

IACLALS Annual Conference 2024
on
“Wit, Humour and the Carnavalesque in Literature and Performance”
co-hosted by
The Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus
15th to 17th February, 2024 (Hybrid mode)

Conference Report

The Annual Conference of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India (IACLALS) on “Wit, Humour and the Carnavalesque in Literature and Performance” co-hosted by the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus, was held from 15th to 17th February, 2024 in hybrid mode. It was very well organized and efficiently managed by Dr Amitendu Bhattacharya (Organizing Secretary) and his team. The three days of intellectual deliberations and discussions were accompanied by an atmosphere of warm camaraderie and memorable hospitality. The BITS Pilani campus with its verdant landscape, well-manicured lawns and a variety of flowering and ornamental plants and trees was an optic delight. The venue of the conference was a charming blend of lush greenery and state of the art conference halls managed to perfection by young, smiling volunteers and members of the tech-support team.



The Inaugural Session – Dr. Amitendu Bhattacharya, Professor Swati Pal (Vice Chair, IACLALS), Professor M Asaduddin (Chair, IACLALS) and Professor K A Geetha (Conference Convenor, and Head, Dept. of HSS, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus)



Professor K A Geetha delivering the Welcome Address



Professor Suman Kundu

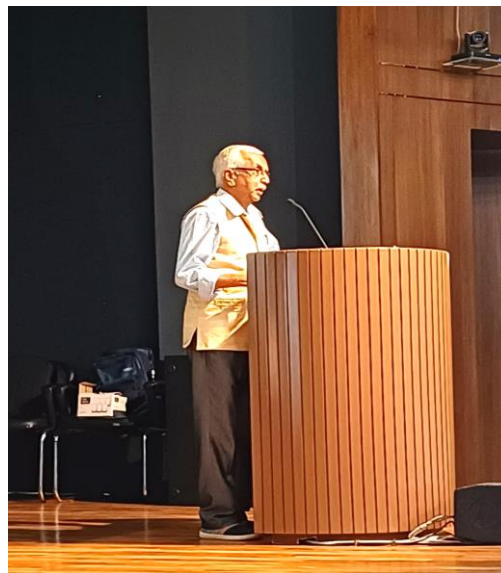


Professor Swati Pal



Professor M. Asaduddin

The Inaugural session opened with a welcome address by Professor K A Geetha, the Convenor of the Conference and the Head of the Department, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus. Professor Swati Pal, Vice Chair of the IACLALS and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, New Delhi, introduced the IACLALS. Following this, Professor M. Asaduddin, Chairperson IACLALS, spoke in detail about the theme of the conference. Professor Suman Kundu, the Chief-Guest and Director, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus, then addressed the gathering. In keeping with the theme of the conference he kept the audience riveted with a delightful combination of intellect and genial humor. The session closed with a Vote of Thanks delivered with subtle, yet distinctive sparkle by the organizing secretary, Dr Amitendu Bhattacharya.



Professor E V Ramakrishnan delivering his Keynote address

Eminent bilingual writer, poet and literary critic Professor E V Ramakrishnan, honoured recently with Sahitya Akademi Award (2023 for Literary Criticism), delivered the keynote address titled “Carnavalesque in Contemporary Indian Fiction: The Interface between Subversion and Affirmation.” His masterly analysis of some instances from classic Malayalam fiction, particularly Vaikom Muhammad Basheer’s *Viswavikhyathamaya Mookku* (The World-Renowned Nose) and S

Hareesh's *Moustache* underlined the relevance of the theme/s of the Conference in vivid detail and these resonated through several business sessions during the 3 days. The session was chaired by Professor Senath Walter Perera, former Chairperson, SLACLALS, Sri Lanka.



Session Chair Professor Perera making his closing comments

This year's edition of the Meenakshi Mukherjee Memorial Prize (2024) (for the best paper published during the past two years) was won by IACLALS member Dr. Ved Prakash, Assistant Professor of English, Central University of Rajasthan, for his paper titled "Examining the domain of Caste, Gender and Sexuality through select Films of Jayan K. Cherian". He received the Prize Citation and a cheque for Rs. 10,000/-.



Prof. M. Asaduddin and Prof. Swati Pal presenting the MMM Prize citation to Dr. Ved Prakash

In a session jointly chaired by Professor M. Asaduddin and Professor Swati Pal, Professor Pal engaged Dr Ved Prakash in a conversation which dwelt on screen representations of multiple struggles and discriminations experienced by Dalit communities, which are socially and politically significant in the contemporary times. Dr. Ved Prakash spoke with gravitas and deep understanding of his study. This year's distinguished jury comprised academic, literary critic, poet and editor former Professor at the University of Calcutta, Professor Sanjukta Dasgupta; Janet Wilson, Emerita Professor at the University of Northampton; and Professor E. V. Ramakrishnan.



Dr. Ved Prakash introducing his prize-winning paper

As always, the CD Narasimhaiah Prize (2024) (for the best paper presented at the conference) was a closely-contested competition. The five young finalists this time– Sanyogita Singh, Ashima Shrawan, Pooja Duggal, Srestha Bhattacharya and Tasnim Nazifa Choudhury were shortlisted after their papers were judged in the first round before the conference by Professor Meenakshi Bharat, Professor, Department of English, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, and Professor Seemin Hasan, Professor, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University. The three floor judges, Professor K A Geetha, Dr. Hemjyoti Medha and Dr. Natasha Thoudam then judged the contestants for their presentations and their skill in answering questions posed by an engaged audience at the conference.



Professor M. Asaduddin presenting the cheque to the winner Ms. Srestha Bhattacharya

The CD Narasimhaiah Prize 2024 carrying a certificate of commendation and a cheque for Rs. 5000/- was won by Ms. Srestha Bhattacharya, Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, University of Delhi, for her paper titled “Humour, Carnavalesque and Counter-Memory in the Literary Works of Suniti Namjoshi.” The runner-up prize which was introduced last year, went to Sanyogita Singh for her paper titled “Humour and Hurt: Narrative as Counter-strategy in Krishan Chander’s *Ek Gadhe ki Aatmkatha*”.



The five CDN Prize finalists with the three floor judges, and the session chairs Professor M. Asaduddin and Professor Fatima Rizvi

After the past three consecutive online annual conferences owing to impossibilities occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic, this year’s annual conference was the first in-person one, and what place could have been better than Goa! This then, was quite naturally, a fairly large conference with well over a hundred presentations, packed in parallel sessions over the three days. A number of powerful papers exploring various aspects of wit, humour and carnivalesque in folk and cultural traditions, bhasha literature, visual arts and cinema, caste, social and political realities, sitcoms, disability, everyday life, children’s literature, and poetry, followed by animated Q & A sessions and discussions were the order of each day.



Session 4C – “Indi-wit: Humour in Bhasha Literatures” chaired by EV Ramakrishnan



Session 7A – “Wit and the Other: Humour’s various Entanglements” chaired by Dr. Hemjyoti Medhi

Many members of the IACLALS are meritorious poets. This year, a poetry reading session chaired by Ms Kalyanee Rajan (Treasurer, IACLALS) showcased several young and senior poets who were also presenting academic papers at the conference. All of them captivated the audience with a variety of compositions – some deeply felt, some clever and witty, ruminative and even subversive, and surreal, in English, Hindi and Urdu. It was a pleasure listening to each one of these compositions.



Ms. Kalyanee Rajan with the participating poets

The IACLALS continued its tradition of releasing academic publications of its members by hosting the Book Release session this year too. It was held in hybrid mode with some of the authors, editors and translators joining the session online. A total of nine books covering a variety of areas of study ranging from women’s movements to South Asian Culture, disability, a festschrift for Professor GJV Prasad, and a translated text among several more, were released by Professor Swati Pal and Professor M. Asaduddin.



The Book Release Session

Since this was election year, a General Body Meeting was held on the second day of the conference. The Chair, Professor M. Asaduddin warmly welcomed all the IACLALS members present in the meeting. He apprised members of the challenging circumstances faced by the present IACLALS

Executive– the pandemic and the fact that the association had not been registered with the government ever since its institution several decades ago. As a result, KYC formalities could not be completed in 2020 and the association’s bank account was frozen for over two-and-a-half years, a period through which the association had to be run by utilising personal funds. He informed the GB that the association is now a registered body, with a slightly changed nomenclature (because of bureaucratic compulsions) though retaining the acronym IACLALS, i.e., **Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies in India**. The General Body appreciated the fact that despite challenges, the IACLALS team did not allow the academic activities to be hampered in any way. On the contrary, apart from continuing the Annual Conference in online mode for three years (2021, 2022 and 2023), and the e-Newsletter, it also added activities like instituting the **Distinguished Speaker Series** lectures and the **IACLALS Discussion Forum** to its kitty. The GB, by consensus, decided to declare the past 3 years of instability as a zero term, and endorsed the continuation of the current executive for the ensuing term, with some necessary changes, as follows:

CHAIRPERSON: Professor M. Asaduddin

VICE CHAIR: Professor Swati Pal

SECRETARY: Professor Fatima Rizvi

TREASURER: Ms. Kalyanee Rajan



At the General Body Meeting

The IACLALS Executive also welcomed Dr. Debashree Dattaray (Associate Professor and Head, Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University, Kolkata) as the new East Zone representative, and Dr. Priyanka Tripathi (Associate Professor of English, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna) as the new Central Zone representative to its Board.

The conference concluded with a short valedictory session where the chair summed up the activities of the 3-day long conference, followed by a Vote of Thanks by Prof. Fatima Rizvi, Secretary, IACLALS, and Dr. Nilak Dutta, Associate Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus.



We at the IACLALS would like to thank our co-hosts at BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus for their warm hospitality – the delicious lunches and very comfortable guest-house residence, and for all the arrangements made by them to ensure the smooth running of the conference; all the faculty at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, BITS Pilani KK Birla Goa Campus for their participation through the three days of the conference; all the chairpersons who conducted their sessions with engaged academic interest, all the delegates who presented their papers at the conference, and the audience who further enlivened each session with their questions and comments. An especially warm “thank you” to all volunteers who helped steer the conference with absolute precision.

Professor Fatima Rizvi
Secretary
IACLALS