

ICSSR SPONSORED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
ORGANISED BY THE POSTGRADUATE DEPT. OF ENGLISH IN COLLABORATION WITH
THE DEPT. OF HISTORY, MAULANA AZAD COLLEGE, KOLKATA

DI(S)-SECTING INDIA: LANGUAGES, IDENTITIES AND POWER IN THE LONG NINETEENTH CENTURY (1835 – 1950)



10th & 11th November, 2025



Maulana Azad College, Kolkata



Plenary Speakers



Prof. (Dr.) Supriya Chaudhuri
Professor Emerita, Department of English,
Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India



Dr. John Hutnyk
Associate Professor, Global Inquiries
and Social Theory Research Group,
Faculty of Social Science and
Humanities, Ton Duc Thang University,
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Prof. (Dr.) Anna Becker
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Dr. Jyoti Mohan
Historian, Independent Researcher,
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Dr. Aparna Bandyopadhyay
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University, West Bengal



Prof. (Dr.) Maroona Murmu
Professor, Department of History,
Jadavpur University, Kolkata

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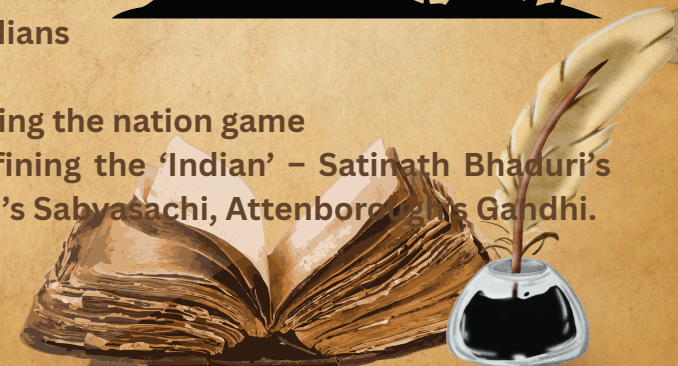


Concept Note

The long Nineteenth Century takes us from the pre-1857 to the gradual consolidation of the idea of the Indian Nation rising out of a plural, multi-ethnic and rift-ridden society. Whether it is an 'imagined community' or a palpable flesh-and-blood pool of humanity, the idea of the Nation passed through the inevitable frictions of history. This conference will focus on the efforts of union as well as the inevitable and avoidable fractures among communities, dissecting the idea of India, examining the causes of the sectarian and the communal identities; the identities of the mainstream and the peripheral communities by following the language issues; and emerging identities through linguistic and cultural constructs. Policies of the British and of the Indian states had significant roles to play in constructing the grand narrative of the Nation as opposed to the tribal, the Dalit, the sub-altern who were never blended properly. This grand narrative has sometimes been questioned by the provocative suggestion of 'playing the nation game'. Historiography, therefore, has been standing at the crossroads and has often faced and accommodated counternarratives. The two-nation theory of Jinnah, and the birth of Pakistan are examples of theory and practice in the cauldron of history – demanding out of the historian a more introspective subtle approach. The history of the Nation would entail alternative narratives from the Feminist point of view too, offering a challenge of accommodating a gendered counternarrative.

Whereas the organisers invite and intend to maintain a catholic point of view in accepting papers on all related topics, some of the probable areas to focus on are the following:

- Geographical border drawing
- Linguistic maps and dominance: competition between Persian, Sanskrit and English
- Ethnic statehood
- Religious consolidations
- Literature of aspirations of ethnic identity
- Revision of historiography
- Renaissance or a false paradigm?
- From Sepoy to Soldier: a military history of the Indian army and the INA
- Freedom revisited: theories of freedom by the English, the French and the Indians
- Enumeration of key-texts: Macaulay's Minutes
- The concept of nationality in the Indian context: Two nations theory and playing the nation game
- Through the text darkly: Texts and subtexts in literature, arts, music in defining the 'Indian' – Satinath Bhaduri's Jagari, Sharatchandra's Pather Dabi, Rabindranath Tagore's Gora, Pijush Basu's Sabyasachi, Attenborough's Gandhi.
- Tribal Language Movements and Dalit Identity Formations
- Feminism and Linguistic Chauvinism in the Indian Context
- Domesticity and Nationalism



Objectives of the Conference

Geographical border drawing was a contentious issue throughout the long Nineteenth Century. Whether it is the Partition of Punjab and Bengal or the contours of the states, the colonial rulers had little regard for the identities of different communities leading to tragic separation of families.

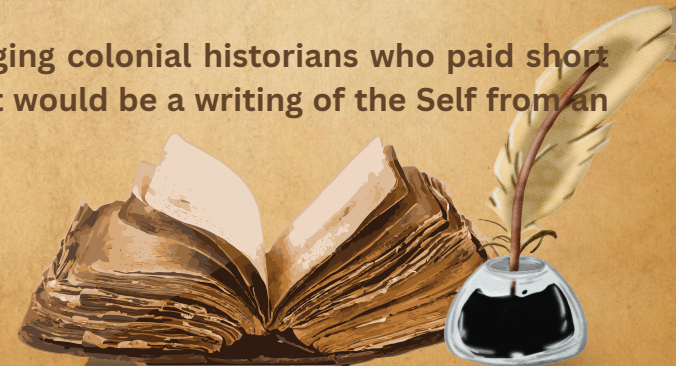
Competition between English, Sanskrit and Persian was an undesirable fallout of the British policy of education. Whereas there was an initial euphoria over Sanskrit resulting out of the activities of the Orientalists like William Jones and Max Mueller, the British Government created parallel systems of education through 'tols' teaching Indian knowledge and schools promoting the learning of English. Government spending over Persian in schools was gradually reduced as it was replaced by English in most Government work.

Ethnic statehood was often an ideal rather than a reality as the population in most Indian states was mixed. The attempt to recognize the dominant majority community often created fissures in the body politic as the minority communities wanted to assert their rights. Drawing the boundaries of states on the basis of linguistic identities also did not succeed as people of different linguistic groups remained spread over the entire subcontinent and concentrated in certain areas. The present Indian state has inherited all these unresolved conflicts.

Religious consolidations of Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Christians, Sikhs and other communities became the basis of communal riots rather than harmony as the rulers were interested in the divide and rule policy. The conference envisages how the Indian nation was di-sected into Muslims and Hindus in spite of the presence of other religions and leaders promoted sectional interests rather than that of the nation.

Literature of aspirations of ethnic identities can be observed in the rise of literature in various languages of different regions of India. Whereas an idea of the Indian nation was taking shape, the literature of regions focused on particular ethnic groups, embodying the diversity in unity.

Revision of historiography is a crucial factor in the self-fashioning of the nation. Challenging colonial historians who paid short shrift to local heroes and movements Indian historians opposed a new historiography that would be a writing of the Self from an Indian point of view.



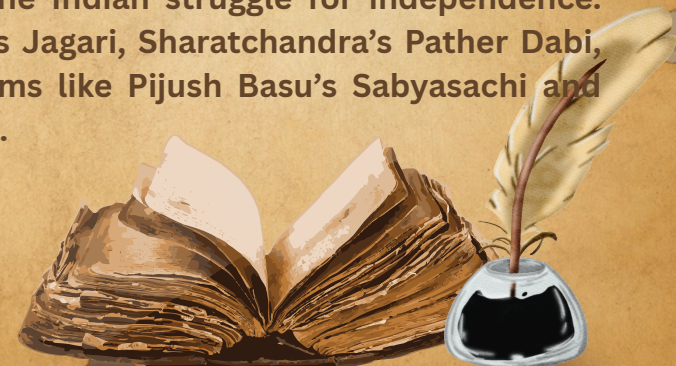
Nationalist movements in India went hand in hand with the outburst of new creative energy and intellectual fermentation, sometimes called Renaissance as in the case of the Bengal Renaissance – a spurt of intellectual activity that was a direct product of the confluence of Sanskrit, Persian and English intellectual traditions. The question remains if such regional expressions can be compared to the 15th century Italian Renaissance or if the Renaissance is a false paradigm.

The idea of freedom anchoring the Indian freedom movement remains a contested concept. The French concept of freedom (liberty) rising with the French Revolution was the basis of the English concept of freedom (mostly envisaged as bourgeois freedom of ruling the sub-classes. The French and the English as colonial powers, however, failed to imagine liberty leading the colonial natives. The freedom fighters of India burnt with an inspiration from the Bhagabad Gita or Swami Vivekananda's ideas. Did they sacrifice themselves for the ideals of a bourgeois-ruled nation?

The transformation of the Indian Sepoy to Indian soldier was a proud fact of Indian nationalist movement. It was mediated by the actions of the Indian National Army of Rashbehari Bose, later led by Subhas Chandra Bose.

Nationality was never for Indians a homogeneous concept. It was fractured from the very beginning. Essentially a European bourgeois concept, it miserably failed to suit the reality of the multi-ethnic, multilingual diversity of our country. However, taking cue from the past masters the nation state of India tried to weave a grand narrative of the nation. The concept was squarely challenged by Rabindranath Tagore in his day. Throughout its history the fledgling Indian state encountered the revolts by multiple communities who were subsumed under majority communities. The bogey of the Pakistan state as enemy further helped in identifying India as an imagined community as a unity. This grand narrative has been questioned from the start by historians and thinkers, whether it was the question of the two-nation theory or the question of giving legitimacy to the movements of multiple communities crying for their own identities. Do the ideologues and makers of political theosophy play the nation game to chart out a false history?

Literary Texts and subtexts reimagined and reflected the turbulent manifestations of the Indian struggle for independence. Attempts were made in literature, arts, music in defining the 'Indian' – Satinath Bhaduri's Jagari, Sharatchandra's Pather Dabi, Rabindranath Tagore's Gora are such seminal texts of the Nineteenth Century. Later films like Pijush Basu's Sabyasachi and Attenborough's Gandhi present us different interpretations of the movements of the period.



Tribal communities wholeheartedly participated in the freedom struggle revolting and fighting against British oppression. However, apart from paying lip-service to a few tribal leaders, mainstream history is silent about their long tradition and culture. Tribal languages still do not find adequate representation and children are forced to learn the language of the majority community. There is this long road to freedom when they won't have to be educated in another's language. The Dalit communities equally face an uphill task in gaining their due place in all spheres of life. India can be an equitable place only when this term Dalit would outlive its use.

Feminism may be a well-known theory but the matrix of Indian society remains patriarchal. Women's fight for equal status in the making of India is a necessity. History does not readily yield place to herstory and the reform needed is profoundly psychological for being manifested in the social.

Domesticity in colonial India is a related area of research into the nineteenth-century concept of home as the private space for women as opposed to the public life. How the concept of 'andar' and 'sadar', the 'jenana mahal' and the public space created constraints for women and how this tension seamlessly compounded with the nationalist movement is an area of intricate research. Rabindranath Tagore's Ghare Baire is an exemplum of literary refraction of the socio-political tensions.

These and many other issues will be examined, debated and thrashed out making this conference an opportunity of rediscovering and describing our modern selves, not as prisoners of the past but as inheritors of an intellectual ethico-political legacy.





List of Speakers selected through Call for Papers

Dr. Anjan Saha

Assistant Professor, Department of
History, Maulana Azad College, Kolkata

Dr. Gourishwar Choudhury

Assistant Professor, Department of Islamic
History, Maulana Azad College, Kolkata

Dr. Abin Chakraborty

Assistant Professor, Department of English,
Salboni Govt. General Degree College, WB

Sri Aritro Mukherjee

Freelance researcher

Dr. Laki Mollah

Assistant Professor, Department of
English, Bhairab Ganguly College, Kolkata

Smt. Menka Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of
History, Daulatram College, Delhi

Dr. Nandini Maity

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Akui
Kamalabala Women's College, WB

Dr. Niranjan Goswami

Associate Professor, Department of
English, Maulana Azad College, Kolkata

Dr. Prachi Gupta

School of Arts and Liberal Sciences, IILM
University, Gurugram

Ms. Rubaiya Nasrin

PhD Scholar, Department of English,
Jadavpur University, Kolkata

Smt. Sandipana Dhar

M.A, Department of History, University of
Hyderabad, Hyderabad

Smt. Soma Ghosh

PhD Scholar, Department of History,
University of Calcutta

Smt. Somrita Misra

Assistant Professor, Chanchal College,
Malda, WB

Sri Rivu Debnath

MA, Department of History, University of
Calcutta, Kolkata

Dr. Suhas Chand Kapur

Assistant Professor, Department of History,
Raniganj Girl's College, Raniganj, WB

Sri Adwaita Basu

MA, University of Delhi

Smt. Oishee Deb

MA, University of Calcutta

Smt. Rishila Mishra

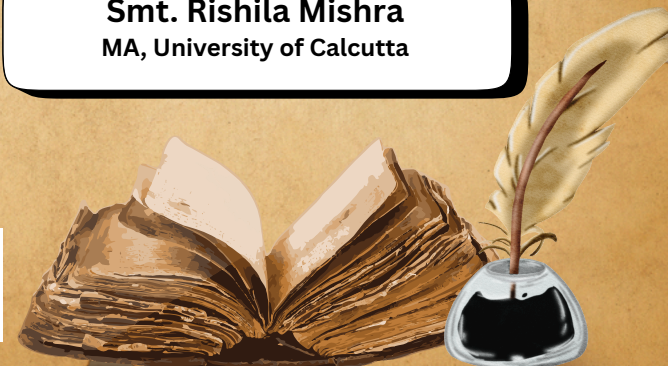
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Sri Somedeeep Bardhan

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