

CALL FOR PAPERS

UGC Sponsored
CLAI BIENNIAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
March 11-14, 2019

Organised by
Comparative Literature Association of India
in collaboration with
Maulana Azad National Urdu University (Hyderabad)
And sponsored by
Nation Council of Promotion of Urdu Literature (NCPUL)
Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi

on

Studying South Asian Narratives Through Pluralist and Dialogic Frames

Concept Note

The CLAI Biennial International Conference takes up the theme of the ICLA standing research committee on South Asian Literature and Culture, aiming to consolidate the conversation on the methods of literary and artistic research in and study of the plural culture of South Asia, with the emphasis on narrative as an expressive and appropriative mode. As comparatists, our focus in this meeting is not on themes or content of individual narratives or a pair of narratives. We seek to encourage the study of difference and otherness, the rationale of the comparative approach, by using linguistic and cultural pluralism as frames for reading of and research on, narratives in south Asian languages.

Histories of various forms of contact (trade, travel, pilgrimage, conquest, colonization) characterise the geopolitical space known as “south Asia”, revealing it as a field which can be fruitfully understood only through a comparative method. Epistemological, ontological and philosophical pluralism provide frames for the comparative method, as pluralism acknowledges the existence and foundational equality of different ways of thinking, being and knowing.

The philosophy of pluralism in India can be traced to the *anekantvad* theory available in the Bhagwatisutra of Mahavira, which emerged in Jainism in the 1st millennium CE, from debates between scholars of Jain, Buddhist and Hindu schools of philosophies. Thus coexistence and dialogue is a tradition of the plural society of South Asia. The ‘pan-Indian’ religious movement made eloquent by the cultural production of the Bhakti, Sufi and Sant poets and composers rose from and addressed a plural society.

Anekant as an idea defines pluralism as manifoldness and non-absolutism; and opens out a view of the “other” not as other to themselves, but just as much “self” as we are to ourselves. Therefore, the relation we have with the world of the living being is not one between subject and objectified world, but between subjects who have the full equal subject-hood. This makes pluralism a conceptual tool to understand difference and otherness not from an individual/subjective or scientific /objective perspective, but from the view that the human being is a being in respect of her existence together with the world. Her living engagement in this world, of which literature and art are singular, unique manifestations, is the result of an inter-subjective relation.

European philosophers of dialogue, phenomenologists like Merleau Ponty or existentialists like Martin Buber, of pluralism, like Isaiah Berlin, and literary culture, like Bakhtin, provide fruitful re-conceptualisation of the fundamental relations that characterise human being in the

world, and language as the medium of that being. They introduce ideas of inter-subjectivity, horizon, sedimentation and signification as conceptual tools to understand plurality and reflect upon dialogue as a way of encountering and engaging with alterity.

The plural culture of South Asia is partitioned, in the “post” colonial era by geopolitical, i.e. ‘national’ boundaries, creating a misleading illusion of national homogenization wrought through the false claims of a single uniform language, culture and religion, discounting the inherent plurality of society itself. The increased espousal of identity politics has led to the hardening of epistemological and political positions towards fundamentalism, seriously challenging the values of pluralism in thought and action. The dialogic relation conceptualises human relations to the world as I-Thou, rather than an I-It relation with her world (Martin Buber). The brief of our discipline is to understand human existence through the inter-subjective medium of language, the balance of mutuality and alterity structure the interpretive framework for comparative literature. Literature and art located, produced and received in a plural culture invite readings that are inherently comparative in transcending the absolutist or the fixed or the given perspective, in favour of situational, existential and ethical encounter in which the relation with the other is dialogic, transcending the boundary of the ego to open ourselves to the manifold of the world. Literature and art foreground a pluralist conceptualisation of and a dialogic relation to the other. Thus the materials for addressing diversity already exist in the literature and the arts, which are born from a plural ethos and thrive in it. Our focus, as scholars of literature, located in and trying to study a plural culture, will be to re-imagine our world through plurality and dialogue. The narrative as a literary phenomenon, situated within a historical conjuncture and in the broad field of the arts, provides the ground of our exploration.

We invite participants to explore pluralism and the philosophy of dialogue as the philosophical basis for the foundational impulse and the ethical relevance of comparative literature not only in South Asia, but across the world.

Subthemes (texts necessarily from South Asia as literary field)

- Multilingualism and the narrative
- Pluri-lingualism as literary phenomenon
- Cross-cultural literary and artistic transactions
- Dialogic reading
- “Boundaries” v/s “horizons” in a dialogic framework
- Interrogating Binaries from a pluralist perspective
- Inter-textuality as Literary Dialogue
- Dialogism and translation theory
- Art as dialogue
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Other Relevant Details

- Abstracts of about 300 words in Times New Roman (12 point, single space), along with the presenter’s designation, affiliation, and email id, mentioned at the end of the Abstract, may be sent to :

Prof. Syed Mohammad Haseebuddin Quadri
Head, Department of English
Maulana Azad National Urdu University
Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500032
Mobile: 9492197720

Email: syedmohammedhaseebuddinquadri@gmail.com
syedhaseebuddins@yahoo.com

Apart from English, papers may also be presented in Hindi, or Urdu which must be mentioned at the time of submission of Abstract.

- All presentations must be completed within 18-20 minutes.
- There will be a few plenary sessions.
- The conference will also hold the prestigious Sisir Kumar Das Memorial Lecture.
- Registration fees shall be applicable as follows:

Outstation participants:	Rs. 3000/=
Local Participants:	Rs. 1500/=
Research scholars:	Rs. 1500/=
Students:	Rs. 1000/=
Foreign Participants:	US \$ 200/=

Important Dates

- Submission of the abstracts: 10th January, 2019
- Communication of acceptance: 5th February, 2019
- Completion of registration: 25th February, 2019

Contacts

- Coordinataor: Prof. Syed Mohammad Haseebuddin Quadri, Head, Department of English, Maulana Azad National Urdu University, Gachibowli, Hyderabad-500032, (Email: syedmohammedhaseebuddinquadri@gmail.com ; syedhaseebuddins@yahoo.com; Mobile: 9492197720)
- Co-coordinators:
 - (1) Professor Mohammed Naseemuddin Farees, Dean, Head, Department of Urdu, MANUU, (email: drynaseemuddin92@gmail.com; Mobile: 9490784290)
 - (2) Professor (Mrs) Shugufta Shaheen, Department of English, MANUU, (email: shugufta.shaheen@yahoo.com; Mobile: 09849469059)
 - (3) Dr Somapalyam Omprakash, Department of English, MANUU, (email: somapalyam@yahoo.com; Mobile: 07981469252)
- Professor Chandra Mohan, General Secretary, Comparative Literature Association of India (CLAI), C-93 (GF) Inder Puri, New Delhi-110012 (Email id: c.mohan.7@hotmail.com; Mobile: 09810683143)
- Professor Anisur Rahman, Secretary, Comparative Literature Association of India, Email: (Email: anis.jamia@gmail.com; Mobile: 9891820924)