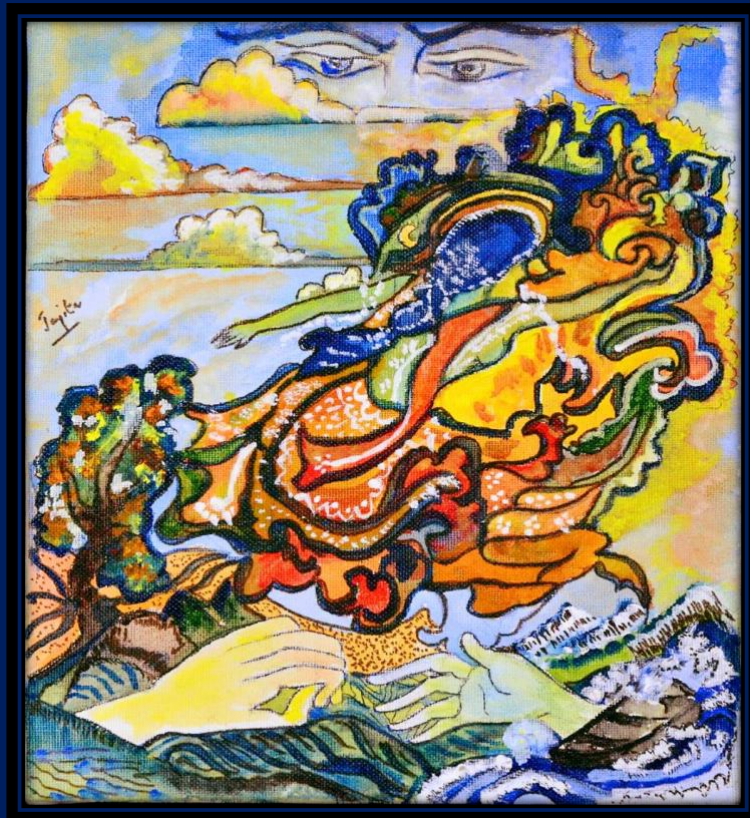




Caesurae Newsletter



July - October 2023



Editorial

We could organize an offline conference this year, as a post-covid endeavour to allow for the good times to be back again. As my colleagues and friends wished that I organize the conference in North Bengal, with the help of Dr. Pankaj Debnath, the principal of Cooch Behar College, who is also the joint director with me for the Centre for Indian Arts and Cultural Studies at Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University, we could with the financial support from ICSSR-ERC go ahead with this Annual International Conference. Academic stalwarts like G.N. Devy, Madhu Khanna, Prakash Joshi, Mani Rao, Debasish Banerjee, Swarnavel Eswaren, Sumit Chakrabarti, readily responded and participated as special speakers in the conference. There was an Art Exhibition by Arghya Dipta Kar coupled with a violin workshop by Nanda Kishore Das, a Haiku workshop by Rochelle Potkar and a musical presentation of “Nayika Bhav” by Srijan Chatterjee.

Caesurae is about relationships. As new members join us to take the organization forward, the old members greet them with love and understanding. It was heartening to see the involvement of young scholars at the conference. I am profoundly indebted to Tathagata Sagar Pal and Oly Roy for their unflinching support for Caesurae work.

We could have the Annual Board Meeting and an election was conducted with Tharakeshwar as the Election officer. A new Board has been formed consisting of young scholars in the team, who we trust will enrich the organization in their own ways.

The specialty of Caesurae has always been to engage sincere academics and artistes who have contributed to the creative world, without being commercial products nor being part of the media trap. As we grow, let us hope we keep alive the depth and dedication which allows both academics and creative arts to survive and hold meaning for posterity. We have had creative stalwarts like Laxman Aelay, Bidushi Kala Ramnath, Shri Indradeep Ghosh, Pt. Ashish Sankrityayan, Shri Anirban Dasgupta, Shri Anjan Chatterjee, along with young artistes like Sanchita Choudhury, Priyanka Aelay, Biluka Nirmala, Supratik Chatterjee with us. Let us hope that this combination of fine arts and academics together will be preserved in the years to come, as a part of Caesurae style and its trademark.

*Jayita Sengupta
Chief Editor
of the Caesurae E- Journal
& President, Caesurae Collective.*



ICSSR-ERC SPONSORED

V ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CAESURAE COLLECTIVE SOCIETY 2023

CULTURING TRANSLATIONS AND TRANSLATING CULTURES: SEMIOTIC AND TRANS-SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVES

(Concept Note by Tharakeshwar V.B.)

It is more than a quarter century since Translation studies took a cultural turn; similarly the entry of semiotics into translation studies is also quite old. But these two have got a new lease of life and vigour in the context of digitalization of signs, texts (both verbal and non-verbal) and their intertwining and crisscrossing. Culture as ensemble of signs and translation as the process of creating the boundaries and altering the boundaries of cultures is something that we are still struggling to comprehend fully. This Conference too seeks to understand the spurt in translations and the way we translate/produce the signs, chain of signs or ensemble of signs and also their movement across semiotic/cultural boundaries along with how these boundaries are constantly altered and maintained by such movement of signs in/through culture.

The process of digitization of cultural products/texts and transformation of these products/texts in both virtual and “real” mode through mechanical as well as human-intervention needs our urgent attention. Looking at the culture of translation and the way it is being cultured in the digital mode, we need to come up with trans-semiotic perspectives to make sense of the way the ensemble of signs is constantly being transformed or is resisting to be transformed. This phenomenon has already rendered “copyright”/print inspired notion of translation and text obsolete, paving way for not simply employing the post-modern/structural notions of text but moving beyond mono-semiotic perspective and calling for trans-semiotic perspective in the field of verbal and non-verbal, blended texts, chain of signifiers (weaving of music, sculpture, painting, words, colours, architecture, costume, food, involving not just visual signs but also signs comprehended through other senses).

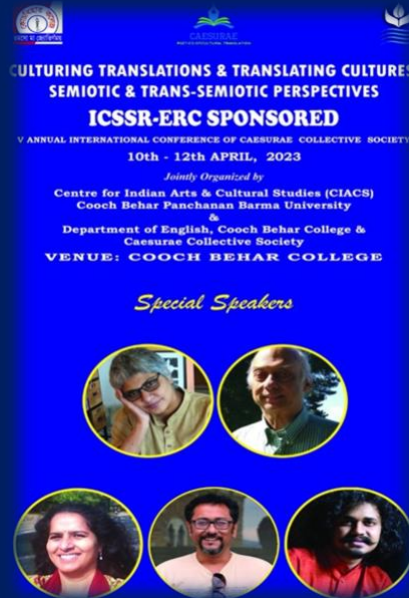
We invite proposals to present papers, posters, displays, installations addressing translation processes in semiotic and trans-semiotic perspective involving all five senses. The following rubrics are suggested for the participants; one can transcend the limits of the rubrics too.

1. Architectural styles and cultural translation
2. Translation of music
3. Translation of food culture
4. Trans-semiotic translations
5. Screen translation
6. Dubbing, subtitling, remakes
7. Multimodal texts in translation
8. Role of translation in making/altering cultural boundaries
9. Cultures of translation
10. Translation in social media/new media
11. Translation practices in the online world
12. Translation and virtual reality



A Report of the Conference by Tathagata Sagar Pal

(Research Scholar, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University)



The ICSSR-ERC sponsored Fifth Annual International Conference of Caesurae Collective Society was held from 10th to 12th April 2023, at Cooch Behar College, West Bengal. Jointly organized by the Centre for Indian Arts & Cultural Studies (CIACS), Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University; Department of English, Cooch Behar college and Caesurae Collective Society, the conference was named as “Culturing Translations & Translation Cultures: Semiotic & Trans-Semiotic Perspectives.” With participation of the dignitaries and scholars from all over India as well outside the country, the conference presented a unique opportunity to broaden the horizon of our knowledge.

The cultural turn of translation and the emphasis upon semiotics in the translation studies have gained a new lease of life in the era of digitization of cultural texts. The production of signs through the processes of translation and their intersections across the cultural boundaries have gained the attention of the academicians. The conference attempted to address these processes in semiotic and trans-semiotic perspectives that have pushed the limits of our sensory perception, with the problematization of the very notion of the text itself. It has brought increasing focus on the ripples of changes in our cultural imagination. The keynote address by G. N. Devy on “What is Cultural Translation?- A View of Indian History” pointed to such translations of culture in India across historical time frames.

The translations of the Indian religious texts into European languages have made the world familiar with the country’s cultural heritage. However, the perennial question of translating such texts replete



with religious symbolism had been raised by Prof. (Dr.) Madhu Khanna in her session on the *Nityashodashikarnava Tantra*, one of the earliest known Sanskrit texts of the Shrividyā school of Tantric Shaktism. The need for an indigenous system/theory that would uphold the integrity of the sacred literature in the process of translation came up in her arguments. The poet and academic Mani Rao also opened up about the problems of translating mantras as in mantras, sounds and their combinations are considered more important than meaning. By taking *Saundarya Lahari* as a sample, Rao's talk was motivated by her personal experience as she pondered upon how to forge a relation between the meaning and the rhythm of the mantras without the coherence being lost.

Indian spirituality has not remained confined to abstract ruminations. Dr. Anuradha Chowdry's enthralling session on "Sanskrit, Mantra and Tantra" highlighted how energy, frequency and vibration in the use of mantras relate to the consciousness of being. The creative impulse associated with tantric doctrines has been expressed through the rich iconographic canvas of paintings, sculptures et cetera. Prof. (Dr.) Madhu Khanna, in her second lecture, addressed the semiotics of tantra as captured in the works of two modernist artists, G. R. Santosh and Sohan Qadri. While G. R. Santosh dealt with non-dual traditions of Kashmir Shaivism, Qadri was attentive to the philosophy of Shunyata in the Buddhist Mahayana doctrine. Prof. Khanna's talk, therefore, mirrored the richness of Indian tantra in its various currents. The spiritual tapestry had been brought forth by the speakers of the Caesurae Special Panel too. From visual aesthetics of a tantric puja to tantric iconography and the structure and form of mantras and yantras, the panel deliberated upon the various fields of Indian spiritual aesthetics that have remained relevant in the modern age.

The academics have always grappled with the politics of translation. As pointed out by Sumit Chakrabarti, it was evident in the nineteenth century Bengal when translation was utilized to help the 'native' intellectual explore his identity. The move away from colonial translations/transactions to Indian theories of translation studies had been touched upon by Tharakeshwar V.B. According to him, the semiotic turn in translation opened the scope for redefining translation. The epistemic conditioning of postmodernity was focused upon in Prof. Debasish Banerjee's talk "The Politics of Rhizomatic Translation in Abanindranath Tagore's Illustrations of the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam." The significance of visual media, as a site of the dynamicity of the translation processes, came up time and again in the sessions. As dubbing has emerged as the means to market a film as 'pan-Indian', Nikhila H.'s session referred to the recent phenomenon of dubbed Hindi cinemas finding few regional takers while the 'regional' cinemas are growing in stature. As the audience and the critics alike are confronting what it means to be a 'national' and a 'regional' cinema, her lecture problematized the relation between a cinema and a linguistic community as a whole. With three aspects of adaptation: borrowing, intersection and fidelity coming into play, the adaptation of literary texts into films has afforded space for spontaneity and creativity in terms of both loss and gain, as highlighted by Swarnavel Eswaran.

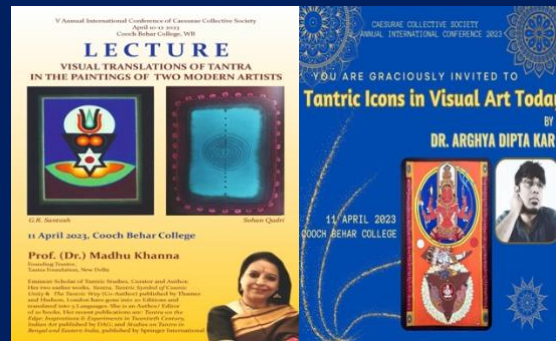
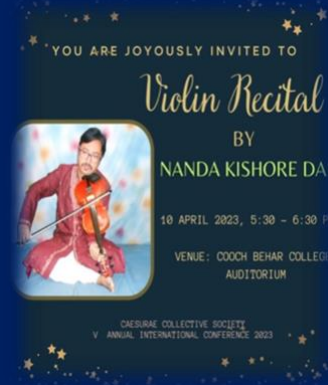
Apart from plenary sessions, ten technical sessions were also arranged with the presentation by forty speakers. They dealt with a host of topics, ranging from translating Northeast India to food cultures, with every chain of signifiers coming within the scope of discussion. The online presentations also widened the scope of participation. A poetry panel was chaired by Rochelle Potkar. She also conducted a haiku workshop which saw an overwhelming response from the students of Cooch Behar College. The cultural evening on the first day drew a huge crowd. Srijan Chatterjee, through his musical performance, which consisted of Khayal, Thumri and Padavali Kirtan, traced the Nayikabhav across the

cultural traditions of India. It was followed by a violin recital by Nanda Kishore Das. A music workshop was also organized. With a herculean effort, Dr. Arghya Dipta Kar put up an exhibition of his paintings of tantric deities.

The Vedas can be roughly divided into Karmakanda (Samhita, Brahman) and Gyankanda (Aranyak, Upanishad). It reflects a journey from ritualism to philosophical inquiry of Brahman in the Upanishads. In Jeffrey Brodd's words, Brahman is "beyond the reach of human perception and thought". The translation of the "Unintelligible and the Illimitable" Brahman in the selected Upanishads was discussed by Professor (Dr.) Prakash Joshi. It is quite fitting that the conference marked its end with ruminations on this quintessential Indian philosophical idea with which the thinkers have remained preoccupied over the ages.

Some Posters of the Conference

(by Rochelle Potkar)



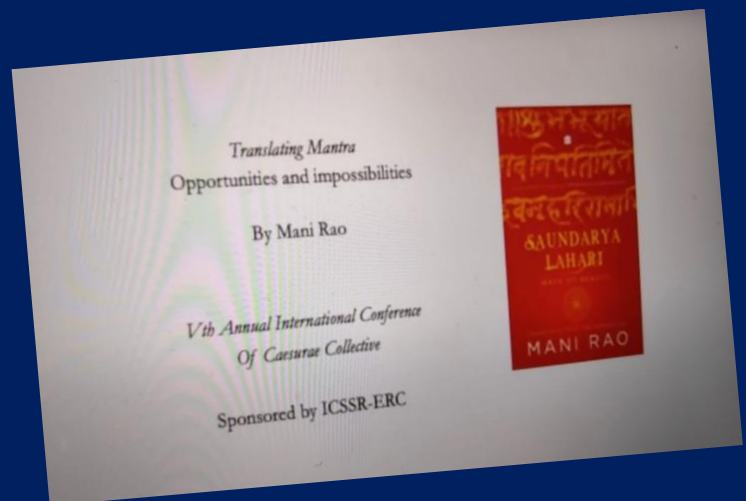
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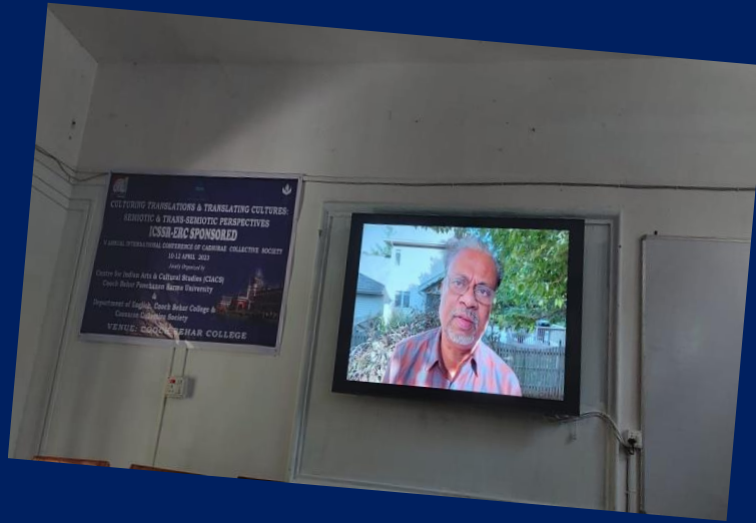
















A Review in *The Statesman* about the Conference by Meena Banerjee

MEENA BANERJEE

Rasotsav, an entire evening of *thumri-dadra*, was daringly organised by Shruti, Jadavpur at Rotary Sadan recently. Supported by *Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan* (BVB) and *Infosys Foundation*, it featured Akashvani's top-graded *khayal* and *thumri* exponent Vidushi Suranjana Bose as an exponent of *Purab Ang Gayaki* (PAG). Apart from uniquely stylised *thumri-dadra*, this *gayaki* also, essentially, consists of seasonal *kajri*, *Jhoala*, *baranasa*, *hori*, *chaiti*, etc; ritual-based *haldi*, *barana*, *sohar*, *bidayi* and a host of songs describing the melody soaked culture of the Ganga-Yamuni doab region, the playground of all the dialects associated with Hindustani classical music.

Suranjana, initially trained in *khayal* with revered gurus Meera and Prasun Banerjee (Patilala Gharana), later she came under Girija Devi and imbibed her style of exploring *thumri-dadras*. During the first season of *Purab Ang Gayaki Utsav* (2011), organised by Delhi-based music connoisseur and one-man-army Vinod Kapur, this senior disciple of Girija Devi participated and won the Sarvottam Kalakar award. Unfortunately, Girija Devi left forever in 2017.

As part of the PAG project, financed and morally supported by Vinod ji, Suranjana, like many other talents unearthed by the successive Utsavs. She started visiting Varanasi to get acquainted with the inner soul of PAG and the culture behind it under the guidance of Manju Sundaram who abhors the limelight despite her holistic knowledge of music, literature, musicology, spirituality and aesthetics. Unlike others, she very generously shares her precious possession with them all and helps them to reinvent their style.

Rasotsav proved that Suranjana, apparently, worked hard to reinvent and reorganise her languidly poignant style. With a Sanskrit *stotra* extolling Goddess Saraswati, composed by Manju ji she commenced the event. As a prelude sarangi maestro, Allarakha Kalawant created the mood for the *Purab Ang* with a soulful *Khamaj aochar* before Suranjana delved into the depths of her chosen piece - *Aj ki raat na jawo*, a *thumri* soaked in earnest plea to stop her beloved from going away. Tabla virtuoso Soumen Sarkar joined in unobtrusively with slow *jat* of sixteen beats.

She handled the aesthetic balance between *Mano mari baitiyan* and *na jawo* with extremely well-crafted melodic phrases that blissfully floated over the *tala's* beats till the arrival of *sam*. The melodic improvisations of the lyrics glimmered with multi-dimensional connotations. These remained the hallmark of her entire presentation in the first half of the evening consisting of two *dadras*, *kajri* and a rare *hori thumri* in *raga Sohini*.

In the second half, very smoothly Sudhir Ghorai replaced the earlier tabla accompanist to help Suranjana etch out another beautiful *hori thumri* set to *raga Pilu* and *deepchandi tala* (14 beats) followed by a lively *chaiti* in the same *tala* but at a fast pace, commonly known as *chanchar*. Both versions of *deepchandi* have a very interesting way between two sets of neatly compart-

mentalised segments of *sam* and *khali* containing three and four beats each, one after the other. This demands melodic patterns to ride the sway from three beats to four. Suranjana could do better by taking hints from Gourab whose harmonium enjoyed the sway to the hilt.

However, she closed with her soulful *Bhairavi dadra*. Her sensitive intonation was very impressive. This is the secret that had been eluding Bengali *khayal* and *thumri* singers to date. Aware of this drawback, Manju ji painstakingly explains the real import of the lyrics. Dr Shikharini Majumdar, disciple of Suranjana, transliterated and read out their English version. Apparently, a meaningless exercise to apathetic listeners and this helped many to enjoy the lyrics better.

Reviving Holistic Art

An international conference on 'Cultural Translations and Translating Cultures: Semiotic and Trans-semiotic Perspectives' was organised by Prof Jayita Sengupta, as convener, who had a dual role to play as the Head Of the Department of English cum Director of the newly formed Centre for Indian Arts and Cultural Studies (CIACS).

There was an Art Exhibition, by a young artist Dr Arghya Dipta Kar, from Assam. His paintings were on the Tantrayana Art, wherein philosophy and the artist's own imagination merge together remarkably.

The opening day also saw a musical evening featuring Dr Nandakishore Das, a student of Indradeep Ghosh,

playing Hindustani classical violin (solo). Srijan Chatterjee, a talented young musician and a research scholar at CBPB University, offered 'Nayika Bhav: A Journey through cultural translations: Khayal Thumri and Padavali Kirtan' an enlightening musical presentation based on his research. Both Arghya and Srijan along with Divya



Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University (CBPBU) and as the Secretary of Caesurae Collective Society. Sponsored by the Indian Council of Social Studies Research-Eastern Regional Centre (ICSSR-ERC) the event was held at the Cooch Behar College (10-12 April) with the support of its Principal Dr Pankaj Debnath, who is also the Jt. Director, CIACS.

Inaugurated by Dr Debkumar Mukhopadhyay, vice chancellor of CBPB University, the conference commenced with the keynote address by Padmashri Prof G.N. Dey, academician, creative thinker and social activist. He spontaneously spoke in Hindi discussing interlinked areas of holistic education in India. The other speakers included stalwarts who came online like Professor Debasish Banerjee, California Institute of Integral Studies and Professor Swarnavel Eswaran, Michigan State University. There were forty-one extremely learned participants from different parts of the country to discuss their research work in the areas of 'Semiotics of the Texts, translation of *tantra* or literary works through paintings or sound.

Joshi, a scholar from Rajasthan, also offered academic presentations on semiotics in a Special Caesurae Panel. Arghya spoke about his Tantrayana paintings; Srijan described his feelings as an artiste and *sadhak* when sculpting the idol of Jagadhatrini.

Divya connected their two lectures with her presentation on *Mantras* and *Yantras* describing how visual and aural aesthetics connect with synesthesia and spirituality. This was encouraged to create awareness about an Art Revival Movement which began with very young exponents like Srijan and Arghya. While Srijan has revived the tradition of *tantric pujas* by sculpting and performing the puja of Kali and Jagadhatrini, he is also re-constructing the *Padavali Kirtan* as a long-lost part of *Dhrupadi* tradition. Arghya is mixing and mingling philosophy with his individual talent as a painter.



Caesurae New Board Members, 2023



Office Bearers and the Governing Body

President : Jayita Sengupta, Professor of English, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University (CBPBU), West Bengal.

Vice President : Prakash Joshi, Professor, Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Allahabad, Allahabad.

Vice President: Rochelle Potkar, Poet, Creative thinker, Mumbai.

Secretary: Nikhila H., Professor, Department of Film Studies, The EFL University, Hyderabad.

Joint Secretary: Divya Joshi, Associate Professor, Government Dungar College, Bikaner, Rajasthan.

Treasurer: Pompi Basumatary, Assistant Professor, Christ University, NCR Campus, Delhi.

Governing body member: Tathagata Sagar Pal, Ph.D. scholar, CBPBU.

Governing body member: Bharathi Annadanam, Independent researcher.

Governing body member: Oly Roy, Ph.D. scholar, CBPBU.

Governing body member: Kokila K. Assistant Professor, Department of Translation Studies, The EFL University, Hyderabad.

Governing body member: Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai, Professor, Department of English and Department of Media and Information, Michigan State University, USA.

Nāgārjuna’s Letter to a Friend: A Five-Day Retreat with Venerable Geshe Lhakdor: A Report by Tathagata Sagar Pal



The Buddha Pāda Institute organized an event on Buddhist studies from 18th September to 22nd September 2023. Situated on the outskirts of Kalimpong, India, the institute, in its tranquil atmosphere, offered the enthusiasts an ideal space of retreat from the hustles of daily life. The design of the institution, founded by Nyichang Rinpoche, is a manifestation of the Indo-Japanese-Tibetan aesthetic. It is committed to the study and practice of Buddhism in all its traditions, though workshops had been arranged on other Indian philosophical systems and cultural traditions as well. The centre is associated with Siddhartha’s Intent for smooth conduct of the programmes.

The event in question was titled “Nagarjuna’s Letter to a Friend”. The discussions were held on Ācārya Nāgārjuna’s Letter to a Friend which he wrote as a letter of advice to King Gautamiputra. The text, in its 123 verses, dwells on the entire path and practice of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It provides precise and comprehensive guidelines to both householders and the ordained monks onto the path leading to liberation and enlightenment. The text is rich in metaphors and imagery and has been commented upon by several scholars. At Buddha Pāda, the discussion had been headed by Venerable Geshe Lhakdor, the Director of the Tibetan Library of Works & Archives in Dharamsala. He had also served as an interpreter for His

Holiness the Dalai Lama & as an editor of many of His books.



(Guru Rinpoche, Dojo where the event was held).

Each day, the programme was divided into three sessions. Around fifteen participants, from different walks of life, attended the illustrative teachings of Geshe Lhakdor. Lhakdor always espoused the fundamental doctrines of Buddhism while delving into the text. To engage the listeners, he translated complex ideas into simple vocabulary by relating them to everyday experiences. As the letter is addressed to the king, reminding him of the necessity to lead a virtuous life, Lhakdor emphasized on the present social, political and ecological condition of the world. He believed that the past and present dictators who had doomed humanity had been neglectful of the 'precious human life'. The humans have been blessed with a rational mind, with the ability to curb their banal instincts and think for the liberation of all. That is why, Geshe Lhakdor repeatedly brought up the urgency of cultivating compassion and wisdom. He also warned of the dangers of blind faith as he talked about relying more on the teachings, rather than on the person. In this aspect, he had also been critical as he ruminated on the present afflictions of certain Buddhist institutions. Nāgārjuna's Letter to a Friend is replete with instructions on honing the virtuous practices, rather than merely developing the intellectual faculty. There have been guidelines on following the ten virtuous practices of body, mind and speech. Lhakdor therefore drove the point of observing the dharma practice immediately. In the modern world driven by consumerist culture, people complain that there has been no time for dharma practice. But Lhakdor believed that such an idea is born from the view of dharma being a secondary requirement. Such practice can start with certain basic habits, like the act of giving based on moral reasons, not to have lingering resentment, restraining of senses et cetera. In the saṃsāra, the root of three poisons is ignorance which entails a misconception about reality. Our ignorant minds perceive that

each object, each phenomenon is independent, leading to attachment and obsession. But Lhakdor here brought up Nāgārjuna's concept of 'emptiness' or śūnyata. Emptiness here does not mean nothingness, but empty of independent existence. Every object and phenomenon are therefore of dependent origin. (Venerable Geshe Lhakdor) Nāgārjuna's text has descriptions about six types of hell that will befall every being leading a sinful life. Lhakdor acknowledged that it is difficult to attain the Buddhahood, but this does not call for deterrence. Letter to a Friend gives direction about seven limbs of enlightenment—mindfulness, discernment, diligence, joy, flexibility, concentration, tranquility and evenness. One precondition of such practices is the development of meditative spirit. Lhakdor encouraged his audience to practice 'one-pointed meditation' or samādhi on a specific object of concentration. The chanting of 'Om maṇi padme hūṃ' were also done, calling for the transformation of ordinary body, speech and mind into those of enlightened beings through method and wisdom.



The Buddha Pāda Institute has an āśramic ambience, with a temple, prayer and teaching halls. Basic accommodation facilities are available for all registered students/participants of its programmes. There is also a cafe and a library to satiate the enthusiast readers. It also has a theatre equipped with audio-visual facilities. Like Buddha's feet making an imprint on the stone after His enlightenment, the institution symbolizes His presence, striving to illuminate the spiritual path to be followed at present.

A Musical Play, *Dakshineswar* directed and conceptualized by Srijan Chatterjee

The musical play replete with songs sung mostly by Srijan Chatterjee, who also played the role of the narrator traces the growth of Shri Ramakrishna's spiritual journey and how this single personality changed the ambiance of Dakshineswar. The play is scripted by Srijan Chatterjee, and his friend Halley Goswami helped him in the research. The first show was in Daga Nikunj, Kolkata in March 2023 and the second at Gyan Manch, Kolkata in April 2023. Whether it is the choreography or acting or music, the show kept all spell-bound, with tears in the eyes of the audience. Here are some photo clips of the musical play.





