

## IACLALS

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(On behalf of IACLALS)

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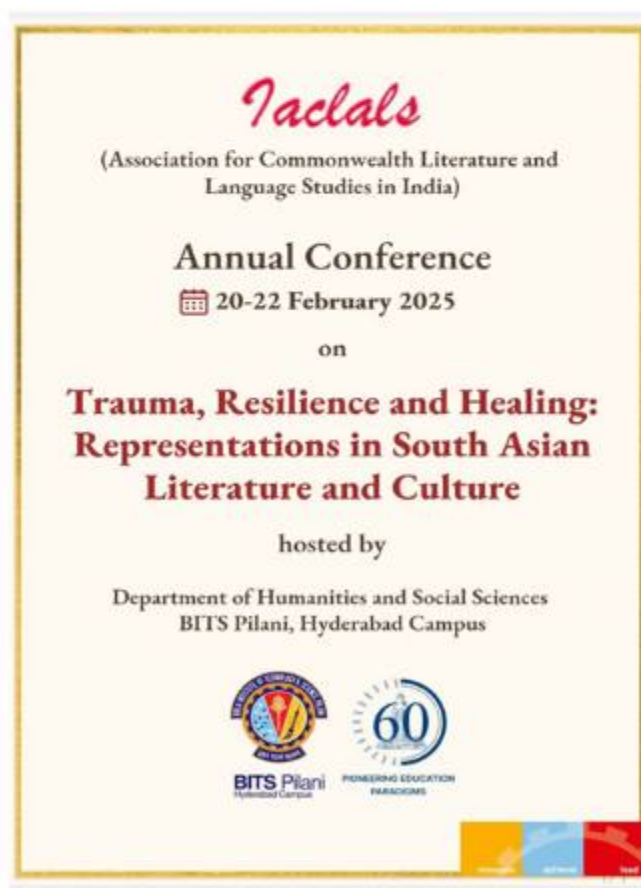
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**About IACLALS:**

The Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies— 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

In recent times, the Humanities have been relentlessly negotiating a turbulent landscape marked by a sense of profound loss – of institutional spaces, of critical voices, of fragile solidarities that once sustained intellectual life. In the context of such fragile terrain, communities such as IACLALS strive to remind us that collective resilience remains embedded in scholarship, dialogue and creative expression. The association stands witness to the myriad pathways generated through reflection, critique and storytelling despite the presence of grief, uncertainty and fractured public worlds. IACLALS Newsletter 14 emerges from this spirit of enduring perseverance. The newsletter foregrounds the confluence of the thoughts and works of scholars, writers and students who continue to confront difficult inheritances while imagining kinder futures. The newsletter attempts to create a shared space where intellectual inquiry meets lived experience through conference reflections, new writing, translations and tributes. Indeed, research becomes inseparable from the emotional, political, and cultural urgencies of our moment.

The past year has also been marked by the loss of cherished members of our fraternity, whose lives and contributions have shaped the field in many ways. This issue would like to take a moment to carry forward the questions they posed and the commitments they embodied. In these pages, remembrance becomes a mode of scholarship, a way of keeping alive the ethical and imaginative legacies they leave behind.

The newsletter articulates the complexities of culture, identity, memory and justice in the backdrop of widening social divides, shrinking academic freedoms, and increasing pressures on the Humanities. It stands as a compassionate record of our collective labour: the intellectual moments we celebrate, the voices we uplift, the losses we bear and the conversations that continue to shape our understanding of literature and life itself. Our community persists in exploring the complexities of culture, identity, memory, and justice. It is also a humble invitation—to read with care, to question with courage, and to contribute to the ongoing dialogue that sustains IACLALS as a vibrant intellectual home.

### **Debashree Dattaray**

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## REPORTS

### 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. 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 through 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. Shilpa 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 Convivalities." Dr. Kannabiran 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

Report by Professor Fatima Rizvi, Secretary, IACLALS

## Sustainability, Memory and Loss: Ecological Heritage and Pathways in Canada and India

**Organized by:** Centre for Canadian Studies, Jadavpur University

**Faculty Coordinators:** Professor Suchorita Chattopadhyay and Professor Debashree Dattaray

**Dates:** 5 – 6 February 2025

The Centre for Canadian Studies, Jadavpur University organised the International Conference on Canadian Studies on 5-6 February, 2025. The conference was titled “Sustainability, Memory and Loss: Ecological Heritage and Pathways in Canada and India” and took place at the Buddhadeva Bose Sabhaghar of the UG Science building in the university.

The keynote address was delivered by Justin Jaron Lewis from the Department of Religion, University of Manitoba, Canada and was chaired by Professor Suchorita Chattyopadhyay, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University.

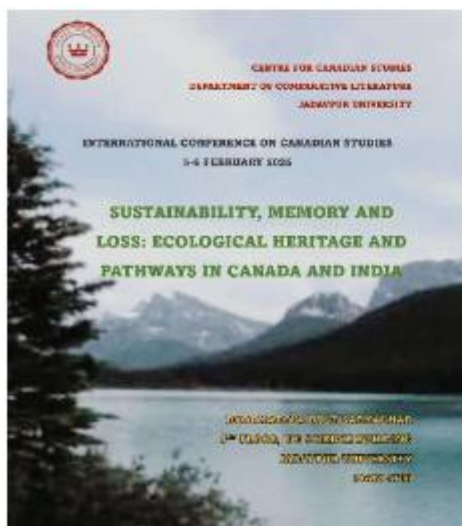
The Conference critically engaged with the opportunities, constraints, and challenges of ecological heritage across Canada and India. The larger purpose of the Conference was to articulate an ecological elegy for a crucial moment of tumultuous environmental upheaval and devastation and “cultural severance” thereby moving towards a direction of positive and resilient action.

A discussion on Professor Chattyopadhyay’s forthcoming book *A Short History of Canadian Literature* was held. Professor Debashree Dattaray, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University moderated the session. The valedictory lecture was delivered by Professor Himani Bannerji, Department of Sociology, York University.

The conference was attended by faculty members, scholars and students from different parts of the world who joined in-person or via video conferencing over the two days.

(Photos: Poster of the Conference, and release of the book cover of *The Short History of Canadian Literature*)

Reported by Debashree Dattaray, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University



## *Literatures of and from Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan: History Politics and Storytelling*

**Organised by:** Department of English, Gauhati University in collaboration with International Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India (IACLALS) and Centre for South East Asian Studies (CEAS)

**Dates:** 8-9 April 2025

The International seminar was inaugurated by Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor of Gauhati University Prof. Nani Gopal Mahanta who deliberated on a thought-provoking and deeply insightful talk that blended history, politics, and spatial-cultural entanglement across the border nations- Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh. His address, rooted in both research and lived regional realities, set a rich and critical tone for the rest of the seminar, which was later taken up by the Keynote Speaker, Prof. Nishat Zaidi during her deliberation on "Landscape as Event: Rethinking Literature from Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh". The keynote address by Prof. Zaidi delved into the aspects of geographies of affinity vis-à-vis the history of ruptures, adding a unique dimension to the topic. Noted academic and Vice Chairperson and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, Prof. Swati Pal outlined the trajectory of IACLALS and how it plays a crucial role in deliberations on postcoloniality from the South Asian perspectives. She also proposed the idea of potential collaborations on these themes to take the studies and research further.



Inauguration

In the opening address of the seminar Prof. Anjali Daimari, Head of the Department of English traced the origin of the series of international conferences on South Asian Fiction from its conceptualization in 2012, which emerged from the inclusion of South Asian narratives in an institutionalized form in the syllabi, in addition to the existing canonical Western/ Eurocentric narratives under the gamut of English literature. Akin to the historical trajectory of space and time, the seminar travelled through the test of time from 2012 to 2025, traversing through the South Asian nation from Sri Lanka to begin with in 2012 and finally culminating in the geographical

proximal trio- Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh in 2025. The resource persons for the Plenary sessions were Prof. Dhruva Bahadur Karki from the Department of English, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Nepal and Utsav K Sharma, Sr. Lecturer (Humanities), Royal Thimpu College, Bhutan. Around 30 papers were presented by faculty members and research scholars on topics like nature and culture in literatures of Bhutan and Nepal, questions of gender in South Asian Fiction, migration and the politics of memory and folktales, songs and South Asian cultural narratives and so on. One of the discussions in the seminar was highlighting the issues that have engaged the attention of writers of/from the three nation-states and how as neighboring countries, they resonate with similar trajectories in folktales, myths, fiction and cinema of the region. It focused on people/communities and planetary concerns / sustainable measures for achieving peace and prosperity of North East India in particular and South Asia at large. In addition, to anchor the debates around the topic there was a panel discussion on the themes of the seminar and a film screening.



Technical Session

Reported by:

Violina Kalita, Research Scholar, Department of English, Gauhati University.

## Exploding Text : An Afternoon with Poetry

**Organised by: New Alipore College, Kolkata in Collaboration with Sri Shikshayatan College**

**Dates: 18 September 2025**

New Alipore College in collaboration with Sri Shikshayatan College, organized an afternoon with poetry, “Exploding Text” showcasing American poet Bob Holman as the chief guest poet and noted Bengali poet Subodh Sarkar as the chairperson on the 18<sup>th</sup> September. With three / four generations of English education as the baggage, English poetry readings by college / university goers are proliferating in Kolkata. English poetry culture is an emerging trend in Kolkata. Founder of Bowery Poetry Club and the author of twenty two poetry collections Bob Holman hypnotized the hall. Audience was reminded of the great American poet Allen Ginsberg, who was an acclaimed poet and a leading figure of the Beat Generation for his radical literary works and advocacy for social change. Principal of New Alipore College who himself is a poet and scholar on poetry recalled Allen Ginsberg and his visit to Kolkata and how his visit influenced a whole generation reading and longing for American poetry. In the welcome address Sarangi referred to two poet-diplomats Pablo Neruda and Georges Seferis in connection with the mass popularity of their poetry. He claimed emphatically, “Poetry could make, poetry could break.” Then, Bob Holman read as many as seven poems. His poem ‘Srinagar’ was very special. His poem ‘My Heart is a Real Thing’ was received very well by the audience:

“You will be loved

In such a way that the streets will rise up to greet you

The rivers will float you across

And the sky itself will also be a means of transportation.”

His acrobatic performance in front of more than one hundred and fifty lovers of poetry gave a feel of how poetry could connect with lives lived on earth. A video of him performing “We are the Dinosaurs” drew huge applause from the audience. The energy in the poetry-video inspired the hall to write more, read more poetry of the world.

Three students from Shri Shikshayatan College and two from New Alipore College read Holman’s poem from their hearts. Recitation of a poem where the refrain “It’s 1990 & Nelson Mandela is free!” appears to electrify the hall with the power of words. He also stressed on the style of Bob Holman’s poetry and how it has traversed genres since the 1970s.

Noted Sahitya Akademi award winning poet Subodh Sarkar mapped the tradition of poetry in contemporary times in his introductory note. He praised the college for being always there for poetry and the poets. Subodh Sarkar read his famous poem, ‘Monipurer Maa’ (Mother of Manipur) and the audience were speechless. Professor Sucharita Banerjee, the noted Professor of Bengali, University of Calcutta also shared her views on Holman’s poetry. Dr. Parnali Dhar Chowdhury, formerly with John Hopkins University in Baltimore, USA read her translated poem. Some research scholars also attended the session with rapt attention. It was a real feast of words! The students and other participants were eager for more from Holman. What else is poetry!

“The Cost of War”, an online magazine by the students of New Alipore College, was also released in the hands of guests on dais. Dr Dhrubajyoti Banerjee, the IQAC coordinator of New Alipore College, coordinated the session wonderfully and professionally.



A section of the audience with Bob Holman and Subodh Sarkar

Report by Prof. Jaydeep Sarangi, Principal, New Alipore College, Kolkata.

***5<sup>th</sup> Annual Indian Network for Memory Studies Conference***  
**Memory, Narrative Designs, and Strategies for Preservation**

**Organized by:** Indian Network for Memory Studies (INMS) in association with the Centre for Memory Studies (CMS), IIT Madras, Chennai.

**Faculty Coordinators:** Dr. Avishek Parui and Dr. Merin Simi Raj.

**Dates:** 27-29 October 2025, IIT Madras

The 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Indian Network for Memory Studies Conference on *Memory, Narrative Designs and Strategies for Preservation*, explored the interface of narrativity and heritage through the lens of memory studies. The three-day event brought together renowned experts, researchers, and practitioners from around the world. The primary objective of the conference was to create a dialogic platform that engages with complex modes of narration and strategies of preservation related to heritage and identity, and how memory is imagined and instrumentalized through material markers, affective apparatus, and discursive designs. This focus positioned the conference within a larger global shift toward understanding memory as an active, dynamic process shaped by technologies, political structures, pedagogical practices, and ecological concerns rather than a mere archival entity. The organizers received over 750 abstracts from scholars and researchers in memory studies from all across the world out of which 200 were selected for offline and 133 were selected for online presentations. Delegates at INMS 2025 were from all across India and also internationally from Iceland, USA, Australia, Poland, Mauritius, and UK.



Inauguration

The conference was inaugurated by the Director of IIT Madras Professor V. Kamakoti who also released the book *Memory Studies in India: Texts and Contexts* (De Gruyter Brill, 2025) edited

by Dr. Avishek Parui and Dr. Merin Simi Raj, faculty coordinators of INMS 2025 and founding chairpersons of the Indian Network for Memory Studies (INMS). INMS 2025 featured three plenary lectures delivered by distinguished international scholars. Professor Andrew Hoskins, Professor of AI, Memory & War at the University of Edinburgh, reflected on digital memory and the transformations brought about by networked technological systems. Professor Benedikt Hjartarson, Professor of Comparative Literature and Cultural Studies at the University of Iceland, examined internationalism, translations, and the forgotten canons of world literature. It was fascinating to explore the popularity and status of Tagore within the Icelandic literary field in the mid-1920s. Professor Alex Easton, Professor of Psychology and Director of the Institute of Advanced Study at Durham University, UK, provided a perspective grounded in cognitive neuroscience, emphasizing the biological mechanisms underlying memory formation, with a particular focus on episodic memory.



Avishek Parui, Andrew Hopkins and Merin Simi Raj at INMS 2025

Throughout the three days, the conference brought together researchers examining a wide range of themes, with over two hundred presentations conducted both online and offline. Parallel sessions were conducted, allowing participants to present their original research papers. Each panel featured multiple presentations followed by Q&A segments, enabling in-depth engagement with the topics. The breadth of issues demonstrated how memory studies continue to evolve as an interdisciplinary field, converging literature, cultural studies, digital humanities, psychology, and history, among others. A notable academic outcome of the conference is the opportunity for selected presenters to contribute full articles to a special issue of *Memory, Mind & Media* journal published by the Cambridge University Press. This opportunity positions the conference within international scholarly circles and ensures the dissemination of emerging research and ideas generated through the event. The INMS 2025 Conference also featured collaboration with two distinguished international partners—Durham University and De Gruyter Brill Publishers.



*Memory Studies in India* released by and gifted to Professor V. Kamakoti, Director of IIT Madras, in the presence of Professor Alex Easton, Director, Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, UK, at the inauguration of INMS 2025, 27 October 2025 at IIT Madras

Overall, the 5th INMS Conference at IIT Madras provided a vibrant platform for intellectual exchange and professional development. By integrating different disciplines and diverse perspectives, the conference again reinforced the value of interdisciplinary approaches in advancing knowledge. The experiences and networks formed during the event are believed to be inspirational for future projects and efforts in the ongoing development of the memory studies sphere.



Report by  
Prof. Avishek Parui  
IIT Madras

### 3rd Graduate Research Meet: “Crisis and Hope in Contemporary South Asia”

**Organized by:** Department of Liberal Arts, Indian Institute of Technology Bhilai

**Date:** 7th November 2025

The Department of Liberal Arts held its 3rd Graduate Research Meet “Crisis and Hope in Contemporary South Asia” at IIT Bhilai on 7 November 2025. This edition of the graduate conference focused on the theme of crisis as an event or a series of events that disrupt, destabilize, and threatens the everyday individual, social, and political order, leading to moments of transition and transformation that are often challenging to comprehend. It sought to dwell on the importance of perceiving the entanglements between different kinds of crises and their repercussions on economic, social, cultural, and psychological realms of the everyday. Dr Diya Mehra, faculty of Sociology at South Asian University delivered the keynote lecture “Shortcuts: Thinking about Roads and Rains; Urbanisation and Infrastructure in Kullu Manali”. Dr Mehra’s talk engaged with notions of hope and crises through the lens of Kullu’s new urbanisation and infrastructure building, mainly roads and highways, in the context of these climate catastrophes.



3rd Graduate Research Meet: “Crisis and Hope in Contemporary South Asia” held on 7 November 2025 at IIT Bhilai



Keynote lecture by Dr Diya Mehra

The one day conference featured papers presented by research scholars and postgraduate students from IITs, NITs, central and state universities, and colleges across the country exploring the notions of crisis that has permeated the everyday in South Asia and more importantly how crisis can also be understood as a catalyst which generates a proliferating network of connections, fostering previously unfathomable bonds of intimacy, solidarity, and collaboration among individuals, institutions, and societies.



Panel: Negotiating the Crisis of Being and Belonging

The first panel, titled “Negotiating the Crisis of Being and Belonging” foregrounded marginalised experiences and the politics of survival in contemporary South Asia. The papers addressed questions of identity and marginality based on Dalit-Trans narratives as archives of radical hope, posthuman anxieties in S. B. Divya’s *Machinehood*, and feminist storytelling from Northeast India as reparative counter-discourse. The second panel, “Ecological Crisis and Resilience,” foregrounded environmental vulnerability and indigenous resistance. Papers examined ecological portrayals of Imphal, postcolonial ecofeminist critiques of infrastructural coloniality in Sarah Joseph’s *Budhini*, and sustainable futures envisioned through indigenous knowledge systems in Sheela Tommy’s *Valli*. The panel highlighted how ecological crisis intersects with gender, community histories, and postcolonial development.



Panel: Reimagining Crisis in Postcolonial South Asian Literature

The third panel, “Precarious Lives and Public Spaces,” explored systemic precarity, queer student activism, and questions of identity in digital campaigns such as Starbucks India’s *#ItStartsWithYourName*. The papers emphasised how public and institutional spaces become key sites for negotiating visibility, vulnerability, and belonging. The fourth panel, “Reimagining Crisis in Postcolonial South Asian Literature” expanded the discourse to literary imaginations of crisis. Papers analysed trauma and hope in contemporary fiction, the spatial politics of Mumbai’s slums in *Grafty’s Wall*, and haunting as a critical lens in nineteenth-century colonial Calcutta.

The conference offered a platform for the research scholars and postgraduate students to reflect on and further the discussions on diverse meanings and situatedness of crises in the ecological, social, political, technological, and historical specificities in South Asian context. The dialogues on identity and belonging, ecological vulnerability, public precarity, and literary reimagining carried out in the panels underscored the importance of understanding crisis in South Asia as layered, intersectional, and embedded in systemic and environmental structures.

The graduate research meet is an annual conference organized by the Department of Liberal Arts as an academic platform for the research scholars in the domain of humanities and social sciences to present their research papers and engage in scholarly interactions and dialogues on topical and socially relevant issues particularly focusing on South Asian contexts.

Report by  
Dr Sruthi Vinayan  
Assistant Professor  
Convenor, Seminar Committee  
Department of Liberal Arts  
Indian Institute of Technology Bhilai

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## CREATIVE WRITING

### POEMS/ SHORT STORIES/ TRANSLATIONS

#### POEMS BY MASUM AHMED

#### Object Permanence

(Prologue to “*The Aligarh Cantos: A Work of My Heart and Hands*”. Dedicated to Victor Hugo)

Prolific are the runes of our organs; this smile, that glimpse  
and the peekaboo of a past  
Play the shy syllables of a curly memory half-dragged into this quarter of reminiscence  
where I recall in orderless fashion the function of old objects to weather away the odd glimpses  
of olden organs;

Man, thou art a machine— *deus ex machina*— walk, climb, board, vanish  
to appear back on the *A-not-B canvas*— don't we show 'location' to our 'feelings'  
like we show places to our children? Let us broaden the theory;

This is not a poem soaked in the theology of Dante,  
And there's no good slosh of Eliot in it— I shepherd the quagmires from old allusions  
to enshrine an old taste back to where it belongs— Poetry,  
thy name is Najd, Nellie, and Nadia,  
Amarnath, Gaza and Piedmont,  
and Haridwar, Kashi and Konan Poshpora?

Jekyll and Hyde shared the same 'feeling' of being connected by a 'y' and not a  
designation— who sees a doctor in a walking asylum?  
Man art but not a city; neither a garden of eloquence to economy, nor a system of vain  
paradigms  
to map future tracks for further smiles, glimpses, peekaboos, and giggles.  
I mean, who would be the patient in a *all-patient-all-doctor city*?

London, thy name is a decree— infect the Ways, pollute the Bays, pluck away the Best  
of the sluggish pawns  
into your speed and process; I can still smell the imperfect smell of *Jallianwala Bagh*—  
beautiful copper jackets that your leads thrust into the uncivil chests  
of deviants, not perfect like objects; neither boxes of lexicons, nor houses of '*la parole*'— I  
mean, see the Fabian Bernard  
Our dearest Shaw, we admire not why you made a puppet of Shakespeare and decided to punch  
him back, but  
we value your poetic atomism in the fashion that the smoker-philosopher Russell would endow  
himself with; rather he would have had he have had had a hard hitting hindering his situation  
given to his state of affairs with the *zone of proximal development*, into which, today I lead  
my dearest readers, judges and solicitors of my late habit— poetry.

Thy name is Whitman, if thou intimately befriend a philosopher's wife; don't we remember

a prolific mathematician failing to calculate the differences between himself and Alys? (This is not an ode to John Osborne; no matter even if he married five times) This verse is also for you, Dear Russell, we saw you smoking and thought Vincent must have a 'sujet' here (if Lacan would agree later)

This is the reflection of all logic in the dust of your ash— it must be so, why would I recall then how our sweetest Rilke lost all his sweetness in the face of a War; how he hopped in and out of himself and let the world know his hopping was instead a changing of his primal loins and a wearing off of the long fostered love for verse.

For verse, I classify thou, dearest Rilke, in that which is not a list but a script of this creation's most eloquent currents that strike the pebbles at the shores of human imagination,

even if I see the *Castle at Duino* as your organ and Munich as your glimpse and Paris as your smile—

Home, dear Rilke, I know what you lost when you faced the creative block; because, poetry takes you home even if you, your organs, your imperfections, your glimpses, and smiles are gone,

Poetry will bring you home, give you comfort, and lull you into its peekaboo—

## **That which cannot be fought**

(Dedicated to Kaifi Azmi)

Because below my eyes flows thy sacred **River**  
and my heart is thy sacred **City**, beloved—

I am caught between the infinite **Maya**  
of your eternal **Maryada** and limitless **Leela**!

Haste not for thy Paduka lord, for Hari keeps them safest  
with their own conch, Mandavi's own **Bharat**.

I sing thy hymn in thy sacred **City** sojourning in my heart  
upon thy sacred **River** cruising quietly below my eyes.

While your twenty four thousandth transition into my times  
is already summarized through their actions  
the ones who made that into the theatre of a profitable fight;  
that which cannot be fought—

Wake up! O bearers of my beloved's name!  
Wake up with my **Raghav**'s return in silence  
while you dare claim something in his name, which cannot be claimed.

Because that which cannot be fought is my heart; soul, flesh, and blood.  
Can you dare claim that for your goal?

**Bionote:**

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

## Memories of a Comics Culture (Graphic Narrative by Natasa Thoudam)



### The Store

This faint store houses as well as signifies my first memories of comics. This store only exists in my memories, but it reminds me of a communal comics culture that existed among the children of Manipur University, Canchipur. We shared, borrowed, exchanged, and read comics together: be it the story of Archie from the USA, in Misha from the USSR, of Asterix from France, of Tintin from Belgium, of Cinderella from the UK, of Chacha Chaudhary from Delhi, of Bahadur from Mumbai, and so on. I read them all in English with the Roman script.



## The Wall

I heard other stories too in Meiteiron: of folktales from my mother and my grandmother. The oral stories I grew up listening to found their written and pictorial illustration in Subadani Kshetrimayum's *Illustrated Folk Tales of Manipur*. I read this book in Meiteiron but with the Roman script. One such story was Lai-Khutsangbi. While listening to her story in the past, I never imagined her to be a woman; but in this book, she was a woman. She was the antagonist of the story; yet I sympathised with her. Is it because her death was the result of a lie? In my previous e-essay, I drew a hand. Here, it is the blood-stained impression left on a wall after her hand fell.



## A Rongmei Folktale in a book of Meitei Folktales

In this book, I also found an unfamiliar story. It was the story of Rongmeikai Amashung Langbung. It was a Rongmei folktale. The difference between a Meitei folktale and a Rongmei folktale is evident in the difference in the drawing of their houses in this book.

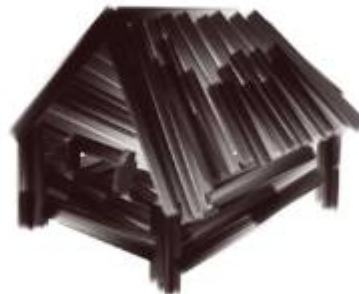
## *A Meitei House*

If a Meitei house looks like this:



## *A Rongmei House*

Then, a Rongmei house built with a raised platform appears as this:



## A Question

*A Rongmei folktale appears in a book of Meitei folktales. How do I make sense of this inclusion? With this question, I close the storehouse of my memories.*

### **Bionote:**



Natasa Thoudam is an Assistant Professor in English at the Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur. She is the elected Associate Fellow of Royal Historical Society (2025). She was the Chair of the Awards Committee of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), a formal alliance of independent Digital Humanities (DH) organizations around the world (2024–25), and Joint Secretary of Digital Humanities Alliance for Research and Teaching Innovations (DHARTI), a constituent of ADHO from India (2025–28). She is currently working on two projects: one theorises on the concept of writing and its relation to various religious movements in India's Northeast, while the other is on the many origins, variations, and versions of comics cultures in the world. Three journal special issues are planned as outputs of these projects.

## BOOK REVIEWS

### ***John Lang: Wanderer of Hindoostan, Slanderer in Hindoostan, Lawyer for the Ranee.* By Amit Ranjan. Niyogi Books: New Delhi, 2021**

Amit Ranjan's *John Lang* is the product of his strenuous effort and rigorous research, covering a decade, from archival studies, his research grants from Australia, and from his travels in Australia, England, and several places in India. John Lang, (1816-1864) primarily known as Australia's first native born novelist and the journalist, is widely acclaimed as the lawyer of the Rani of Jhansi and the founding editor of the journal, *Moffusilite*. His identity remained obscured until Ruskin Bond brought him out of the bushes concealing his shroud in at Camel's Back Cemetery in Mussoorie in 1964, after 100 years of his death. However, his obscurity existed until 2002, when Rory Medcalf, the then spokesperson of the Australian High Commission in India, collaborated with an Australian researcher, Victor Crittendon to begin research on Lang. In 2005, their studies came in the form of a book and the same year, a plaque at Christ Church, Mussoorie, was also unveiled in his memory. It will not be any exaggeration in putting the author, Amit Ranjan after Bond, Medcalf, Crittendon, and indeed, John Earnshaw for carrying forward studies on John Lang. One of the chief pursuits of Amit's book is to locate Lang in literary discourses where his contributions and collaborations have remained unacknowledged. This review focuses on three aspects of his book – one, it explores his literary works to locate his contributions in the discourses of British literature; two, it discusses John Lang's excursions and experiences in India as a lawyer and wanderer; and three, it seeks to examine the author's style and structure carried forward in writing and how it often intersects with his poetic sensibility.

#### I

The book begins with Amit Ranjan's letter to John Lang engaged in an interrogating conversation about his obscure identity by addressing him as writer, translator, journalist, polyglot, Christian, Australian, Indian, British, a lawyer, phrenologiphiliac, or a just lawyer. His letter also bespeaks his acquaintances and encounters with Charles Dickens, Tom Taylor, and Rudyard Kipling while they were emerging as successful writers in late nineteenth century. On arriving India, he learnt Hindustani and Persian in six months in India and was fond of making use of Hindustani punchlines and his habit of drinking is corroborated by Henry Vizetelly and William-Forbes Mitchell, a soldier in 1857 battle. As a wanderer, Lang is fond of telling tales; Vizetelly confirms how in his drunkenness he began telling stories after stories from India and "Dickens matched you story for story, joke for joke, also from India" (p. 23). His stories were produced and re-produced by another gatherer "Tom Taylor, who gathered stories from everywhere and tailor-made them to produce intriguing plays. Your play became his play" (p. 24). His literary contribution indeed embarks on his habit of telling tales which often disseminate ideas among the writers who were wandering as a story-gatherer and who often found a wanderer like Lang telling-tales. His invention of ghost in the Fisher's case is also one of his major contributions of telling stories which helped in organization of Fisher's Ghost Festival in Campbelltown in Sydney. Commenting upon his personality, he writes, "you are a storyteller, and that that's your consuming passion. Life is a stage, and you want to record it and write it feverishly...you get drunk, and are forever drunk it seems, and it is a story for you. That's the predicament of the writer – to write what you live or to live what you write" (p. 34).

John Lang has lived under four 'aliases' – an Australian-born Emancipist; a 'gentleman' lawyer; a British student, writer, and journalist; and a scholar with knowledge of Latin and continental history. His professional aliases have been evident now – lawyer, journalist, and writer. By locating his literary oeuvre in nineteenth century literature, Ranjan picks up the case of Lang's

novel *The Secret Police or Plot and Passion* (1856) and Tom Taylor's play *Plot and Passion*, performed in 1853. This is the place where his 'liasing-with-alias syndrome' originated. In 19<sup>th</sup> century sources, the play is documented as having been co-authored by Taylor and Lang. Taylor, however, claimed having written it with Lang, while Lang argued that his novel was not drawn from his play but the play was dramatized from his story. Latter, Taylor espouses his definition of 'originality' to claim its authorship and in the journal *Athenaeum*, he defends himself and claims several plays as his original while "pieces, like *Plot and Passion*, *Masks and Faces*, *The King's Rival*, *The Loves of a Life*, I have worked in partnership, but may claim, at least, half the honours of invention, as well as dramatic treatment" (p. 52). Amit argues that since Tom Taylor was an established playwright (though his suspicious originality) in England and Lang had just arrived there from India to further his literary career, Taylor was lauded for being an English author. This case justifies exploitation of an Australian in Britain on literary ground. Amit claims, "Mr. Taylor, in short, re-tailored various fashions and retailed them in the Victorian market" (p. 57). The first play at his early age in 1864 that Bernard Shaw saw was *Plot and Passion* – a three-act play. The play was enacted without acknowledging Lang's contribution. Even, 1883 performance also led to become "yet another unacknowledged debt to John Lang" (p. 64).

Unravelling Lang's literary contribution, Ranjan takes another case of Kipling's book saving a life and he names his chapter "The Book That Saved a Life or *Kim* or What". He refers to a tale published in 1952 *Kipling Journal*. During First World War, a French soldier, Maurice Hamonneau, got a bullet aimed straight at his heart but it could not pierce him as he was protected by a book – 1913 French pocket edition of *Kim* – in his left breast-pocket. The book saved his life by deflecting the bullet by twenty pages only. "Kipling creates an easy dichotomy between the material and the spiritual in a classical way. The West is in its material pursuits, and the East in its spiritual one; and the boy – a crossover between the two – is at confluence, an embodiment of both" (p. 69). Kipling did know Lang who was already an established figure in India as writer and lawyer; he was an Anglo-Indian writer writing novels set in India. Lang's *Wanderings in India* explores issues of Anglo-Indian children in three of his stories viz. 'The Mahommedan Mother', 'Black and Blue,' and 'Marching'. *Kim*'s story is drawn from Lang's stories; "Kipling getting inspired by another tale by Lang, and writing his own book; this book acting as an armour against a bullet for a real man in a real war – is prime material for great ponderings-over for those who seek connections and patterns in this mysterious world" (p. 75).

Dickens's journal *Household Words* was publishing Raj narratives and to his journal, Lang contributed 33 pieces. His journal had many publication had anonymous authors with only editor's name added to it. Dickens was influenced by Collins's *Forzen Deep* in his *Edwin Drood* and *The Tale of Two Cities*; while "imitating Collins's intricate plots, Dickens lost the 'magic' of literary genius" (p. 152). Collins – having read and edited Lang's works while working as sub-editor of *Household Words* – appears to have been influenced by John Lang for creating Indian sub-plot in his plays. John Lang was a great reader of Shakespeare's works and he would often quotes from his works. In Amit's words, "Dickens's inspiration comes from Lang, even if it is twice removed. Wilkie Collins, who borrowed the idea of the 'cursed stone' [for his *The Moonstone*] from Lang, also learnt the art of intricate plots from him" (p. 176).

Lang's knowledge of Persian and Arabic is well reflected in his reading of Edgar Allen Poe's 'The Raven' which was followed by his essay 'The Philosophy of Composition'. When Lang read the poem, he created a commotion by writing back to him; he claimed that it was very good Persian by quoting the original Persian poem published in *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine* of 1855. In the article, the name 'Mr. Moffusilite Lang' appears in the footnote saying "Hullo! That's very good Persian!" instantly quoting the original. Poe was a good Persian scholar" (p. 143). His story 'Botany Bay' and 'Fisher's Ghost' invented the ghost of the man Fisher who was a convict in New South Wales and wished to leave for England by giving his neighbor the right to sell his property and sending him the money. However, he was found dead in the pond and neighbor was

found guilty and hanged in public. Lang inserted a ghost in the story – that an old man saw a ghost upon Fisher’s property and it pointed towards the pond. And that old man, drunkard, found the dead body in the pond. Fisher’s Ghost Festival owes their celebrations to Lang’s invention and his ‘Botany Bay trick’ came to address clever convicts. To his unacknowledged debts, Amit’s remarks are more pertinent, “Lang’s association with To Taylor or vice versa didn’t really create any ripples. What did create a stir – rather whole lot of turbulence – in the literary world was one of Lang’s stray comments on Edgar Allen Poe poem” (p. 139).

## II

In India, John Lang has already established himself as a writer and a lawyer. He came to India in 1842 and he was very critical of John Company – the informal address for East India Company. Lord Elleborough, the then Governor-General, would keep elephants and used elephant metaphors to describe political situations; he christened him Lord Elephantborough. He never missed any opportunity to target the Company; he lampooned Governor-General Hardinge and made him accept the economic reason for his arrival in India. He also confessed that writing against him brought growth in his selling. He was jailed twice for this mischief. He befriended Lala Jotee Persaud who gave him three lakh for winning his case in 1851. Another most significant mischief is his play with the sketch of Nana. In 1857, when the British were looking for Nana’s sketch, an illustrator barged into his house and mistook the portrait of the Lala for Nana, he copied it and get it published everywhere.

As a lawyer of Rani he first received his recognition in India; she summoned him to save her Jhansi from being annexed by the Doctrine of Lapse. He not only becomes her lawyer but also gives her personality a detailed sketch which is the only description by someone in English documentation. “She was a woman of about the middle size – rather stout, but not too stout. The expression also was very good, and very intelligent. The eyes were particularly fine, and the nose very delicately shaped. She was not very fair, though she was far from black” (p. 221). In the opinions of Amit, Lang’s description led to “remarkable confluences and conjectures in popular culture” (p. 222).

The case of Lala Jotee Persaud earned him great victory and name in Indian law. In the decade of 1850-1860, the destiny of Lala and Lang got intertwined. Raja Lall Singh was staying at Lala’s house, he betrayed India and British both, and was a good operator. He wanted to have Lala’s head. Jotee Persaud’s portrait was mistaken for Nana Sahib of Bithoor and during 1857 mutiny, Nana’s picture was in a great demand in England because he was the scourge of East India Company. In Amit’s book, the case of Jotee Persaud is the longest chapter which discusses John Lang’s most significant case in Indian lawsuit. For detailed study, his book does owe a serious attention. However, one of the most influential insights drawn from Amit’s study worth a mention that Lang alluded to literary reflections, “John Lang was fond of ghosts and that he read too much Shakespeare. That his fancies would rub on to Lala is difficult to imagine. The writer’s imagination seems to be a little too farfetched – to set up a whole apparatus in front of fort, and then to act out a little skit in front of the fort gate posing as Akbar. One can almost imagine it to be a sequel to the Nana’s-picture-story. Jotee Persaud, in knowledge that everyone thinks that he looks like Nana Sahib, decided that he must play the role of a monarch” (p. 270).

Another finding of Amit’s studies has shown that John Lang does not portray any exotic picture of India. His *Wanderings in India* explores the fate of Anglo-Indian children born out of different kinds of wedlock. The picture of Kabuliwala in John Lang is different from that of Tagore and yet very similar. He does not use the term ‘Caubuli-wallah’ though the term ‘Kabuli-wala’ was deeply ingrained in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Lang was the owner and founder of the journal, *Moffusilite* for twenty years. Recently, the Mussoorie based journalist, Jai Prakash Uttarakhandi has founded a newspaper, *Mafasilite* as a token of their love and honour for Lang.

## III

The most interesting part of the book lies in the writer, Ranjan's style in which he has carried the narrative. The book is blended with factual historicity and fictional magnitude which give the narrative a novel form which falls neither of the genre. The narrative style of the writer has framed his book as "non-fictional fiction" kind as it has drawn historical facts and data from archives but the narrative is carried in the form of story-telling. The book has also presented indicated a parallel line between Lang and Amit. John Lang is a wanderer, traveler, and translator who invents ghosts out of the factual and real stories; Amit likes "to wander and wonder" and one of his friends puts it – 'ponder in a funk.' "The ocean, the commotion of the city, the silence of graveyards" says the editor of Niyogi Books, "have all beckoned him with their hauntedness. He began to see patterns and symmetries in the words written on tombstones. He saw names writ on waters of the eastern shores of Australia, America, and Hindustan. This hunt is the writer's haunt".

Poetic sensibility of Amit Ranjan is one of the prominent aspects of his book that has colored his narrative from the very beginning. Writing poetry is at the core of his heart; in his letter to Mr. Lang, he writes a limerick for him –

There was a wayward wanderer  
O! That incorrigible squanderer  
Spirits he would drink  
Spirited, he would think  
The lonesome philanderer! (p. 41)

This limerick creates a bridge between the researcher and the subject or between Amit and Lang. Amit has already got published two collections of poetry to his credit. After Leonard Cohen, John Lang has come to suit his mind and soul. The phrase 'wayward wanderer' describes Lang and Amit in its own ways. If Lang is fond telling tales, Amit is endowed with the sensibility to put words in poetic and rhythmic beauty. John Lang's unacknowledged debt has been unlocked through his poetry dedicated to Lang –

I had come off edge,  
I was in college.  
So I read many romances,  
Also attended a few séances.  
So we raised toasts,  
And summoned ghosts.  
But for every vice,  
There is a versa.  
So ghosts can also beckon,  
And have their share of fun.  
Stories forgotten,  
Or lying in the cold,  
Find their own time,  
To be told. (p. 43)

The story of his unacknowledged wisdom and literary contributions has been haunting the writer and always alluring him to be told in his own poetic style. And the poet does not hesitate in voicing it. His journey to work on 'barrister-cum-author-cum-maverick' began with his hunting for Alice Richman who was a lone grave in the Pune University; but it was the poet's 'serendipity' that directed him towards researching on John Lang. At the end of the book, he dedicates a poem of some length, titled 'But I Will', to Alice Richman and John Lang.

If die I will  
Which I will not  
It's my will  
That I be given a grave  
So that a hundred and fifty years later

Some wanderer  
Spots an old wanderer,  
Not at his best;  
Ignominiously  
At rest.

\* \* \*

Alice's ghost refuses to tell anymore  
But hangs around  
And takes me to Landour's ghosts  
Hills, thunder, rain, dark nights  
Perfect to raise a toast  
To the ghost  
Of a Mofussilite. (p. 401-2)

### References

Ranjan, Amit. *John Lang: Wanderer of Hindoostan, Slanderer in Hindoostan, Lawyer for the Ranee*. Niyogi Books, New Delhi, 2021, pp. 471.

### Bionote:



Dr. Alka Vishwakarma is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities (FSH), SRM University, Delhi-NCR, Sonapat. She defended her doctoral thesis at the Department of English, Banaras Hindu University. Her research interests include comparative literature, performance studies, and Indian literature in translation.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS BY MEMBERS

**Name of Editor:** Dr. Nishi Pulugurtha

**Institutional Designation/ Affiliation:** Head and Associate Professor, Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College, Kolkata

**Bionote of author:**

Dr. Nishi Pulugurtha is academic, author, poet, editor, critic and translator. She is Head and Associate Professor in the Department of English, Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College. Her areas of interest are British Romantic literature, Indian writing in English, the diaspora, disability studies, Shakespeare adaptations in film. She writes short stories, poetry, on travel and non-fiction and has published works in them apart from several academic writings published in refereed international and national journals. Her edited volume, *Literary Representations of Pandemics, Epidemics and Pestilence* was published by Routledge in 2023. Her recent work is a co-edited translation work - *Bandaged Moments*.

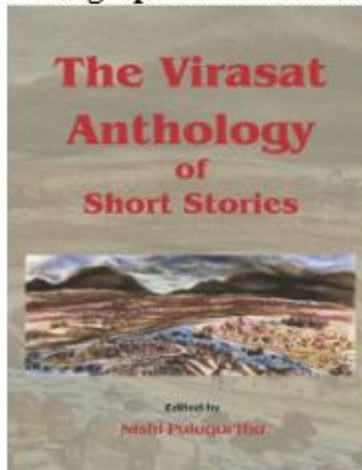
**Brief Description of the Book**

*The Virasat Anthology of Short Stories* is a collection of 34 stories written by authors located in different geographical locations. Writers from Mauritius, USA, Venezuela, India, The Netherlands and Ireland find representation in the Anthology. The authors whose stories feature in the volume range from published writers, well-known names, to writers who have just started out. Each of the stories present various subject positions as they negotiate with myriad themes and character/characters trying to negotiate life in its myriad ways. Written in a variety of styles, each short story works at revealing the human predicament. Nature, society, climate, disease, circumstances, values and value systems, culture, religion, gender, politics, education work their way through the stories revealing strands of life, of lived experiences, of crime and the darker sides of life, of dreams and dreamy states, of unmitigated harshness, of smiles and a few laughs.

**Keywords :** short stories, anthology, literature, new writing, fiction

**Title, Publisher, Year of Publication, ISBN Number, Price:** *The Virasat Anthology of Short Stories*, Virasat Art Publication, 2025, ISBN: 978-93-92281-29-7, Rs. 550/-

**Photograph of book cover:**



Nishi Pulugurtha (editor)

**Name of Editors:** Dr. Nabanita Sengupta and Dr. Nishi Pulugurtha

**Institutional Designation/ Affiliation:**

1. Head and Assistant Professor, Sarsuna College, Kolkata
2. Head and Associate Professor, Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College, Kolkata

**Bionotes of editors :**

**Nabanita Sengupta** is translator, creative writer and academic. Her works of translation are *A Bengali Lady in England* and *Chambal Revisited*, and *Open Your Door Library*. She has co-edited anthologies of critical essays on gender and South Asia - *Understanding Women's Experiences of Displacement* and *Female Narratives of Protest, Voices and Visions: IPPL anthology of poetry* and *Bandaged Moments: Stories on Mental Health by Women*. Her collection of short stories is titled *Ghumi Days* (e-book, Juggernaut). Her research articles, translations, and creative writings have been published in various journals and anthologies and she regularly reviews books for journals.

**Nishi Pulugurtha** is academic, author, poet, editor, critic and translator. She is Head and Associate Professor in the Department of English, Brahmananda Keshab Chandra College. Her areas of interest are British Romantic literature, Indian writing in English, the diaspora, disability studies, Shakespeare adaptations in film. She writes short stories, poetry, on travel and non-fiction and has published works in them apart from several academic writings published in refereed international and national journals. Her edited volume, *Literary Representations of Pandemics, Epidemics and Pestilence* was published by Routledge in 2023. Her recent work is a co-edited translation work - *Bandaged Moments*.

**Brief Description of the Book:**

*Bandaged Moments* is a collection of 26 stories from 17 Indian languages written by women authors on the subject of mental health. Each of the stories in the volume present humanising psychological conditions. Each story illustrates the multifaceted nature of mental health issues, the challenges of seeking psychiatric help in India, along with the redemptive power of a support system (or the consequences when there isn't one), and the lived experiences of individuals grappling with mental health issues in varied cultural settings.

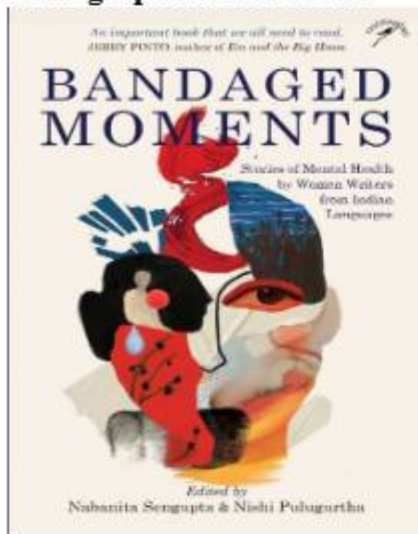
The volume has two Assamese stories, two Bengali stories from West Bengal, one Bengali story from Silchar (Assam), one Bhojpuri, one Gujarati, two Hindi, one Hindi story from Rajasthan, one Kannada, one Kashmiri, one Magahi, one Maithili, two Malayalam, one Marathi, a Marwari story, a Nepali one, two Odia, one Punjabi, one each of Tamil, Telugu and two Urdu stories. The oldest story in the anthology, a Marathi one, dates to 1932 and the most recent one is the Kannada one that was published in 2023. The translators range from well known names to amateurs translating for the first time too.

Apart from compiling a range of women writers, the anthology also brings to the fore the insidious intricacies of trauma and suffering, and the challenges and triumphs faced by people with mental health issues and their caregivers within the social fabric of India.

**Keywords (Five):** mental health, women's writing, short story, translation, Indian languages

**Title, Publisher, Year of Publication, ISBN Number, Price:** *Bandaged Moments: Stories of Mental Health by Women Writers from Indian Languages*, Niyogi Books, 2025, ISBN: 978-81-19626-15-1, Rs. 499/-

**Photograph of book cover:**



Nabanita Sengupta (editor)



Nishi Pulugurtha (editor)

**Name of the Editors:** Dr. Avishek Parui and Dr. Merin Simi Raj

**Institutional Designation /Affiliation :** Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras.

**Bionotes of the Editors:** Avishek Parui is Associate Professor in English at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Madras and Associate Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. He is founding chairperson of the Indian Network of Memory Studies (INMS) and faculty coordinator of the Centre for Memory Studies at IIT Madras. He is the author of *Postmodern Literatures* (Orient Blackswan, 2018) and *Culture and the Literary: Matter, Metaphor, Memory* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2022). He is member of the advisory board for Memory Studies Association (MSA), the editorial board of *Memory, Mind, Media* (Cambridge University Press), and *Memory Studies Review* (De Gruyter Brill).

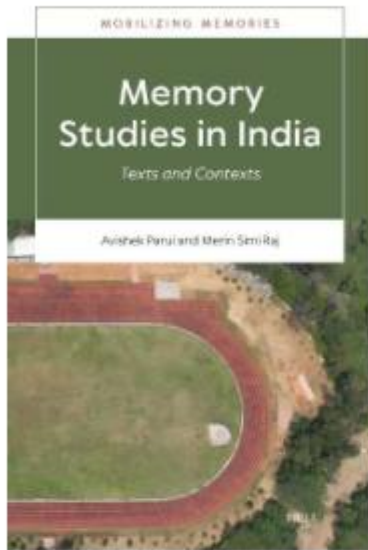
**Merin Simi Raj** is Associate Professor of English & Memory Studies in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Madras. She is the faculty coordinator of the Centre for Memory Studies and the co-founder of the Indian Network for Memory Studies (INMS) <https://www.indiannetworkformemorystudies.com>, the first national network in Asia under the aegis of the international Memory Studies Association (MSA). She is trained in Digital Humanities at the University of Oxford. Her research on the Anglo-Indian community in India was developed into *MemoryBytes* (2022), an AR-based interactive app <https://www.memorystudiesiitmadrass.com/memorybytes>. She co-edited the volumes *Anglo-Indian Identity: Past and Present, in India and the Diaspora* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021 <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-64458-1>) and *Memory Studies in India: Texts and Contexts* (Brill 2025 <https://brill.com/display/title/711007>).

**Brief description of the book:** *Memory Studies in India: Texts and Contexts* is a collected volume of academic essays published as part of the Mobilizing Memories series by Brill De Gruyter. This pioneering work makes a significant contribution to the emerging field of memory studies in India, offering a nuanced examination of the ways in which collective and individual memories inform, shape, and transform identities, narratives, and historical consciousness. Addressing a wide range of themes—spanning forgotten events, massacres, monuments, public spaces, and culinary rituals—across diverse historical periods, the essays bring fresh perspectives to India’s intricate cultural landscape. In the editors’ words, the volume attempts to channel an interdisciplinary epistemic inquiry towards mapping memory-entanglements and deconstruct what they call the archaeology of memory integrating subjective experience and objective knowledge. Organized into three sections, the volume stands among the first substantial compilations of original research from India that interrogates both macro- and micro-level intersections of memory with sites of remembrance, identity formation, narrative reconstructions, and the materialities that underpin varied social, historical, literary, and cultural contexts in the country ranging from events like the Bengal Famine, the Marichjhapi Massacre, the Bhima-Koregaon Memorial, the 1947 Partition, and the Indian-Jewish history to food practices and traditions of the Dangs of Gujarat and Indian Jewish communities to name a few. Featuring contributions from scholars at various stages of their academic trajectories from across the country, this collection enriches the field of memory studies in the country while meaningfully contributing to the global discourse on memory with representative voices from the Global South.

**Keywords:** memory studies, India, identities, events, materiality, narrative reconstructions

**Title, Publisher, Year of Publication, ISBN Number, Price:** *Memory Studies in India: Texts and Contexts*, Brill De Gruyter Publishing, 2025, ISBN: 978-90-04-72251-4, ₹ 1,756/-

**Photograph of book cover:**



Avishek Parui (editor)



Merin Simi Raj (editor)

## TRIBUTES / OBITUARIES

### NGŪGĪ WA THIONG'O (1938 - 2025)



“Gūtiri ūtukū ūtakā”<sup>1</sup>

(No night is so Dark that it will not end in Dawn)

The second half of the 20th century marks the era of the African literary revolution, producing literary giants who presented the complexity of African modernities through their nuanced exploration of language, race, class, gender, religion, and nationality in African and Europhone languages. Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian luminary, remarked in an interview, “There was something in the air”.<sup>2</sup> It was the era of freedom: attaining it, understanding it, and experiencing its possibilities and impossibilities. The passing of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o on 28 May 2025 marked the end of a magnanimous literary career that pioneered a ‘quest for relevance’ through this era of African literary revolution. His literary works and criticisms presented an uncompromisingly fearless character of ‘Africanness’ to the world.

By the time he was a student at Makerere University College in Uganda, he was already committed to the task of reimagining Africa through literature. At Makerere, his predecessors included Julius Nyerere (future president of Tanzania), who translated Shakespeare into Kiswahili. The early works of Ngũgĩ were published in *Origin: East Africa*, an anthology of stories, plays and poems featuring the works of prominent African writers who had studied at Makerere. The anthology featured four short stories by James Ngugi (he was yet to reject his birth name), along with the works by John Nagenda, David Rubadiri and Ben Mpaka (future president of Tanzania). In 1948, the production of Julius Caesar at Makerere featured Apollo Milton Obote, who was later to become the president of Uganda. This was the time when writers and politicians shared the common ground in the redemptive nature of African cultural productions. Literature and culture were tasked with unpacking the perils of freedom and exploring ways of survival and progress. Simon Gikandi says, “Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o belonged to a generation that saw literature as a forum for critique, of questioning dominant ideas and beliefs”.<sup>3</sup> Gikandi observes that in the context of the given era, creative writing performed at least four tasks: reimagined an African past and

rehearsed its resources for the future, rehearsed the drama of decolonisation, accounted for a post-colonial failure, and produced fiction that could make the reader rethink a Global African identity<sup>4</sup>. From bearing the burden of the past time in *Weep Not Child* (1964) and *The River Between* (1965), to problematising the dream of nation-building amidst the realisation of post-colonial failure and betrayal in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967), *Petals of Blood* (1977), *Matigari* (1986), and *Wizard of the Crow* (2004), Gikandi says Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o delivered these tasks with a powerful conviction.

His passing also creates a moment for his readers to reflect on the transformative phases of his life and understand the national, class, and philosophical bases of his becoming, the outcome of which was *The Devil on the Cross* (1980). The powerful postcolonial critique of capitalism in the novel is widely regarded as a cornerstone of Ngũgĩ's fame. It was of paramount importance for writers like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o to counter the destruction of the essential elements of the dominated cultures by denying the oppressor's culture and forging a new language of African being and becoming. Ngũgĩ called this 'the quest for relevance', explaining it as a 'search for a liberating perspective' within which the dominated would see themselves clearly in relationship with themselves and with the other selves of the universe<sup>5</sup>. The quest for a new perspective demanded a re-shaping of the African selfhood. As he adopted the anti-colonial revolutionary perspective of Fanonist Marxism, James Ngugi released himself from bearing a name burdened with a colonial legacy in 1967 and embraced a new name: Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o.<sup>6</sup> In a conversation with Sudhanva Deshpande at Victoria Memorial Hall in Kolkata (2018), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o spoke on the importance of the history of names.<sup>7</sup> He mentioned that the first thing that the enslaved Africans lost was their names. The name of the owner identified an enslaved person; thereby, the colonisers performed a branding of their bodies as the colonised other. Also, the Africans lost their old names and got new ones while getting baptised into Christianity. Thus, re-naming themselves was a way of returning to Africa and regaining a sense of self.

The rupture of the colonial legacy was his agenda as he sought to find a new mode of articulating African experiences. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o took a stand for promoting the pivotal role of the African languages in African literature and pedagogy. The Language Debate between Chinua Achebe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in 1962, held at Makerere University, is regarded as a defining moment in African literary history.<sup>8</sup> Achebe spoke for the need for English as a unifying language for the people uprooted from their indigenous languages. The African author, argued by Achebe, could 'Africanize' English by employing phrases, idioms, songs, and proverbs in their writing. Ngũgĩ, on the other hand, reinforced African literatures as the site of decolonisation for their potential to reclaim the historical and cultural processes denied by imperialist domination, and regarded African languages as the instruments for 'decolonising the mind'. This was succeeded by the 'Great Nairobi Literature Debate', sparked by the 1968 proposal of revitalising the English Department of Nairobi University. Ngũgĩ argued, "If there is a need for a study of the historic continuity of a single literature, why can't this be African? Why can't African literature be at the centre so that we can view other cultures in relationship to it?"<sup>9</sup> Finally, in 1977, he stopped writing in English and embraced Gĩkũyũ and Kiswahili as the preferred languages for writing.

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's project of decolonising the mind was a continuous wrestling with the devil. He was detained in 1977 and taken to Kamiti Maximum Security Prison for "activities and utterances which are dangerous to the good Government of Kenya".<sup>10</sup> While in detention, Ngũgĩ used the metaphor of the African Sisyphus to describe the experience of post-colonial betrayal, for the order of neo-colonialism is not much different from colonialism. The prisoners at Kamiti

were tortured until they were consumed by despair and pessimism and could no longer resist the colonial devil. They were given a glimpse of the “African Sisyphus endlessly labouring to push up the rock of oppression, only to see it roll back to the original spot”<sup>11</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o did not succumb to the oppressive system but sought ways to wrestle with the devil of intellectual slavery. Thus, the novel *Devil on the Cross* was born, scribbled on the scraps of toilet paper. Every scribble on the scrap of toilet paper was an act of rebellion. His devotion to the cause of the Kenyans helped him survive detention and exile. From the prison cell, he said, “Viva the ‘naive’ peasants and workers of Kenya! Viva the glorious history of the Kenyan people.”<sup>12</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o fought the devil until the end of his time and continued writing even at an old age. His last book, *The Perfect Nine: The Epic of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi*, published in 2020, is an epical poem in *Gĩkũyũ* that he translated into English. In the age of neocolonialism, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s spirit of defiance and his relentless contributions to African languages and literatures are a continuous reminder of not abandoning the quest for relevance.

#### End notes

<sup>1</sup> “Dawn of Darkness,” A Poem by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o  
<https://www.international.ucla.edu/africa/article/227463>

<sup>2</sup> Chinua Achebe, Interview by Simon Gikandi, 2009  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02690050903019772>

<sup>3</sup> <https://theconversation.com/ngugi-wa-thiongo-and-the-african-literary-revolution-258428>

<sup>4</sup> Simon Gikandi, “On Culture and the State: The Writings of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o”  
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3992225>

<sup>5</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, “The Quest for Relevance” in *Decolonising the Mind*, (London: James Currey, 1986), 87

<sup>6</sup> <https://shorturl.at/xmThK>

<sup>7</sup> [https://youtu.be/I\\_692sFyjYA?si=M9-SG7rNJ\\_wM5-O](https://youtu.be/I_692sFyjYA?si=M9-SG7rNJ_wM5-O)

<sup>8</sup> Toyin Falola, “The Language Debate”, in *Milestones in African Literature*, (London: Routledge, 2024), 21

<sup>9</sup> “The Quest for Relevance”, 89

<sup>10</sup> Ilona S. Koren-Deutsch, “Detention, Exile and the African Playwright: The Case of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o”, *South African Theatre Journal* 7, no.1 (1993), 33-38,  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10137548.1993.9688076>

<sup>11</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Wrestling with the Devil: A Prison Memoir*, (London: Vintage, 2029), 105

<sup>12</sup> *Wrestling with the Devil*, 203

**Shreyasi Dasgupta**

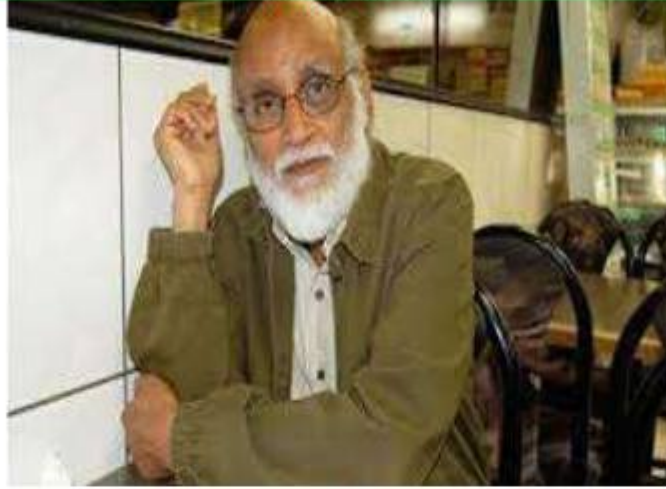
**PhD Scholar**

**Department of Comparative Literature,**

**Jadavpur University**

C.M.NAIM

(1936 – 2025)



### Naim Sahab: The Impeccable *Urdū-dāñ*

July 9, 2025, marks the passing of a stalwart – one of the most impeccable scholars of the Urdu world. Urdu enthusiasts in South Asia and across the world will fondly remember Choudhri Mohammed Naim or C. M. Naim for his dedication and contribution to the discipline of Urdu Studies, to Urdu language, literature and culture. Naim Sahab was born on 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1936 in Barabanki, a *qasbah* located over thirty kilometres away from Lucknow, in erstwhile United Provinces and well-known for its ethos of Urdu *adab*. His genteel, enlightened family was deeply conscious of the values of formal education and stressed its exigency for both, boys and girls. Naim Sahab acquired his early education in City School in Barabanki, commuting diligently every day on foot. Thereafter, he travelled to and fro, by the daily passenger train, punctually and conscientiously, while reading for his B.A. (Honours) and M.A. in Urdu, at the University of Lucknow, Lucknow. In 1957 he moved to the University of California, Berkeley, to pursue an M.A. in Linguistics. Starting his professional career as a lecturer at the Department of Linguistics, University of Chicago, in 1962, he went on to chair the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilisation between 1985 and 1991, and remained Professor Emeritus till 2001. He taught generations of non-Urdu speakers and carried out extensive research in both, conventional and less-explored areas in Urdu literature and culture. Through his academic life, he actively pursued and participated in the changing paradigms of politics, language, and identities of the postcolonial world.

Naim Sahab moved to the United States in precarious times, when, in India, the aggressive divisive linguistic politics, pitting Hindi against Urdu, had relegated Urdu to the margins, especially in the state of Uttar Pradesh, and the number of schools offering Urdu either as a subject, or, as the medium of instruction was exponentially on the decline. He remained an unapologetic proponent and defender of the language and its political dichotomy concerning Indian Muslims in modern India. He records in one of his articles, “*Urdū Adīb kī Sūrat-e Ḥāl*” (translated from Urdu by Ajmal Kamal), the state government’s reluctance to support Urdu in independent India. He alludes that the fates of Indian Muslims and Urdu language are similar, which he presents with a *sh’er* by Hasan Kazmi:

*Sab mere chāhne wāle haiñ, mera koī naḥīñ  
maiñ bhī mulk meñ Urdū kī taraḥ rahtā hūñ*

I am everyone’s beloved, nobody is mine

I too live in the country like Urdu (translated by Siddique)

This negligence on the part of the state led Indian Muslims to abandon Urdu language and learning or even send their children to *madrasas* (centres of Islamic learning) which otherwise made it possible for them to sustain their cultural identity. Either way, Indian Muslims were now forced to choose one of the two essentials. Naim Sahab was also conscious of the fates of those who still managed to learn the language; if they wished to write and publish, they must do so at their own expense, for Urdu writers could neither expect a large readership nor financial stability through their writing.

These were discouraging times in India, but Naim Sahab stood firm for the future of Urdu in the United States. He inaugurated and led Urdu-Hindi language programs in the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilisations at the University of Chicago, the first of their kind in the 1960s. Such programs required designing full-fledged syllabi for teaching Urdu script and basics of language acquisition. From designing an adaptable pedagogy for non-Urdu speakers to building a platform for modern scholarship on Urdu literature, he single-handedly created a new habitat for Urduwallahs. Moreover, teaching Urdu language and its nuances required a new set of practical and theoretical methodologies to accommodate learning capabilities of Anglophone scholars. For this reason, *Readings in Urdu: Prose and Poetry* (1965), *Introductory Urdu Volume I & II* (1999), and *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays* (2004) were written and became instrumental in teaching Urdu literature and language in all the American Universities.

To cater to the interests of people who embraced the beauty of Urdu literature and very importantly, establish a critical base for Urdu literary studies, he along with Carlo Coppola founded *Mahfil*, the pioneering English journal in the field of Urdu Studies at the University of Chicago.

Professor Carlo Coppola spoke about Naim Sahab, his Urdu teacher and mentor, and the founding of *Mahfil* in his keynote presentation, "Calls for and Responses to *Angarey*," at the seminar on "*Angarey* and the Progressive Writers' Movement" hosted by the Department of English, Avadh Girls' Degree College, Lucknow, in association with the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India (IACLALS) on 16<sup>th</sup> – 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2022:

He was a brilliant, no-nonsense task master. We students—maybe five or six--were at different levels of instruction with him. We often commiserated with one another about keeping up with the vigours and challenges of his teaching. In 1963, Naim Sahib honoured me (likely because I had had some earlier experience as an assistant editor and then editor of my undergraduate university's literary magazine) by inviting me to join him in bringing out a journal of English translations of South Asian literature: *Mahfil: A Quarterly Magazine of South Asian Literature*. A group of us produced on a mimeograph machine in the dim basement storeroom of Wilson Hall Volume 1, Number 1 of *Mahfil*: twenty-nine pages, printed on one side; on sale in the university bookstore for about 75¢, maybe 4 or 5 1963 Indian rupees. It was rather *cacha* (raw; unbaked)-looking, but its contents were, we thought, excellent.

Later, he founded the *Annual of Urdu Studies* in 1981, insisting on such endeavours in its first editorial: "*Annual of Urdu Studies* has been started with the hope to meet the needs of 'Urduwallahs' in the West." In 1993, M. U. Memon took up the journal's editorship and continued it at the University of Wisconsin-Madison till 2013.

Naim Sahab's academic writings and translations cover both, literary and political areas. From writing the powerful essay on Hasrat Mohani—"The Maulana who loved Krishna" to attending to less explored areas such as *Urdu Crime Fiction, 1890-1950: An Informal History*, or tackling explicitly political subjects like *Iqbal, Jinnah and Pakistan: The Vision and the Reality*, and *The Muslim League in Barabanki* are only few of the examples from a large corpus, most of which is available on the website of Columbia University. He regarded the political satire of Harishankar Parsai to be unparalleled in the Hindi literary canon and also believed that nobody in

the Urdu literary canon could match up to his calibre, which is why he translated *Inspector Matadeen on the Moon*.

Urdu writer and critic Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, who was also Naim Sahab's friend and contemporary, held him, his learning and academics in deep reverence. He believed that Naim Sahab was Urdu's most honest and clear-thinking critic. Khalid Jawed, the contemporary Urdu fiction writer, remembers him as having a strange attribute of *akkhaḍ imāndārī*, implying that he was honest to a point of rudeness. This quality alluded to scholarship and opinions and to his charm; it kept his students on their toes and also brought out the best in them. As Danish Khan calls him "The Conscience Keeper of Urdu," he was critical of writers like Nazir Ahmad, who, he believes, wrote only to impress and receive awards from the colonial masters. He constantly wrote against those expressing clichéd nostalgia for Urdu and its native elitism, and those who limited its scope to its aristocratic affiliations. His approach and sensibilities were modern and unorthodox towards both Urdu and Indian Muslims. He warned that Muslims had to be careful against both, communal co-religionists and majoritarianism in India, and Urdu writers must not be apologetic for their politics.

Naim Sahab propagated and popularized research and translations of Urdu literary, cultural and political texts. Several doctoral theses and independent research studies on the Urdu ghazal, different schools of thought, pre-modern, progressive and modern movements in Urdu poetry and partition literature owe their existence to his exhaustive learning and intellectual sponsorship. These studies often drew heavily on materials available on the critical base developed by him and editors and contributors to *Mahfil* and *The Annual of Urdu Studies*. His essays in *Urdu Texts and Contexts: The Selected Essays* become essential in understanding cultural and esoteric nuances related to *marṣiyah* and *mushā'irah* traditions, homosexuality, and Rekhti, all central to Urdu poetry. His selection of short stories, essays, news articles and poetry from Ismat Chughtai, Sa'adat Hasan Manto, Ahmad Nadeem Qasimi, Patras Bokhari and Muhammad Iqbal in *Readings in Urdu: Prose and Poetry* covers the linguistic and cultural diversity of Urdu literature.

Naim Sahab was of the inclusive vision that incorporates equally, the ordinary readers and academics in their different capacities. He stood against the notion of excluding non-native scholars and translators from studying and translating Urdu literature. His fears regarding such elitist prejudices, which he covers in "Our Ungenerous Little World of Urdu Studies," are realistic and demand serious meditation. His efforts to revive the language and its research are integrated with an understanding of the rise of majoritarianism and anti-immigration in India and the Western world.

Naim Sahab visited Barabanki regularly, spending time with his family, particularly his ageing mother. His family remembers him as a loving and caring person, deeply conscious of his roots, his cultural belonging and familial bonds – as a person whose individuality was inseparable from his academic and intellectual engagements, as one who wholeheartedly encouraged academic enthusiasm among his friends and relatives, even while on vacation. In the United States, as a bastion of Urdu adab, he was also an embodiment of the syncretic Gangā-Jamunī tehzīb despite having lived through the most turbulent times of communal animosity around the Partition, which also divided his family, before his migration. Naim Sahab also pursued his academic interests and imparted education in India. He served as visiting Associate Professor at Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh; visiting Professor at Jamia Millia Islamia University, New Delhi and was a national fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla.

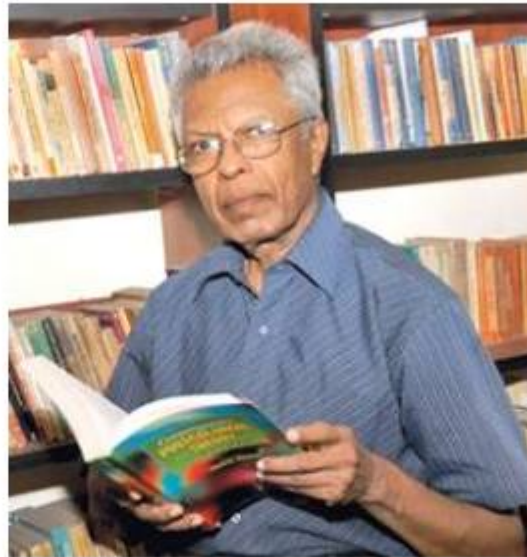
With a realistic approach to language and literature that is often trapped in the fantasies of the past and monopolised by the provincial thinking of indigenous users of the language, future scholarship in Urdu Studies will need to align with Naim Sahab's cautions and suggestions. Despite the challenges and hostility it is encountering in contemporary readership and academia in India and the US, the future holds immense possibilities for Urdu Studies, all of which will owe immensely to Naim Sahab's vision and love of the language.

**Dr. Mohd. Siddique Khan**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**School of Liberal Arts and Management**  
**Dehradun Institute of Technology**

(with inputs from Fatima Rizvi as shared by Naim Sahab's family and Professor Carlo Coppola)

## DCRA Goonetilleke

(1938 – 2025)



“He will be missed,” was John Thieme’s response when I informed him that DCRA Goonetilleke had passed away at the age of 87. Goonetilleke compiled the annual bibliography on Sri Lankan writing in English for *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* during Thieme’s tenure as editor, so Thieme knew him well. In its own way, that pithy, low-key remark appropriately captured the significance of the demise of an individual who had led a simple, unfussy life while also suggesting that it would leave a substantial void. Goonetilleke will indeed be missed for a plethora of reasons. No Sri Lankan English don to date could match his prolific scholarship which was largely brought out by reputed UK and US publishers. His ground-breaking *Developing Countries in British Fiction* was followed by *Images of the Raj: South Asia in the Literature of Empire*, *Joseph Conrad: Beyond Culture and Background*, and an edition of *Heart of Darkness*. All these constituted works that focussed on his area of specialization; Goonetilleke, however, did not confine himself to his comfort zones but accepted other challenges which resulted in a book on Salman Rushdie, *Between Cultures: Essays on Literature, Language, and Education*, and *Perspectives on Post Colonial Literature*, a collection he edited. Then again, his commentaries on Sri Lankan Writing in English in publications such as *Sri Lankan English Literature and the Sri Lankan People 1917-2003* which to a large extent brought Yasmine Gooneratne’s seminal *English Literature in Ceylon, 1815- 1878* up-to-date and the many anthologies he compiled on Sri Lankan fiction, drama and poetry are unparalleled for their scope and depth. This list, though truncated, demonstrates his monumental contribution to the world of letters.

Goonetilleke founded *Phoenix*, the journal of SLACLALS which continues to be published by the association, edited issues of *Navasilu*, and was the Sri Lankan editor of *Encyclopaedia of Post-Colonial Literatures in English*. A far-sighted and pragmatic academic, he branched out into writing study aids which focussed on the texts that featured in the Sri Lankan GCE Advanced Level Examination English syllabus. Although some peers scoffed at these publications, considering their production unbecoming of a true scholar, hundreds of candidates who passed examinations by virtue of these guides would surely disagree.

After a very creditable studentship at Royal College, Colombo, during which he won the Governor General’s Prize for Western Classics, Goonetilleke entered the University of Ceylon, Peradeniya, to read English for a Special Degree in the late 1950s. The Department which was then headed by

the talismanic EFC Ludowyk was so highly rated that it attracted scholars from around the world. The institution produced the likes of Ashley Halpé, Yasmine Gooneratne, Gananath Obeyesekere, Thiru Kandiah, Gamini Haththotuwegama, Mervyn de Silva, Ernest McIntyre and others whose names are now synonymous with the ethos of the Department during Peradeniya's "golden summer," as one journalist described it. While others were noted for their charisma, flamboyance, or the ability to attract a cult following, DCRA Goonetilleke for the most part was a foil to them. He "kept the noiseless tenor of ... [his] way" focussing almost exclusively on his scholarship.

Goonetilleke taught briefly at Peradeniya after graduation (1961-62) before moving to Vidyodaya University (1962-73). While on study leave from Vidyodaya, he completed his PhD thesis at Lancaster University on a Commonwealth scholarship under the supervision of David Craig who had been a student of FR Leavis. Craig had previously taught Goonetilleke at Peradeniya. He eventually secured a position at the University of Kelaniya, an institution he served for 34 years, before retiring as Chair of English/Senior Professor in 2004.

In chairing the 1995 ACLALS conference, Goonetilleke demonstrated qualities of determination, resilience and problem solving that had not been associated with him before. ACLALS, when Sri Lanka was given the chair in 1992, was substantially different from what it is now. After Commonwealth Foundation funding ceased with the 2013 triennial held in Saint Lucia, regional chairs became reluctant to take up the major position because of challenging funding issues. Till then, renowned academics from across the Commonwealth would often fiercely compete to hold the triennial conference. The agreement reached in 1992 was that Goonetilleke would be the ACLALS chair, but the conference be held in the University of Peradeniya (his alma mater), where the then SLACLALS chair was based. Determining that such a requirement placed unreasonable logistical and other demands on him, Goonetilleke decided to have it in Colombo anyway. He achieved his objective despite internal pressure and formidable emissaries such as Anna Rutherford being sent to the island to prevail on him to honour the original decision. The conference was held when large parts of Colombo were declared high security zones because of the prevailing ethnic conflict and one Indian delegate found himself detained by the police after he had ignored briefings given to foreign participants about wandering outside defined zones. Goonetilleke had to employ considerable diplomatic skills and influence to have him released. The conference was a resounding success despite all these challenges.

Goonetilleke was not one to court controversy but took controversial positions when governed by his convictions. His contention that there was no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka because it was a "multiracial and multireligious nation" and that the "Tamil minority enjoys a much better position in Sri Lanka than most minorities in other countries, and also because of favoured treatment ensuing from the classic colonial policy of 'divide and rule' during a century and a half of British occupation, they became, in the words of Sri Lanka's leading historian, K.M. de Silva, 'a minority with a majority complex,'" angered many dons in English Departments who held liberal or left wing views. Such sentiments were arguably true of the elite Tamil classes in the immediately post-independence period, they asserted, but were negated after the passage of the Sinhala Only bill of 1956 and the pogrom against the Tamil community in 1983 which prompted many of the Tamil elites to flee the country. Furthermore, these standpoints ignored the war that took the lives of thousands of Sri Lankan soldiers, LTTE cadres and innocent civilians. What cannot be denied, however, is that his ideological stances did not lead to Goonetilleke taking umbrage at those who held different views or affect his personal and professional interactions with minorities.

Many honours were bestowed on him locally and internationally during his long and distinguished career. While space does not allow me to include them all, the following speak for themselves: Goonetilleke was appointed fellow commoner by Churchill College, Cambridge University, and foundation visiting fellow by Clare Hall of the same institution where he was later given life membership status. He was the recipient of the Henry Charles Chapman Visiting Fellowship, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London; invited to be the DAAD Guest

Professor of English, University of Tübingen; appointed to the Advisory Board of the Graz Centre for the International Study of Literature in English; and toured India under the Distinguished Visitor programme of the Government of India. In Sri Lanka, he won the State Award for English Writing given by the Arts Council of Sri Lanka on two occasions and the Sahitya Ratna award, the highest literary honour (for lifetime achievement), by the same body.

Goonetilleke was a connoisseur of music, drama and sport. He excelled in badminton during his undergraduate days, and it was while playing mixed doubles that he met Chitranganie, who was to become his partner for over half a century. They had two sons Suren and Dillhan, both of whom also have two sons each. He delighted in the company of his grandchildren during his twilight years.

I had but a brief encounter with Ranjan Goonetilleke in the undergraduate classroom because he was on sabbatical leave during my first year in Kelaniya and I transferred to Peradeniya in the second. But I discovered in those few classes that he was methodical and thorough in his approach to teaching. Not for him the rhetorical flourishes and one to one engagement with students in class that others fancied. He delivered what could be best described as old-fashioned lectures which were closely anchored to the texts and gave students a comprehensive introduction to the subject. He was one of the first to congratulate me on my receiving a Commonwealth scholarship to read for a PhD since he had won the same award and urged me to submit an article for *Phoenix* which he had just instituted while I was yet working on my doctoral degree. But it was when I took over from him the compiling of the annual Sri Lankan bibliography for *JCL* that we established a close bond. He introduced me to his contacts and continued to advise me on how I should undertake that arduous task until I became a veteran myself.

DCRA (as he was often called) would have been bemused had he known that I would use Octavius Ceasar's remark in *Antony and Cleopatra* on learning of Antony's death, "The breaking of so great a thing should make/A greater crack," in concluding this memorial tribute to him. Still, it is a given, that academics with half his achievements but carefully cultivated public profiles, have generated a greater volume of obits and social media posts at their passing, and been honoured with public memorials at which speakers from Sri Lanka and overseas participated. The response to the demise of this retiring, family man has been muted by comparison. It is my fervent hope that this tribute will go some small way to remind the world of academe, of Devapriya Chitra Ranjan Alwis Goonetilleke's signal contributions to the field of English studies.

**Senath Walter Perera**  
**Professor Emeritus**  
**Department of English**  
**University of Peradeniya**  
**Sri Lanka**  
**(Former Chair of SLACLALS)**

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### **Disability Futures: Intersections, Precarities, and Possibilities**

#### **The Indian Disability Studies Collective Conference 2026**

**Conference organized by the Social Science Group, Azim Premji University, Bengaluru in association with The Indian Disability Studies Collective**

**Conference Dates: May 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> 2026**

**Venue: Azim Premji University, Bengaluru**

In the recent decades in India, disability has emerged as a critical axis of social and political engagement. This paradigmatic shift from approaching disability through a medical model to the social model has meant that disability activism and advocacy in India has increasingly focused on highlighting the pervasive barriers constructed by ableist social structures. Furthermore, building upon and moving beyond the social model, critical disability scholarship and activism is increasingly focusing on a political/relational model of disability which resists the rigid, essentialist separation of 'impairment' and 'disability' and instead recognizes ways in which the meanings and consequences of impairment are contingent upon diverse socio-political and historical contexts (Kafer 2013). The theoretical realignment away from the medical model has played a significant role in catalysing both legal and socio-cultural reforms across India. From India's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006, to the passage of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, to ongoing struggles around accessibility, education, healthcare, employment, data on people with disabilities, questions of disability have become increasingly significant to broader debates on social justice. Nonetheless, despite these developments, persons with disabilities, particularly from historically oppressed and marginalized backgrounds, continue to encounter systemic barriers, stigma and cultural marginalization (Ghosh 2015, 2016). Inclusion remains both a promise and a challenge, calling for sustained dialogue across disciplines. In such a context, this conference aims to unpack different visions of disability futures.

In a 2012 essay, feminist critical disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson stated that disability remains unexpected in our world because we do not imagine disabled people as having tractable futures. Although this statement retains resonance, disability futures has emerged as a critical framework which has opened up new horizons for thinking about disability not as a deficit or condition to be overcome, but as a generative site for envisioning alternative worlds, socio-political structures, and forms of belonging (Kafer 2013). Central to this reconceptualization are questions regarding futurity itself: who gets to have one, whose futures are imagined, whose body/minds are included in narrations of progress—has long haunted disability scholarship and activism. In recent years, with the rise of crip theory, decolonial approaches, intersectional analysis and transformative technological innovation, the horizon of disability futures has expanded dramatically, placing people with disabilities and their collective practices, desires, and knowledges at the center of social imagination. While this direction is to be lauded, it is also simultaneously important to recognize the inequitable social and material conditions under which the desire for crip futurities is produced, circulated, and celebrated (Erevelles 2011). Furthermore, it is equally important to recognize the debilitating condition rendered by social, economic, and political processes, particularly under conditions of colonialism, capitalism, and warfare while looking ahead at disability futures (Puar, 2017).

This *Disability Futures: Intersections, Precarities, and Possibilities* conference aims to critically weave together sets of overlapping concerns while interrogating new visions for a crip future. Realizing the vision for the disability futures involves intersectional justice that requires reimagining policies, practices, and social imaginaries so that the diverse experiences of marginalized groups—across caste, class, gender as they intersect with disability—become central to visions of equity and belonging. This conference aims to create a space to think about disability futurity by bringing together scholars doing interdisciplinary work from Humanities and Social Sciences to critically unpack a range of themes including, but not limited to the following:

**1. Intersectional analysis**

a) Caste location and privilege as it intersects with experience of disability b) Gender/Sexuality, Queerness and Disability

**2. Theorizing Disability and disability futurity in India** a) Decolonising critical disability studies in India

b) Feminist critical disability perspectives on disability futurity c) Disability and post-humanism  
d) Crip theory  
e) Crip epistemologies

**3. Disability in Law, Policy, and Governance** a) Judicial interpretations on disability

b) Reservations for people with disabilities: Applications and Challenges c) Inclusion in education and employment  
d) Social Security policies/schemes  
e) legal and policy inclusion for neurodivergent persons

**4. Disability Inclusion in Education** a) Universal design

b) Accessibility in curriculum and learning environments c) Pedagogical innovations  
d) Neurodiversity and Inclusion in educational institutions

**5. Care and Community**

a) Unpacking relationships of care: interdependence, autonomy and ethics of care b) Institutional care  
c) Care labour  
d) Critiques of psychiatric incarceration  
e) Care systems for ageing adults with disabilities

**6. Accessibility, Technology and Beyond** a) Assistive technologies

b) digital inclusion  
c) accessibility in public spaces: urban and rural infrastructures of mobility d) Accessibility beyond technology such as in financial systems

**7. Culture, Identity, and Media**

a) Representations of disability in literature, film, and popular culture b) performance, art, and activism in digital and non-digital spaces  
c) Lived Experiences and Narratives: autobiographical life writing, activist writing d) Oral histories

**8. Disability and Democracy** a) Disability and debility

b) Elections and voting preferences with disability

- c) Data and Disability: How data or lack of it treats persons with disability. The impact of under counting on the lives of persons with disability.

### 9. Disability and Affect

- a) What is the nature of emotions and affect in disabled life (ontology)? How are disability-related feelings known and understood (epistemology)? What do emotions “do”—how do they act in the world (performativity)?
- b) Disability Identity, Community, and Belonging
- c) Affective responses and resistance to ableist social norms

### 10. Medicine and Disability Futurity

- a) Advances in medical technology and disability    b) Critical analysis of Genetic testing, new eugenics    c) Medicalization of disability
- d) Critiques of Psychiatry

### References

Erevelles, Nirmala (2011) “The Color of Violence: Reflections on Gender, Race, and Disability in Wartime” in *Feminist Disability Studies*, edited by Kim Q. Hall, 117–35. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Garland-Thomson, Rosemarie (2012) “The Case for Conserving Disability.” *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry* 9, no. 3 (2012): 339–55. doi: 10.1007/s11673-012-9380-0.

Ghosh, Nandini (2015) “Sites of oppression: Dominant ideologies and women with disabilities in India”, in Tom Shakespeare (ed) *Disability Research Today: International Perspectives*, UK: Routledge, 2015.

Ghosh, Nandini (2016) *Impaired Bodies, Gendered Lives: Everyday Realities of Disabled Women*, New Delhi: Primus Publishers.

Kafer, Alison (2013) *Feminist, Queer, Crip*, Indiana University Press.

Puar, K. Jasbir (2017) *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability*, Duke University Press.

### Important Information

- 150-to-300-word abstracts and full paper of 3500- 4000 words to be submitted on 15 Feb 2026.
- Acceptance of papers will be informed to presenters by 15 March 2026.
- Abstracts and full papers need to be submitted here: <https://forms.gle/Y71LmuKxur7fcwk2A>
- The submitted papers will be put through a strict process of plagiarism check.
- Conference funds can provide limited support towards travel within India — further details will be communicated to selected participants.
- Selected participants will be provided food and accommodation at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru campus.
- For queries, you may reach out to us at: [disabilityfutures2026@gmail.com](mailto:disabilityfutures2026@gmail.com)

**AWARDS/ RECOGNITIONS**

**Awardee: Dr. Amitendu Bhattacharya**

**Name of Award: UEA Award 2025**



**Amitendu Bhattacharya**, Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani, K K Birla Goa Campus, and Life Member of IACLALS, received the UEA Award 2025 for visiting the University of Queensland, St Lucia Campus, Brisbane, Australia, from 22 May 2025 to 18 July 2025



**Name of Awardee: Dr. Natasa Thoudam**

**Name of Award: Associate Fellow**

**Awarding Institution: Royal Historical Society, UK**

**Year of Award: Elected in 2025**

**Natasa Thoudam** is an Assistant Professor in English at the Indian Institute of Technology Jodhpur. She is the elected Associate Fellow of Royal Historical Society (2025). She was the Chair of the Awards Committee of the Alliance of Digital Humanities Organizations (ADHO), a formal alliance of independent Digital Humanities (DH) organizations around the world (2024–25), and Joint Secretary of Digital Humanities Alliance for Research and Teaching Innovations (DHARTI), a constituent of ADHO from India (2025–28). She is currently working on two projects: one theorises on the concept of writing and its relation to various religious movements in India's Northeast, while the other is on the many origins, variations, and versions of comics cultures in the world. Three journal special issues are planned as outputs of these projects.

**Corrigendum:** In IACLALS Newsletter Issue 13, 2024 – Rani Uniyal should read as Ranu Uniyal in the Table of Contents.

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