

Call for Papers

Department of Humanistic Studies, University of Salerno

is organizing a two-day international online conference on

“Bangladeshi English Novels: From Emergence to Efflorescence”

24-25 June 2021

Concept Note

The history and development of Bangladeshi English literature are closely bound up with the political vicissitudes of the Indian subcontinent. Some of the major events of the region—the partition of the Bengal Presidency in 1905 and its reversal in 1911, the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, the language movement of 1952 in East Pakistan, the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 and the socio-economic sea-change the country experienced in the 1990s—all had profound impacts on this tradition of literature. Although the first Bangladeshi English novel, namely Begum Rokeya’s *Sultana’s Dream*, came out in 1905, it is only in the 1990s that this category of literature gained some momentum. The second decade of the twenty-first century witnessed the publication of some of the best works ever written in this category, such as K. Anis Ahmed’s *The World in My Hands* (2013), Zia Haider Rahman’s *In the Light of What We Know* (2014), Numair Atif Choudhury’s *Babu Bangladesh!* (2019) and so on, marking what Kaiser Haq, the foremost Bangladeshi poet writing in the English language, called an “efflorescence” to describe the present status of Bangladeshi English literature.

Despite Haq’s optimism, Bangladeshi English literature has always had a marginalized status. Not only did the experience of the 1952 language movement make Bengali people lean more towards Bengali language and culture, the liberation of the country also made it sure that whatever tenuous tradition of “English medium” education there was in Bangladesh in pre-independence times gave way to education in Bengali language. English education returned in the country in the 1990s in some schools and all privately owned universities when the waves of a specific kind of modernity—of globalization and industrialization—splashed over Bangladesh, making it possible for a handful of people to start producing and receiving literature written in English. Things have gotten better for this category of literature gradually, albeit reluctantly, ever since. Still, the readership of Bangladeshi English novels within the country is minuscule even today, and these novels are consumed mostly by an international audience.

Indeed, an apt categorization of Bangladeshi English novels would be as transnational literature rather than postcolonial or diasporic literature because of the international readership, the novelists’ relative affluence and capacity for mobility across the globe and, many times, the absence of diasporic and/or postcolonial sensibilities. Most of the novelists have been educated in the “English medium”—a privilege afforded by only the well-to-do class in the country. Almost all of them also lived for at least a few years in the English-speaking “first world” for higher education, employment or some other business. Their literary efforts are sometimes labelled in Bangladesh as “boroloker shahitya” or “literature of the rich” implying that these novelists and their readers belong to an elite margin. However, their works often evidence themes and concerns

that are fundamentally Bangladeshi: the country's violent history; its encounters with globalization and modernity; Islamization and/or Islamic radicalism; marginalization and othering of the minority population and so on. It is as if this category of literature is attempting to write the nation from the margin, and it is specifically for this reason that we notice many departures in these novels from the nationalist narratives of history the Bangladeshi state has woven for itself. There is yet to be a meaningful discussion on the concerns outlined above, which is what we intend to do in the online conference on "Bangladeshi English Novels: From Emergence to Efflorescence". The following themes are suggested but, by no means, prescribed for abstracts (300 words):

1. Nationalist narratives of history and Bangladeshi English novels
2. Archaeology of history and Bangladeshi English novels
3. Writing the nation from the margin
4. Transnationalism and Bangladeshi English novels
5. English language and Bangladeshi English novels
6. Partition, Liberation War and other scars of history
7. Islamization and Islamic radicalism
8. Modernity and globalization
9. Man against Environment

Abstract submission details

Abstract submission: 07 March 2021

Acceptance of abstracts: 21 March 2021

Submission of Final Paper: 01 June 2021

Submit to: i.papia@studenti.unisa.it

Keynote speakers



Dr. Fakrul Alam

Director

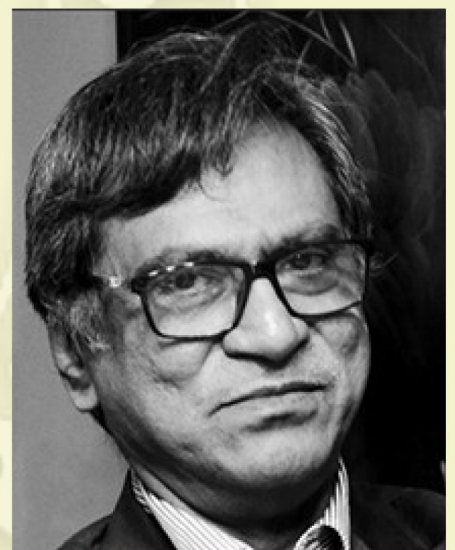
Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Research
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and

UGC Professor

Department of English

University of Dhaka



Dr. Kaiser Haq

Professor

Department of English and Humanities (DEH)

School of Arts and Humanities (SAH)

University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB)