



School of Humanities

NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY

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**UGC-DEB Sponsored Colloquium on “Myth,
History, and Creative Writing”**

**(Organised by The Department of English, School of
Humanities, Netaji Subhas Open University)**

Colloquium Report

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Introduction

As a follow-up of the Workshop-cum-Symposium organised by the Department of English, SoH, NSOU, on 22-23rd August, 2024, a virtual UGC-DEB funded Colloquium on “Myth, History and Creative Writing” was organised by the department on 13th September, 2024 from 6.30 pm IST onwards. The Colloquium was attended by the speakers Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta and author Rahad Abir. The entire session was moderated by Professor Siddhartha Biswas, University of Calcutta.

Introduction to the Speakers

The Colloquium had two speakers for the day.

Dr Sanjukta Dasgupta, the first speaker, is a Professor and Former Head, Dept of English and Former Dean, Faculty of Arts, Calcutta University. Recipient of the Fulbright postdoctoral fellowship and Fulbright Scholar in Residence grant, Australia India Council fellowship, Gender Studies fellowship grant, University of British Columbia, among others, she has been invited to participate in conferences and teach/lecture at universities in the USA, UK, Europe, Canada and Australia. She was also the Chairperson of the Commonwealth Writers Prize jury panel (2003-2005) and visited Melbourne and Malta in 2004-2005. In 2014 she gave the keynote address at the conference on Body and Identity held at the Pedagogical University, Krakow, Poland. In 2015, The Indian Institute of Advanced Study Shilma invited her as Visiting Professor and she delivered a series of talks on Tagore, Nation and Gender. She has been granted the Charles Wallace Trust UK Translator Fellowship 2016, to work on her project on translations of selected texts of Tagore and his daughter Madhurilata at the University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK.

Rahad Abir, the second speaker, is a writer from Bangladesh. His debut novel *Bengal Hound* won the Georgia Author of the Year Award for literary fiction. He has an MFA in fiction from Boston University. He is the recipient of the Charles Pick Fellowship at the University of East Anglia and the Marguerite McGlenn Prize for Fiction. His work has been translated into French and Hindi. Currently he is working on a short story collection, which was a finalist for the Miami Book Fair Emerging Writer Fellowship.

Location and Period

The colloquium was organised on 13th September, 2024, virtually on Zoom Meet, from 6.30 pm IST onwards. The link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89820472096>. The event was simultaneously live streamed on the official YouTube channel.

Opening

The colloquium began at 6.30 pm IST with the introduction by Dr Srideep Mukherjee, OiC, SoH, who briefly introduced the speakers and the faculty members of the Department of English, SoH, NSOU. Following his introduction, Professor Himadri Lahiri, Department of

English, SoH, NSOU, discussed that the objective of the colloquium is to function as a follow-up of the workshop to enrich the content writers to prepare materials for the new NEP syllabi. He further emphasised that the department is also planning to publish booklets based on the lectures of the workshop and the colloquium.

Objectives of the Colloquium

The objectives of the colloquium were basically the same as the workshop that was organised in blended mode on 22-23rd August. This colloquium was expected to function as a follow-up in order to facilitate and enrich the content developers in their process of content creation.

Participation

The colloquium was attended by two speakers – Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta and author Rahad Abir. Professor Siddhartha Biswas functioned as the moderator of the colloquium. The sessions were attended by the organisers and faculty members of the Department of English, SoH, NSOU. There were around 50 participants in total who attended the sessions in virtual mode on Zoom.

Colloquium Sessions and Discussions

The moderator of the sessions, Professor Siddhartha Biswas began the first session of the Colloquium with the introduction to Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta. The session was followed by Professor Dasgupta's talk.

Session 1: "Creation and Re-Creation of Myth: The Art and Craft of Creative Writing" by Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta: Professor Dasgupta began her talk by thanking the members for organising such an event. Then she proceeded to speak on how creative writing can actually transcend time and boundary. Creative writing, according to her, when applied to the re-creating of myths, decodes the text, subtext and context and as an end result creates a different piece of its own. The art of creative writing, is therefore, intangible, and the craft is accumulated through assimilation. She mentioned that incorporating creative writing into a university course is a dynamic process. Her talk continued with the discussion of myths and how they function. She mentioned Devdutt Patnayak's division of religious and secular myths, and how mythologies function. Mentioning the name of Barthes, she elaborated that there are myths that are ancient, but here is nothing such as an eternal myth. Furthermore, she mentioned Virginia Woolf and the concept of killing the woman as "the angel of the house", thereby destroying the monolithic and eternal structure of certain myths. Her lecture proceeded with the discussion of several woman authors of the age such as Eunice de Souza and Kamala Das. Her elaborate and illuminating talk of myth and its re-creation concluded with brief discussions of her own poems such as "Laxmi Unbound", "Millennial Sita", "O Draupadi" etc and how she has attempted to create revisionist myths out of the existing ones.

Moderator's Note: Following the conclusion of her talk, the moderator summed up her session, recalling how creative writing functions as a revisionist retelling of existing myths, and how in her works such as *Ekalavya Speaks*, she not only talks about the revisionist position of women in her recreation, but also the marginalisation of the subaltern by the existing patriarchal structure.

The moderator then introduced the audience to the next speaker of the Colloquium, the author Rahad Abir.

Session 2: "The Story of a Banglish Writer" by author Rahad Abir: In the second session, we had the author Rahad Abir, who shared with the participants his experiences of becoming a renowned author. He recollected the reasons for him becoming an author in the English language despite hailing from a Bengali family. He also discussed the importance of memory and individual history that had influenced his works throughout his career. His aspirations began in 1999 after his college days were over and he was searching for stores, which he found in one of the unfortunate events of his life. Interestingly, he describes, the story that he created in the end was much different than he thought he would create in the beginning. He also talked about the reason he started writing in English, as he wanted to represent his native country to a global audience. Finally, he concluded with how his obsession towards personal history shaped his narratives and experiences as an author.

Moderator's Note: The session was summed up by the moderator who noted the importance of memory, individual history, trauma in shaping one's creative identity. He further noted how creative authors, such as Mr Abir, manages to create a juxtaposition of ancient and contemporary history thereby giving birth to a new kind of narrative.

The talks were followed by Questions and Answers and Interactive Sessions where both speakers interacted at length with the audience.

Closing

The Colloquium concluded with the formal vote of thanks by Debottama Ghosh, Assistant Professor, Department of English, SoH, NSOU. In her conclusion Ms Ghosh pointed out the relevance of history and myth in shaping the time that we are living in today and as citizens of the subcontinent we must be aware how the political always inadvertently influences the personal selves. Keeping all of that in mind, she mentioned, the syllabus of creative writing that has been designed can cater to the learner to know more about the lives and literature of our time.

Some Glimpses of the Workshop-cum-Symposium

