garnering accolades both at the regional and national spheres. At the core of Thomas's literary tapestry lies an unmistakable predilection for narrative profundity and thematic gravity. Her magnum opus, *Narmadi Pudava* (1979), which clinched the coveted Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, stands as an exemplar of her adeptness in dissecting the intricate interplay of familial obligations and individual agency within the Brahminical milieu. Through this nuanced exploration of societal norms and personal dilemmas, Thomas demonstrated a remarkable acumen in delineating the contours of human experience with consummate finesse, thereby etching her name indelibly upon the annals of Malayalam literary canon.

Furthermore, an exploration of Thomas's literary oeuvre unveils a conspicuous thematic preoccupation with matters of social justice and systemic oppression, particularly as they intersect with the intricate dynamics of gender and caste. Her magnum opus, *Daivamakkal* (1982), occupies a seminal position within the pantheon of Dalit literature, wielding its narrative prowess as a potent instrument to castigate the pervasive injustices inflicted upon marginalized communities. In the annals of contemporary literature, this novel stands as a poignant testament to the enduring struggles of

marginalized communities. Through the compelling narrative lens of protagonist Kunjikannan, Thomas deftly navigates the labyrinthine corridors of social injustice and systemic oppression. Kunjikannan emerges as a symbol of resilience, striving to transcend the shackles of his subjugated existence. As the narrative unfolds, Thomas masterfully elucidates the stark realities faced by Dalits, shedding light on the pervasive discrimination and dehumanization perpetuated by entrenched societal hierarchies. Moreover, *Daivamakkal* serves as a stark indictment of the exploitation rampant within the *savarna* classes, underscoring the universal nature of human suffering irrespective of social strata. Through its searing portrayal of individual strife and collective resilience, *Daivamakkal* resonates as a timeless work that continues to reverberate with profound significance in the contemporary socio-political landscape.

Moreover, alongside the thematic depth pervading her corpus, Thomas's stylistic virtuosity and narrative finesse emerge as distinctive hallmarks of her literary craftsmanship. Her prose, suffused with mellifluous cadences and vivid imagery, exudes an ineffable aura of poignancy and profundity. Each narrative intricacy, each character's emotional trajectory, is meticulously etched with a masterful hand, resonating with readers at a visceral level and engendering a profound empathic connection. Beyond the realm of thematic exploration and stylistic innovation, Thomas's literary legacy is distinguished by her steadfast commitment to challenging normative paradigms and amplifying the voices of the marginalized. Her unwavering advocacy for a more inclusive and egalitarian literary milieu, one that transcends the boundaries of gender, caste, and historical categorizations, attests to her status as a trailblazer within the annals of Malayalam literature. In recognition of her substantial contributions, Thomas's accolades, including the prestigious Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for overall contribution to Malayalam Literature, stand as enduring testaments to her indomitable spirit and literary prowess. While her passing marks the culmination of a storied literary career, it simultaneously heralds the perpetuation of her indelible legacy within the rich tapestry of Malayalam literary tradition. As her works continue to resonate with readers across generations, Thomas's enduring legacy serves as a poignant reminder of the transformative power of literature to illuminate the human condition and effectuate profound societal change.

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**SAMARESH MAJUMDAR****(1944 – 2023)**

The demise of Samaresh Majumdar on 8 May 2023 marked the end of a luminous career. Majumdar will be remembered for his blend of political vision and emotional impulse, making a prominent mark on the Bengali cultural landscape.

Samaresh Majumdar was born on 10 March 1944, in Gairkata, in the Jalpaiguri district of British India, and he spent much of his childhood amidst the greenery of the Dooars, Gairkata, in the Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal, India where he completed his schooling from Jalpaiguri Zilla School. Later, he moved to Kolkata to pursue higher education. Majumdar got his bachelor's degree in Bangla literature from Scottish Church College in Kolkata and a master's degree in Bangla literature from Calcutta University. He won the Ananda Purashkar in 1982, the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for *Kalbela* in 1984, the Bankim Puroshkar for *Kalikatay Nabakumar* in 2009, and the Banga Bibhushan from the government of West Bengal in 2018. His first literary creation was an unplanned adventure as Majumdar, then a young theatre practitioner, wanted to move beyond the safe cocoon of only performing acclaimed plays by renowned playwrights.

<sup>1</sup> His search for original stories made him write his first short story 'Antar Atma', published in *Desh* literary magazine in 1967. His first novel *Dour* (Run) was published in *Desh* 1976. This novel again emerged from an event of a phenomenal experience when he witnessed a horse race on the race course for the first time. All that he saw and felt transformed into an existential question underlining the novel — the meaninglessness of the race of life, where worthiness is imposed on the runner based on their ability to run a race with no goal. *Dour* was an immediate hit that set sail for his prolific literary voyage that appealed to the aesthetic and political aspiration of the Bengali middle class. Majumdar is best known for the Animesh quartet comprising four novels *Uttaradbikar*, *Kalbela*, *Kalpurush* and *Moushalkaal*. The first three of the quartet were written between 1979 and 1989, a period that marked the political confusion of the Bengali middle class still coping with the state's violent repression of the Naxalite movement. The ideologically conflicted Bengali middle class saw itself in Animesh, the protagonist of the series, a young student who came to Calcutta to pursue higher education, getting initiated into the new politics and plunged into the Naxalite movement. *Kalbela* brought him the

<sup>1</sup> <https://scroll.in/article/1048933/samaresh-majumdar-1944-2023-the-writer-whose-novels-of-politics-set-bengali-hearts-on-fire> Accessed 12 June 2024



Sahitya Akademi Award. His widely read works were set against the political upheaval caused by the Naxal movement. They were also responsible for aestheticising the resistance and creating a popular romantic contention sympathetic to the young people who sacrificed their lives for the cause. Even though he refrained from disclosing his ideology, his writings show his reverence for the Leftist movement.<sup>2</sup> The last novel of the quartet, *Moushalkaal* was published in 2013 after a very long gap as Majumdar felt that the rise of a new ruling party was yet another watershed moment in West Bengal's political history.

Majumdar was also adept at writing detective and adventurous fiction. He created the character named Arjun Roy, a young private detective cum adventurer that fuels the nostalgia quotient of many young people growing up in the '90s and '20s. Arjun first appeared in *Khutimarir Range* in 1983 and continued the adventurous exploits for more than three decades until the last of the Arjun series, *Arjun Ebar Chilapatay* came out in 2019. The monumental series used to be periodically published in *Anandamela*, a very popular literary magazine for children and young adults and later was anthologised by Ananda Publishers. In many ways, this series expanded the horizons of popular detective fiction. As against the overbearing charisma of mature fictional detectives like Bomkyes, Feluda, and Kakababu, young Arjun was in the process of maturing carrying a little innocence. Still learning under the guidance of his mentor Amol Shome, Arjun is brave, intelligent, philosophical, self-reflexive and at times nervous and unsure of his capabilities. The relatable qualities of a young adventure-loving detective devoid of social capital battling economic insecurity made Arjun a representative of the aspirations of middle-class Bengalis. Arjun too, like the author himself, was based in Jalpaiguri. His adventures comprised intricate details of the North Bengal terrain and the vast plethora of flora and fauna. The landscape added an extra layer to the thrill of adventure that attracted the young readers, a kind of thrill that is absent in the adventures of the city-based detectives.

Against the scorns of intellectual writers and critics, Samaresh Majumdar's immense popularity makes him one of the most significant Bengali writers of the post-Independence era. Majumdar's fluency in language and gripping narratives reached out to a wide range of readers hailing from different age and social groups.<sup>3</sup> Even when reading as a habit is shrinking with time, Samaresh Majumdar's popularity remains untarnished with his creations becoming a perennial source of popular Bengali cinema, tele serials and audiobooks. Many of his novels including *Kalbela*, *Buno Hnaasher Palok* and *Saatkahon* have been made into films. Perhaps, *Tero Parbon*, a teleserial based on Samaresh Majumdar's novel is a landmark in the history of Bengali entertainment media.<sup>4</sup> The raging popular serial was the third fictional series telecasted in Bangla Doordarshan and was responsible for shifting the interest of the Bengali audience from radio to television. Majumdar's popularity makes us rethink the sociology of popular literature as his works have broken away from the confines of intellectual groups and reached the masses. It makes us rethink the nuances within the apparent simplicity of language and ideas that have made Majumdar's oeuvre remain a popular favourite for more than five decades.

After Samaresh Majumdar's death on 8 May 2023, the joint secretary of Babupara Library in Jalpaiguri, Tapan Ghosh, a retired teacher shed tears reminiscing the days when Samaresh Majumdar

<sup>2</sup> <https://frontline.thehindu.com/news/tribute-bengali-writer-samaresh-majumdar-1944-2023-bengali-literary-colossus-who-captivated-generations-obituary/article66831274.ece> Accessed 12 June 2024

<sup>3</sup> <https://robbar.in/robbar-durga-puja-2023/pracheta-gupta-remembering-samaresh-majumdar/> Accessed 12 June 2024

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.thewall.in/entertainment/tero-parbon-teleserial-based-on-samaresh-majumdar-novel/tid/102001> Accessed 12 June 2024

used to be a regular visitor in this library. Earlier, Majumdar had publicly expressed his gratitude claiming that the library was responsible for making him love literature.<sup>5</sup> The library remained closed for a day to mourn Majumdar's death. As libraries in the cities and towns are gradually getting buried under layers of dust, this insignificant news is a fitting end to an obituary of the literary colossus as his life reminds us of the time when information was not a click or tap away and libraries, like his writings, used to bustle with the dreams, failures and mundanities of the middle class.

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**Corrigendum:**

In IACLALS E-Newsletter Issue 11, 2022, the year of birth for Sudhakar Marathe in page 102 should read as 1944 and not 1941.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.sangbadpratidin.in/bengal/samaresh-majumdar-wanted-to-back-childhood-city-jalpaiguri-they-remember-and-mourn/> Accessed 12 June 2024

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