

Being Bengali: at home and in the world



Australian Academy of the Humanities – International Collaborative Workshop

Convened by Dr Mridula Nath Chakraborty
Writing and Society Research Group

Friday, 20 August 2010, 8:30 am – 5:30 pm

Building 23, G 40-42 (Conference Rooms 1 & 2)
University of Western Sydney, (2 Bullecourt Avenue Milperra)

Program

Being Bengali: at home and in the world

8:00–8:30 am: Registration for local participants

8:30 am: Welcome: Mridula Nath Chakraborty

9:00–9:45 am: **Opening Address: Anisuzzaman**
Professor Emeritus, Department of Bengali
University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
“The Bengali Identity: its arduous journey”

9:45–10:00 am: Tea and coffee

10:00–12:45 am: **Session 1: At home and in the world**

Firdous Azim: Professor of English and Women’s Studies, BRAC University, Bangladesh
“It’s the image that matters: representations of women in Bangladesh’s cultural history”
Respondent:

Sezhar Bandyopadhyay: Professor of Asian History in the School of History, Philosophy, Political Science & International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
“Does caste matter in Bengal? Examining the claim of Bengali exceptionalism”
Respondent:

Paulomi Chakraborty: Shastri Indo-Canadian Postdoctoral Fellow, Jadavpur University, India
“The Refugee Woman and the New Woman: (En)gendering Middle-Class Bengali Modernity and the City in Satyajit Ray’s *Mahanagar* (The Big City; 1963)”
Respondent:

Mahua Sarkar: Associate Professor of Sociology, Asian & Asian-American Studies, and the Women’s Studies Program at Binghamton University, SUNY, USA
“Being Modern Together: Urban Muslim and Hindu Women in Pre-Partition Bengal”
Respondent:

12:45–1:30 pm **Lunch Break**

1:30–3:15 pm: **Session 2: Figures and Institutions:**

Fakrul Alam: Professor of English, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
“The University of Dhaka and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh”

Respondent:

Vijay Mishra: Professor of English Literature and Australian (ARC) Professorial Fellow at Murdoch University, Australia
“Religion and the demonic form of sacralization: the case of Swami Vivekananda”

Respondent:

Saranindranath Tagore: Associate Professor of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore, Singapore
“Bengal and Cosmopolitanism: On the Question of Identity”

Respondent:

3:15–3:30 pm: **Afternoon Tea**

3:30–4:45 pm: **Session 3: Identity Questions**

Ali Riaz: Professor in the Department of Politics and Government, Illinois State University, USA

“Being Bengali Abroad: Identity Politics Among the Bengali Community in Britain”

Respondent:

Ranabir Samaddar: Director, Mahanirban Calcutta Research Group, India

“Eternal Bengal”

Respondent:

4:45–5:15: **Closing Remarks: Dipesh Chakrabarty**

Lawrence A. Kimpton Distinguished Service Professor of History, South Asian Languages and Civilizations and the College, Chicago University, USA

5:15–5:30: **Acknowledgements and Thanks**

Workshop Description

This workshop is an intervention into contemporary debates around identity. Using “Bengalis” as a case-study, this forum seeks to understand what constitutes Bengalinness, imagined and otherwise, as a way of entering into the debate from a linguistic perspective. Bengali is the sixth most spoken language in the world, and its speakers in Bangladesh, India and their not inconsiderable diaspora, constitute a significant portion of the human population. The Bengalinness that started consolidating itself around the fifteenth-century, undergoes religious division under Mughal and British rule, as also through internal caste, tribal and regional distinctions, and reaches its peak during the nineteenth-century Bengal Renaissance. The most acute changes occur in the twentieth-century as a result of increasing sectarianism and religious fundamentalism in the lands historically inhabited by Bengalis and within its considerable diaspora. The sense of being Bengali, built around the idea of a common language, is shaken due to the two Partitions of the land inhabited by Bengalis. Argued for as an “ethnically distinct race” by Nitish Sengupta (*History of the Bengali-Speaking People*, UBSPD, 2001) and as “a specific religion” by Sanjida Khatun, one of the main promoters of Bengali music and culture in Bangladesh, “Bengalinness” transforms the very mode via which race and religion have been hitherto deployed in conceptions of identity. Mindful of the critique of identity and its attendant politics, this workshop poses the question as to why then identity continues to exercise such a powerful attraction for individuals and peoples and thereby offers ways of interrogating ‘identity’ itself. Taking up the socio-linguistic group constituted as Bengalis as a case-study, this workshop is interested in historical explanations of the emergence of the group as a distinct category of being and belonging and its specificities in emplaced and embodied situations.

Abstracts and Bios

Alam, Fakrul

Title: “The University of Dhaka and National Identity Formation in Bangladesh”

Abstract: Located in the heart of the city of Dhaka, which itself is the heart of Bangladesh, the University of Dhaka has been playing a central role in the evolution of the Bangladeshi national identity ever since it was founded in 1921. Established, according to the report of the Calcutta University Commission of 1917, “to accede to the demand for further facilities for the Muslim population who form a vast majority in Eastern Bengal”, the University has from the beginning played a key role in the nation building project that would ultimately lead to Bangladesh by being associated with an idealized sense of belonging/identity based on the notion of being Bengali as well as being Muslim. But the university can also be seen as a site of a kind of psychomachia where a battle has been going on for the soul of the nation. This contest involves the desire to affirm ethnicity, religion and sovereignty on the one hand and democracy, secularism and equity on the other. My paper will trace the impact of the University of Dhaka in the formation of the national imaginary by not only tracing its history but also by focusing on the culture and traditions that have become sited in the university. I will thus highlight dates such as 21 February 1952 (the beginning of the language movement) and 2nd March 1971 (when the flag of Bangladesh was first hoisted), when events crucial to the founding of the nation took place in the university. I will focus on festivals such as Basanta Utsav (the Spring Festival), Ekushey February (the 21st of February or Language Martyrs Day) and Pohela Boisakh (celebration of the Bengali New Year). I will also spotlight monuments such as Shahid Minar (dedicated to the language martyrs) or Kazi Nazrul Islam’s mausoleum (the “national” poet), sculptures and plaques commemorating liberation war heroes and student leaders killed by dictatorial regimes, and buildings such as Modhu’s Canteen, where student leaders meet before setting out on demonstrations, which have become national as well as university landmarks.

Bio: Fakrul Alam is Professor of English at the University of Dhaka and currently a member of the Dhaka University Senate and the Dhaka University Teacher’s Association. He has been a Fulbright Scholar and a Visiting Associate Professor at Clemson University, USDA, and has also been Visiting Professor at Jadavpur University, India. He is the author of *Imperial Entanglements and Literature in English* (2007), *South Asian Writers in English* (2006), *Jibananada Das: Selected Poems* (1999), *Bharati Mukherjee* (1996) and *Daniel Defoe: Colonial Propagandist* (1989). He has been editor of *Dhaka University Studies, Part A (Humanities)* and the *Asiatic Society Journal*. At present, Professor Alam is working on his translations of Rabindranath Tagore’s poems and is co-editing *The Essential Tagore* (with Radha Chakravarty) for Visva-Bharati and Harvard UP.

Abstracts and Bios (continued)

Anisuzzaman

Title: “The Bengali Identity: its arduous journey”

Abstract: There are reasons to believe that when the Bengali identity emerged in the fourteenth century AD, it had a territorial basis. Soon it became involved with the mother language. An interrelationship of language and religion was, perhaps, sought at a certain level. At the same time, language cut across the communal borders and subsumed the whole Bengali-speaking community. Bengali identity had to cope with two other identities in the recent past: the all-India identity and the religious identity of the Hindus and Muslims. Bengali identity reached a crescendo during the movement against the partition of Bengal (1905–11). The two other movements that came to be associated with it, the *swadeshi* and the boycott, particularly the latter, gave rise to dissensions leading to communal clashes. The following years witnessed a strong showing for the mother language as also communal strifes making forays into Bengali solidarity. Just at the time of the partition of India (1947), an abortive attempt was made to found a sovereign and united Bengal that would keep the flag of Bengali identity flying. It became possible for the Bengali-speakers in independent India to reconcile their Bengali identity with a greater Indian identity. That could not happen in Pakistan. A gory liberation war led to the creation of Bangladesh (1971), where both language and territory formed the identity. More and more Bengali-speakers from Bangladesh and India have since tended to settle abroad. The first generation of immigrants have zealously guarded their Bengali identity. The case with the second generation is going to be different with implications for their sense of identity.

Bio: Professor Anisuzzaman, an expert on the history of Bengali Language and Culture, has authored many books in Bangla and English including *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya* (1964), *Swaruper Sandhane* (1975), *Purono Bangla Gadya* (1984), *Factory correspondence and other Bengali documents in the India Office Library and Records* (1981), *Creativity, Reality and Identity* (1993), *Cultural Pluralism* (1993) and *Identity, Religion and Recent history* (1995). He was a Post-doctoral Fellow at the University of Chicago (1964–55), a Commonwealth Academic staff Fellow at the University of London, and was associated with research projects of the United Nations University (1987–93). He has been a recipient of the Bangla Academy award for research (1970) and the Ekushe Padak, an award given by the Bangladesh state, for his contribution to education (1983). He also received an Honorary D. Lit. from Rabindra Bharati University.

Azim, Firdous

Title: “It’s the image that matters: representations of women in Bangladesh’s cultural history”

Abstract: The image of the woman has been central in moments of nation-making in the history of post-colonial nations. Women have been considered the bearers of culture and tradition, and the nation is represented through images of women. This paper proposes to look at two iconic images of women in Bangladesh. First, the well-known figure of Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, which has been used as a representative of the negotiation between modernity and tradition that marked the early decades of the twentieth century. As Bengal debated its identity, veering between being Bengali and Muslim, this figure came to bear for the Bengali woman what the transition to modernity and independent nationhood meant. This image will be juxtaposed against another iconic image created during the 1971 War of liberation: poster images that represent woman as militant, and speak of a militant route to liberation. These two images, read in tandem, delineate the very different expectations that independence struggles have of women. The article will try to see how women veer between these different terrains, and end with some contemporary images of women – which will stress on variety and hence the difficulty of creating of easily definable cultural positions.

Bio: Firdous Azim is Professor and Chair of the Department of English and Humanities at BRAC University. She has been a member of Naripokkho, a women’s activist group in Bangladesh, and currently heads a research team called “Pathways of Women’s Empowerment” housed in the BRAC Development Institute (BDI) of BRAC University, where she is researching the cultural history of women. Azim has published widely in the fields of post-colonialism, literature and feminist issues. Her books include *Galpa: Short Stories by Women from Bangladesh* (2005), *Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters* (1999), *Different Perspectives: Women Writing in Bangladesh* (1998), *Infinite Variety: Women in Society and Literature* (1994), *The Colonial Rise of the Novel* (1993). She is a contributing editor for *Feminist Review*, for which she has just edited a special issue entitled *South Asian Feminisms: Negotiating New Terrains* (March 2009).

Abstracts and Bios (continued)

Bandyopadhyay, Sekhar

Title: “Does caste matter in Bengal? Examining the claim of Bengali exceptionalism”

Abstract: It is often claimed that because of some exceptional historical developments, untouchability and caste have never been significant in public life in West Bengal. But this claim of exceptionalism was blown away by the midday meal controversy in 2004, when it was widely reported that the high caste parents in some villages refused to allow their children to eat cooked food prepared by dalit volunteers. However, this sudden public exposure of the progressive Bengali society’s prejudiced face does not seem to be surprising, as a number of historical studies have already revealed that caste was as much a compelling factor in determining social relations in colonial Bengal as it was in any other region of India. As it appears from these studies, the Bengali Hindu society maintained the essentials of caste discrimination even while giving the outwardly appearance of change and reform. And nothing seems to have changed fundamentally since independence, although it has rarely been acknowledged until recently. It is difficult to explain this phenomenon in terms of the political economy of the province, where some changes, although limited, have undoubtedly taken place. Yet caste survives, signifying the ambivalence of Bengali modernity. While embracing modernity and globalization, many Bengali Hindus still stick to their caste to assert their social identity and cultural distinctiveness. This paper seeks to provide a broad survey of how this process has worked in colonial as well as post-colonial West Bengal.

Bio: Sekhar Bandyopadhyay is Professor of Asian History in the School of History, Philosophy, Political Science & International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He has a prolific publishing record, both in English and Bengali, on decolonisation, identity and modernity in South Asia, with particular reference to popular religion and culture in Bengal. His books include: *Decolonization in South Asia: Meanings of Freedom in Post-independence West Bengal, 1947–52* (2009), *Caste, Culture and Hegemony: Social Dominance in Colonial Bengal* (2004), *From Plassey to Partition: A History of Modern India* (2004), *Caste, Protest and Identity in Colonial India: The Namasudras of Bengal 1872–1947* (1997), *Caste, Politics and the Raj: Bengal 1872–1937* (1990), *Burma To-day: Economic Development and Political Control since 1962* (1987).

Chakrabarty, Dipesh

Bio: Dipesh Chakrabarty is a founding member of the editorial collective of *Subaltern Studies*, a co-editor of *Critical Inquiry*, and a founding editor of *Postcolonial Studies*. A Contributing Editor to *Public Culture*, he has served on the editorial boards of the *American Historical Review*. Chakrabarty is currently engaged in completing two books to be published by the University of Chicago Press, provisionally entitled *Presentism and the Predicament of Postcolonial History* and *The Climate of History: Four Theses*. His other publications include: *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (1989, 2000), *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000, second edn. 2007), *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (2000). He has also edited (with Shahid Amin) *Subaltern Studies IX* (1996), (with Carol Breckenridge, Homi Bhabha, and Sheldon Pollock) *Cosmopolitanism* (2000), (with Rochona Majumdar and Andrew Sartori) *From the Colonial to the Postcolonial: India and Pakistan in Transition* (2007), (with Bain Attwood and Claudio Lomnitz) “The Public Life of History,” a special issue of *Public Culture* (2008). A collection of his essays in Bengali is forthcoming.

Chakraborty, Mridula Nath

Bio: Mridula Nath Chakraborty completed her doctoral work on “Hotfooting Around Essentialism: Feminisms of Colour” at the University of Alberta, Canada. Trained in a classical English literary canon at Delhi University, India, Mridula’s research interests include postcolonial literatures, studies in nationalism, feminism and diasporas, translation theory, culinary cultures, public intellectuals, global English and Bombay cinema. She has publications in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *South Atlantic Quarterly* and in edited collections like *Feminism Goes to the Multiplex*, *Third Wave Feminisms: a critical exploration*, *Is Canada Postcolonial?: Unsettling Canadian Literature* and *Narratives of Home in South Asian Literature*. She has worked at the intersection of English and regional language publishing in India with Penguin Books and Katha. In 1997, she won the A. K. Ramanujan Award for translation from two Indian languages and has translated and co-edited, with Rani Ray, *A Treasury of Bangla Stories* (Srishti 1999). In 2006, she curated an exhibition on *Alberta Women Making History* and produced a catalogue for it, *The Blue Sky Their Horizon*, as also a digital, oral narrative history of academic women at the University of Alberta as part of a special project on *Institutionalising Feminism*. She is currently editing a collection of essays under the title *Being Bengali: at home and in the world* and working on a culinary biography of red lentils as well as the trope of marriage in pre-globalisation Bombay cinema.

Abstracts and Bios (continued)

Chakraborty, Paulomi

Title: “The Refugee Woman and the New Woman: (En)gendering Middle-Class Bengali Modernity and the City in Satyajit Ray’s *Mahanagar* (The Big City; 1963)”

Abstract: This paper attempts to tease out the inextricable interconnections among post-Partition/post-Independence Bengali modernity, the city as a site for the production of the modern citizen-subject, and the category of the new woman. Taking as my text Satyajit Ray’s film *Mahanagar* (The Big City; 1963), I contend that the figure of the East-Bengali refugee woman – who were first generation of women from the Bhadrakalok class to enter paid workforce in large numbers – is instrumental in sculpting out a vision of a modern – ‘new’ – Bengali woman. Using the refugee woman as the narrow end of a funnel, I open out the enquiry to trace how a particularly sexualized new woman and the city are *both* sites of post-Partition urban Bengali modernity and how one is constructed, mapped, and negotiated through the other. I also argue that the sexuality of the modern woman, as she becomes a working woman and part of public urban spaces, is the key term through which this negotiation is necessarily conducted.

Bio: Paulomi Chakraborty has recently completed her PhD from the Department of English and Film Studies, University of Alberta, Canada. Her dissertation, titled “The Refugee Woman: Partition of Bengal, Women, and the Everyday of the Nation,” examines the figure of the refugee woman in three major narrative texts of the Bengal Partition from the Indian side. She is now working on a post-doctoral project funded by the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute, tentatively titled “Love and Hate in Bollywood: Partition of India in Popular Hindi Cinema since 1990” at the Department of Film Studies, Jadavpur University, India.

Mishra, Vijay

Title: “Religion and the demonic form of sacralization: the case of Swami Vivekananda”

Abstract: Swami Vivekananda is, along with his master, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, arguably Bengal’s greatest exponent of non-dualist (Vedantic) thinking. He was barely 40 when he died in 1902 but left behind a huge legacy by way of a *Maximum Testamentum*, a Universal Gospel for humankind. Vivekananda argued that social reform and politics had to be preached or enacted through the discourses of religion. India was offered to the world as an instance of a nation where religion laid the foundation of ‘the whole music of national life.’ In this exploratory paper I want to examine the limits of an essentially mystical (and exclusionary Indian) version of religious practice and the impossibility of reconciling, against Vivekananda’s own belief in the identity of self and the Absolute, a mystical sense of religion with social, political and, most importantly, ethical responsibility. I use Derrida’s exegesis of Patočka’s warning that demonic rapture (a mystical understanding of belief) is inimical to the idea of ethical responsibility as my entry point into Vivekananda’s ideas on a universal religion. Does Vivekananda in fact offer a ‘demonic form of sacralization’ and in doing so, fail to surpass the orgiastic in his understanding of the links between religion and ethics? Derrida had paraphrased Patočka as follows: ‘religion exists once the secret of the sacred, orgiastic, or demonic mystery has been, if not destroyed, at least integrated, and finally, subjected to the sphere of responsibility’ (*The Gift of Death*, p. 2). For Patočka (and I suspect for Derrida too) a non-dualistic (Vedantic) system disallows such an overcoming. Can a case be made for an ethics of responsibility from within a demonic form of sacralization? The paper attempts to traverse this difficult terrain and in doing so also assesses Bengal’s contribution to a religiously sanctioned Hindu modernity.

Bio: Vijay Mishra is Professor of English Literature and Australian (ARC) Professorial Fellow at Murdoch University. He holds doctorates from the Australian National University and from Oxford University. Among his publications are: *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (with Bob Hodge) (1991), *The Gothic Sublime* (1994), *Devotional Poetics and the Indian Sublime* (1998), *Bollywood Cinema: Temples of Desire* (2002) and *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorizing the Diasporic Imaginary* (2007). He plays the Indian harmonium, is a Beatles fan, and reads Sanskrit.

Abstracts and Bios (continued)

Riaz, Ali

Title: “Being Bengali Abroad: Identity Politics Among the Bengali Community in Britain”

Abstract: In the past two decades, the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain, especially the younger generation, has increasingly begun to identify itself as Muslim in preference to its ethnic identity of being Bengali. This paper examines the dynamics of this change. The central question is: are we witnessing a decisive shift in the British-Bangladeshi identity? In dealing with this question, I problematize the notion of diaspora and the diasporic identity. Moving away from the conventional definition of diaspora, which implies that migration is the sufficient condition for construction of a diaspora community, I argue that the formation of diaspora should not be conceived as a natural/ incontrovertible consequence of migration. Instead, for a diaspora to emerge, specific processes of mobilization have to take place. In this respect, the Bangladeshi diaspora in Britain is on the making as the ethnic Bengali community continuously negotiates its current location (space) and its relationship with the host society and its ‘homeland’. The diasporic identity is not a fixed state; instead identity formation is a dynamic process and that, as Stuart Hall has suggested, “the fully, unified, completed, secure, and coherent identity is a fantasy.” My contention is that the emerging salience of Muslim identity is a reflection of the process of contestation and accommodation between the ascribed (ethnic) identity and the re-imagination of a new (universal) identity. This is not an autonomous ideational process, instead it has been influenced by a wide range of socio-cultural-political factors including the domestic politics in Bangladesh, the race and immigration policies of Britain, to name but a few.

Bio: Ali Riaz is Professor and Chair of the Department of Politics and Government at Illinois State University. He worked for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service for five years, as Producer and Senior Broadcast Journalist. His research interests include Islamist politics, South Asian politics, community development, and political economy of media. His publications include *Faithful Education: Madrassahs in South Asia* (2008), *Islamist Militancy in Bangladesh: A Complex Web* (2008), *Paradise Lost? State Failure in Nepal* (with Subho Basu, 2007), *Unfolding State: The Transformation of Bangladesh* (2005), *God Willing: The Politics of Islamism in Bangladesh* (2004), ‘*State, Class and Military Rule: Political Economy of Martial Law in Bangladesh*’ (1993). He earned the College of Arts and Sciences first Dean’s Award for Outstanding Scholarly Achievement 2004 and Outstanding College Researcher Award 2005. Riaz received Pi Sigma Alpha Excellence in Teaching Award in 2006.

Samaddar, Ranabir

Title: “Eternal Bengal”

Abstract: What does it mean being a Bengali? This is a question that has been raised in history repeatedly. Therefore this question can be understood only in a historical frame. We have to ask, why does this question repeatedly arise? What is this history that has again and again led the Bengalis to ask of themselves, do they know of their own history enough? What sense do they make of this history that compels them to recognise that this issue of self-identity and self-knowledge is a historical one, and that they must know of their own history to claim that they are indeed Bengalis? In short, what is this history that merges the two issues of becoming and being? As we know, this consciousness of being a Bengali is a product of modern time – modern education, modern politics, and modern history. Yet the question would be: where does one mark the beginning of the modern? How would one identify or define the epistemic break that supposedly inaugurated the modern era for the Bengalis, whence the Bengalis started thinking of being Bengalis? This question may seem somewhat academic and philosophical. But some discussion on this question will help us in understanding the pattern of our own self-inquiry, this preoccupation with our collective self that marks our own history. Probably a good start can be made if we can trace how the later day Bengalis judged the period of transition from Nawabi rule to colonial rule – a period of half a century full of myths, scandals, killings, famines, regicide, unrest, and the instituting of a different order and rule. What sense did the later-day Bengalis make of this era of violent transition? This essay will be an exploration in that world of reflection on that history; we can say a response to that history – a response and reflection that by now has become a historical part of modern Bengali’s self-consciousness to the extent that we can say that to a significant extent it has constituted the latter. At the same time, this exploration is not merely an exploration in the nationalist universe, which is by now a standard exploration, but also an exploration of the process whereby the aesthetic begins shaping such self-inquiry, also the history of that self-inquiry. Qazi Abdul Wadud wrote of “saswata banga” (“Eternal Bengal”). Therefore is the question: What sense shall we make of the history, which the resonance of this invocation of “saswata Bengal” brings to our mind?

Bio: Ranabir Samaddar is the Director of the Calcutta Research Group, and belongs to the School of Critical Thinking. He has pioneered, along with others, peace studies programmes in South Asia. He has worked extensively on issues of justice and rights in the context of conflicts in South Asia. The much-acclaimed, *The Politics of Dialogue* (2004), was the culmination of his work on justice, rights, and peace. His particular researches have been on migration and refugee studies, the theory and practices of dialogue, nationalism and post-colonial statehood in South Asia, and new regimes of technological restructuring and labour control. He authored a three-volume study of Indian nationalism: *Whose Asia Is It Anyway – Nation and the Region in South Asia* (1996), *The Marginal*

Abstracts and Bios (continued)

Nation – Transborder Migration from Bangladesh to West Bengal (1999), and *A Biography of the Indian Nation: 1947-1997* (2001). His recent political writings, published in the form of a two-volume account, *The Materiality of Politics* (2007), and the just published *The Emergence of the Political Subject* (2009), have challenged some of the prevailing accounts of the birth of nationalism and the nation state, and have brought to fore a new turn in critical post-colonial thinking.

Sarkar, Mahua

Title: “Being Modern Together: Urban Muslim and Hindu Women in Pre-Partition Bengal”

Abstract: This paper studies the ways in which processes of modernity have intersected with, and influenced, the shifting history of communal relations in pre-Partition colonial Bengal. The questions that animate this study are: What kinds of sociality did such intersections between the two processes produce? What resonances did they leave within the simultaneously intimate and mundane realm of day-to-day experiences? And in what terms, if any, are such experiences recollected today by elderly women—Muslim and Hindu—in both West Bengal and Bangladesh? What can we learn by engaging that privatized sense of the past generated within lived culture? The paper draws on oral histories of middle class Bengali Muslim and Hindu women, who were born and lived in Calcutta or Dhaka between 1910 and 1950, to provide insights into their changing lives during the final years of colonial rule with implications for the post-Independence period.

Bio: Mahua Sarkar is Associate Professor of Sociology, Asian & Asian-American Studies, and the Women’s Studies Program at Binghamton University, SUNY. Her areas of research interest include historical sociology, sociology of culture, gender/feminist theory, postcolonial theory, qualitative research methods, the political economy of world-systems, states and public authority, and international migration. Her recent publications include *Visible Histories, Disappearing Women: Producing Muslim Womanhood in Late Colonial Bengal* (2008), “Difference in Memory” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, (2006), “Looking for Feminism.” *Gender & History*, (2004), and “What is the EU? (with József Böröcz), *International Sociology* (2005).

Tagore, Saranindranath

Title: “Bengal and Cosmopolitanism: On the Question of Identity”

Abstract: The title of this workshop directly invokes the notions of identity and cosmopolitanism within the referential domain of Bengal. Surely, “Being Bengali” summons the question of identity and the descriptor “at home and in the world” invokes a particular version of cosmopolitanism that is inflected by the conviction that Kantian universality may not be the only source of cosmopolitanism and further flags the idea that to be domiciled in a tradition can be accommodated in a portrayal of the cosmopolitan vision. I have argued elsewhere that the master-thinker of the region of the world that interests us here, Rabindranath Tagore, was one of the chief architects of such a domestically textured cosmopolitanism. In this paper my task is two-fold. First, I will offer a provisional sketch of the contours of cosmopolitan identity. My discussion, engaging Martha Nussbaum and Jacques Derrida respectively, will pivot on a distinction, both indebted to different texts of Kant, between what I will call a cosmopolitanism of reason and a cosmopolitanism of hospitality. Secondly, I will turn to Bengal to show that the notion of cosmopolitanism of hospitality can be fruitfully used to arrive at a hermeneutic understanding of a conception of modern identity that was powerfully advanced in Bengal by a constellation of thinkers, such as Rabindranath and Aurobindo. Thus we hope to arrive at a provisional (and one possible) understanding of the notion of being Bengali as invoked in the title of this workshop.

Bio: Saranindranath Tagore is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore. His teaching and research interests lie in the areas of Indian Philosophy and Continental-European Philosophy. He is currently working in the areas of cosmopolitanism and modernity with reference to the modern Indian tradition.

Respondents and Participants:

Sugata Bose (Gardiner Professor of Oceanic History and Affairs, History Department, Harvard University), **Amit Dasgupta** (Consul General of India, Sydney), **Hanifa Deen** (Melbourne-based writer on Islamic identities in Australia), **Devleena Ghosh** (Director of the Indian Ocean and South Asia Research Network, University of Technology, Sydney), **Ivor Indyk** (Whitlam Chair in Writing and Society, UWS), **Gail Jones** (Professor in Writing and Society Research Group, UWS), **Nicholas Jose** (Chair in Writing at the Writing and Society Research Group, UWS), **Naadir Junaid** (Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Dhaka), **Emilian Kavalski** (Lecturer in Politics and International Relations, UWS), **Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt** (Fellow, Resource Management in Asia and the Pacific, College of Asia and the Pacific, Australian National University), **Farjana Mahboub**a (Postgraduate Student, Centre for the Study of Contemporary Muslim Societies, UWS), **Brett Neilson** (Director, Centre for Cultural Research, UWS), **Goldie Osuri** (Lecturer, Department of Media, Music and Cultural Studies, Macquarie University), **Santi Rozario** (Reader in Social Anthropology, School of History, Archaeology and Religion, Cardiff University).

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Program design: Maureen Goh, Graphic Designer