

## IACLALS Annual Conference 2025

on

### “Trauma, Resilience and Healing: Representations in South Asian Literature and Culture”

co-hosted by

The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus  
20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2025 (Hybrid mode)

### Conference Report

The Annual Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India (IACLALS) on “Trauma, Resilience and Healing: Representations in South Asian Literature and Culture” co-hosted by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus, was held from 20<sup>th</sup> to 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2025 in hybrid mode. Well organized and efficiently managed by Professor T. Vijay Kumar, Dr. Shilpaa Anand (Convenor), Dr Tony Sebastian (Organizing Secretary) and their team. The theme resonated with a large number of delegates, making this a large conference with the presentations numbering to about one hundred and thirty. Spread over three days these presentations ensured intellectual deliberations and discussions that often continued outside the session rooms and over lunch or tea breaks. The BITS Pilani, Hyderabad campus with its undulating, verdant landscape, manicured lawns, stunning rock formations and a variety of trees and particularly the multi-coloured bougainvillea was a riot of colour in the bright daytime sunshine. The cool evening breeze made the ambiance more pleasurable. The conference was spread over two locations in state of the art conference halls managed to perfection by young faculty, enthusiastic student-volunteers and members of the tech-support team.



### The Inaugural Session

Dr. Shilpaa Anand, Prof. Soumyo Mukherji (Chief Guest & Director, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus) Prof. Swati Pal (Vice Chair, IACLALS), Prof. Fatima Rizvi (Secretary, IACLALS) and Dr. Tony Sebastian releasing the Book of Abstracts

The Inaugural session opened with a welcome address by Dr. Shilpaa Anand, the Convenor of the Conference and Head of the Department, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus. Professor Swati Pal, Vice Chair of the IACLALS and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, New Delhi, introduced the IACLALS. Professor Asaduddin, Chairperson

IACLALS, who was engaged in steering the conference preparations over the months was unable to travel to Hyderabad owing to a last-minute, medical emergency in his family. His presence was thoroughly missed. Professor Fatima Rizvi read out his note on the theme of the conference which expressed that the subject was particularly relevant to the present times “not only for South Asia but also for the entire world, a world ravaged by war, displacement, human trafficking, gender injustice, climate injustice, and a host of other evils. He expressed that the papers “will engage with the broad categories of Trauma, Resilience and Healing in a substantial way and add richly to the existing archive of knowledge in this area.” Professor Soumyo Mukherji, the Chief-Guest and Director, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus, then addressed the gathering. He underscored the contemporary relevance of the theme of the conference, and engaged the audience by quoting poems and deliberations on philosophical and literary ideas that he had imbibed since early youth. The session closed with a Vote of Thanks delivered with subtle sensitivity by the organizing secretary, Dr. Tony Sebastian.



Dr. S. Anand delivering the Welcome address



Prof. S. Mukherji making his comments



Prof. Pal speaking about IACLALS



Prof. Rizvi reading Prof. M. Asaduddin's note



Dr. T. Sebastian giving the Vote of Thanks.



(L-R) Prof. Rizvi, Prof. Pal & Prof. Mukherji



Professor Radhika Mohanram, a leading postcolonial studies scholar from Cardiff University, United Kingdom, delivered the Keynote address on “Complexifying Trauma Theory.” She problematized the Kashmir issue and explored ideas of entangled histories, state sponsored amnesia, social memory and its relation to political power and the relation between memory, trauma and nationalism thorough Rahul Pandita’s *Our Moon has Blood Clots* and Basharat Peer’s *Curfewed Night*. She brought into play, Emanuel Kant’s critique of judgement, Barbara Misztal theories of social remembering, and Michael Rothberg’s ideas on the implicated subject to elucidate her postulations. The session was chaired by Professor Senath Walter Perera, former Chairperson, SLACLALS, Sri Lanka.



Session Chair, Prof. Senath Walter Perera introducing Keynote speaker Prof. Radhika Mohanram



Prof. Radhika Mohanram delivering the Keynote address

This year’s edition of the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize (2025) (for the best paper published during the past two years) was won by IACLALS member Dr. A. K. Muneer, Assistant Professor of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, for his paper titled “Amphibious Poetics on the Malabar Coast: Kappappattu and Chronotope of the Ship in Mappila Literary Culture.” Dr. Muneer received the Prize Citation and a cheque for Rs. 10,000/-.



The citation scroll is presented to Dr. Muneer by Professors Shobha M., S. Pal and R. Mohanram

In a session jointly chaired by Professor Swati Pal and Professor Shobha M, Professor Shobha engaged Dr Muneer in a conversation which revealed his deep knowledge of niche literatures emerging out of Kerala as well as the critical framework in which he situated his paper. He spoke with gravitas and deep understanding of the Mappila culture, poetry and the history he has internalized since his childhood. This year's distinguished jury comprised eminent postcolonial studies scholar Professor Radhika Mohanram from Cardiff University, United Kingdom, Professor Nathalie Cooke from McGill University, Canada and Professor Udaya Kumar, from the School of Languages, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.



The Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize Session  
Prof. Shobha M in conversation with Dr. A. K. Muneer

As always, the CD Narasimhaiah Prize (2025) (for the best paper presented at the conference) was a closely-contested competition. This year, the five finalists – Hriya Banerjee, Pooja Duggal, Pritha Chakraborty, Roshima Uday and Sana Wahid, were shortlisted after their papers were judged in the



first-round prior the conference by Professor Meenakshi Bharat, Professor, Department of English, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, and Professor Nishat Haider, Professor, Department of English, Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi. The three floor judges, Professor T. Vijay Kumar, Professor Chitra Panikkar, and Dr. Shilpaa Anand then judged the contestants for their presentations and their skill in answering questions posed by delegates among the audience.



Dr. Kalyanee Rajan (Coordinator, CDN Prize 2025) apprises the audience about the rules of the CDN Prize Contest, final round



The five CDN Prize finalists (L - R) Sana Wahid, Roshima Uday, Pritha Chakraborty, Pooja Duggal and Hriya Banerjee

The C.D. Narasimhaiah Prize 2025 carrying a certificate of commendation and a cheque for Rs. 5000/- was won by Dr. Pritha Chakraborty, School of Business, Woxsen University for her paper titled "Navigating Life and Loss on the River Ganga: Analysing Bhatiyali Songs as Econarratives of the Fishing Community of West Bengal." The runner-up prize went to Ms. Roshima Uday for her paper titled "Transfiguration as a Coping Mechanism in Negotiating with Insidious Trauma".



Prof. Swati Pal presenting the cheque to the CDN Prize winner Dr. Pritha Chakraborty (L) and a certificate to the runner-up Ms. Roshima Uday (R)



Prof. Chitra Panikkar presenting certificates to the panellists

This year's annual conference was a fairly large one with about a hundred and thirty presentations, spread over the three days in three parallel sessions. Powerful papers exploring various aspects of the theme of the conference foregrounded the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, the Bangladesh war of liberation, environmental denudation, caste discrimination, gender issues, disability, disease and everyday trauma experienced by individuals and communities, at times, over generations. Many papers dealt with ideas of healing and moving on, memorialization, memory politics, peoples' resilience and forgiveness. The presentations were well-attended by engaged audience and followed by animated Q & A sessions and discussions.



Session 6.3 "Memorialising Trauma"



Session 6.2 "Growing up with Trauma"





Session 10.3 “Emplacing Trauma”



Session 9.1 “Conflict and Trauma”

The IACLALS continued its tradition of releasing academic publications of its members (published within the last year) by hosting the Book Release Session on the first day of the conference. The session was chaired by Professor Swati Pal, Vice Chair, IACLALS. A total of four authored or edited books were released by authors: Professor Swati Pal, Professor Anjali Daimari, Dr. Kathryn Hummel and Mr Raj Kumar. These volumes cover a variety of areas of study and anthologies of creative writing.



(L -R) Mr. Raj Kumar, Prof. Anjali Daimari, Prof. Swati Pal and Dr. Kathryn Hummel at the IACLALS Members’ Book Release Session

Apart from the many technical sessions with research paper presentations, one of the regular showcase sessions at the Annual IACLALS conference is dedicated to providing a platform to IACLALS members who write poetry. The day two of the conference coincided with the International Mother Language Day (21<sup>st</sup> February 2025), and the poetry reading session chaired by Dr. Kalyanee Rajan (Treasurer, IACLALS) showcased several young and senior poets, including the Director of BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus, Professor Soumyo Mukherji, who recited his poignant poems in English and Bangla. The other languages represented in the session were Hindi and Urdu. In all, ten poets recited their poems and captivated the audience with a variety of deeply felt compositions. Mohd Aqib, a research scholar from Jamia Millia Islamia also recited a few of his she’rs and ghazals. It was a pleasure listening to each one of these.



Dr. Kalyanee Rajan with the poets who participated in the Poetry Reading Session

The evenings were enlivened by SPIC-MACAY concerts – a soulful Hindustani vocal recital by Pt. Omkar Dadarkar on 20<sup>th</sup> February, and a riveting Kathak performance by Vidushi Gauri Diwakar on 21<sup>st</sup> February. 21<sup>st</sup> February, the International Mother Language Day also had several students from BPHC displaying handmade posters and writeups in the central foyer, sensitising the delegates about the relevance of linguistic and cultural diversity and preserving the mother language. Also screened was the Tamil political comedy *Raghu Thatha*, centring a young woman and her community's resistance against linguistic hegemonization, exhibiting alongside, strong feminist overtones. Dr. Tony Sebastian and his team of spirited volunteers thoughtfully set up an art installation sensitizing viewers on the various themes and sub-themes of the conference by displaying pictorial representations, write-ups and book-titles. A book corner set up by Orient BlackSwan had a constant stream of enthusiasts hovering around to read through a variety of books, or make purchases.



Dr. Sebastian's art installation



A film celebrating linguistic diversity



An Annual General Meeting of the IACLALS was held on the third day of the conference, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2025. Professor Swati Pal, Vice Chair, IACLALS, apprised members about the past year's activities and accomplishments including the BITS Pilani, KK Birla Goa Campus annual conference and the release of e-Newsletter (Issue 13). She informed that the 2021 volume of the IACLALS journal has been released while the 2022, 2023 and 2024 volumes are ready to go to the publisher. She also informed the members that the IACLALS has migrated to a new website IACLALS.in. She invited suggestions from the members for the IACLALS Distinguished Speaker Series lectures to be held biannually on topics relevant to South Asia, and the IACLALS Discussion Forum intended to host book discussions regularly as well. She invited proposal/ suggestions on the theme and location of the forthcoming, 2026 annual conference. Professor Pal also invited proposals to host mini-conferences in collaboration with academic institutions with limited facilities. Forthcoming is the IACLALS international seminar in collaboration with Guwahati University on "Literatures of and from Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan: History, Politics and Storytelling" on 8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> April, 2025. Dr. Kalyanee Rajan, Treasurer, IACLALS, informed the members about the finances of the IACLALS, and requested newer members to spread the word about IACLALS to help with the membership drive.

The conference concluded with a valedictory session. Professor G. Sundar, Director, Off-Campus Programmes and Industry Engagement, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus, also graced the valedictory session, which was chaired by Professor T. Vijay Kumar. Sociologist and legal scholar Dr. Kalpana Kannabiran delivered the Valedictory address on "Justice and the Constitution as Commons: Jurisliteratures, Courtly Theatres and Literary Convivialities." Dr. Kannbiran upheld the importance of resisting violent and supremacist acts of occupancy, control, subjugation and silencing in personal and public domains. She reiterated that literatures open up possibilities of conviviality and solidarities as they narrate life, particularly, in times fraught with injustice and forceful attempts at homogeneity.



Prof. T. Vijay Kumar introducing the Valedictory speaker Dr. Kalpana Kannabiran



Dr. Kalpana Kannabiran delivering the Valedictory address

The extremely engaging valedictory session was followed by the Vote of Thanks by both Professor Fatima Rizvi, Secretary, IACLALS, and Dr. Shilpaa Anand, Conference Convenor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus.



Prof. Fatima Rizvi and Dr. Shilpaa Anand delivering their Votes of Thanks, respectively, on behalf of IACLALS and BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus

We at the IACLALS would like to thank our co-hosts at BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus for their warm hospitality – the delicious food and snacks served at the conference, the travel and residential arrangements, and for the spirited efforts made by them to ensure the smooth running of the three-day conference. We would like to express our gratitude to all the faculty at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus for their participation through the three days of the conference; the chairpersons who conducted their sessions with engaged academic interest, the delegates who presented their papers, and the audience who further enlivened each session with their incisive questions and comments. An especially warm “thank you” to the convivial and dedicated volunteers who helped steer the conference with precision.





Group photograph taken on Day 2 of the conference, including delegates, volunteers and organizers at BITS Pilani, Hyderabad Campus as well as members of the IACLALS board

Professor Fatima Rizvi  
Secretary  
IACLALS