Webinar Brochure

Young Researchers’ International Webinar
on
The Evolution of Bengali Identity
Reflections in Literature, Culture & Society

10, 11, 12 October 2020

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The year 2020 being the year of 200th birth anniversary of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, one of the pioneers of Bengal Renaissance, this webinar proposes to map the evolution of the Bengali identity during these last 200 years, the pluralities and the nuances, that have often outgrown the linguistic and geographical dimensions. The webinar will also focus on the cultural, social, religious and political events that have impacted Bengali identity during the 200-year-long journey through which it has evolved since the Bengal Renaissance.

The webinar proposes to create a space for contestations and deliberations on how the factors and facets relating to Bengali identity have been represented in different types of literary media. Some of the subtopics that the webinar looks forward to dwell upon are:

- Bengal Renaissance and Reformations
- Nationalism and Politics
- Religion and Partitions
- Famines and Disasters
- Home and Diaspora
- Globalisation and Multiculturalism
- Science and Rationalism
- Literature and Arts
- Regionalism and Provincialism
- Language and Dialects
- Performances and Popular Culture
- Inclusivity and Multiplicity

However, this is by no means a comprehensive listing.

- Webinar Dates: 10, 11, 12 October 2020

**Online Platform:** Google Meet [the event will be recorded and live-streamed; link for joining the event will be shared with registered participants]

**Streaming Platform:** Facebook

**Streaming URL:** https://www.facebook.com/psjourn/live [please click here to visit and follow the official Facebook page of the journal to receive updates]

**Registration:** Please click here to access the registration form

**Registration Fees:** NIL

**Query e-Mail:** psjourn@gmail.com

**Publication**

Papers revised after presentation may be sent within 30 October 2020 for publication in the January issue (Volume VI Number I: Special Issue on ‘The Evolution of Bengali Identity: Reflections in Literature, Culture & Society’) of *postScriptum*. Selection of the papers for publication in the journal is subject blind peer-review. **Publication Fees:** NIL.
YRIW: Bengali Identity

Schedule

An indicative schedule (subject to change) of the webinar (times mentioned are PM IST)

Day1: Saturday 10 October 2020

5.00-5.15 – Inaugural Session
- Welcome Address by Dr Sandip Kumar Basak, Principal, Sarat Centenary College

5.15-6.00 – Keynote Speech
- “Being Bengali: Reading Bankimchandra’s Bangadarshan and Monica Ali’s Brick Lane as Continuum”
  - Dr Nandini Bhattacharya, Professor of English, Department of English & Culture Studies, The University of Burdwan
6.00-6.15 – Interactions

6.15-7.15 – Business Session 1
Chair: Dr Sharbani Banerjee, Associate Professor of English, Trivenidevi Bhalotia College

Sharmita Ray: The Elusive Science: Medicine and Women in Late Colonial Bengal
Mita Bandyopadhyay: Female Literacy in Bengal: The Journey of a Woman from Andar Mahal to a Professional Life
Debottama Ghosh: The Emerging Bhadramahila of Colonial Bengal: Subarnalata's Journey from the Periphery to the Centre
Nibedita Paul: Nationalism and Politics through Bina Das’s Memoir

7.15-8.15 – Business Session 2
Chair: Dr Jati Sankar Mondal, Assistant Professor of English, Sidho-Kanho-Birsa University

Dipannita Barua: Women Artists and their Voices in Colonial Bengal
Stella Chitralekha Biswas: Daughters of the Nation: Revisiting Women’s Speculative Writings in Bengal
AGNIBHA MAITY: (Trans)Forming Identity: A Study on the Cartographic Project of Nineteenth-Century Bengal
KYAMALIA BAIRAGYA: SPORTS AND THE BENGALI CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF COLONIAL BENGAL
YRIW: Bengali Identity

Day 2: Sunday 11 October 2020

4.00-4.45 – Invited Speaker: Dr Dipendu Das, Professor of English; Dean, Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyay School of English & Foreign Languages Studies, Assam University, Silchar
   "Being Bengali in India’s Northeast: Constriction/Construction of Identity"
   4.45-5.00 - Interactions

5.00-6.00 – Business Session 3
Chair: Dr Pradip Shyam Chowdhury, Assistant Professor of English, University of North Bengal

Semanti Nandi: Embattled Bodies: Revisiting the Birangonas of Bangladesh
Debasreeeta Deb: The ‘Other’ Bengalis in Assam: Linguistic Nationalism and the Language Movement of 1960
Mohona Chatterjee: “Travelling memories and reformed identities” Re-reading Adhir Biswas' Deshbhager Smriti in Light of the Partition of Bengal
Md Nahid Kamal: Identity Crisis in Shahidul Zahir’s story Indur-Bilai Khela: A Critical Representation of the Conception of Power and Negative Liberty

6.00-7.00 – Business Session 4
Chair: Dr Abin Chakraborty W.B.E.S., Assistant Professor of English, Chandernagore College

Paromita Ghosh: Memory of Home: A Study of Siliguri Through Partition Memories
Debarun Sarkar: ‘A city to look at' and 'presenting the world to the city': Reading Biswa Bangla Gate and Eco Park in New Town, West Bengal
Anirban Banerjee: The Temple Village of Maluti: A Re-appraisal of Bengali Identity and Culture from the Margin

7.00-8.00 – Business Session 5
Chair: Dr Anindita Chatterjee W.B.E.S., Assistant Professor of English, Durgapur Government College

Soumi Nandi: “ADDA”: Bengali’s Institution of Expression and Argument
Anwesha Chattopadhyay: The Prodigal Probashi: Bengali Identity in Kushanava Choudhury’s “The Epic City”
SOURAV KR SARKAR: Being (Non)Bengali in a Postmetropolis City: A Study of Kunal Basu's novel Kalkatta
YRIW: Bengali Identity

Day3: Monday 12 October 2020

4.00-4.45 – Invited Speaker: Dr Sourit Bhattacharya, Lecturer in Postcolonial Studies, School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow
- “Hunger, Food Movement, and Modernist Bengali Poetry”

4.45-5.00 - Interactions

5.00-6.15 – Business Session 6
Chair: Dr Ariktaom Chatterjee W.B.E.S., Assistant Professor of English, Government General Degree College, Singur

Sagarika Bhattacharjee: Disaster, Class Struggle, Racial Worldview: A Study in the Famine of Bengal
Shireen Sardar: Mapping Famine in Colonial India: Re-identifying the Great Bengal Famine (A Case Study)
Saikat Chakraborty: “Oi ghasiyara ke bolo na, jeno amar oi gach gulo na kate” / “gari vi ghar ka aurat hai kya?”: Examining Rabindranath Tagore’s Bolai and Subodh Ghosh’s Ajantrik from a Posthumanist and Transhumanist Perspective Respectively
KAUSHIK PAUL: Performance as Resistance: The Making and Unmaking of Radical Aesthetics in Bengali Literature
Anamta Rizvi: Identity and Authority: Inclusion of Bengali Poets in the Canon of Indian English Poetry

6.15-7.30 – Business Session 7
Chair: Dr Pinaki De, Freelance Graphic Designer & Illustrator; Associate Professor of English, Raja Peary Mohan College

Arpita Ghatak: Jatragaan of West Bengal: The Post-Independence Scenario
Miss. Priyanka Basu: Beyond the Mainstream: Bengal’s Search for Identity Through the Journey of Her Folklore from Oral Tradition to Web Series
Sayan Chatterjee: The Identity of the Tantric as a storyteller: Re-reading Taranath Tantric
HAIMANTI MUKHOTI & Titiksha Chakraborty: Nnanabidha(Myriad): A Rediscovery of Sundry Bengali Identities Through Lenses

7.30-8.00 – Valedictory
- Vote of Thanks
- Open Feedbacks

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Abstracts

The Elusive Science: Medicine and Women in Late Colonial Bengal
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This paper will present an analysis of women’s fraught relations with scientific learning and its subsequent application in Bengal with special focus on women’s inception into professional medicine. Another focus of the paper will be to assess the influence of knowledge of Western science/medicine and the Bengali women’s consequent interest and engagement with issues pertaining to women’s health as reflected in articles published in vernacular journals. Gender biases had denied women the opportunity to engage with the sciences and empirical learning until the late nineteenth century. These biases were thwarted when the determination of a set of reformers and the practical needs felt by a gender-segregated society generated the demand for trained female medical professionals. This paper will focus on the evolution and fruition of a gendered identity of women in the field of medicine as qualified doctors, distinct from the image of the notorious indigenous midwives, who (being the closest to medical aides) had been the exclusive female companions attending to women at the time of childbirth.

The paper will argue that a specialised identity of women with a scientific temperament was constituted from the late nineteenth century based on their direct/indirect engagement with various aspects of scientific knowledge in the colonial context. Biographical writings and contemporary Bengali journal publications on medicine and women will constitute my resource to point towards an epistemological breakthrough as far as women’s association with science, health and medicine are concerned. Kadambini Ganguly, Haimabati Sen and Jamini Sen were among the earliest women doctors from Bengal. Through an analysis of their experiences in learning and dispensation of medicine, this paper will argue that women negotiated their way to establish their worth as medical professionals and asserted a unique identity of their own. In an atmosphere of a range of social reforms working towards creating the “new woman” in the context of Bengal, women doctors simultaneously complied with, challenged and also subverted the norms that guided the bhadralok sections in the Bengali society. Bio-medical concerns that intersected with reform agendas associated with child marriages, amelioration of widows’ conditions, restrictions of purdah practices found articulate expression based on first-hand experience of women practicing medicine as well as in the writings of educated women engaging with matters of health and medicine in a reform oriented colonial milieu. Writings from journals including Bamabobodhini Patrika, Antahpur, Swasthya and Swasthya Samachar will substantiate the assertions made in the paper.

This paper will focus on the evolution of this unique identity of Bengali women as doctors and of women with a scientific temperament engaging with the knowledge of health and medicine. The paper will explore the evolution of this identity in the backdrop of the colonial context which created special circumstances for women to explore their individuality. The paper will offer an analysis of some aspects of the gendered dimensions of the trajectory of Western medicine and scientific knowledge in colonial context.
Female Literacy in Bengal: The Journey of a Woman from Andar Mahal to a Professional Life
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Female Literacy in Bengal: The Journey of a Woman from Andar Mahal to a Professional Life

The social and cultural reformation of Bengal that was reshaping the ideologies of the urban educated Bengali youth, under the effect of liberal western education, also affected the condition of woman and also their state of literacy. Education for female in contemporary Bengal mainly meant Zenana education, that is, informal educational practiced in private homes, but roads to formal education was barred for the woman. Even after the establishment of formal education in schools and colleges, women had no recourse to professional education. The article attempts to explore the affordances of professional education, the road to which was laid down by Dr. Kadambini Ganguli under the active and staunch support of her father, Braja Kishore Basu, her cousin, Monomohan Ghose and the most efficient of all her husband, Dwarakanath Ganguli to enable her to smash the glass ceiling and shatter all stereotype and become the trailblazer for generations to come.

Female Literacy

Although modernity introduced certain changes in the condition of the women, but ironically it served as the gateway to fresh bondages. A report on the State of Education in Bengal in 1836 stated the popular notion that an educated woman was responsible for the death of their husband (Forbes 33). It was the urban educated male, generally termed as the bhadralok who enjoyed the privilege to define the precepts and dictates of womanhood and whose viewpoint satirised the educated bhadramahila. Continued attempts of female literacy turned things somewhat better and education in females was considered necessary for their grooming as the ideal wife of the bhadralok, generally termed as sahadharminī (Chakrabarti Chapter 2). Women were generally identified with the domestic sphere of life. She was either the sadhabā (married woman) idolised as the deśamātā or the mother land, or personified as the Goddess Kali or Druga, who nurtures her children physically and mentally as the citizen of the country, or the bidhabā (widow) clad in white sari symbolising purity, patience and sacrifice. Though the role of woman as the mother had gained significance since centuries, in reality it was “into the more self-sacrificial and digestible holiness of motherhood” (Auerbach 219). Even progressive and educated women like Krishnabhabini Das (1864-1919), Kailasbasini Debi (b. 1837), wife of Kishorichand Mitra (1822-1873), considered maternity, chastity, patience, and domesticity and the subservience of woman to the male dignity as the chief virtue of womanhood.

It was against such elitist, narrow-mined, discriminatory precepts set by the modern educated bhadralok that the professional education of Kadambini Ganguli (1862-1923) and also her active service as the first practising medical professional in Indian along with her social reforms should be considered as the first step towards female emancipation in pre-partition India. Such an incident, when most of the women were subjugated to the male dominance, could hardly have occurred without the ardent support of her father, Braja Kishore Basu, her husband, Dwarakanath Ganguli, and her cousin and first practicing barrister of Indian origin, Monomohan Ghose. The study undertakes an attempt to explore the support of these three stalwarts in making Kadambini Ganguli the first professionally qualified and economically independent lady from Bengal.
The emerging Bhadramahila of colonial Bengal: Subarnalata's journey from the periphery to the centre
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City as a space is not just characterized by its heterotopias, but also points towards the existence of a centre and periphery. This bifurcation between the centre and the margin becomes more prominent in the wake of colonial modernity in Bengal. If we are to understand that the very framework of colonial modernity in Bengal developed based on this binary division between the existing villages and the emergence of a new colonial urbane space, we can locate a movement that takes place both physically as well as culturally towards a new urbane centre. The cultural milieu of the nineteenth century marked this notable migration from the erstwhile villages to the growing Kolikata. Trying to adapt to the colonial modernity, the Bengali men underwent a radical self re-fashioning. However, I would like to shift the focus from this emerging class of Bengali Babus, to point out the way feminine consciousness was also going through a paradigm shift. What happened to the women when their home-space had to face this colonial invasion?
I aim to look at Ashapurna Devi’s The First Promise (1964) which maps this movement from countryside to city and explores the politics of gender roles in this newly emerging urbane space. The woman is placed in midst of a cultural milieu undergoing paradigm shifts be it in physical migration from villages to the city or in the face of the newly emerging political and social condition. My paper aims to elucidate upon how this migration broke down the customs of andormahal but at the same time put the feminine ‘self’ under the dual need to abide by customs of sashtra as well as adapt to the city ideals of Bhadramohila. My reading of Ashapurna Devi’s work aims to focus on this very duality that affected the feminine consciousness of the age and, how their specific gender and class position colour their experience of colonial modernity.
Nationalism and Politics through Bina Das’s Memoir
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The paper, ‘Nationalism and Politics through Bina Das’s Memoir’ is an analysis of the author’s political-prison memoir which probes into the much argued domain of nationalism with the prime focus being on colonial Bengal. One of the youngest patriot to have dared to shoot the then Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson at the Convocation Ceremony of University of Calcutta, Bina Das continues to be an unacknowledged nationalist. A common facet of Bengali women’s political participation in the nationalistic strife against the British hegemony was their ungrudging compliance of imprisonment. Time spent in confinement was high yielding as to combat the monotony of their prison existence, women harnessed and nurtured a strong solidarity among themselves. They taught each other to read and write so as to enable them to expand their nationalistic disposition and wrote their own tales in prose and poetry which was their modus operandi to resist the colonial regime and the offensive practice of state apparatus. Even though they were enclosed behind the bars and cut off from society yet, they were keenly aware of all that was occurring outside through their avid reading habits as being political prisoners they were entitled to claim for books, newspapers and periodicals. The memoir gives a vivid account of the workings of a prison - segregation of prisoners which was not only gender specific but also on the basis of the prisoner’s social and educational standings.

The stark difference between criminal and political prisoners highlighted the injustices and tortures that were meted out to the poor, illiterate peasant women whose crime was to resist their patriarchal in-laws. The upper and upper-middle class Bengali women moving out into the public sphere and readily participating in the nation’s concern led to a change in the meaning of the bhadramahila (gentle woman). While most of the men thought that women would go back to their previous position of being tender and affectionate in the private arena once the country attained freedom however, women thought rather differently and were now ready to withstand any force that might lead them back to the dingy and confined andarmahal.
Women Artists and their Voices in Colonial Bengal
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This research aims to understand the way theatre, music and various art forms helped the prostitutes between the years 1872-1930 to emerge as an artist. It helps us to understand the struggle they had to go through in order to create an identity of themselves and a new domain of artistic self. I just want to delve deep into the narratives of these women who contributed to the formation of history, culture and traditions of Bengal. Despite numerous contributions by the then actresses, theatre continued to be dominated by the male playwrights and actors. The prostitutes were deemed as fallen women who couldn't be regarded as respectable. Despite numerous attempts the actress-prostitute failed to gain respectability from the then society who continued to view her as a fallen women and not an artist, her artistic self-continued to be negated. However the characters enacted by them on stage such as Sita, Draupadi, Kaikeyi, Kapalkundala, Motibibi and most importantly Chaitanya, the charismatic saint acted by Binodini Dasi had left deep impression upon the audience as well as the actresses. Although the list of characters as mentioned above confirms to the notion of respectability and devotion but the actresses who performed these roles on stage had always faced severe criticism from the society. Therefore this thesis will attempt to show that despite their fallen status these women had been able to uphold their artistic talents while performing as leading actresses in major roles. Theatre helped them to emerge as an artist, to portray their talents and skills before the society while leaving aside their status of being a fallen woman. Their free living, ability to earn their livelihood, mixing freely with their male counterparts, travelling to distant locations for stage performances although had initiated various controversies but their freedom in the then contemporary society cannot be overlooked. They also exercised a great deal of freedom while choosing their costume during performances.

Binodini, Golap, Jagattarini, Elokeshi and Shyama achieved immense success in the world of theatre and had left impression for future generations.
Daughters of the Nation: Revisiting Women’s Speculative Writings in Bengal
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This paper will look at speculative writings by women in Bengal, both in the colonial and post-independence years, in an attempt to locate the emergence of certain counter-tropes against the dominant trope of the masculinist hero. Taking select writings from Rokeya Racanabali (Complete Works of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain) and Kheror Khata by Leela Mazumdar, it argues that the preconceived gendered discourses on socio-cultural roles and asymmetrical bifurcation of agency that were propagated through Bengali juvenile literature since the mid nineteenth century also contained certain disruptions. These women writers question the very notion of assertive native masculinity that was emblematic of the nationalist body politic, and promote an alternate model of female agency and power in an almost utopian manner. This paper also proposes arguments on the crucial accommodation of the Muslim woman’s voice within the larger question of women’s emancipation in Bengal that had appeared to concern itself with the Hindu bhadramahila class predominantly, through the speculative visions of Hossain. While Hossain adopts an emphatic feminist stance in her reformist motives, Mazumdar depicts a more humorous, ironical and self-reflexive strategy in her deconstructing mission. Both writers disrupt and gradually subvert the narrative of patriarchy by attributing to their female characters crucial roles and often even sole authority in various walks of life, thus paving the path for their visible presence in the project of social reform and emancipation of the motherland. These consciously wrought counter-tropes of feminist agency and authority within the diegetic space of Bengali speculative writing will be examined from a critical, historiographical perspective to understand the problematic dynamics of gender operative in the nationalist discourses. The de-mystifying agenda of these writers in their speculations against the myth of male superiority balanced with the celebrative notions of female efficiency, and their ideological plea for the case of gender equality will also be examined.
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The ethos of “productionist Metaphysics” which harbors latent violence towards the existing order of the past, here, in the sense of production of knowledge, can be compared with the project of cartography that deals with the representation of a globe/sphere on a plane. The perpetual dilemma embedded in the discourse of map-making – an interminable slippage of projection is that- it can never be articulated without distorting the measurements and proportions. Suppose, Mercator projection, culminating the holistic approach of surveying/monitoring, could preserve the acute shape but fails to constitute proper size on the map and it has been subject to severe criticism for stimulating an Eurocentric bias towards the Southern Hemisphere. On the contrary, Gall-Peters projection does the exact opposite, epitomizes the fantasy of authentic representation of unrepresentable, calculation of incalculable by leaving permanent traces of its own finitude in the discourse of unending quest of cartographical/archival truth that interminably slips and undoes the theoretical congolomeration. Since, this desire of systematic archivisition is by definition unattainable, unobtainable even at its embryo form, it is forced to undergo the repetitive compulsive movement of formation-dissolution over the course of the period. However, this lacuna of authenticity is not an inherent characteristic in the field of hermeneutics, it is also vastly interconnected with the problem of semantics- in relation to which nineteenth-century Bengal had to undergo a colossal change in historicity. This productionist strain in the Bengali Language was an outcome of colonial institutional experimentation to aid the administrative work in vernacular by producing bi-lingual lexicons (that also standardized Bengali font as a matter of fact), so that, nineteenth-century learners acquired instructions, whether it is educational or vocational, with the assistance of translation method which is still in praxis in the rural, semi-urban Schools. The anatomy of nineteenth-century Archive then has this rhizomatic structure-marked by “ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze and Guattari 7) as opposed to an arboroscent hierarchical genealogy to trace. Archive, then, as prior mentioned, is an assemblage of multitudinous textuality- “a body without organs”; that is assembling, juxtaposing, disorganizing, dismantling and then allowing the signifiers to rupture the semantics ad infinitum. To a great extent, any “self-contained, harmonically hermetic” (Ghosh 3) theoretical disposition or so to speak, the testimony of direct experiences fails to achieve hermeneutic denouement out of this aedificium’s labyrinth. Here, in my paper, thus, I intend to explore this multilinear, multiparous archive of nineteenth Century Bengal (that harbours the traces of identity formation) by methodologically wielding/implementing (in)fusion approach; an “operative, dynamic space” (Ghosh 2) which tunnels through a concept and allows to sidestep synchronously. It will elutriate, corrode and finally (to make an attempt to) edulcorate the texture of speech acts in relation to the existing connotations/interpretations of nineteenth-century Archive.

SPORTS AND THE BENGALI CULTURAL IDENTITY: THE CASE OF COLONIAL BENGAL
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Sports has featured in the Indian and in the Bengali cultural sphere in various forms of games and recreations. Prior to the European encounters, India under the Mughal rulers had witnessed the flourishing of games like Polo, Wrestling, animal hunting, Chess, Cards etc mostly among the royal and upper classes. The English started establishing their sports facilities around coastal areas of India as soon as they could find the right opportunity to do so. Along with them came the modern Western influences in all fields including games and sports. Western sports captured the Bengali imagination quite as early as the mid eighteenth century. Records on English sports in India hold it that one of the first sports clubs by the British was formed in Kolkata around the 1780s for playing Cricket. With the gradual development of the club culture particularly for Cricket and Cricket matches being held in various places near Kolkata, the institutionalizing of sports became an emerging phenomenon. Along with Cricket, other sports like Football, Hockey, Tennis, Rugby and Golf also had its similar phases of influence in Bengal. The English sporting culture however expanded primarily among the elite class of Bengal hands in hand with the spread of Western education. Many affluent Bengali individuals offered patronage to new indigenous players of their locality. Colleges imbibed the western sports culture of team spirit and discipline into their cultural blending. The necessity of building up an indigenous Bengali sports culture was also important for self conscious individuals trying to prove their ‘manliness’ as against the humiliating charges of effeminacy brought by the English upon the culture of Bengal. The cultural assimilation in the field of sports also initiated the establishment of many athletic unions and smaller self financed gatherings which were responsible for spreading the love of sports among the upper middle and gradually emerging middle classes of Bengal resulting in the creation of a gradual but separate cultural identity in the field of sports for Bengal. There were however many imperial undertones in this cultural osmosis between the English and the Bengali people as sports was also one of the many projects of imperialism. This paper will try to address the evolution of the cultural consciousness regarding sports in Colonial Bengal as a result of the imperial policies of the Britshers and also focus upon some individual personalities who were successful in chalking out separate identities for themselves in this field.
Embattled Bodies: Revisiting the Birangonas of Bangladesh
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The Partition of India which led to the formation of East Pakistan and West Bengal in India as well as the subsequent formation of Bangladesh as a separate nation after the liberation war of 1971 are key historical phenomena in the evolution of international Bengali identity. During times of conflict, women’s bodies are often turned into objects of symbolic exchange between the warring parties. But during the liberation struggle of 1971, wartime rape was systematically employed as a martial strategy for crushing the dissent of the Bengali-speaking Muslim community of East Bengal, whereby thousands of women were allegedly violated by the Pakistani militia and their local collaborators. Besides targeting them as the metonymic embodiments of their community whose defilement would bring shame upon the entire ethnic group, Pakistan also identified these women as biological propagators whose wombs could be appropriated to symbolically ‘convert’ East Pakistan by engendering ‘true’ Muslims. The Bangladeshi liberation struggle witnessed the violation of almost two hundred thousand women, with many of them being even incarcerated in rape camps as sex slaves. After the war, although these rape survivors were welcomed back by the Bangladeshi government with the honorific of “Birangona” or war-heroine, most of them had to endure humiliation and ostracisation within their own communities. The lives of the Birangona women post-1971, as my paper tries to elucidate, have spanned out in diverse ways, with their existence evolving under the currents of multifarious socio-political developments. The aim of my paper is to interrogate the identity of the Birangona as it is examined by Nayanika Mookherjee and Najmun Nahar Keya in their graphic novel “Birangona: Towards Ethical Testimonies of Sexual Violence during Conflict”. I intend to locate the figure of the Birangona as one which occupies pluralistic spaces of identity, in contrast to her generic representation as a mute and disempowered victim. Revisiting the identities of the Birangona women and decoding the nuances of their subjectivities are not only integral for the reconfiguration of national identity itself through the figure of the Birangona but also for arriving at a comprehensive idea of post-1971 Bangladesh.
The ‘Other’ Bengalis in Assam: Linguistic Nationalism and the Language Movement of 1960
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One of the recurrent themes informing the politics of post-colonial Assam, a state sheltering the largest ethnic and cultural identities, has been over the issue of language. The aggressive linguistic nationalism endorsed in postcolonial Assam having a majority Assamese speaking population was primarily positioned in relation to the Bengali language and the Bengali community in particular. This found expression in the promulgation of a series of hegemonic language policies since 1947, by the then state government, as part of the ‘Assamisation’ project of transforming Assam into a cohesive region bearing a unilingual and uni-cultural character. The introduction of the Assam Official Language Act in 1960 which stated the introduction of Assamese as the only official language of Assam acted as the ultimatum in this regard. The district of Cachar along with that of Karimganj and Hailakandi forming the region of Barak Valley, situated in Southern Assam, the homeland to a majority Bengali speaking population, an ethno-linguistic minority in Assam, transformed into a site of tremendous protest, guided by an ineffable emotion of saving their identity and locating their belongingness, resisting the linguistic nationalism of the government that disregarded the minority linguistic and cultural aspirations perpetuating a sense of existential and identity crisis among them, a history that has shaped the lives of the Bengali community having a ‘fractured identity’ in Assam.

Barak Valley in Assam shares a close border with Bangladesh and the barbed wire fencing that demarcated the two nations in the wake of the Indian independence through the Sylhet Referendum that was held moments before India attained freedom stands as a cordon between the two regions sharing the same culture, language and tradition. Sylhet, a largely Bengali speaking province which was part of Assam, was considered by the Assamese as a major burden in their desire to create a unilingual state of Assam. Hence, the decision of holding a referendum to decide the fate of Sylhet was a ‘god-sent opportunity’, to get rid of the ‘Bengalis’. Sylhet was partitioned in 1947 and was merged with undivided Pakistan following the results of the referendum.

Against this backdrop, this paper, using the case of Barak Valley and its struggle to save the mother tongue, argues that statehood based on identity has created an extreme sense of regionalism and resulted in parochialism as well as ethnocentrism in Assam where language has served as a cultural marker. The decision for the reorganization of the postcolonial states of India based on the respective languages spoken by the majority populace in those states to make them socially homogeneous has, in reality, submerged the heterogeneity that characterizes the nation and the subsequent birth of the narrative of Assam for Assamese, Telangana for Telugus, Gujarat for Gujaratis etc. has simultaneously produced minority languages with respect to their status in these states. The Barak Valley case serves as a unique example as it emerged from such a context and is therefore quite different from the language-based mobilizations in post-independence India and it shall be substantiated by discussing the relatively ‘unknown’ Bhasha Andolan of 1960 in Assam, an uprising to save the mother tongue countering the linguistic nationalism and homogeneity adopted by the government of Assam. It also provides a critical understanding that in a cosmopolitan nation like India, linguistic standardization and forceful homogenizing can often lead to a ‘crisis of belonging’ for the marginalized thus acting as an impediment to the realization of the Indian ethos of ‘unity in diversity’.
“Travelling memories and reformed identities” Re-reading Adhir Biswas’ Deshbhager Smriti in light of the Partition of Bengal
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Some of the perpetual images of the Partition of Bengal (1947) are those of the foot pageants, the old and the young clustered collectively, hauling in small number possessions if any, wanting to accomplish their journey's end to find shelter. These travels across the borders augment the reading of memories as we consider travel as movement from one place to another not forced by one’s desire to “see or know” in the conventional sense of exploration, but enforced by intimidation where the migrants had to encounter the trauma of an uprooted present and endure the humiliation of an uncertain future “seeing or knowing” their unvarying personal loss. In this context, this paper seeks to focus on Adhir Biswas’s Deshbhager Smriti (A Memoir by Adhir Biswas) in four volumes to trace how travel led to affliction of the displaced self. The inescapable displacement forced the author to get torn away from his river fed homeland, (Desh) and from his family in person to a distant place amidst violence and carnage. Thus, the coercive travel at the time of Partition of Bengal for the author is recorded as one of the many experiences underwent through travel, in a historical reality characterized by arbitrary violence.
The author skillfully interweaves individual memory with the history of his alienated family. The author highlights the manifold silences, gaps and contestations and endows us with another view of nation – building endeavors. This paper shall reassess the issues of identity, raising the identity question – Where do I belong? With the assessment of memory and loss, fabrication of the imperceptible lines separating the subcontinent these travel accounts act as para-textual references tracing the collective history of the Bengal partition and the post-Partition reformulation of the ‘Bengali’ identity.
Identity crisis in Shahidul Zahir’s story Indur-Bilai Khela: A critical representation of the conception of Power and Negative Liberty
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Dolu Nodir Hawa O Onyanya Golpo (2004) is an acclaimed work by Shahidul Zahir (1953-2008). It is a short story collection and contains seven stories. Among these stories, Indur-Bilai Khela (2002) is a story that depicts human imagery of modern Dhaka, concurrent political reality, and identity crisis of citizens through connecting incidents from liberation war of Bangladesh with the political incidents that are taking place in twenty first century, in a given context. Zahir interwoven peoples of two different realities firstly, those were victim of liberation war and secondly, peoples living in same locality in current time and by doing this, he describes the crisis of identity in different occasions. The name of this story is a metaphor that shows some kind of crucial game between hunters and victims. This metaphorical name of the story gives a new meaning to its reader by using typical imagery of cat and rat. We use Paul Ricoeur to understand metaphor and meaning making in Shahidul Zahir’s story. He was a modern writer and connected his idea of identity with the idea of oppression and liberty. To understand him, Isaiah Berlin’s ideas on negative liberty are very crucial, and in this paper we used Berlin too along with Ricoeur to understand Zahir. Shahidul Zahir created metaphors in his story through the medium of language. There are two sides of the power he shows in his writing. His metaphor is built on the interrelation of these two sides of the power that by defaults illustrates identity and related crisis of citizens of “Bhuter Gali” (A typical street of Dhaka). To create the metaphor Zahir adopted a structure of the story that is interconnected yet split in its narrative.
While Bengal Partition aligned to draw new contours, the Northern part of Bengal was gruesomely divided, and Rajshahi, Rangpur, Dinajpur, Pabna, Bagura, Malda, Jalpaiguri, Balurghat, Darjeeling districts were torn between India and Pakistan. The Bengal divide cut through the anthropological, geographical, and cultural equality making both Rajbanshis (inhabitants) as well as the Bengali Hindus (migrated) a minority. Thousands of homeless started taking refuge in Siliguri from the nearby areas of Northern Bengal which was becoming part of Pakistan. The refuged settlers settled in this empty land with a hope that this Partition was a temporary phase and soon they would walk back to their land. The story of Partition here shared a different story: a story of sameness where every individual settled or migrated became a minority to Time and Hegemony. Interestingly, while remembering the subordination and the nostalgia of loss by Partition, it countered as an important tool to claim and reclaim identity. The culture of Siliguri did not represent the culture of the migrated population of Bengalis nor Rajbanshis instead Bengali Bhadroloks culture engulfed away the dialect, way of living of individuals. Being prey to time, hegemony, and politics, the memory of Partition shares the nostalgia of loss of identity that is re-iterated through the memory of culture and re-lived through oral-narrations passed on to generations. However, this rebuilding and reclaiming underwent a conscious process of remembering only those memories that are important to reclaim oneself and the community. More than the memory of migration and the struggle of Partition, Home-left away during Partition is remembered every day through culture, dialect, and Food which has been an essential ingredient to memory. The process of preparing food is different in different locations of Bengal. A particular spice ‘phoron’ defined and reminded the district, desh(land) left behind during partition. Relooking through this minute lens of understanding, Home has been an intersection point for identity and identification of individuals in Siliguri and along with it even objects like naming their belongings in memory of their Home also hold a unique way to claim Identity/their land. Partition is 7 decades old, but the remembrance of ‘homeland’ is very much a part and a process of connecting to ones’ identity and reconstructing oneself against Hegemony (Chatterji, 1994; Ghosh, 2013; Narayan, 2010; Thappan, 2005). This paper thus locates Home, and Memory like a guiding star helps to claim identity. Pinning a section of my M.Phil. research, this paper explains how Partition is part of our everyday lives and our culture weaves the nostalgia to claim identity. Tracing through Literature review and gathering memories of my family, several others who have been staying in Siliguri (Rajbanshis) and migrated (Bengali Hindus) after Partition provided immense understanding. This autoethnographic study weaves a journey of Partition and Identity far from the usual stories of loss, violence, pain, and struggle.
On August 15, 1947, India gained independence from British colonial rule. While this was widely welcomed across the Indian subcontinent, because it bestowed new levels of political autonomy and provided opportunities for redefining an Indian national culture and identity, it created a sense of conflicted nationalism amongst the people of Calcutta; and specifically, the Bengali Bhadralok or elite class. Although the residents of Calcutta desired freedom as much as the rest of India and spearheaded the independence struggle, anti-western sentiment that accompanied the switch to the postcolonial challenged their perception of their own heritage. Calcutta had, for more than two centuries, benefitted from being the second city of the British Empire, after only London. This made it the urban epicenter for the concentration and dissemination of Western culture and expressions of power and place in the East. As such, British rule directly reconfigured space and society in Calcutta.

As a colonial capital, the city enjoyed a level of economic prosperity, political power and cultural clout which fostered a sense of entitlement amongst the elite that thrived under such urban conditions and methods of governance. For more than 200 years, Bengali Bhadralok cherished the dominant imaginary that privileged their city and its populations precisely because of colonial rule. However, the relocation of the British imperial center to Delhi in 1911, which occurred in response to Bengali resistance to the colonial attempt at partitioning the state along the lines of religion, challenged their standing. In this article, I investigate the legacies of loss and conflicted nationalism that shape Calcutta’s Bengali Bhadralok socio-spatial identity. Through my work I observed a Bengali Bhadralok paradoxical imaginary — one driven by the simultaneous protection of the city’s colonially entangled urban condition and embrace of both the nation’s postcolonial status and global aspirations.
‘A city to look at’ and ‘presenting the world to the city’: Reading Biswa Bangla Gate and Eco Park in New Town, West Bengal
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The paper reads two spatial configurations in New Town, West Bengal—a planned city being developed east of Salt Lake City, east of Kolkata—the Biswa Bangla Gate and Eco Park. The paper argues that a lack of engagement with the state-led designed and planned spaces has led to the primary register of framing New Town within the ‘dystopic’ register. The paper argues that such a register cannot take into account spectacular architectural interventions. Following Ong, the paper argues that such architectural punctuations are not exhausted by a framing of global capitalism but are concrete interventions in the urban fabric by the sovereign to mark its arrival on the global stage. First, the paper reads the Biswa Bangla Gate, an elevated viewing deck and cafe maintained by a state-owned limited company. Biswa Bangla Gate translates to ‘Global Bengal Gate’ alluding to a globally linked Bengal. By situating the viewing deck above a major intersection, the built-form spectacularizes the mobility on the roads as well as the rising skyline. Biswa Bangla Gate, the essay argues, is an architecture both made ‘to look at’ and ‘to look from’. In the process the city emerges as a city ‘to look at’. Second, the paper develops Eco Park, particularly the miniature versions of seven wonders of the world which it houses as ‘presenting the world to the city’. By doing a reading of the above two spatial configurations, the paper develops the ‘aesthetic’—‘aesthetic’ being a process which foregrounds certain processes and effaces others—field in New Town as being a field which spectacularizes the city-scape to create networks of affective, material and discursive linkages from the urban to the global. Such an aesthetic configuration then links the bodies traversing these spaces with the planetary and the global in particular affective, discursive and material networks. Through the above two architectural and designed punctuations, the paper argues, New Town links the global with the urban in a particular way enacting Bengali identity with global aspirations, staging the arrival of the twenty-first century urban in West Bengal.
The Temple Village of Maluti: A Re-appraisal of Bengali Identity and Culture from the Margin
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While defining the Bengali identity and culture, most of the people often simplifies it and, in their replies, we find some recurrent terms, like, “Maachh Bhaat” (fish with boiled rice), “Robi Thakur”, “Durga Puja” and “Rasogolla”. But, is the Bengali identity only limited to these terms! Well, those above-mentioned terms do represent some facets of Bengali culture, but limiting the entire culture within those terms, simplifying the identity is basically diminishing the complex Bengali culture and making the other facets of culture obsolete.

For understanding the culture, we can take example of the little hamlet, Maluti, which is literally at the margin or border of Bengal and Jharkhand. For many years this village has suffered from lack of government attention after independence. While the nearby villages and towns were enjoying the products of electricity, this village was shunned to primitive darkness. It is only in the first decade of 21st century that they have seen the flash of electricity. But in earlier years the village has seen much prosperous days. With the help of Mr. Gopaldas Mukherjee, a local teacher and an independent researcher who has reached his 90s, I have come across the fact that, with the break of 16th century, the then densely forested stony land observed the emergence of a new kingdom, The Nankar Kingdom (tax-free kingdom). As a reward for rescuing the pet hawk of Sultan Allaudin Hussain Shah of Gaur, a twelve-year-old orphan brahmin boy Basanta Roy received this tax-free land, consisting of villages like, Damra (first capital), Maluti (final capital), Masra, Kashtthagara, Hastikanda, Katigram, Surichua etc. In this kingdom we see a Vajrayana Buddhist shrine of Amitabha and his power deity Prajna Pandarvinsi converted into a Hindu Shakta temple of Maa Mouliksha in the hands of a clan of Shamkara Vedantists. We find a king who even though being a Shakta, built 108 Terracotta temples of Shiva. With the emergence of people from Vaishnava faith, we find Vishnu temples and Kali temple made in the format of Rasamancha of Krishna. Even the terracotta arts on the temples show figures from Bhagavada Purana and also the Durga of Shakta faith in the same building. We can see Santali tribe performing during the Kali puja. We can even find documents of Princess Kashishwari Devi donating tax-free lands to the Muslim community to build Majahar for Kalapir. When we pay attention to the centre only, the identity of the Bengali people may be reduced to Maach-Bhaat, Robi Thakur, Durga Pujo and Rosogolla and those who are in power successfully clash on these simplified versions. The plurality in Bengali culture, the complexities it has acquired over ages are often denied. Maluti, known as Gupta Kashi (Secret Varanasi) in the times of the Sunga rulers in Bengal is absent in the cultural map of the Bengalis. But like the ghost of Hamlet’s father this absence haunts. In this paper I wish to capture that Derridian “hauntology” with reference to Maluti, a place associated with the hallowed presence of Sadhak Bama Khyapa.
“ADDA”: Bengali’s institution of expression and argument
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The Bengali word “ADDA” has no exact English connotation; it generally means gossiping or chatting but it may also be considered as an informal mode of discussion and debate within a generally homogeneous group. Adda is an inalienable part of Bengali life and culture, and sometimes has great social value. Adda not only brings together people of same or occasionally dissimilar age-groups to talk on any issue that has direct or indirect relation to the life of the people engaged in the adda. One of the most important aspects of adda is that it creates a kind of social bonding among men and women of disparate taste, education, profession, and so on, and allows the free expression and interchange of ideas in an informal mode. Though adda cannot be characterised as a specific ‘public sphere’, it opens up a space for giving free expression to thoughts and ideas on issues that often shift from day to day and even within the short span of the engagement. An adda can come up anywhere—within a community club, at a restaurant, in the drawing room of any home, a street-side tea stall, or even at the bend of lane or bye-lane. Its nebulous character defies any social categorization, nor has there been a very serious study of its nature.
As integral part of Bengali life “ADDA” evolved gradually over time. It has extended vastly from the “chondimondop” (the outer quarters for worship of the deity), the “andarmohol”( the inner quarters of women within the house), the Calcutta Coffee House, Bosonto Cabin to Akashbani Bhawan (the last three are famous adda centres of Calcutta). What has remained constant is the amalgamation of Bengalis from all religions. Exceptions prevail in certain cases although. Just like how village ADDA and city or town ADDA is different, the topics of discussions are also different. Interestingly, like there are different forms of discussions for different professional groups, ideas are also different with gender differences. Like Coffee House saw a footfall of writers, authors and poets, a roadside tea stall has people returning from office or work. While women were seen more interested about “ADDA” related to jewellery, costume, food, films and other family issues; men’s ADDA evolved around politics, workspace and lifestyle. The upper class’s leisure and the lower class’s dismay give rise to middle class and their thoughts where they have dreams and desires which remain unfulfilled. This unfulfilled dreams and desires take the form of ADDA where they gradually link and discuss about various other prospects. With time, as topics have changed, so has the gender gap reduced. Nonetheless the evolution of “Para” (locality) culture has grown with the Bengali “Adda”. Unfortunately, this popular “ADDA”, which once used to be an integral part of Bengali community, has almost reached a dead end as nowadays people hardly have the time to look up from their mobile and laptop screens and socialize.
In 2001, as his Ivy League peers were preparing for lucrative careers in Finance, Management, Law, or Medicine, New Jersey-bred Princeton Graduate Kushanava Choudhury left the United States for a low-paying job as a beat reporter for The Statesman, Kolkata. In the years that followed, this Bengali Boswell wandered the streets of his youth attempting to live, love, and reclaim the city he had left behind at the age of ten. “The Epic City”, a non-fiction account of Choudhury’s travels and interviews in the City turning from Calcutta to Kolkata, is the parable of this prodigal ‘probashi’. Shuttling between two vastly different cities, both undergoing rapid transformation- one reeling from the effects of 9/11, and the other in the last years of Communist rule- Choudhury personifies a kind of Transnational Bengali who is little seen in Diasporic or native Bengali literature. Unlike the “American Born Confused Desi”, for whom the city is an imaginary homeland existing only in their own or their parents’ memories. Different too from those who have lived in and written of Bengal their entire lives.

“The Epic City” portrays a kind of Calcutta culture which is very recent- the book was only published in 2017- yet already near-extinct. The Internet has gained ascendancy, political and economic allegiances have drastically changed, and the “bowl shaped Ambassadors” and other signifiers which Choudhury saw as evidence that “Nothing has changed since my childhood…The city was in its own time zone” are dwindling. In this book review, I shall examine Choudhury’s search for his own Bengali identity, as well as the different Bengalis he meets in his quest, through the lens of both diasporic Bengali writing of fiction authors such as Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Amitav Ghosh, as well non-fiction post-colonial flaneur-authors such as Suketu Mehta. I shall look at the themes that recur in his writing and theirs- such as the post-colonial connection between food and heritage, STEM and middle-class immigration, and the influence of the American “Creative Writing” schools- and the ways in which the writing stands apart. Finally, I shall look at the trappings of non-fiction and travel writing as genres, and how they affect the content and style of “The Epic City”.
The popular imagination of Bengali is gradually becoming reductive and homogenous. A Bengali in India tends to be imagined both by Bengalis and nonbengalis alike as educated, cultured, middle class, Hindu (Durga puja being the main festival of Bengalis) whose mother tongue is Bangla. Kolkata, in popular nonbengali imagination, is viewed as home of every Bengali. So the term Kalkattawalah, which the non Bengali people use for the people of kolkata, by and large refers to this particular Bengali speaking community which is Hindu, middle class, educated and cultured. Kunal Basu’s bildungsroman Kalkatta deals with the trajectory of a Hindi speaking refugee Muslim Jamshed and his family, who aspire to be identified as kalkattawalah. For they live in a city, where one has to be a kalkattawalah, the ‘bhadrolok’, the hegemonic Bengali speaking consumers, in order to gain visibility as citizen. Jamshed's aspiration ultimately forces him to take up the illegal profession of gigolo. But he finally succumbs to the pressure that the homogenizing city exerts upon him in particular, and upon all those who the city views as other in general. Jamshed is Subaltern in terms of language, religion and class. His aspiration to be a Bengali ‘bhadralok’ is his way to move spatially, economically and politically from the margin to the centre. He is a victim of the urban exclusionary politics of the middle class. The paper thus attempts to highlight this politics of the middle class Bengali community which initiates a new form of othering, which operates at the level of space, class, religion and gender, and ends up giving birth to new subaltern population in postmetropolis urban space of Kolkata, where Bengali is not only an identity, but also to a large extent a marker of privilege, security and visibility.
The Capturing of Transgender Identity in Bangla Cinema: A Critical Study of Selected films by Rituparno Ghosh and Kaushik Ganguly
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Just as literature, cinema has the capacity to capture the nuances of culture and society. Bangla cinema is worldwide esteemed for advancing creativity to engage with the socio-political issues. This facilitates a dialogue between art and the society. It has enabled the issues of marginalized section to be brought out to the mainstream society and this marks the first step taken toward making a change. This potentially charged space of cinema has been used by the directors such as Rituparno Ghosh and Kaushik Ganguly to initiate a dialogue between the marginalized transgender community and the mainstream society. The term ‘transgender’ is an umbrella term, such as queer but the term queer accommodates not only marginalized gender identities but also sexual identities. However, the term transgender specifically deals with marginalized gender identities- such as pre-operated trans, transvestites, hijras, MtF, FtM etc. This non-essential defining nature of the term invokes the idea of pluralism a marked feature of the postmodernist society. Keeping the thread of pluralism at the center, the transgender movement is being led worldwide. But how is Bengali society responding to this movement? If cinema is trying to create a space for transgender identity, then does this process take in account the responsibility of undoing the damage that has been done to the transgender identity by the mainstream commercial cinema? What is the nature of the development made by the parallel cinema in the context of transgender identity?

For a long time, since the advent of colonial rule in India, transgender community has been sidelined. Now, in the wake of feminist movement, the foundational structure of the institution of patriarchy has been questioned. This has provided an opportunity for the marginalized identity to reformulate their identity in their own respective ways. The identity which was once shaped and vilified by the institution of patriarchy in the light of heteronormativity has started to evolve. This is why when cinema is presenting the narrative of transgender identity, it is not simply a presentation rather it is an act of reformulation of identity. Then what is the nature of this reformulated identity in our postmodernist globalized world? Hence to answer these questions, a critical study of these movies needs to be undertaken. Cinema and literature has the capacity to extend the intellectual developments made in the field of academia to reach out and influence the real materialistic world. These developments have certainly made their way to an extent in Bengali society. Keeping this idea in mind the paper will be primarily focused on the cinematic work of Rituparno Ghosh and Kaushik Ganguly dealing with the transgender identity. Both the directors are known for their works in the artistic cinema. The nature of their contribution to the transgender movement will be analyzed in the paper. For this, the movies have been selected are- Nagarkirtan, Chitrangada- the Crowning Wish and Arekti Premer Golpo.
Disaster, Class Struggle, Racial Worldview: A Study in the Famine Of Bengal 1943
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The paper explores about the famine of Bengal 1943 and the racial worldview of Churchill then Prime Minister during that time with reference to Bhabani Bhattacharjee's So Many Hungers!(1947) and Madhushree Mukherjee's Churchill's Secret War; The British Empire and the Ravaging of Empire during World War II
Mapping Famine in Colonial India: Re-identifying the Great Bengal Famine (A Case Study)
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As a boat moved across the Brahmaputra River from Bahadurabad, in 1943 October morning, a scientist who was assigned by the government of Bengal, noticed heaps of dead bodies all along the river bed from what seemed to have been an aftermath of a war. However, these dead bodies were not a result of any form of plunder but rather an aftereffect of a disastrous famine that hit Bengal in the summer of 1943, which caused the death of three million populations due to diseases and starvation. A relook at the Great Bengal famine allows one to trace one of the worst mismanaged famines in 20th century South Asia and how an environmental crisis was grossly linked to the economic and political crisis in Bengal. While tracing the background of the Bengal Famine of 1943 most pertinently points out to the environmental crisis at its crux but a deeper analysis allows one to understand the a host of other components in consideration, albeit, the high prices of commodities could be asserted to the role of land market, subsistence crisis, poor agrarian economy and a host of other reason which this paper tends to study.
“Oi ghasiyara ke bolo na, jeno amar oi gach gulo na kate” / “gari vi ghar ka aurat hai kya ?” : Examining Rabindranath Tagore’s Bolai and Subodh Ghosh’s Ajantrik from a posthumanist and transhumanist perspective respectively

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In this paper I attempt to show Tagore’s Bolai and Ghosh’s Bimal as the harbingers of a imagination that becomes a passage to a space beyond humanism. So then, what is posthumanism or transhumanism? Posthumanism is a philosophical school that imagines a world beyond or after humanity and transhumanism is a method to transcend human abilities and imagine a world of extropianism or immortalism. In other words, posthumanism dismantles the humanist supremacy in an anthropocentric world in order to integrate them with other non-human species and transhumanism with the aid of machinic development tries to transcend the human abilities in order to immortalize them (For example, Cryonics is a branch of transhumanism where the body of the dead is preserved in order to revive them later to achieve a better versions of themselves). Tagore’s short story Bolai is a wonderful manifestation of the post-humanist paradigm as the eponymous protagonist seems to be in perfect unison with mother Nature. On the other hand, Ghosh’s protagonist Bimal imagines his taxi to be his best friend and the abilities possessed by the taxi seem to transcend the human abilities there by giving it a transhumanist turn. This transhumanist turn within the text makes our perception even convoluted and we are confused whether Bimal is the protagonist or his ‘mechanized friend’ Jagaddal is the protagonist of the story. Therefore, through the course of my paper I wish to investigate such nuances in order to imagine a world that entails a perfect camaraderie between humans, non-humans and machines in order to create a heterotopic Post-dualist space that is beyond the dualisms such as nature/culture, social/natural or humans/machines or precisely all non-humans.
Culture one of the crucial factors behind the formation and articulation of identities. Overcoming the stereotype of ‘base-superstructure’ binary the neo-Marxists rightly pointed out the role of culture both as a reflection of the economic base as well as the potential arena of reproducing the ruling economic base through a daily basis meticulous mechanism known as hegemony. In order to challenge the ruling hegemony a counter cultural process is required, which encompasses all the dissenting and marginal voices prevailing in the society. This paper is going to deal with such a counter cultural attempt, which is commonly known as the progressive cultural movement to challenge the ruling hegemony in the context of Bengali literature and culture. The progressive cultural movement in Bengal started as a world-wide response to the war-ridden international political order at that time, when the fascist aggression was in its peak and the scope of democracy was threatened globally. The leading intellectuals like Henry Barbusse and Romain Rolland in Europe started to organize all the intellectuals under a broader democratic and progressive organizational umbrella against destruction of war. Thus, the League against War and Fascism was established and most notably Rabindranath Tagore became its President. Inspired from this ideological aura some of the Indian intellectuals in Britain founded an organization named All India Progressive Writers Association (AIPWA), which gradually expanded its root all over India including Bengal. In Bengal, where the cultural politics was already established in the wake of Swadeshi movement, the new ideological-cultural programme was well accepted among its intelligentsia. In this we context we have to keep in mind the role of the Communist Party in mobilizing the intellectuals, bringing them under a broader ideological platform, both in India as well as in other countries. The movement was committed towards the motto of bringing back people into the literature and culture. The voice of the movement became louder with the formation of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA), who declared “People’s theatre stars the People”. Most notably, this movement introduced the Bengali intelligentsia with the ideological currents of Marxism and on the other hand, Marxism as a narrative became synonymous with the ideals of progressivism. Application of Marxist principles such as dialectics, class struggle and its revolutionary potential became the critical yardstick through which the literature and performance used to be measured as the ‘ideal’ standard. Thus the authenticity in ‘revolutionary’ literature provoked myriad questions within the Bengali intelligentsia, which led to serious and critical debates. Debates were triggered off regarding the role of the communist party in the cultural front. Prominent Bengali intellectuals like Manik Bandopadhayay, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, Bishnu Dey, Samar Sen, Hemanga Biswas, Salil Chowdhury took part in this great debates. This paper will critically focus into the debates among the Bengali intelligentsia and will uphold the nature of the progressive cultural movement and thus concentrates into the limitation of the movement especially its middle-class centrism and critically answer the question whether this performance of resistance was merely an ‘elite performance’ or not.
Identity and Authority: Inclusion of Bengali Poets in the Canon of Indian English Poetry
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Makarand Paranjape in his review of Bruce King’s Modern Indian English Poetry deliberates on how King’s critical work seemingly authenticated and legitimized the canon of Indian English poetry, focusing only on poets belonging to specific geographical location- Bombay. In 1970s when the process of anthologization commenced, only a dozen or so Indian English poets attained validation, relegating many other meritorious poets to the periphery. As the process of anthologization and canonization are two facets of the same coin, publishing houses like Macmillan and Oxford University Press that captured the Indian literary scene in 1970s brought out Contemporary Indian English Poetry (1972) and Ten Twentieth Century Indian Poets (1976), respectively, shaping a canon of Indian English poetry, which till date remains unquestioned and unchallenged. This coterie of poets essentially belonged to Bombay and therefore the canon of Indian English poetry seemingly became increasingly geographically centric. However, in 1970s, P. Lal also engaged himself in publishing anthologies, and, ostensibly, his endeavors were towards the establishment of an anti-canon. In 1972, when Macmillan brought out its anthology, housing the following poets- Ezekiel, Ramanujan, P. Lal, Kolatkar, Parthasarathy, Kattrak, Daruwalia, Kamala Das, Gauri Deshpande, Mamta Kalia, Adil Jussawala, Gieve Patel, A.K. Mehrotra and Saleem Peeradina- P. Lal, in 1974, brought out Indo- English Poetry in Bengal, edited by K.C. Lahiri. The poets that it included were- Margaret Chatterjee, Harindranath Chattopadhyay, Sukanta Chaudhuri, Prafulla Ranjan, Ira De, Rupendra Guha Majumdar, Dhan Gopal Mukherjee, etc. This anthology was allegedly an answer to Macmillan’s Bombay centric anthology. Lahiri’s anthology included forty-six Indian English poets who primarily belonged to Bengal. Ostensibly, this was Lal’s answer to the exclusive canon of Indian English poetry. Absence of any Bengali poet in the canon was jarringly blatant, and this was befittingly answered by Lal. In the Preface, Lal writes, “The inspiration behind the preparation of this anthology of English verse composed by Bengalis has been the distinctive character of the aesthetic appeal and emotive responses of the poets rather than regional parochialism” (Lal xv). This statement of Lal further brings the argument of the identity of Indian English poetry in the post- independence India. Ostensibly, the canon of Indian English poetry was fixated on the idea of forming a single identity, concentrating essentially on the concept of “Indianness”. This overemphasis on forming a single identity did not only obscure the surfacing of myriad themes and issues which were being discussed by many other non-canonical poets but also circumscribed the parameters of the canon of Indian English poetry, withholding further promulgation, growth and development of this genre. This paper therefore argues that instead of focusing on forming a single identity, Indian English poetry should be an amalgamation of multiple identities. India, being a land of pluralities, should not have such a representation in the canon of Indian English poetry which demonstrates only one single identity. Therefore, the idea of representation of Bengal identity must be included in the canon. This paper, while discussing K.C. Lahiri’s Indo English Poetry in Bengal, will put forward the aforementioned arguments. It will argue for the inclusion of Bengal poets in the canon of Indian English poetry, furthering the case of the canon of Indian English poetry to be more inclusive in its outlook.
Jatragaan of West Bengal: The Post-Independence Scenario
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The archetypal Jatra consisted of high-pitched voice modulations with numerous songs which essentially embedded an auditory factor, e.g. listening (to) Jatra (Jatra Shona). With time the poetic Jatra grew more prosaic and got filled with dialogues and acrobats. Gradually the ‘to be listened’ Jatra turned ‘to be seen’. With time, eventually, the professional theatre (with proscenium setting) deeply affected the innate musicality in Jatra. Till today, Jatra takes the name of ‘opera’ because of its once preoccupation with dance and music. Following the cinematic trend, new terms floated into Jatra, eg. the ‘Director’, the ‘Producer’, the ‘Musician’ (music director), ‘background music’, ‘musical arrangement’, which became significant markers for the pala or palawright. The present chapter seeks to engage with this musical journey of Jatra in post-independence Bengal.
Folklore has a key position in the construction, revival and expression of the self identity as well as the cultural identity of regions and ethnic groups. This identity is constructed through the interplay of cultural elements which includes myths, folk tales, instruments, arts, ballads, crafts, rituals, religious culture, festivals among the members of a particular group that is transmitted to their offspring as a link to the past. Bengal has a rich treasury of folklore. The middle class ‘bhadralok’ of Bengal, in the early twentieth century made an attempt to collect and preserve the folklore and folktales of Bengal. Gurusaday Dutt emerged as an important figure who played a major role in the preservation of Bengal folk arts. He has linked the folklore of Bengal to the ancient Indus Valley civilization and dedicated a national value. The endeavour of preserving the folklore of Bengal began as a tool of the Bengal Swadeshi Movement to disseminate the principles of “bideshi drobho borjon o swadeshi drobho grohon” (Elimination of foreign goods and acceptance of indigenous goods) among the mass. Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar’s Thakurmar jhuli, Thakurdadar Jhuli etc. were the products of folk tradition which was published as an attempt to restore the cultural identities of Bengal in an era when the Indian markets were overflowing with western folktales. The folklore in the colonial period serves an important role in the presentation of cultural history to articulate the national identity. Folklore is the medium of sharing the common belief among the members of a particular group not shared by others and thereby establishes the ethnic identity. Printing media has transformed the oral tradition of folklore and folktales and brings the attention of the mainstream written literature. The printed folklore serves as a historical document and gives legitimacy to the folk culture. In the present age of digital India the modes of presenting folklore changed from auditory to visual medium. The folk tales travelled a long way from animated versions of folklore to the web series with the advent of tablets and smart phones. The animated series of Panchatantra, Gopal Bhar on Zee Bangla, Sony Aath is very popular among the modern Bengali children living in an urban area. A Bengali child born and brought up in a foreign country forms the concept of self identity by establishing his belief in his individual affiliation with certain symbols of a group which is communicated by the folklore which reminds him of the soil of his homeland. This paper attempts to explore the evolution of identity of Bengal and Bengalis associated with the journey of Bengali folklores from the oral tradition to electronic media. This paper also portray how the folk culture which was considered to be associated with the lower stratum of society becomes a source of archaeological evidence and an important element of popular web series (with special reference to Netflix’s Bulbul).
Bengal in Byomkesh, Byomkesh in Bengal- Analysing 'Aadim Ripu', ‘Artham-Anartham’ and ‘Mogno Moinak’ from Byomkesh series

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Mrinalini Sinha in her book Colonial Masculinity points out the formation of the discourse of colonial masculinity which stereotyped Bengali man as “effeminate” and “lazy” unfit for strenuous physical labour. This portrayal of Bengalis was challenged by a counter discourse by creating the literary figures of the fictional detectives whose task involved the cerebral and the physical. Panchkori Dey first wrote serialized detective fiction and translated the works of Wilkie Collins and Emile Gaboriau. Although, Bengali detective fiction was highly inspired from European detective fiction (for example, Feluda’s deductive methodology resembled that of Holmes’s or his mentor Siddhu Jyatha reminds the readers of Sherlock’s brother 'Mycroft Holmes), Byomkesh was an exception. He was married unlike Holmes, Poirot, Feluda, Kakababu or any other name that can possibly come to readers' mind. His aversion to the tag “detective” and preference with the word ‘Satyanweshi’ (“the seeker of truth”) exemplifies his carving out a niche for himself keeping a very definite and concrete Bengali identity all the while reshaping and challenging the European literary figure of the detective. Although, ‘deduction’ (by logic) and ‘rationality’ formed the crux of detective fiction, which makes it a product of the legacy of ‘Age of Enlightenment’, inclusion of ghosts in Byomkesh series makes Sharadindu Bandhopadhyay stand out amongst the writers of this classic yet popular genre.

This paper would analyse how Byomkesh Bakshi, was unique in all aspects possible and how how Sharadindu Bandhopadhyay brings in socially, politically and culturally relevant elements(which is totally absent in stories on Feluda, Bakshi’s biggest competitor in terms of fame)- for example, the religious tension prevalent in Bengal in ‘Aadim Ripu’ or the famine in ‘Artham-Anartham’ or the Cholera pandemic in Bengal and after smuggling of illegal arms in ‘Mogno Moinak’.
The identity of the Tantric as a storyteller: Re-reading Taranath Tantric
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We tend to perceive the figure of Tantric through a negative light, who dwells amongst ghouls and is associated with dark magic. This perception might have entered the collective consciousness of the Bengali readers through the several negative representations which literature itself has propagated over time. Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay perhaps, for the first time, places the Tantric in the seat of a storyteller, who narrates his experiences from his rich repertoire, to two of his friends. He deviates from the stereotypical figures of the storytellers like Thakuma, Thakurda, Ghona Da and Tarini Khuro amidst others who had occupied the central role of storytelling in Bengali literature. Bibhutibhusan Bandopadhyay had originally perceived the character of Taranath Tantric, however he could only two stories in his lifetime. His son, Taradas Bandopadhyay, had contributed six more stories to the compilation which we read today. We get to know that Taranath is a fallen Tantric (Ashtasiddha), who had received some supernatural powers from his guru, had misused them and subsequently had lost his powers over time. The narrator while describing the appearance of Taranath mentions that he lacks the will power with which he had initially started his life as a Tantric. He redirects us to his addictions which were women, horseracing and alcohol which made him lose all his money. Now he is in his mid-fifties and lives with his daughter Chari in Mott Lane, Calcutta. Bibhutibhusan reconstitutes the mystic figure of the Tantric and creates a new form of storytelling through Taranath’s encounters with the supernatural in his extensive travels throughout Bengal, which helps us to locate a different side of the Bengali landscape altogether. In this paper, I intend to revive this character of the Tantric, who emerged as a new storyteller and as a contrast to the conventional storytelling figures we find in Bengali literature. I would also attempt an analysis of the popular representations of Taranath Tantric in graphic novels and the popular web series, to make a comparison between the characterizations of this figure in the original text and the adaptations. At the same time this paper would also explore the narrative technique employed by Bibhutibhusan in the text and simultaneously look into the diverse locations across Bengal which have been portrayed in the text.
Nanabidha (Myriad): A rediscovery of sundry Bengali identities through lenses
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One of the most contested arena of today’s socio-cultural political scenario is the battle between several identity formations, be that individual or microcosms of several individual identities. Hence, when we talk about a Bengali identity per se, it becomes difficult to conjure up a monolithic set of features that is congruous with the term “Bengali”. Various strands of geographic, economic, political factors and their push and pulls have continuously contributed to the carving out of a heterogeneous identity structure that has been constitutive of an abstract “Bangaliana.” But does this “Bangaliana” or the essence of being a Bengali equally permeate to different strata of a society that inhabit in a territory that we precisely call Bengal? As a way to comprehend the mobility of these diverse features that are collectively associated with a somewhat homogeneous Bengali essence, we have chosen to look into some iconic Bengali movies of late 20th century. Thus, in the beginning, this paper seeks to explore and accommodate all those accidental evidences of the evolution of the Bengali identity that has been captured by the directors in those films while their intention was not to invoke any monolithic Bengali identity but to celebrate, encapsulate and showcase different tensions, conflicts, and moments of joy and happiness through their lenses. In the latter half of the paper we focus on the 21st century rendition of several parochial societal customs which manifests itself through the several urban Kolkata elite family circles represented in these immensely popular Bengali serials. Several themes intertwine themselves through this paper. They might include, on one hand, overtly domestic themes like marriage, mother-children relationship, leisure, or the monotonous plots of household quarrels (imagined vagrantly in recent Bengali serials) while on the other, it also includes the socio political upheaval that dotted the “public” domain of the then Bengali life. While we talk about Satyajit Ray’s films from a more gendered perspective of Bengali social life, Rittwik Ghatak and Mrinal Sen’s movies have been used to decode the layered evocation of Bengali identity across class structures juxtaposed in turbulent times. Share chuattor and Basanta Bilap are completely on a diametrically opposite lens where all these problems, though predominantly existent, somewhat mute themselves while the vibrant cheers and gestures from the rooms of Kolkata mess flats start making their presence felt amidst the Kolkata cacophonies. Moving forward along the timeline, we will take a look on the central themes and characterizations predominant in the modern day Bengali serials, most of which claim to seek its legitimacy from some archetypical Bengali tradition and household norms that are gulped vigorously by innumerable Bengali audiences over their evening snacks! Hence, all these seemingly disconnected elements mingle together in this paper to present Bengali identity (as seen through the selected cinema and television representations spanning across a wide timeline from 1950s to late 2010s), as a tangible and still evolving social phenomenon which didn’t exist from times immemorial but rather underwent and is still undergoing a process of efflorescence.
p.s: About postScriptum

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Aim
postScriptum aims to provide connoisseurs, scholars and academicians a space for publishing popular, research and academic discourses involving several intersects of literary studies.

Scope
The interdisciplinary nature of literary studies, in recent times, is evident not only in its incorporation of the socio-cultural idioms in its regular discourses, but also in its acknowledgement of several nonscriptural forms that have emerged in recent times. The scope of postScriptum encompasses the multifaceted socio-cultural aspects reflected through the prism of scriptural and nonscriptural mediums of literature in general.

In spite of being an afterthought, appended to the script, post scriptum is always an integral part of the script. Post scriptum is often the space for revisions, modifications and alterations of the original script. Literary discourses are but the reflections of our engagements with the literary works. Being post scriptum in the literary sense — scripted after the script — such discourses sometimes prove themselves to be the rightful appendices of the scripts through revisions, modifications and alterations.

This online journal is just an endeavour to bring to light some such post scriptum discourses. The interdisciplinary nature of this journal accommodates literary discourses that deal with literary representations which have sprouted from original scripts or, maybe, never had a script so to say. The emergence of nonscriptural literary works is gradually taking us towards a postscriptum era. Being online in publication nature, this journal also strives to capture the essence of this postscriptum era.

About Sarat Centenary College

Sarat Centenary College started its journey in 1976 (the birth centenary year of Bangla novelist Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay) as a junior college and was subsequently upgraded to an undergraduate degree college with affiliation from The University of Burdwan in 1978. It is located in Dhaniakhali Development Block of Chinsurah Sub-Division of Hooghly District in the state of West Bengal in India. Dhaniakhali, in spite of being a rural and agrarian locality, happens to be one of the largest development blocks in West Bengal.

The college offers undergraduate Honours and General degree courses in Arts (Literature & Language, Humanities & Social Sciences), Commerce, and Science (Physical and Biological) streams. The college is aided by the Government of West Bengal under its Grants-in-Aid scheme. In 2016 the college was reaccredited (2nd cycle) by NAAC with a CGPA of 2.33 (grade B). The college is also recognised by UGC under Section 2F & 12B Act of 1956.