**REPORT

​IACLALS Annual Conference 2018
February 8 – 10, 2018
Aligarh Muslim University**‘Tolerance and Bigotry: Contestations in Indian Literatures in English’ – this was the theme of the three-day Annual International Conference of the IACLALS (Indian Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) this year. Hosted by the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) on 08-10 February 2018 at Aligarh, a place of great cultural and literary heritage, it was a memorable event for all of us.

Heritage it was -- visible everywhere. The Heritage Walk was only a part of the heritage journey. More than 60 participants and guests warmed up the chilly late winter days of the campus with their presentations and deliberations. As the report at the Valedictory said, there were 48 presenters in all, of which “31 were females and 17 males”.
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The inaugural was graced by eminent academic and scholar Masood-ul Hasan as Chief Guest and noted poet and writer Keki N. Daruwalla with Mohd Asim Siddiqui, Chairperson, Department of English, GJV Prasad, Chairperson IACLALS, M. Asadduddin and Subhendu Mund, Vice Chairs, IACLALS, and Angelie Multani, Treasurer, IACLALS on the dais. The speakers expressed concern over the growing bigotry and intolerance and hoped that the scholarly deliberations in the coming three days would try to explore the various aspects of bigotry and intolerance in art, literature as well as the social fabric.

In his keynote address, eminent poet and writer Keki N. Daruwalla expressed his concern over the rise of intolerance. He said that writers need not necessarily be either ‘colluding or colliding’ with the political establishment. He concluded his speech by stating that writers have a right to have a voice of their own but they should avoid falling into binaries. He also averred that things are not as alarming as we think them to be, and by and large, Indian society believes in tolerance and harmony. The keynote address was followed by two book releases: Subhendu Mund's Odia Identity: History, Culture, Language, Literature and M. Asaduddin's Premchand: The Complete Short Stories.

Like the previous year, this year too there were  five finalists, as against the usual four in the CD Narasimhaiah panel:  Srinjoyee Dutta (“‘Refugee from Belief’: ‘Affective’ Disunities and Ethno-Sexual Identity Formation in the Ghazals of Agha Shahid Ali”), Sania Hashmi (‘Anatomy of a Provocation: Bigoted Apostasy at the Limits of Intentional Fallacy’), Shinjini Basu (“Kunal Basu’s Kalkatta: Making the city Tolerable at its seams”),  Amrapali Saha (‘The Liberation of Sita: Formulating a Feminist Mythopoesis’) and Chinmaya Lal Thakur  (“Subalternity and the Question of Responsibility: Reading Upamanyu Chatterjee’s English, August”). As the Iaclals Chair indicated, the contest had been very tough from the very preliminary stage, and those present in the hall witnessed how close the papers were in merit. The Jury this year comprised Rohini Mokashi Punekar (IIT Guwahati) and Meena Pillai (University of Kerala) in the preliminary round; and Mohammad Asim Siddiqui (AMU), Amritjit Singh (Ohio University) and Margaret L. Pachuau (Mizoram University) during presentation.

The prestigious Meenakshi Mukherjee Prize went this year to Fatima Rizvi of Lucknow University for her published paper “Politics of Language, Cultural Representation and Historicity: ‘Shatranj ke Khiladi’ in Self-translation and Adaptation”. The judges were Rina Ramdev, Rita Kothari and Alex Tickell. It was wonderful to watch Dr Rizvi in conversation with Dr Asaduddin, the editor of the volume where the paper was published.

There were two plenaries this time: Professor Radhika Mohanram (Cardiff University) spoke on ‘Textures of Indian Memory’ and Prof. Amritjit Singh (Langston Hughes Professor of English, Ohio University) on the pedagogy of tolerance.

One of the highlights of the conference was the Writers’ Meet in which writings in various bhashas were presented by such well-known poets and writers of the country as Keki N. Daruwalla, Sami Rafiq, Tariq Chhatari, Namita Singh, Asif Naqvi and Subhendu Mund.

On the second day, there was a delightful cultural programme. It  began with a ‘nukkad natak’ (street play)  based on a story of Dr Rashid Jahan, followed by musical performance by the Western Music Club (AMU), and an adapted play ‘My Last Maharani’ (‘My Last Duchess’) staged by ‘The Raleigh Literary Society’ (Department of English, AMU).

Professor Emeritus Farhatullah Khan and Prof A. R. Kidwai, Director, Academic Staff College attended the Valedictory Session. Prof Subhendu Mund and Dr Siddhartha Chakraborti proposed the vote of thanks on behalf of Iaclals and AMU respectively.

Every year there is a general feeling that this year’s conference is the best so far, and the warmth of hospitality was something which indeed touched everyone, thanks to the extremely caring organisers (which includes the ever-smiling students) and, on the top of everything, the delicious food which was served.    **Subhendu Mund
Vice-Chair
IACLALS**