

IACLALS

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ABOUT IACLALS:

The Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies— is the officially recognised Indian chapter of the international ACLALS (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies). IACLALS was instituted in India in 1974.

Its objectives are to promote and coordinate Post Colonial/ Commonwealth Literature Studies in India, organize seminars and workshops, arrange lectures by writers and scholars including those visiting India, publishing a newsletter about activities in the field of Commonwealth Literature in India and in other parts of the world, and holding the annual conference in collaboration with various Universities and Institutions in India.

The International ACLALS holds a conference once in three years. The international ACLALS was started in 1964 with a conference in the University of Leeds. Since then the headquarters have moved every three years, and conferences have been held in different parts of the world including Canada, Australia, Singapore, Jamaica and India.



CONTENTS

Editorial	4
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Reports

1. IACLALS Annual Conference 2021, March 17-20, 2021	6
2. Expressions@RGNUL, 29-31 August, 2020	11
3. International Interdisciplinary Lecture Series, 5 th Sept. 2020	13
4. Bangalore University International Science Fiction Conference December 7-10, 2020	15
5. Foundation Lecture Series, JDMC, 2020-2021	17
6. Swami Vivekananda's 158 th Birth Anniversary Celebrated, 12 th Jan 2021	18
7. 128 th Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda's Chicago Speech observed, 19 th Sept 2021	19
8. Women's Writings in India: Issues and Perspectives - Online Lecture Series, February 12- April 23, 2021	20
9. IIT Madras launches Indian Network for Memory Studies, 17 th June 2021	22

Creative Writing

1. Poems by Subodh Sarkar, Tr. Jaydeep Sarangi	25
2. Poems by Vineet Maxwell David	28
3. Poems by Bhumiika R.	30
4. Short story by Manoranjan Byapari, Tr. Somdatta Mandal	32
5. Excerpt from Kusum Khemani's novel <i>Lavanyadevi</i> , Tr. Banibrata Mahanta	37
6. Short story by Shayeari Dutta	41

Book Reviews

1. <i>Salman Rushdie and the Genesis of Secrecy</i> Reviewed by Harish Trivedi	48
2. <i>Indian English Literature 2001-2015: A Critical Survey</i> Reviewed by GJV Prasad	50
3. <i>The Ramayana: A Stage Play and a Screen Play</i> Reviewed by Somdatta Mandal	51
4. <i>Meera Vs Meera: devoted saint-poet or determined queen?</i> Reviewed by GJV Prasad	54
5. <i>In the Labyrinth</i> Reviewed by Shyamala A. Narayan	55
6. <i>The Untouchable and Other Poems</i> Reviewed by Shyamala A. Narayan	58
7. <i>Prose Writings from North East India</i> Reviewed by Dhurjjati Sarma	60
8. <i>Women and Education in India: A Representative Study</i> Reviewed by Ankana Das	63

9. <i>Ghalib: A Wilderness at My Doorstep</i> Reviewed by M. Asaduddin	65
New Publications by Members	69
Awards / Honours / Achievements	75
IACLALS Distinguished Speaker Series	77
Tributes / Obituaries	
1. Kapila Vatsyayan	78
2. Manglesh Dabral	81
3. Sugatha Kumari	84
4. Sankha Ghosh	87
5. Subhadra Sen Gupta	89
6. R.S. Sharma	91
7. Homen Borgohain	93
8. Subhendu Mund	96
9. Lakshmi Nanda Bora	97
10. Siddalingaiah	100
Memorial Meeting for Subhendu Mund	102
Call for Papers: Conferences / Volumes	105
Membership of IACLALS	113

EDITORIAL

In January 2020, as we welcomed a new decade, none of us would have imagined that in a few months' time, a sea of change would take place wherein we would be attending lectures and meetings on a virtual platform in our housecoats and carrying the burden of wearing a mask every time we stepped out of the house. The outbreak of Covid-19 has disturbed the very foundation of human society and created a fissure in our lives between pre-and-post pandemic time frames. As a world without face masks or zoom classes is hard to remember, the impossibility of reproducing the everyday realities compel us to cling to the pre-pandemic memories. While the irretrievability of life's norms belonging to pre-pandemic times is daunting and distressing, the earlier histories and literatures of conquering epidemic and pandemic (plague, cholera, smallpox, tuberculosis and the 1918-19 Spanish flu, etc.) offer optimistic views about the future. In this context, questions such as — what does it mean to be human during a major crisis? What can the humanities, history and literature in particular, offer to help us survive such trauma? —become important.

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread across the world, looking back in times has helped us to understand how this disease has affected us and how our precursors handled a similarly critical situation. In this sense, literature becomes a valuable resource in our attempt at comprehending shared human experience throughout history. In several works from the ancient world to the modern world— from Homer's epic *Illiad* to the biblical book of *Exodus* that describes ten plagues of Egypt to the references to The Black Death in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, to Katherine Anne Porter's 1939 novel *Pale Horse, Pale Rider* referring to the 1919 Spanish flu to Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1985), to name a few—we see an exploration of a wide range of themes in relation to diseases. There has been an increased interest in the study of epidemics/pandemics in order to understand their impact on politics, socio-economic structures, and personal relationships. The overdramatised extremes of human behaviour depicted in Dystopian and Holocaust literatures have become a reality after the human race was held ransom to Corona virus since March 2020. As the certainties of humanism are interrogated in these narratives, bodies, desires, minds, knowledge and being itself are reinterpreted in new ways which cannot possibly be explained by traditional anthropocentrism. With the collapse of the opposition between human and the inhuman there has been a blurring of the conventional distinction between fact and fiction.

When we consider the changes, both short and long term that the coronavirus may bring for us, we cannot forget that the world we know today has been shaped by the pandemics of the past. Thus, the academic world has responded with more alacrity: various webinars, workshops, and symposia held online since March 2020 have attempted at mapping similar themes and concerns of both fiction and non-fiction pandemic literature, and also at underlining their differences. The IACLALS International conference (March 17-20, 2021) on "Utopias and Dystopias in our Times," while highlighting the Indian response to utopic/dystopic imaginations vis-à-vis Western conceptualization of the same, successfully addressed the complex aspects of the subject through a wide array of texts from India and abroad. It has become necessary for the academic fraternity to address the concerns of the real world on a priority basis; some of our previous IACLALS conferences ("Reimagi(n)g Identities in the Global South: Challenges, Transgressions and Articulation," 2020; "Literature, Culture and

Society in the Age of Post-truth,” 2019; “Tolerance and Bigotry: Contestations in Indian Literatures in English,” 2018 etc.) can be discerned as attempts to bridge the gap between the academia and the real world.

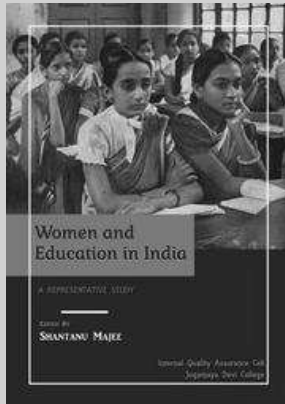
Several writers and scholars have deliberated on the profusion of pandemic writing. Tabish Khair opines that pandemic writing is not only an index of fighting the virus, but also an index of privilege, to be able to engage in creative activities in relative safety. According to him, significant literature from this pandemic is yet to come: “Perhaps significant literature will come from those who walked miles to reach ‘home,’ or lost jobs or had their homes repossessed, if (like Manoranjan Byapari) they ever get the chance to write” (“Inside the Tortoise: On the Literary Responses to the Ongoing Pandemic,” December 19, 2020, *The Hindu*). While evolution of genres, increase in short content, resurgence of books written during times of crisis are the phenomena observed during the pandemic times, fiction will take some more time to emerge since it involves contemplation and retrospection.

In the midst of coping with illness, losing many scholars, writers and loved ones, our IACLALS members have penned heartfelt obituaries and tributes, have taken time to send reports of various events held in their institutions and have contributed book reviews of the most recently published books. Prof. Nandini Saha and Prof. Fatima Rizvi have happily reviewed and edited contributions in the Book Review and the Creative Writing/Translation sections respectively. Kalyanee Rajan has assisted with last moment proofing, formatting and designing. We are happy to bring to you in this Newsletter, 9 Reports, 6 Creative Writing pieces, 9 Book Reviews, and 10 Tributes/Obituaries, along with the details of the New Publications by IACLALS members, Awards/Honours/Achievements (of our members), IACLALS Distinguished Speaker Series, Call for Papers, and the Memorial Meeting for Subhendu Mund. Closure of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have brought far-reaching changes in all aspects of our lives. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices.

Hopefully, we will be able to make sense of all these in the times to come.

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***Women and Education in India: A Representative Study.* Edited by Shantanu Majee. Kolkata: Jogamaya Devi College, 2020, ISBN: 9788193829035.**

Discourse surrounding women's education in India since the late twentieth century has seen a steady rise in interest in academic circles, where the patriarchal and colonial structures that work around the topic have been called out. However, conversations orbiting around education for women doesn't follow a unilateral pathway of critiquing patriarchy alone but embraces variegated avenues through which it can be sought to be understood. There must be an exhaustive cognizance of laws (both religious and legal), along with feminist philosophical and ethical debates, and also an acute awareness about the promotion of indigenous and gendered perspectives in science and technology, in order to grasp the nuances of the domain.

This book under review, titled *Women and Education in India: A Representative Study* edited by Shantanu Majee, is a holistic academic representation of women in education, women and education, and women's education. It does so not by the classical narrowed down analysis of each topic, but by allowing a range of discussions on varied questions starting from the colonial visions of women's education in India, the sustenance, and traces of Victorian morals in the imagination of the figure of an educated woman, to studies on contemporary issues surrounding the education of women, and on persons and institutions that contributed to the establishment of institutions for women in post- colonial India. Through 15 edited articles divided into 3 thematic sections, the book gives a sense of the issue and concerns that have come to constitute the field of women's studies over the last few decades.

Each of the 15 articles in the book addresses a distinct aspect of women's education in India. These articles employ various methodologies, from archival historiographies to ethnographic fieldwork, to discuss the multifaceted aspects of the question of women's education in India. The first three articles in the book are clubbed as "Initiation." Articles in this section act as a historical background to the further discussions around the representation of women and education in India. For example, Ramkrishna Bhattacharya's article involves archival study on the works of D. D. Kosambi, and other documents relevant to laws on Hindu marriage acts. He shows how debates surrounding the question of widow remarriage had been contested along the lines of caste, and how Rammohun Roy and Vidyasagar had to carefully manoeuvre around religious sentiments of their time in order to bring mass acceptance of the practice. Following the archival grain, Biswadeep Chakraborty's essay calls to attention the social narratives of the late 19th century, especially the scandals involving transgression of normative sexual and gendered boundaries that emerged along with the introduction of legal courts by the British in India. Though the article starts with the Victorian scandals, it later shifts attention to the Victorian ideals of domesticity, and the status of schools for women in colonial Bengal. While

Chakraborty's article attempts to capture the shifts in ideas regarding female education movements in late 19th century Bengal, Sanchayita Paul Chakraborty's article takes the reader on a journey through the works of Kailashbasini Devi, who wrote extensively on the subject of women's education. The general condition of women in colonial Bengal is evoked throughout the article, and Paul Chakraborty delicately outlines Kailashbasini's personal struggles (with her in-laws) and her political stance. Her support for British reformist policies stands in contrast with her espousal of moral based syllabus for women in schools. Paul Chakraborty rightly concludes that "perhaps, she (Kailashbasini) could not completely overcome the overpowering influence of the Hindu Brahminic patriarchy," where education for women defined its limitations prominently rather than urging for empowerment.

The second section of the book titled "Individuals" consists of 6 articles, each dwelling on the contribution and legacy of individuals in the discourse. Anchita Ghatak's essay on Ms. Neena Singh, highlights the personal and ethical battles waged by a renowned city high school teacher to establish safe learning environments for girls. Similarly, Miratun Nahar brings out the legacy of Rahila Khatoon, a less famous personality known for her words. Prof. Nilanjana Gupta and Rebecca Gordon's contributions offer very important insights into the contemporary debates on the topic. Their respective works in Kerala and Bihar consolidate the foundation of this book. Prof. Gupta's empirical research on the status of Madrasa education in Kerala adds valuable insights into the normative understanding of Islam and education. She argues against the prevalent notions surrounding education of females in Muslim communities, and shows how in Kerala, state sanctioned contemporary education plans has been able to intervene into the sphere of education and bring out progressive reforms. Similarly, Gordon's article subverts comfortable and urban notions of women's education about rural areas. She studies the lesser looked into factors behind women's education in India, such as mothers' encouragement for daughters' achievements, the disadvantages of belonging from caste and tribe groups, etc. which structurally affect women's education. Similarly, Rosina Ahmed's article on women in medical education broadens any possible limitations of the book.

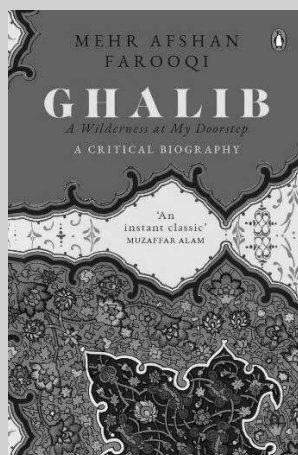
The six articles in the third section of the book, titled "Institutions," dwell on the structures and institutions that enabled the rise of women's education in India. Rahi Soren's work stands out amidst the other brilliantly written articles. Soren connects gender with wildlife and highlights the role of gendered perspectives on environmental conservation. Aditi Das Gupta, Samata Biswas and Nirajana Chakraborty's articles on the significance and contribution of institutions such as Loreto and Bethune to the field of women's education adds important accounts. Sukla Basu, Nilmani Mitra and Satyabrata Bhattacharya's articles throw light on Tagore's contribution to the discourse, while Reena Bhaduri, Lekha Mukhopadhyay and Kajol Kumari through their articles on Jogamaya Devi College demonstrate a contemporary picture of female education in India.

Women and Education in India provides the academic field of women's studies with a collection of related writings. It includes divergent dimensions that together provide a complete overview of the topic. Each contribution is unique, and compliments the other contributor in one way or the other. The absence of an introductory chapter by the editor of the book does make for a sad omission. Again the careful compartmentalization of the articles in the three sections makes it easier for the reader to grasp the flow of the book. However, it is appreciative that the editor did not let the limitations of the compartmentalization be a necessary impediment in selecting articles for the book. Needless to say, the book is an important addition to the literature on women's education in India. It caters to a wider audience outside the regular niches of academia, and might interest those who are not only acquainted with issues surrounding women's studies, but also those who are newly venturing out into the field.

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***Ghalib: A Wilderness at My Doorstep: A Critical Biography* by Mehr Afshan Farooqi, Allen Lane/PRH, 2021. Hardcover. ISBN: 978-0670094295, 416 pages, Rs. 799/-**

Literary biographies, as a genre, has remained popular in the west, covering a wide spectrum, from the purely documentary and factual to the wildly and extravagantly imaginative. The latest in the genre that created a buzz when it came out was *The Dawn Watch: Joseph Conrad in a Global World* by Maya Jasanoff that had as its subject Joseph Conrad, the great writer of Polish origin and stylist of the English novel. Readers had wondered -- after more than a dozen biographies that explored Conrad's life (and its relationship with his works) from all possible angles, and eleven well-curated tomes of his correspondence, what new facts or perspectives could Jasanoff bring to light. Yet when the book finally came out they were dazzled by its brilliance. Jasanoff, a professional historian, drew on insights both from history and literature, to substantially redefine how we see Conrad. Her book compelled many to revisit Conrad as one who prefigured several important concerns and anxieties of the twentieth century. A new book on Ghalib's life justifiably raises the same kind of speculations.

Ghalib's life has been fairly well-documented in English by the foundational collaborative work of Khurshidul Islam and Ralph Russell, particularly in the volume *Ghalib: Life and Letters* (1969). Natalia Pregarina's 'Creative Biography' of Ghalib (in Russian, 1986, translated competently into English by Osama Faruqi, 2000) really lives up to the reputation of that title, bringing into play both facts and imagination in abundant measure and in a judicious combination. Pavan Varma's *Ghalib: The Man, The Times* (1989) was really intended for the general readers. Besides these works in English, there are pioneering works in Urdu, starting from Altaf Husain Hali, through Malik Ram, Gyan Chand Jain, Kalidas Gupta Raza to Shamsur Rahman Faruqi, to name only the most prominent ones, dealing with every probable facet of his life and works. So, one wondered -- what Mehr Afshan Farooqi was going to bring to the table that was not already known to Ghalib admirers. She calls her book a 'critical biography' which might create the impression that she was going to hold certain facts of Ghalib's life, described in earlier life writings, to scrutiny, which is not the case. Neither does she attempt to 'critically' assess the available criticism on Ghalib's poetry. Instead, what the book engages