

ICLA Standing Research Committee
on
South Asian Literature and Culture
Report (2021-2022)
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I. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE MAJOR EVENTS ON SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE HELD DURING THE YEAR 2021-2022

INDIA

- **Prof. Sudha Gopalakrishnan, Executive Director, International Research Division, India International Centre Delhi, reported the following programmes in 2021–2022.** On September 16-17, 2021, the International Research Division–IIC convened an online international colloquium on ‘**Afro-Asian Musical Imaginaries: Reconnecting Histories across Continents**’. This built on research from the ‘Recentering Afro-Asia Project’ (led by the University of Cape Town and Ambedkar University Delhi), and brought together over a dozen scholars and musicians from India, South Africa, and Italy. The papers and the demonstrations showed how, in centuries past, trade and migrations had led to the evolution of common musical traditions and discursive

frameworks in far-flung countries of Asia and Africa, and how this transforms our understanding of history.

On December 11, 2021, the International Research Division–IIC convened a day-long workshop, **‘The Multivalence of an Epic: Texts and Recitations of the Ramayana’**. Scholars from India and abroad read from texts from southern India with which they had engaged deeply as translators and critics. This programme brought out how the Ramayana has been retold across languages and in all genres, and recitations are key to elaborating its meaning. The workshop opened with a discussion of a new collection of essays, *The Multivalence of an Epic: Retelling the Ramayana in South India and Southeast Asia* (ed. Parul Pandya Dhar, 2021).

- International Conference organized by Comparative Literature Association of India in collaboration with BHAGAT PHOOL SINGH MAHILA VISHWAVIDYALAYA, KHANPUR KALAN, SONEPAT-131305 (HARYANA) on “Persian-Arabic Poetics in the Context of Indian Poetics: Readings, Recoveries and Re-orientations in South Asian Literatures” March 15-17, 2021. It dealt with the following sub themes: Comparative Poetics in Indian Contexts; Sanskrit Cosmopolis; Reception of Persian-Arabic Literary Forms in South Asia; Ganga-Jamuni Culture as a Conversation between Cultures; Tarjama/Anuvad/Vivarttha/Paribhasha: Indian Concepts of Translation; Ghazal in the Sub-continent: A Critical History; Popular Culture and Persian-Arabic Traditions of Story-telling/Poetry/Theatre; Historiography of Minor Literary Forms in the Context of Persian-Arabic Literature; Literary Movements in Indian Languages and Persian-Arabic Traditions; Sufism and Bhakti Poetry: Grounds of Comparison; Tamil Poetics and its Modern Readings *and* Linguistic Dynamics and Hermeneutic Articulation in Comparative Literatures.

Convenors of the conference: Prof Sushma Yadav, Prof Ravi Bhushan, Prof Chandra Mohan and Prof E.V. Ramakrishnan

Because of the Corona period restrictions, the conference was held online and it attracted significant participation from India and abroad. An anthology of select papers presented at the conference is under preparation.

II. BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ONGOING RESEARCH PROJECTS:

INDIA

Under the supervision of Prof. Sudha Gopalakrishnan, Member of the Research Committee of ICLA Standing Research Committee on South Asian Literature and Culture, the International Research Division–IIC reported on its ongoing research project, **‘SAMHiTA: South Asian Manuscript Histories and Textual Archive’**. SAMHiTA (‘compilation’/‘compendium’ in Sanskrit) is an initiative to consolidate metadata on manuscripts of South Asian provenance that are housed in repositories outside India. This would be published on an online platform that would be accessible to scholars worldwide. In July 2021, a scoping meeting was convened online, with 21 participants, including diplomats and scholars from India and abroad. Participants welcomed the initiative, speaking of its importance for retrieving knowledge, giving scholars access

to manuscripts, translating and publishing for posterity, and applying technology to decipher damaged manuscripts.

Based on these deliberations, the IRD submitted a proposal to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India, for a project to inventory, catalogue and selectively digitize manuscripts from South Asia in public and private repositories outside India, to build an open online knowledge resource, and convene activities for research, education and public awareness. It was decided to start with a pilot, where the IRD would work with select universities and libraries to establish frameworks for cooperation, standards and guidelines, and to build a network of scholars in different countries.

In March 2022, the IIC signed an MoU with the MEA, which will support the pilot phase of cataloguing, digitising and publishing online manuscripts from Kathmandu, London, Oxford, and the University of Copenhagen, over a period of 12 months. These collaborations will bring to light rare early copies of influential texts, and represent manuscripts from different traditions, from early medieval to modern times, on subjects ranging from religious literature to the practical sciences. Alongside, the IRD has initiated a monthly lecture series, '**Kriti-SAMHITA: The Plurality of Indian Knowledge Systems**'.

BANGLADESH:

- Prof. Mashrur S. Hossain, reported on the following ongoing Research Project titled: "The Pleasures and the Perils of the Net: A Critical Survey of Bangladeshi Cyber Literary Culture" for a chapter in a *Routledge Handbook of Bangladeshi Literary Culture*.
- "Apprehending the Trans: A Cultural Reading of the Hijra Speaks of Bangladesh", Research Project funded by the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Jahangirnagar University in 2020-2021.

III. PUBLICATIONS IN THE AREA OF SOUTH ASIAN LITERATURE AND CULTURE:

A) Publications by Prof. Kavita A. Sharma

- **Echoes of Nalanda** - under publication with Rupa Publications, New Delhi. The book explores a glorious period of ancient Indian education by focusing on the Mahavihara of Nalanda in the 6th century AD, which in effect became a university of international repute. It attracted scholars from far and wide including China, Tibet, Indonesia and Korea. The focus is on Nalanda and on Rajgriha, the present day Rajgir. It was a fruitful period of interaction between two great Asian civilizations, which continued till around the 11th C. The path to this interaction was paved by Indian scholars who went to China and about whom not much is known.
- **India and China: Access Equity and Quality in Higher Education** – under publication with Springer. Prof Kavita Sharma's visit to China to deliver a

couple of lectures at Beijing Normal University got her thinking about what China did right to make such a name for itself in higher education. The question was reinforced when she visited other universities like Sichuan University and Shanghai University. These visits planted the seeds of the current book in the mind of Prof Kavita Sharma. The book, on a comparative study of “India and China—Access, Equity and Quality in Higher Education”, consists of six chapters. Springer undertook its publication.

B) Volume entitled ‘South Asian Literature as World Literature’ contains papers presented at the ICLA Congress 2019 at Macau, edited by E.V. Ramakrishnan, Chandra Mohan and Mashrur S. Hossain (under publication)

C) Publications by Prof. E.V. Ramakrishnan

- Published the edited volume, *Literary Criticism in India: Texts, Trends, Trajectories* from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2021.
- His poems in English have been included in the international anthology, *The Penguin Book of Indian Poets* (2022), edited by Jeet Thayil and published by Penguin International.
- His poems have been included in the international anthology, *Singing in the Dark: A Global Anthology of Poetry under Lockdown* edited by K. Satchidanandan and Nishi Chawla, published by Penguin Books.

D) Publications by Prof. Harish Trivedi

- (Contributing editor). *“South Asia” in Literature; A World History*, 4 vols., eds. David Damrosch and Gunilla Lindbergh-Wada. New York and London: Wiley Blackwell, forthcoming July 2022.
- Trivedi, Harish (ed.) *Indian Literary Historiography: Concepts, Languages, Histories*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, forthcoming 2022.

E) Publications by Prof. Jasbir Jain

- 'The Complex web: In Search of New definitions', *The Literary Criterion* 2020
- 'Dialogues Across Time: Omair Ahmad's The Storyteller', *Journal of Comparative Literature and Aesthetics*' Summer 2021. No 2

F) Publications by Prof. Sayantan Dasgupta

- Published the edited volume, *Celebrating the City: Kolkata in Indian Literature* from Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, 2021.
- *Contemporary Bodo Short Stories in English Translation*. Co-edited with Adaram Basumatary and Chandramalli Sengupta. Asiatic Society, Kolkata (in press).

G) Publication on REKTI Poetry

- “Languaging Gesture/Gesturing Language: A Case for Rekhti Poetry”, *Transcultural Humanities in South Asia* (ed.) Waseem Anwar and Nosheen Yousaf, London/New York: Routledge, 2022.

H) Publication on Corona Poetry

- *Dusk to Dawn: Poetic voices on the current times – South Asia and Beyond*, edited by Chandra Mohan, Rita Malhotra and Anamika (Heritage Publishers, 2021).

I) Publication by Prof. Jagdish Batra

Indian English Fiction (2001-2020): History and Reflections, Published 2021 by Atlantic, New Delhi.

Submitted to the ICLA EC for its meeting in July 2022.

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ICLA Standing Research Committee on South Asian Literature and Culture**