



NABA BALLYGUNGE MAHAVIDYALAYA

(Formerly CHARUCHANDRA EVENING COLLEGE)

27E, Bosepukur Road, Kolkata - 700042

Email: nbmv2005@yahoo.co.in, Website: nbmahavidyalaya.in

Title of the symposium: Voices in Verse: A National Symposium on Indian Writing in English

Organizer: Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya, Department of English

Collaborators: New Alipore College, Dinabandhu Andrews College, Lokpara Mahavidyalaya

Type: National

Keynote speaker: Shri Gopikrishnan Kottoor, Indian English poet, novelist and playwright

Chairperson: Dr Sandipan Sen, Associate Professor, Department of English, Ananda M

Date: 5th February, 2025

Links to the symposium on institution's YouTube Channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcGVMnhX0-w>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0J9gyH76T8g>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qi5jOPZGE74>

NABA BALLYGUNGE MAHAVIDYALAYA, DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
In collaboration with
NEW ALIPORE COLLEGE, DINABANDHU ANDREWS COLLEGE, & LOKEPARA MAHAVIDYALAYA
presents

Voices in Verse: A National Symposium on Indian English Poetry

Resource Person

GOPIKRISHNAN KOTTOOR
Indian English Poet,
Novelist & Playwright

Chair Person:
DR. SANDIPAN SEN
Associate Professor
Anandamohan College

Patrons:
DR. AYANTIKA GHOSH
Principal, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya
DR. JAYDEEPSARANGI
Principal, New Alipore College, Kolkata
DR. SOMNATH MUKHOPADHYAY
Principal, Dinabandhu Andrews College
DR. MRINAL KANTI DAS
Principal, Lokpara Mahavidyalaya, Birbhum

Convener: Dr. Sayantina Dutta
Assistant Professor & Head
Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya

Wed Feb 05, 2025 at 2:00 pm, College Auditorium

Poster of the symposium titled "Voices in Verse: A National Symposium on Indian Writing in English" on 05.02.2025

The national symposium started with the welcome address delivered by the principal of Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya Dr Ayantika Ghosh. She congratulated the organisers, especially the Department of English, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya and all the collaborators for conducting the symposium on such a vibrant topic like Indian English poetry which has carved out its unique space in literary world, drawing inspiration from ancient and modernity, indigenous and global. She expressed her hope that the participants will actively engage and ask questions to make the symposium immensely successful.

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Felicitation of the keynote speaker and the chairperson



Welcome address by the Principal of Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya

The chairperson Dr Sandipan Sen, Associate Professor, Department of English, Ananda Mohan College, Kolkata, congratulated the organisers for selecting a very conspicuous day for discussion on Indian poetry because the day happened to be the birthday of the contemporary Bangla poet Shri Shankha Ghosh. He mentioned Tagore's iconic essay *Sabhyatar Sankat* translated as "Crisis in Civilization" to be a paradigm for understanding the origin of Indian writings in English. Dr Sen added that the birth of Indian writings in English if traced back to the early masters like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and RK Narayan one would discover that the writings were born from an anger and disillusionment. While Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the forefather of Indian Literature in English and later writers like Toru Dutt, Michael Madhusudan Dutt, Henry Louis Vivian Derozio, and Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay were more vocal about the benevolent nature of British rule this illusion shattered when British refused to grant freedom or local self-government to the Indians, the consequent rage and disillusionment is reflected in "Crisis in Civilization". In Dr. Sen's words, Rao, Anand and Narayan used English language as a tool to express Indian experiences, Indian realities, Indian sentiments as opposed to English experiences, realities and sentiments while they accepted the English language as a tool, they rejected the supremacy of English Literature, trying to present Indian reality in English language which is very important in understanding the history of Indian English poetry. From the chairperson's address it was easy to understand that the rejection of English Literature was equivalent to rejection of Eurocentrism and that the early masters also rejected the kind of modernity, British wanted India to have. With the rejection of English literature or Eurocentrism, the early masters started the movement of Indian English Literature and this movement reached heights in the hands of Salman Rushdie, Amitav Ghosh, Kiran Desai.

Ghosh

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Dr Sandipan Sen, Associate Professor, Department of English, Ananda Mohan College chairing the session



Shri Kottoor, the keynote speaker, addressing the audience

The speaker also mentioned about Edward Said's Orientalism which is the Occidental tendency to portray the East as the other. However, the concept of inferiority or otherness was shattered by Indian English Literature, which is now a part of the canon and hence a part of the curriculum in the global universities. He further mentioned a poem by Gopikrishnan Kottoor, the keynote speaker which is "Father, Wake us in Passing" which refers to the universal bonding between father and son and journey of the soul to the infinity. Dr Sen mentioned that Kottoor's reference to Kalidasa, Buddha, Yakshi speak about the Indianness, the Indian context, which is a very important aspect.

The mic was then handed over to the keynote speaker Shri Gopi Krishnan Kottoor, renowned Indian poet writing in English. He began his inciting talk comparing poetry to the Japanese art of repairing broken things with gold, silver or platinum known as kintsugi. He said that poetry is kintsugi in action and that poetry is made of teardrops, of tragedies, of sad feelings and of loss of love. He referred to William Butler Yeats's famous lines "Bodily decrepitude is wisdom, young/ We loved each other and were ignorant." He went on to say that poetry is something that we cannot express the fullest and that poets are both born and made, as long as tears are in the eyes, there will be words in the heart. He cited the examples of Langston Hughes, Edward Thomas, Swami Vivekananda and Michael Angelo to explicate that one can chisel out poetry if one puts a lot of efforts. Langston Hughes in his childhood was given the homework at his school to write a poem. He was neither helped by his mother or father and he was at a loss how to write a poet poem because he had never done so in his life ; but throughout the night he tried. The next day he went to school with a masterpiece. Who knew that Langston Hughes would become one of the greatest Black American poets? Edward Thomas was inspired by his friend Robert Frost, and with dire efforts, he became one of the finest poets before he got killed in the war.

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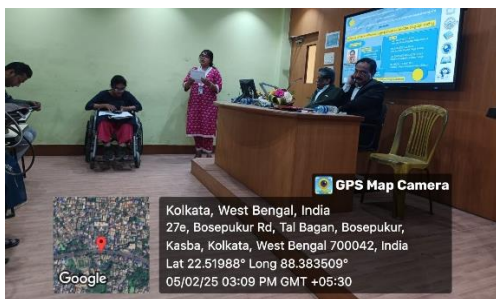
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Then Shri Kottoor gave the popular example of the European teacher at Scottish Church College William Hastie teaching Swami Vivekananda, William Wordsworth's poem "The Excursion" where Vivekananda wanted his teacher to explain the meaning of trance, as they came across the lines: "A momentary trance came over me and to myself/ I seem to muse on one day/ Sorrow led asleep or born away." It is interesting that an agnostic and atheist like William Hastie cited the example of Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa to be met in order to understand the meaning of momentary trance, which actually is wild transformation. Shri Kottoor gave this example to imply that poetry is also born in "momentary trance", in an emotion that is spontaneous when the emotions are very deep, and they need a release. Then he gave the example of the Italian Renaissance sculptor Michael Angelo sitting in the ruins, collecting stones when the governor of Rome came on his chariot and asked him why he was looking for stones, to which Michel Angelo replied "I am finding the angel in the stone." The governor patronised him to become one of the greatest sculptors of the world. To the question whether poetry is art or craft, Shri Kottoor said that it is both art and craft. At its initial stage, it is art when it comes from the heart, from the spontaneous overflow of feelings, from the momentary trance. But with efforts a poet makes it a monument with chosen words, diction and rhythm, and then it becomes a craft. To validate, that poets are both born and made, he gave the example of many schools and colleges which have creative writing as a major course, which teaches the nuances of writing good poetry. He concluded inspiring the student audience to look for poetry in every stone as Michael Angelo did and endeavour to become a poet, not for recognition or appreciation, but for happiness, to seek Ananda/ Bliss/ priceless of joy in poetry. Finally, the keynote speaker of the day ended his brilliant riveting talk with two poems of his own From his latest book A Land in the Sun; the poems being "Notes on the Wayanad Tragedy" and "At the Garden of Gethsemane".

This talk was followed by a poetry-reading session. The smart room reverberated with enthralling recitations/renditions from Kottoor's poems. The first reciter was the Faculty, Department of English, Naba Ballygunge Mahavidyalaya Shri Debojyoti Dan, who read out Kottoor's "Song of the Guitar" and "The Back of the Crucifix". The next two people reciters were two students from New Alipore College: Samriddhi who recited "Africa" and Swastika who recited "Digging". This beautiful two hours symposium ended with a group photo clicked.



Samriddhi, a student of New Alipore College reciting a poem of Gopi Kottoor



Swastika, a student of New Alipore College reciting a poem of Gopi Kottoor

Ghosh
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A mandatory group photo at the end of the symposium—Keynote speaker, chairperson, faculty and students

Outcomes of the seminar:

The students were able to

- ✓ Know about the origin of Indian writings in English
- ✓ Understand the nuances of crafting out poetry
- ✓ Appreciate poetry as an art
- ✓ Be familiarized with the poems of Gopikrishnan Kottoor

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