

Report on Book Discussion Session on *Nationhood and the Indian Subcontinent: Contemporary Cultural Reflections* held on May 16th at Oxford Bookstore, Park Street, Kolkata



[L to R: Professor Himadri Lahiri (Editor), Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta, Professor Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha & Srideep Mukherjee (Editor)]

On May 16th, a thought-provoking discussion centred on *Nationhood and the Indian Subcontinent: Contemporary Cultural Reflections* was conducted at Oxford Bookstore, Park Street, Kolkata bringing together scholars, academics and intellectuals to deliberate on themes of nationalism, resistance movements, and the possibilities of cultural continuities across borders, despite the divides that the shadow lines of political boundaries enforce. The event featured the editors of the book, Professor Himadri Lahiri and Dr. Srideep Mukherjee, both from Netaji Subhas Open University; along with two distinguished discussants, Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta, a poet, short story writer, critic and translator and former Head, Department of English and Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Calcutta University and Professor Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha, from the School of Translation and Cultural Studies, Institute of Language Studies and Research (ILSR), Kolkata and currently a visiting Global South Fellow at University of Cambridge. The interactive session between the four discussants examined critical issues on globalisation, inclusivity, the evolution of nationalist narratives over the decades, both before and after India's independence. The event also saw active participation from contributors to the volume and audience members who left their deeply insightful remarks.

Dr. Mukherjee, as editor, expressed sincere appreciation to the Centre for Language, Translation and Cultural Studies at NSOU for their initiative in publishing *Nationhood and the Indian Subcontinent: Contemporary Cultural Reflections*. He emphasised the vital role of open universities and their publications in fostering more liberal education, democratising knowledge, transcending borders, and promoting a deeper understanding of global citizenship.



(Srideep Mukherjee)

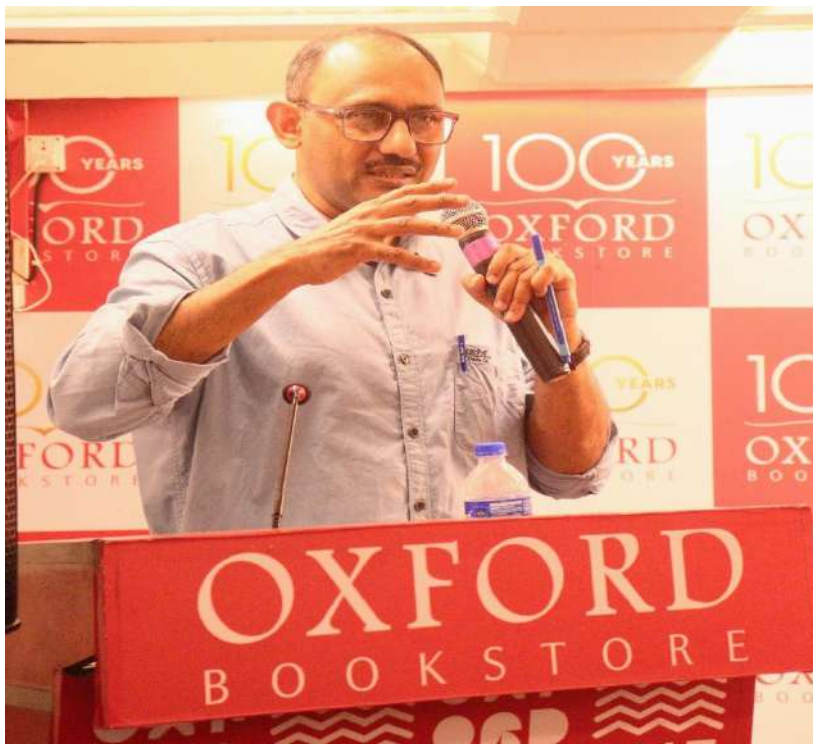
Professor Himadri Lahiri (editor) provided insight into the genesis of the book, tracing the discussions and scholarship that contributed to its development. He emphasised nationalism's colonial and postcolonial aspects, highlighting its temporal (historical) and spatial (geographical or territorial) dimensions. The anthology builds upon previous works on nationalism by scholars such as Nayantra Sehgal, Sukrita Paul Kumar, Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Shamsar Rahman, Meghna Guhathakurata, and Ranabir Samaddar, analysing the development of nationalist narratives in the modern millennium.



(Professor Himadri Lahiri)

A crucial area of discussion revolved around the public understanding of nationalism, including their relationships with neighbouring countries and perspectives on nationhood versus statist apparatus. The titles of the papers in the volume reflect diverse viewpoints on nationalism, analysing established tropes like “Ram Rajya,” “Bharat Mata,” and Gandhian nationalism, while also critically challenging them.

Professor Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha praised the volume for addressing the fervour of cultural nationalism as a phenomena in contemporary India, emphasising why it is essential to critically engage with the idea of a nation in an era of hyper-nationalism. He highlighted the pedagogical and performative aspects of nationalism as discussed in the book, urging scholars to examine the ideological warfare shaping democratic India.



(Professor Anindya Sekhar Purakayastha)

There was great focus on the ways the chapters included in the book discusses ambiguous “borderlands” — particularly Chitmahals, the border enclaves between India and Bangladesh, and how they exemplify the fluidity of cultural identities despite rigid political borders. The panel reflected on how nationalism manifests in diverse representations, including Bangladesh, Pakistan, the Chitmahals, gender perspectives, Miah poetry, and the representation of Muslims in Assam. The conversation delved into broader questions about what constitutes political boundaries and the contrasting realities of cultural continuities across borders. Both the discussants acknowledged nationalism’s affective and emotive turn, recognising its significance in cultural studies and intersectionality research and how the volume proves to be a significant addition in the existing work in this area.

Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta explored the role of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) in the Indian subcontinent, particularly its significance in fostering regional cooperation amid nationalist and sub-nationalist tensions. She touched upon the distinctions between nationhood and nationalism, with the former relating to the status of belonging to a nation and the latter encompassing actions associated with national identity.



(Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta)

She further reflected on the responsibility of intellectuals in shaping conversations about nationalism, arguing that academics play a crucial role in taking the nation and the world forward. The discussants encouraged the editors to consider a future volume that could expand the anthology's scope to include perspectives from other South Asian nations, as well as incorporate anthropological and psychological viewpoints.





The session concluded with an engaging discussion on Rabindranath Tagore's interpretation of nationalism and its enduring relevance in today's world. Tagore's perspectives were revisited to critically examine contemporary nationalist ideologies and their implications for global harmony and cultural inclusivity, with comments on the same by Debasis Majumdar, a severally awarded playwright-director from India, whose interview is included in the volume, along with two other interviews by a leading thespian and actor from Bangladesh— Bonna Mirza, a celebrated television and silver screen figure from Pakistan— Samia Mumtaz.

The evening provided an insightful exploration of nationalism, resistance movements, and global interconnectedness. Through the contributions of esteemed scholars, the discussion underscored the need for continued academic engagement with nationalism and its evolving narratives in political, cultural, and philosophical contexts. The session reinforced the importance of examining nationalism not only through historical and territorial lenses but also as an ongoing ideological and emotional construct that shapes collective identities across borders.