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## From the Office Desk

Nilanjana Bhattacharya

ॐ सह नावतु ।

सह नौ भुनक्तु ।

सह वीर्यं करवावहै ।

तेजस्वि नावधीतमस्तु मा विद्विषावहै ।

ॐ शान्तिः शान्तिः शान्तिः ॥

This prayer, uttered in the days of the Upanishads, is still relevant. In the last few months, the world, Visva-Bharati, and the Centre for Comparative Literature, have seen certain changes. Some of these changes were routine, some brought us hope, some, nothing but devastation. In this age of “selfie” and growing disharmony, this hymn reminds us the value of togetherness – together we stay protected and nourished; as learners, together we learn; may our lessons enlighten us, let us have clarity, so that there is no misunderstanding between us.

That we managed to bring out this issue of *Ebarta* on time, is an example of standing together. Some devastating changes in my life compelled me to remain physically absent from my office – it is from my “home-office desk” that I write these lines. And as I write, I feel I must express my gratitude towards my colleagues and students, my fellow-learners, who stood firmly behind me in this difficult time. My special thanks to Ankana, Sruthi, Rachayita and Niranjana for their editorial and technical assistance.

However, I also feel that these lines are not purely personal. It the spirit of Comparative Literature, the bond we share – and perhaps, the anxiety – that help us stand together. Thanks to this spirit, with very little, sometimes zero, financial assistance, CCL has been able to organise multiple academic events in the last few months. This bond has helped us survive so far, and hopefully, it will help us overcome many more problems. Today, on the first day of the Bangla new year, we celebrate that spirit of togetherness.

In that spirit, we also request our readers to share their feedback with us at [cclvbu@visva-bharati.ac.in](mailto:cclvbu@visva-bharati.ac.in).

## National Symposiums

### A Symposium on the Pedagogy of Dance

*Tushita Banerjee, Ankana Bag*

Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati organised a national symposium on “What is Critical in/about Dance Studies?” on January 27, 2025 where Aadya Kaktikar and Aishika Chakraborty presented on the topic. At the beginning, Dheeman Bhattacharyya, from the Centre for Comparative Literature, spoke about the previous international symposium organised by the Centre on “Literature and Dance” in December 2024 and introduced the current symposium as an extended continuation of it. According to him, the objective of the symposium was to look at the pedagogy of dance and engage with the bodies as ‘texts’ through the lens of interrogating the nation state, class, history and gender as an act of emancipation.

The first speaker, Aadya Kaktikar, Head of the Department of Art, Media, and Performance at Shiv Nadar University and a renowned Odissi dancer, guided the audience through the evolution of Gotipua into Odissi. She highlighted how regional styles such as Odhra Magadha evolved into present-day Odissi, providing an in-depth exploration of its pedagogy and canon. Discussing the pivotal contributions of Kalicharan Pattnaik, the Odia poet who coined the name ‘Odissi’ and Kelucharan Mahapatra, who played a significant role in its revival, Aadya Kaktikar underscored Odisha’s emergence as a cultural epicenter, where dance is deeply intertwined with the state’s linguistic and geographical identity. In 1964, Odissi was officially recognised as a classical



dance form, elevating its status and leading to a structured pedagogy and wider institutional acceptance. Later Sanjukta Panigrahi brought Odissi to the global stage, embodying its sculptural grace and emotive depth. Her dedication to the dance form helped revive and popularise it beyond temple traditions, inspiring future generations. With impeccable *Sabhinaya*, she redefined Odissi’s aesthetic, blending devotion with fluid artistry while performing *bhakti* songs. Through her performances, she secured Odissi’s place as a revered classical dance form, bridging tradition and modernity.

The second speaker, Aishika Chakraborty, Professor and Director of the School of Women’s Studies at Jadavpur University, spoke about the cabaret dance form, with a special emphasis on the life and the art of Arati Das, popularly known as Miss Shefali. As a cabaret dancer from the British era to post-Independence Kolkata, Miss Shefali was a rebel in her own right. Her art and journey as a performer embodied and exposed the irony of how the market shapes society. Despite her fame as the ‘Queen of Cabaret,’ she was consistently rejected by the mainstream film industry and remained an outsider. Aishika Chakraborty had the rare privilege of personally meeting Miss Shefali and listening to her story. She highlighted how class dynamics exist independently of economic status. Coming from an educated middle-class Hindu family, who were forced to escape from Bangladesh during the Partition, Miss Shefali established herself from scratch through her talent, practice, and dedication. In an era when traditional ideals of sexual morality prevailed, she embraced her identity as a cabaret dancer,

celebrating her form and movements as statements of self-acceptance. Her story runs deeper than what is captured in her autobiography, *Sandhya Raater Shefali*.

After the two presentations, Amitava Srivastav and Sangram Mukhopadhyay, two contemporary dancers of Kolkata delivered an electrifying performance on the idea of consent. Titled “Jashn-e-Consent” it challenged the rigid canon of both classical Indian and Western dance forms, integrating conventions while infusing them with the performers’ own essence. By reading beyond the lines of a popular song, they unearthed unique and deeply personal experiences.



## National Symposium on Gender in Academic Discourse

*Debasmita De Sarkar, Rachayita Sarkar*

The Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati organised a National Symposium on Gender in Academic Discourse on February 20, 2025. It started with an inaugural speech by Professor Mrinal Kanti Mandal, Principal, Bhasha Bhavana. He discussed how the topic requires deeper conversations and efforts into understanding the idea of gender. Soma Mukherjee, coordinator of the symposium, delivered the welcome address, where she spoke about gender construction. She explained how gender affects the system in family as well as in society.

As the first speaker, Swati Ganguly (Department of English, Visva-Bharati) traced the beginnings of the presence of gender in the academic discourse and explained how it was linked with feminist thinking over time. She then elaborated on how radical feminism created possibilities of discussions of sex and gender, and the different ways in which gender was conceptualised. Gender is bound to affect the literary productions in the academic discourse. Joan Scott, in “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis”, points out how gender is a relational aspect in a wilderness of binaries. The entry of gender effectively politicised the domains of humanity and social sciences. The speaker referred to *Gender Trouble* by Judith Butler and explained gender is a primary category as well as a performative and repetitive act; it is not a disguise but a reiteration of every day.



Achyut Chetan (Department of English, Sido Kanhu Murmu University) posed the question of language and how to conduct a feminist reading, which, in the case of this presentation, was the Indian constitution. He elaborated on feminist criticism, gynocriticism and reevaluated Satyagraha from a gendered perspective which is also linked to the importance of Memory Studies and Dalit Studies. His ongoing research focuses on retrieving and ‘reading’ the voices and roles of women in the early constituent assembly of India which requires him to deconstruct the idea of archive itself.

Epsita Halder's (Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University) presentation focused on problematising feminist discourses, emphasising agency, resistance, and emancipation as the core imperatives of feminism. She highlighted the significance of the 'macro sites' of women's lives, with a particular case study on Shia women in Kolkata. She analysed their participation in religious spaces, considering the various motivations shaping their roles. Drawing from anthropology and Michel Foucault's framework, she examined religion as an institutionalised and sanctioned practice, revealing the power dynamics embedded in cultural rituals and encouraged a re-examination of the 'private' space in gendered environments. She drew attention to the corporeal and symbolic values women signify in religious rituals.

In the second session of the day, Madhura Mukherjee's (Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University) talk offered an intriguing perspective on the often-overlooked contributions of women in cinema. Through fictional narratives and fieldwork, she highlighted women's vital roles behind the camera, from hairdressers and make-up artists to costume designers. Her presentation featured pictures of women at work like Devika Rani.



Mukherjee examined creative and affective labor within the film industry, emphasising the importance of preserving archival materials to honour the unsung work of women who shaped cinematic history.

The session concluded with the screening of *Abar Jodi Ichha Koro [If You Dare Desire]* (2017), a documentary by Debalina Majumder followed by a discussion by the director on the film-making and audio-visual narrative techniques used for telling queer stories. The film poignantly explores the fictional aftermath of the joint suicide committed by Swapna and Sucheta. It was a continuation of the documentary screened on the previous day as part of a Cine-carca. It urges a deeper reflection on societal attitudes toward gender and sexuality.

The session provided rich insights into the intersection of gender, feminism, religion, cinema, and queer identities, fostering an engaging and critical conversation on several pressing issues of the present time.

## Contemporary Representations of Art, Theatre, Image and Visual Expressions: CREATIVE 2025

*Debalina Dutta, Shiny Bhattacharjee*

During February 24-26, 2025, Department of Rabindra Sangit, Dance and Drama, Sangit Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, organised an international conference on "Identity Formation and Formulation: The Crisis and Praxis of Modern Art Practices" in collaboration with Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana; Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, Kala Bhavana; Centre for Journalism and Mass Communication, Vidya Bhavana, and Department of English, Bhasha Bhavana. Academic panels 4 and 5 on the first day of the conference were held in the Centre for Comparative Literature.



The fourth academic panel was chaired by Soma Mukherjee, Centre for Comparative Literature, and was conducted in hybrid mode. Nipa Pramanik presented a paper titled “শিক্ষা-সংস্কৃতি ও সামাজিক বিকাশে জোড়াসাঁকো ঠাকুরবাড়ির অবদান” which discussed the impact of the Thakur family of Jorasanko in the scenario of education and culture in nineteenth century Bengal, with a special emphasis on the field of music. Anusha Chakraborty’s paper, titled “Effects of Multiculturalism on the Artistic Practices of the non-Tribal Communities of Tripura in post-Independence Period” examined the different forms of performance among the non-Adivasi communities of Tripura, tracing how region-specific art forms developed, their journeys outside of Tripura, as well as their reception. The next speaker

Vandana Wahengbam spoke on “Amaibic Culture: Ritual and Trance Performance as an Act of Cultural Expression” underlining the praxis of ritualistic trance as an ambiguous performance where ancient rituals seem to exist in the luminal space of



sexes as well as of the state of ‘being’ itself— situating itself somewhere between the divine and the human through the existence of the ‘shaman’. The next paper was by Somabha Bandyopadhyay on “Performing Arts: Form of Emancipation for Vulnerability, Violence and Victimisation of Transgender Persons”. She highlighted how internalised transphobia operates in society and its ramifications in the Indian legal system. She brought up the important duality of how certain performances, meant to be exercises in free will and a form of expressing freedom, are still objectified and exploited. Ankana Bag from Centre for Comparative Literature acted as the respondent to the panel and shared her thoughts on each paper, particularly pointing out whether ‘shamanism’ can be used as an umbrella term to describe every ritualistic trance-induced performance in other cultures, each with its own cultural baggage and nuances.

The fifth academic panel was chaired by Dheeman Bhattacharyya, from the Centre for Comparative Literature. The first paper of the session by Arnab Rakshit titled “আদিবাসীদের



শৈল্পিকতা: প্রসঙ্গ পুরুলিয়ার দেওয়ালচিত্র” explored the lives of Adivasi communities, emphasising how their existence is deeply intertwined with the art they create on the walls of their homes. This discussion sparked debate, a key point of contention arising from the speaker’s limited familiarity with the term ‘Adivasi’, as the art form discussed in the paper is specific

to a particular community, shaped by its distinct social and cultural ethos. Ultimately, the session encouraged a deeper exploration beyond the visual aesthetics of these artworks, inviting a more intrinsic understanding of their significance.

Nandita Sarkar spoke on “Voices of Harmony: Rabindranath Tagore’s ‘Santiniketan Bhashanmala’ (Santiniketan Lectures) as a Response to Identity, Social Change and Justice”

focusing on said lecture series as a profound response to the essence of harmony and the significance of unity, with language being a powerful tool, capable of transcending differences and weaving diverse voices into a singular, cohesive whole. Urbashi Lachit, in her paper “Echoes of Her Voice: Representations of Women in Assamese Biya Naam”, illustrated how performances and cultures are intricately intertwined, forming an eternal connection that cannot be separated from their cultural and historical roots. She sang some of the traditional songs, accompanied by instruments that enriched the melodies, seamlessly linking them to their corresponding dance forms. As the official respondent for the fifth panel, Suparna Mondal from Centre for Comparative Literature talked about the key points of each paper and put forward a query to Arnab Rakshit about the scope of his fieldwork regarding the wall-art found in Purulia. The panels were concluded with a question-answer session and a vote of thanks.

### Masterclasses

## Masterclass on the Aesthetics and Poetics of Judaism

*Shiny Bhattacharjee*

Storyteller-singer Jane Enkin and storyteller-scholar Justin Jaron Lewis offered an intellectual and experimental workshop organised by the Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati on January 8, 2025 on the topic of aesthetics and poetics of Judaism.



Justin, Associate Professor in the Department of Religion and the Judaic Studies Programme at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, began by explaining how Jewish art is inspired by the ancient belief that God cannot be depicted or seen visually. In the Jewish tradition, the Creator is neither a human nor any physical being. He discussed performances in Jewish tradition, giving the example of a dance performed to worship the moon.

The foundation of Jewish art lies in the beauty of language, letters, and scripts based on abstract designs. Language itself flourished as a visual tradition, evidenced by the four sacred letters that spell the name of the Creator, which the followers of the Jewish faith are not allowed to pronounce but only to look at. Jewish art tends to be visually exuberant, with the interiors of holy scriptures decorated with vibrant colours. Justin traced a resemblance between Jewish folk art and the folk art of India. He provided an example of an illustrated Jewish manuscript that depicts how Jewish people were once required to wear hats to distinguish themselves from Christians, a rule imposed by the government. He mentioned Yaacov Agam, an artist known for portraying the concept of the divine as something beyond human understanding. Agam's art teaches about God and different perceptions of the divine.

Jane Enkin began by discussing poetry and how the poetic medium is a unique way of imagining the world. She talked about Robert Alter, a professor of Hebrew and Comparative Literature at the University of California, and highlighted the abundance of poetry in the Bible,

such as the Book of Psalms which comprises of one hundred and fifty deeply emotional songs. Jane then sang and explained verses from Psalm 1, Psalm 19, Psalm 49, and Psalm 23. She also recited “Summer Evening by a Window with Psalms” by Yehuda Amichai and presented its translation by Robert Alter. She shared melodies from the Hasidic tradition, along with the dance forms that developed within it. These melodies are deeply nourishing, and they naturally lead to dance as an expression of joy as well as entertainment. The session concluded with a devotional song by Jane, followed by a discussion.

## Masterclass on Comparative Religion

*Sruthi M*

The Centre for Comparative Literature (CCL), Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, hosted a two-day masterclass titled “Comparative Religion: A Canadian Teacher’s Perspective” on January 9 and 10, 2025. The sessions were conducted by Professor Justin Jaron Lewis, a scholar in Jewish Studies and Comparative Religion. The event addressed complex questions on religious identity, the politics of religious comparison, and the evolving role of religion in different contexts.

The first session began with an introduction by Dheeman Bhattacharyya from the Centre for Comparative Literature. He spoke about the history of Visva-Bharati as a space for multidisciplinary learning and emphasised the importance of Comparative Religious studies in such an academic environment.

Professor Lewis opened his lecture with a story about Chaim of Volozhin, a Jewish scholar who believed in learning from all traditions without hierarchy. This set the stage for his discussion on religious identity. He shared his personal journey as a Jewish convert and reflected on how Jewish identity is shaped by both birthright and personal choice. He then tried to situate the contemporary Canadian Jewish identity, both amidst Canada's colonial tendencies and the complexities of Israeli Zionism. The session then moved to the history of comparative religion. Lewis traced its early development to the colonial explorations, when French Christian missionaries first encountered Indigenous communities in Turtle Island. He explained how these missionaries interpreted Indigenous religious practices through a Christian lens, often dismissing them as primitive. To challenge these colonial perspectives, he highlighted indigenous storytellers such as Elder Louis Bird and Tomson Highway, distancing Comparative Religion from its early beginnings. Professor Lewis summed up his lecture in a striking comparison between Wisakedjak, the trickster figure in Indigenous Canadian mythology, and Christ.

The second session took a more experiential approach with Professor Lewis offering insights into his thoughts on Comparative Religion. Unlike the former session, this was structured around three points of thought the speaker wanted to explore within the discipline.

First, he examined Hasidic Judaism, particularly the Chabad-Lubavitch movement. He critiqued aspects of its insularity and cult-like tendencies but also noted the unusual acceptance it has received within mainstream Judaism, a tolerance not always extended to emerging cult movements in other traditions. Secondly, he compared L. Ron Hubbard, founder of Scientology, with Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, a Hasidic spiritual leader. Finally, he explored *Kabbalah* and the *Zohar*, comparing the Jewish concept of the Shekhinah (the feminine divine presence) with Hindu goddess Kali. He examined different portrayals of Kali, including the Mudi yettu performance tradition of Kerala, to highlight how monastic and performative

representations of even similar concepts differ. Jane Enkins added insights on gendered interpretations of these comparisons, offering a broader perspective on how different traditions construct and represent a feminine divine.

Professor Lewis encouraged students to continue exploring these ideas and invited them to reach out to him for further discussion.



### Invited Lectures

## Lecture on Octavio Paz

Ankana Bag

The Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati organised a special lecture on “Octavio Paz and India” by Indranil Chakravarty on January 10, 2025.

The speaker began by stating that the life and the writings of Octavio Paz had been of much interest to him since decades and it has also inspired him to write his forthcoming book *The Tree Within: Octavio Paz and India*. Octavio Paz wrote in Spanish mainly and he also received the Nobel Prize in 1990 for his literary contributions. The ideals of the Mexican Revolution (1910) was something that Paz grew up with and he was also affected by the lectures of the Theosophical Society, European Modernist poetry, French Surrealism and the activities of prominent cultural figures like Victoria Ocampo.

Mexico was the first Latin American country to open an embassy in independent India in 1951 and Paz came to India as a diplomat. He spent his most bountiful and creative years in this country. His residence was a meeting place of writers, artists and intellectuals, both Indian and foreign such as Jagadish Swaminathan, Gulam Muhammad Sheikh, Vivan Sundaram, Himmat Shah, Maqbool Fida Hussain, Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Nirad C. Choudhury,



Nirmal Verma and Romila Thapar. Eminent individuals from overseas included people like Julio Cortazar, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Yves Bonnefoy and Andre Malraux.

Paz wrote several books during his time in India and travelled extensively to understand the country. His travelogue through Rajasthan, *The Monkey Grammarian* (1974) is a reflection on language itself at a time when he was influenced by French Structuralism. Another book of



his, *Marcel Duchamp: Appearance Stripped Bare* (1977) juxtaposed the figure of goddess Kali with Duchamp's art. The speaker also explained with example from the poetry by Paz that his poems are often considered meta-textual compositions where the salvation of the mass is chosen over the salvation of the individual. Octavio Paz also took on important duties as an administrator. He drafted the Indian policy for Mexico and also played an instrumental role in the Green Revolution in India.

In 1968, the news of the Tlatelolco Massacre of hundreds of students by the Mexican government gravely affected Paz and he resigned from his service to return to Mexico.

The lecture was followed by a question-and-answer session and was concluded with a brief discussion on Hispanic Orientalism.

## Online Lecture on Costa Rica's Reception of Rabindranath Tagore

*Suparna Mondal*

On January 21, 2025, Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, in collaboration with Coherent Digital, organised an online lecture titled "Absent Presence: Rabindranath Tagore in Costa Rica." The lecture was part of a series of events organised by the Centre for Comparative Literature to commemorate the centennial of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Argentina. The lecture was delivered by Roberto Morales Harley, Professor, Universidad de Costa Rica. The session was chaired by Gustavo Canzobre, of Fundacion Hastinapura in Buenos Aires. Shyama Prasad Ganguly, former Professor, Jawaharlal Nehru University, was also present as discussant.

The session started with an introduction to the topic of the lecture by Nilanjana Bhattacharya, Teacher-in-Charge, Centre for Comparative Literature. Elizabeth Robey gave a brief introduction of Coherent Digital afterwards. Roberto Morales Harley divided his lecture into five parts. In the first part titled "My Tagore," he talked about his personal encounter with works of Tagore. As a student of Universidad de Costa Rica, he was offered a course on Tagore in 2011, which he identified as a landmark event as the year also marked the sesquicentennial birth anniversary of the poet. The speaker also mentioned how Tagore has been an integral part of his teaching, research and travels. His visit to Santiniketan in 2023 was one such instance.

In the second part of his lecture titled “Costa Rica’s Tagore,” Harley mentioned that even though Tagore did not visit Costa Rica, he was well-known there for his visit to Argentina. Spanish translations of his works were reprinted there. Several articles on Tagore were published in popular magazines. Harley argued that this reception of Tagore was more like an “Imagined Tagore” rather than the actual one. This was the reason behind him choosing the title “Absent Presence,” drawing from Jacques Derrida. In the next section titled “García Monge’s Tagore,” the speaker focused on the impact of Tagore on Joaquín García Monge, Costa Rica’s notable writer, intellectual, educator and editor of the journal *Repertorio Americano*. The speaker tried to address how Argentina mediated Costa Rica’s reception of Tagore through articles published on him in *Repertorio Americano*. According to him, Tagore was discussed in this journal not only as a poet, but also as an educator and the latter had more impact on Costa Rica.



In the next section titled “Chen Apuy’s Tagore,” Harley talked about the articles on Tagore written by Costa Rican author Hilda Chen Apuy, who stressed on the educational legacy of Tagore. The final section “UCR’s Tagore” focused on the introduction of Tagore in the university curriculum. The speaker mentioned that works of Rabindranath have been part of the syllabi of the University of Costa Rica since 1980, thanks to Hilda Chen Apuy and Sol Arguello Scriba. An overview of the course on Tagore at UCR was also shared by the speaker. The session ended with comments of Gustavo Canzobre followed by a discussion by Shyama Prasad Ganguly.

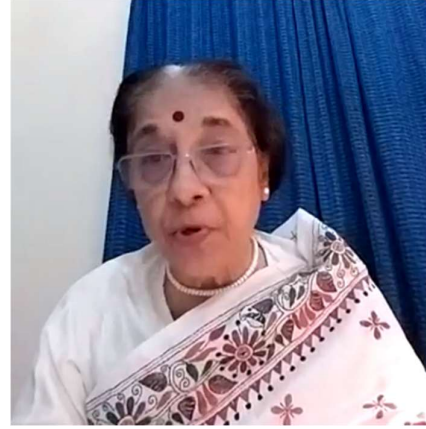
## Online Lecture on Translating *Geetobitan* into Spanish

*Riddhi Gupta*

On February 25, 2025, the Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati, organised an online lecture in collaboration with Coherent Digital as a part of the lecture series commemorating the centennial of Rabindranath Tagore's visit to Argentina.

Coordinated by Nilanjana Bhattacharya, the session was originally planned as a conversation between Jesus Aguado and Subhro Bandyopadhyay, two poets who are translating the songs of *Geetobitan* directly from Bangla into Spanish – something never done before. However, due to unavoidable circumstances, Jesus Aguado could not join the session, which then became a conversation between Subhro Bandyopadhyay and Malabika Bhattacharya, former professor of Spanish in the Institute of Foreign Languages, Ministry of Defence, Government of India. Being a translator and renowned scholar, Bhattacharya facilitated the discussion to a large extent. Bandyopadhyay explained the project undertaken by Jesus Aguado and himself, which involves translating almost three hundred songs from *Geetobitan*, to be published shortly from Spain. He further explained the meaning of *Geetobitan*, where *geet* means ‘song’ and *bitan* refers to a place where these songs are stored.

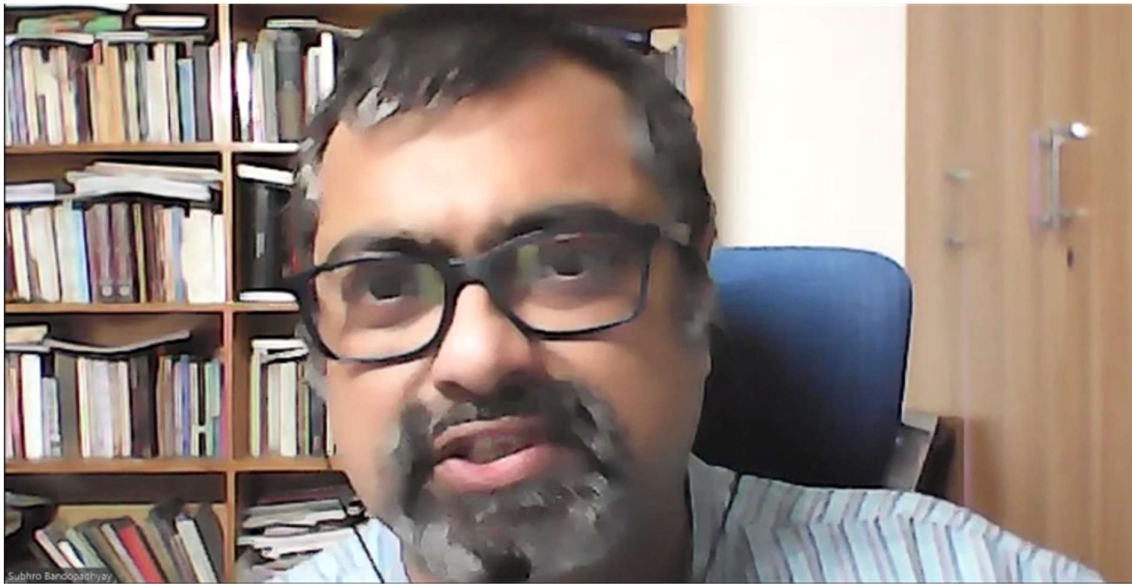
Malabika Bhattacharya asked Subhro Bandopadhyay his reason for doing these translations and he responded that if Bangla were to disappear someday, future generations would still remember Tagore's songs through translation. He also mentioned that he had translated songs from *Geetanjali* in a literal manner. When asked about how he had used the concept of *paryay* (which is an important concept to appreciate Rabindrasangeet) in his Spanish translations, he explained that he had taken most of the songs from the *Puja* and *Prakriti paryay*, which transformed the translation process into a transcendent experience for him.



Bandyopadhyay recited the songs “Prabhu Amar, Priyo Amar” and “Aaj Jyotsna Raate Sobai Gecche” and read out their Spanish translations done by him. While reciting “Jabo Na Go Jabo Na” Bandyopadhyay drew upon Rainer Maria Rilke's philosophy which helped him understand the text. As an answer to Malabika Bhattacharya's query on how he incorporated music or musicality into his translations, Bandopadhyay replied that it was a difficult task since the syllable patterns in Spanish differ from those in Bangla. However, he noted that a tune could still be applied to the translations. He further compared rhythm to *chhondo* (metrical pattern) in Bangla poetry.

While sharing some of the challenging choices he had to make during the translation process, the speaker talked about how Rabindranath had created unique conjugated terms in his songs, which he, as a translator often had to split to retain their meaning in Spanish. He also discussed the challenges posed by the poet's extensive use of multiple nouns with a similar meaning, such as *kheya* and *tori*, both meaning ‘boat.’ In Bangla, these could be used interchangeably, but in translation, he could use the word only once as there are not many synonyms of ‘boat’ in Spanish, therefore losing the layered effect present in the original.

In the concluding segment, he spoke about the prologue to his translation where he highlighted the challenges of his role as a translator.



## Carcā: Exercise in Comparativism

### Looking Back at Sarala Das' *Mahabharata*

*Debalina Dutta*

The Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati organised the first Carcā session of the year on January 31, 2025, where Rabindra Kumar Das, from the Department of Odia, Bhasha Bhavana, delivered a talk on “From Sanskrit *Mahabharata* to Sarala Das *Mahabharata*: A New Historical Study”. The speaker began by explaining how translation depends on the reader to determine the ‘cult value’ of a translated work which might give rise to the question: what exactly is translation according to an ideal critic (*sahridaya samajik*)?

Sarala Das is considered the first person to translate numerous tales from the Mahabharata from Sanskrit to Odia. In his translation, the focus of the narrative shifts from divine characters to mortal beings, providing new insights to the readers. Since Sarala Das composed his piece during the reign of King Kapilendra Deva (early to mid-fifteenth century), his translation contains elements of the political climate of that time. The work captures the lives of common people, along with a critique of contemporary society. The speaker pointed out that history and literature are inseparable because every new idea demands a truth claim—whether poetic or historical.



Das further explained that the term ‘translation’ in English, or ‘anuvada’ in Bengali and Sanskrit, does not have an equivalent term in Odia. However, the term ‘anusrijan’ in Odia closely reflects the English term ‘transcreation.’ Sarala Das’ translation had a significant impact on the culture and tradition of the Odia language even though he did not receive due recognition until the early twentieth century. The translation was also well-received in the Bengali literary tradition. During the question and answer session, the speaker mentioned how Sarala Das has been referred to in the writings of Rabindranath Thakur and other prominent Bengali authors.

### History of Marathi Translation

*Dipashna Mukhia*

The February segment of “Carcā: Exercise in Comparativism” was organised by the Centre for Comparative Literature on February 27, 2025. Sumedh B Ranvir, from the Marathi Language Unit, Bhasha Bhavana, delivered a lecture titled “History of Translation: From *Bhavarthadipika* to *Bible* via *Vajrasuchi*.”

The speaker explored the rich history of Marathi translation, highlighting its deep connections with the linguistic and cultural evolution of Maharashtra. He discussed how the movement towards vernacularisation began with the Mahanubhav sect, founded by Chakradhar Swami in the thirteenth century, which sought to make spiritual knowledge accessible in Marathi rather than restricting it to Sanskrit. During the medieval period, scholars and *darbari pandits* took on the task of translating classical Sanskrit texts into Marathi, ensuring that these teachings reached a wider audience. Ranvir highlighted how this period saw the emergence of Panditkavya, a genre that emphasised scholastic refinement in Marathi poetry and prose.





also translated into Marathi, marking a significant moment in Marathi literary scholarship. A significant work in this tradition is *Bhawarthadipika*, a Marathi commentary on the *Bhagavad Gita* by Sant Dnyaneshwar. Ranvir highlighted how this text was a revolutionary step in Marathi translation, as it rendered a complex Sanskrit scripture into a simple and poetic Marathi form, making it accessible to the masses.

In the nineteenth century, the *Satyashodhak Movement*, led by Jyotirao Phule, brought a new dimension to Marathi translation. Phule and his followers sought to reinterpret religious texts through a rationalist and anti-caste lens, making them accessible to marginalised communities. A significant event was when the Brahmins of the Dakshina Prize Committee diverted funds meant for literary development into religious purposes, while Jyotirao Phule fought to reclaim them for their intended role in fostering Marathi literature.

The session concluded with a question-and-answer segment that further enriched the discourse.

## Tradition of Translation in Santali Literature

Debasmita De Sarkar

The ‘Carca: Exercise in Comparativisms’ session for March was organised by the Centre for Comparative Literature on March 28, 2025. Mansaram Murmu, Department of Santali, Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati spoke on the topic, “সাঁওতালী সাহিত্যে অনুবাদের ধারা”.

His lecture was an amalgamation of different translation projects that he undertook over the years. He explained how Bengali and Santali have the ability to express certain things in a similar manner. The literary syntax and forms of Bengali and Santali varies but the essential characteristics and qualities do not change. He further clarified this point with the example of the Santali translation of Rabindranath Tagore’s *Gitanjali* done by Srikanto Soren. According to him, the Santali translation of *Gitanjali* closely mirrors the original Bengali text. The speaker demonstrates how the translation closely parallels the grammatical rules and meanings of the source text. Santali translations vary with



different genres such as songs, poems, dramas, etc. each having its unique structure. He then listed some of the ongoing translation works in Santali and gave detailed description of the translation politics associated with it. He used the Santali translation of Rabindranath Tagore's short story "Ghater Katha" as an example and analysed the translation process.

'Western' literatures have also been translated in Santali. Murmu ended his lecture with a discussion on the collection of short stories by Sowvendra Shekhar Hansda titled *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. Murmu believes that learning a language or gaining an understanding of a language is the first crucial step towards appreciating its cultural nuances which would play a primary role in translation.

## Cine Carcā

### Screening of এবং বেওয়ারিশ (*And the Unclaimed*)

Sinjini Ghosh

The Centre for Comparative Literature organised "Cine Carcā" on February 19, 2025 in which the documentary এবং বেওয়ারিশ (2013), or *And the Unclaimed*, was screened. It is directed by Debalina Majumder and produced by Sappho for Equality. This documentary was screened as the prelude to the symposium on "Gender in Academic Discourse" organised by the Centre for Comparative Literature on February 20, 2025.

The documentary revolves around Swapna and Sucheta, two women of Nandigram, West Bengal and the aftermath of their death. The suicide letter left by Swapna becomes the backbone of the entire documentary. The narrative displays the love between two women and the discrimination faced by them in the society. Four other individuals who identified themselves as part of the LGBTQIA+ community were also interviewed parallel to the families of both the deceased women. Through the experiences of these four living people and their reaction to the suicide letter by Swapna, the struggle of finding and establishing one's own identity while battling against the prejudices of the society are depicted.

"If we die together, keep us together, if we remain alive, together we will go far away..." is the most poignant line from the documentary. The internalised misogyny and homophobia of a significant section of the society becomes prominent during the interview of the villagers of Nandigram, the advocate and the personnel from the police force. In the documentary, the aspect of being 'unclaimed' refers to both the facts that neither of the women's families came forward to claim their bodies and also the tenuous situation of queer and trans folks in India.

The director, Debalina Majumder herself was present for the screening and talked about her experience of the making of the documentary during a question-answer session.



## Events

### Celebration of Fifteen Years of Bhasha Bhavana

*Ankana Bag*



The students and faculty members of Centre for Comparative Literature, Bhasha Bhavana, attended a one-day symposium on “Commemorating Fifteen Glorious Years of Bhasha Bhavana” organised by Bhasha Bhavana, Visva-Bharati on January 22, 2025. The event began with an inaugural song by the students and the felicitation of all the former professors who have held the position of the Principal of Bhasha Bhavana throughout the past fifteen years. An audio-visual clip about the principals was also played, followed by the release of a commemorative volume by the honourable former Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Binoy Kumar Soren. He also addressed the assembly, emphasising the importance of language and culture.

The former principals were honoured with citations that expressed our gratitude for their guidance and service to Bhasha Bhavana. All the faculty members who had held the position of the Vice-Principal of Bhasha Bhavana as well as the Heads of the different departments under Bhasha Bhavana were felicitated next. All the former principals delivered speeches where they reminisced about their own experiences as the Principal, Bhasha Bhavana, and the development of Bhasha Bhavana during their tenures. The event ended with the distribution of trophies for the students of the departments who were placed first through third during the celebration of the International Mother Language Day in 2024.

### শ্রীনিকেতনের মাঘ মেলায় তুলনামূলক সাহিত্যকেন্দ্রের অংশগ্রহণ

*শিলাজিৎ মন্ডল*

মাঘ মাস পড়তেই শ্রীনিকেতনের মাঠে অনুষ্ঠিত হয় তিন দিন ব্যাপী মাঘ মেলা যেখানে চোখে পড়ে, কৃষির সঙ্গে সংস্কৃতির মেলবন্ধন। ৭ই ফেব্রুয়ারি বিশ্বভারতীর তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য কেন্দ্রের শিক্ষক-শিক্ষার্থীরা মেলায় হাজির হয়েছিলেন এক অন্যরকম অভিজ্ঞতার সন্ধানে। তবে এ বছরের মেলার প্রধান আকর্ষণ হয়ে উঠল



মুর্শিদাবাদ থেকে আসা রায়বেঁশে দলের দুর্দান্ত পরিবেশনা। সাহোড়ার বাসুদেব ভল্লার নেতৃত্বে দলটি মেলা প্রাঙ্গণে উদ্দীপনা ছড়িয়ে দিলেন তাঁদের যুদ্ধসঙ্গীত ও শক্তিশালী নৃত্য দিয়ে।

বাংলার অন্যতম পুরনো যুদ্ধনৃত্য রায়বেঁশের আদি রূপটি বয়ে এনেছেন এই শিল্পীরা। ঢাক-ঢালের তালে তালে মাটিতে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়া, শূন্যে লাফানো, কাঠের তরোয়াল ঘুরিয়ে একের পর এক কৌশল প্রদর্শন, রণপা নৃত্য—সবই এর অন্তর্গত। তুলনামূলক সাহিত্যের শিক্ষার্থীরাও রায়বেঁশের এই লোকায়ত ঐতিহ্যকে বাংলা সাহিত্যে যুদ্ধ এবং প্রতিরোধের ভাবনার সঙ্গে মিলিয়ে দেখার এক আকর্ষণীয় ক্ষেত্র খুঁজে পেলেন। শুধু রায়বেঁশেই নয়, এবারের মাঘ মেলায় ছিল বিশ্বভারতীর কৃষি বিভাগের উদ্যোগে আয়োজিত সবজির প্রদর্শনীতে অর্গানিক সবজি থেকে শুরু করে বিভিন্ন ঔষধি গাছের সম্ভার। গ্রামবাংলার স্বনির্ভর গোষ্ঠীগুলির হাতের কাজের স্টলে শোলার কাজ, কাঁথা সেলাই, মাটির পুতুল থেকে শুরু করে নানান কারুকার্যের সম্ভার মেলায় এনে দিয়েছে গ্রাম্য জীবনের উষ্ণ পরশ। বিশ্বভারতীর গ্রিকালচারাল বিভাগের স্টলে ছিলো আধুনিক কৃষি প্রযুক্তি এবং প্রাকৃতিক কৃষি সম্পর্কিত তথ্য, যা কৃষকদের পাশাপাশি গবেষকদেরও আকৃষ্ট করেছে। শিক্ষার্থীরা জানান, মেলার অভিজ্ঞতা তাঁদের স্থানীয় সংস্কৃতি এবং তার সামাজিক-অর্থনৈতিক পরিপ্রেক্ষিতকে নতুনভাবে চিনতে সাহায্য করেছে।



## আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবস উদযাপন

সাদিয়া আফরিন মোহনা

একুশে ফেব্রুয়ারি আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা দিবস উপলক্ষ্যে ভাষা ভবনে আয়োজিত হয়েছিল বিশেষ কর্মসূচি। অনুষ্ঠানের উদ্বোধন করেন বিশ্বভারতীর উপাচার্য বিনয় কুমার সোমনেন এবং সভাপতিত্ব করেন ভাষা ভবনের অধ্যক্ষ অধ্যাপক মৃণালকান্তি মন্ডল। প্রতিবছরের ন্যায় এই বছরও দিনটি যথাযথ মর্যাদা ও শ্রদ্ধার সঙ্গে পালন করা হয়েছে। অনুষ্ঠানের শুরুতে বাংলা বিভাগের শিক্ষার্থীর বাঁশির সুরে বাংলার মাটি, ও জলবায়ুর প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা জ্ঞাপন করা হয়। তারপর বক্তব্য রাখেন বিশেষ অতিথি বাংলাদেশের জগন্নাথ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের আধুনিক ভাষাতত্ত্বের অধ্যাপক। তিনি দুই বাংলার ভাষাগত মিলনকে স্বরণ করেন এবং ভাষা শহীদদের প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা জ্ঞাপন করেন। পর্যায়ক্রমে ভাষাভবনের সকল বিভাগের শিক্ষার্থীরা তাঁদের উপস্থাপনার মাধ্যমে ভাষার প্রতি শ্রদ্ধা জ্ঞাপন করেন। তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য বিভাগের শিক্ষার্থীরাও সৃজনশীলতার সাথে একটি নাটিকা পরিবেশন করেন, “চায়ে পে চর্চা, ভাষা কি অত্যাচার” নামে। সেখানে ভাষার ভিন্নতা, ভাষার ক্ষমতায়ন এবং প্রত্যেক ভাষার প্রতি সম্মান প্রদর্শনের কথা উঠে আসে। অনুষ্ঠানের শেষে সকলের প্রতি কৃতজ্ঞতা প্রকাশ করেন ভাষাভবনের সহ উপাধ্যক্ষ তপু বিশ্বাস এবং আশ্রম সংগীতের মাধ্যমে অনুষ্ঠানটির সমাপন হয়।





## পরিচ্ছন্নতার আনন্দ, গর্বের সকাল— তুলনামূলক সাহিত্যকেন্দ্রে

### গান্ধীপুণ্যাহ

শিলাজিৎ মন্ডল

প্রতি বছরের মত এই বছরও তুলনামূলক সাহিত্যকেন্দ্রে গান্ধীপুণ্যাহ উদযাপিত হল ১০ই মার্চ, ২০২৫। আকাশে রোদুরের স্বচ্ছ আলো, বাতাসে শান্তিনিকেতনের চিরচেনা স্নিগ্ধতা। এর মধ্যেই তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য কেন্দ্রে ধরা দিল এক অন্য সকাল— ‘গান্ধীপুণ্যাহ’-র দিনে ছাত্রছাত্রীদের হাতে বাঁটা, কাপড়, জলভর্তি বালতি। জানালার শার্সি থেকে শুরু করে মেঝের প্রতিটি কোণ— ধুলো-ময়লা সরিয়ে আসছে একরাশ

নির্মলতা। ১৯১৫ সালে মোহনদাস করমচাঁদ গান্ধী তাঁর ফিনিক্স স্কুলের ছাত্রদের নিয়ে শান্তিনিকেতনে আসার পর থেকে প্রতি বছর পালন করা হয় গান্ধী-পুণ্যাহ। এই দিনটির উদ্দেশ্য হল গান্ধীজির স্বাবলম্বন ও স্বচ্ছতার নীতির প্রতি ফিরে দেখা। এই বছরও বিশ্ব-ভারতীর সমস্ত বিভাগে দিনটি পালনের অন্যথা ঘটে নি।

সকাল থেকে শুরু হওয়া এই কর্মযজ্ঞ শেষ হয় দুপুর একটার মধ্যে। একে একে জল ঢেলে, কাপড় নিংড়ে পরিচ্ছন্নতার কাজ সেরে উঠে দাঁড়ায় সবাই। সূর্যের আলোয় তখন তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য কেন্দ্রের ঘর যেন নতুন প্রাণ ফিরে পেয়েছে। পড়ুয়ারা ধুলো-ময়লা সরালেন, আর সঙ্গে সঙ্গে যেন সরল একরাশ অবহেলা— তৈরি হল এক পরিচ্ছন্ন চেতনার প্রতিমূর্তি।



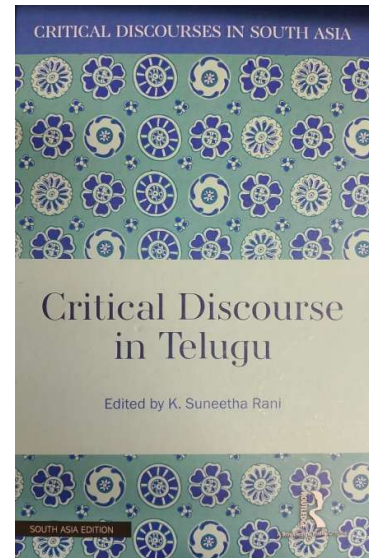
### Book Review

#### *Critical Discourse in Telugu*

Edited by K. Suneetha Rani  
Routledge, 2022  
Price: 995/-

Ankana Bag

*Critical Discourse in Telugu*, edited by K. Suneetha Rani and published by Routledge is a part of the Critical Discourses in South Asia series. This book traces the emergence of critical discourse after colonial modernity reached the Telugu speaking region. In the “Introduction” of the book, K. Suneetha Rani identifies that critical discourse in Telugu region concerned “identity movements, linguistic influences, gendered understandings and complex hierarchies”. The “Introduction” forms an



important part of this book as it offers an overview of the Telugu literary and cultural tradition from eleventh century to the ‘early modern’ and ‘modern’ eras, giving a glimpse into the ‘canonised’ journals, magazines and movements which makes this portion very important for readers who are unfamiliar with the Telugu tradition and thought. The extensive bibliography provided at the end of it is also helpful to readers who are interested in acquiring a comprehensible understanding of the matter. Thirty-two articles are included in the current volume with only four among them being originally written in English. The other articles are translated into English with an objective to maintain a uniform standard in the transliteration and spelling of names. Like other volumes in the series, this one too has an introduction before each article that briefly introduces the authors and explains the context of the article. The timeline of the articles ranges across almost a hundred and fifty years from the first article being published in 1875 to the last article being originally published 2012.

A number of essays such as “Women’s Education [February 1875]” by Kandukuri Veeresalingam, “Prologue to *Radhika Santvanamu*” by Bengaluru Nagaratnamu, “Man and woman (excluding the aspect of love)” by Gudipati Venkatachela, “Rasa and women’s experience” by Katyayani Vidmahe, “Muslim women’s poetry” by Khaja and “The story of Yellamma— the philosophical perspective” by Challapalli Swaroopa Rani bring up different issues regarding women’s evolving position in the society and in academic discourse. On the other hand, “Prologue to a *memorandum on modern Telugu*” by Gidugu Venkata Ramamurthy, “Foreword to a *history of Telugu literature*” by Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy, “Why Sanskrit, Oh Swami?” by Bojja Tharakam, “First-generation short stories of Telangana” by Mudiganti Sujata Reddy. “The origins of Telegu drama that one does not wish to see” by G. Kalyana Rao and “Reflections on Marxist literary criticism in Telugu” by N. Venugopal are writings that focus on the multifaceted development of Telugu literature from early twentieth century onwards.

The interesting point of these essays is the intersection of different issues within a single text. The articles that are centred around the ‘caste-question’ look at the formation of caste from different perspectives. For example, B. Vizia Bharati’s “The story of Rama and the class character” examines the character of Tataka as the representation of a tribal queen who is defeated by the mainstream Aryan kings, intent on invading her forest to expand their own kingdom. “Protest against the caste hegemony” by Jayadhir Thirmal Rao and A. K. Prabhakar is the introduction portion to the *Jambapurana* formulating a creation-myth of ‘untouchability’ and subverting the Brahminical narrative of the origin-myth. G. Lakshmi Narasaiah’s “Difference of perspectives between Dalit literature and revolutionary literature” tries to posit the ‘Dalit problem’ as a part of the problem of caste instead of being only a problem of untouchability and talks about how Dalit poetry interprets the ten avatars of Vishnu as ten phases of invasions done by the Aryans to encroach into the territory of the aboriginals. In this light, the selection and placement of “The story of Yellamma — the philosophical perspective” as the final article in this anthology is more than apt as it reads the story of Yellama as the victim turned goddess (worshipped by the lowest strata of the Dalit communities) due to the ostracization and violence that is meted on her by her husband Jamadagni and son Parashuram.

The meticulous notes at the end of each text offer additional helpful information to the readers. Although the translations attempt to maintain a uniform quality across the book, the language of certain portions can feel stilted to some extent. However, the variety of topics discussed in the articles within the anthology *Critical Discourse in Telugu* makes for an interesting but rigorous academic read.

## Ongoing Research Works

- Ishani Dutta: Of Recitals and Performances: Reading New Modes of Representation in Contemporary Indian Nepali Poetry in the Darjeeling Hills and Sikkim (2000- 2022) [Thesis submitted]
- Sounak Dutta: Translation-based Reception of the 'Soviet' in Bengali Literature in the Post- World War II Era (1945-1965) [Thesis submitted]
- Edu Sherpa: The Rise of the Indian Nepali Periodicals: A Historiography from 1900 to 1950 [Thesis submitted]
- Mrityika Ghosh: Contextualising the 'Canon' and 'Periphery': Historicising the Works of Select Nigerian Women Writers (1960 - 2020)
- Ankana Bag: Exploring Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism: The 'Travel Writings' (1942-52) of Ramnath Biswas
- Arjyarishi Paul: Assessing the Idea of the Juvenile in India with Respect to Selected Bangla Illustrated Texts (1947-1991)
- Suparna Mondal: বাংলা বিদ্যাচর্চায় ভারতীয় সাহিত্যের প্রতিগ্রহণ: প্রসঙ্গ 'সাহিত্যিক ইতিহাস' নির্মাণ (১৯৫০-১৯৯৯) [The Construction of 'Literary History': Indian Literature as Received in Bangla Literary Studies (1950-1999)]

## Students' Achievements

- Suparna Mondal was invited to Yapanchitra Festival 2025 to present her poems on March 8, 2025.

## Students' Publications

- মণ্ডল, সুপর্ণা। "কবিকল্প চণ্ডী ও স্পেনসারের "দ্য ফেয়ারি কুইন" কাব্যে নদনদীর সমারোহ বর্ণনা।" সুখময় মুখোপাধ্যায় স্মারকগ্রন্থ, সম্পাদনা অতনু শাশমল, বঙ্গীয় সাহিত্য সংসদ, ২০২৫, পৃ. ৪৮-৫৪।

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