

A Report on Unmesha: Festival of Expression

International Literature Festival

Shimla: 16-18 June, 2022

Unmesha: Festival of Expression, an event most relevant to Comparative Literature in India, was organized by the Sahitya Akademi in Shimla from 16 to 18 June, 2022. This International Literature Festival focused on many areas that are important thrust areas of Comparative Literature—Literary Studies, Reception Studies, Literature and the Other Arts, Tribal and Indigenous Literature, Folk Literature and Translation.

Billed as India's largest literary festival, *Unmesha* brought together creative writers, film personalities, critics, scholars, publishers, editors and translators from all over India and even beyond. It was organized in association with the Ministry of Culture, as part of the activities of the Azadi Ki Amrit Mahotsav programmes.

Among the academic sessions was a thrust on Indian Classics, which was manifested in the form of a number of discussions sessions on "Indian Literature and World Classics," "Literary Classics of the World and Indian Writings," and "World Classics and Indian Readers." Speakers and chairpersons included, among others, Harish Trivedi, Jatindra Kumar Nayak, Krishna Manavalli, Chinmoy Guha and Shafey Kidwai.

Among the most interesting themes was "What Literature Means to Me" where the topic was discussed by personalities as diverse as a playwright like Satish Alekar, a dancer like Sonal Mansingh and an academic like Nabanita Sengupta. Side by side with this were the sessions on "Why I Write?" which sought to understand the creative impulses behind literary creation.

India's creative and linguistic diversity was showcased by sessions like "Multilingual Poetry Readings" and "Multilingual Short Story Readings", which featured readings from languages as diverse as Hindi, Malayalam, Bangla, Mandyali, English, Gujarati, Konkani, Kashmiri, Kangri, Kannada, Chambaili, Urdu, Dogri, Rajasthani and Sindhi. These sessions provided an important window to the creative spirit of established and promising writers from various Indian languages. There were also reading sessions focused on "Tribal Languages" featuring literary creations from languages such as Lepcha (Tamsang Lyangsong), Karbi (Joysing Tokbi) and Mog (Thailow Mog). This was also accompanied by scholarly presentations on literature in tribal languages featuring personalities like Anil Boro (Bodo), Chandrakanta Murasingh (Kokborok) and Madan Mohan Soren (Santali).

The sessions on "Translation" featured practicing translators and academics specializing in Translation Studies such as N Kalyan Raman, Ranjit Hoskote, Rita Kothari, Mini Krishnan and Sumanyu Satpathy.

The Festival also had several sessions on “LGBTQ writing,” “Literature and the Indian Independence Movement”, “Indian Diaspora”, “Publishing in India”, “Northeastern Literature” and “Bhakti”. The sessions relating to cinema and literature were some of the most popular and well-attended sessions. The Festival also had sessions focusing on women’s writing, and Geetanjali Shree, who has recently won the International Booker Prize, was among the speakers.

A special feature of the Festival was the cultural programmes that were organized as part of it. These included dance recitals by Sonal Mansingh, Dastan presentation by Mahmood Farooqui and troupe, and percussion performances by P Jaya Bhaskar and Nathulal Solanki and their troupes. In addition, the Festival saw the screening of a number of documentaries on literary personalities of India, such as Sunil Gangopadhyay, UR Ananthamurthy Dharamvir Bharati, Bholabhai Patel and Khushwant Singh.

—Sayantan Dasgupta.