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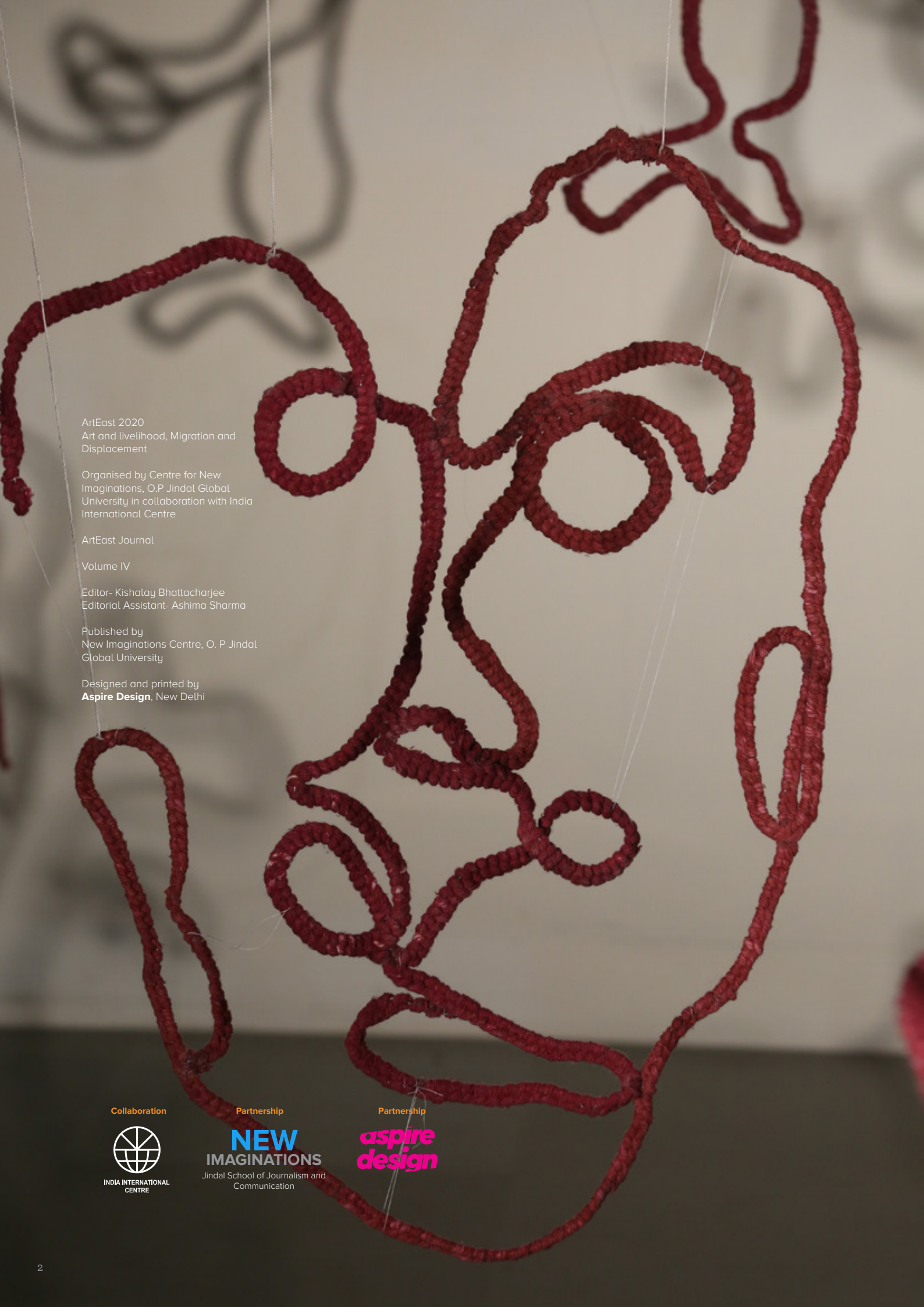

ArtEast 2020
Art and livelihood, Migration and Displacement

Organised by Centre for New Imaginations, O.P Jindal Global University in collaboration with India International Centre

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Curator's Note

Kishalay Bhattacharjee

The Story of Telling

Migration, an overarching theme of the festival, has tremendous effect on people's lives and language and is perhaps one of the most invisible losses of people across regions. "Languages" as Ganesh Devy says "are extremely important because they are the holders of culture, of collective memory. The best way to conserve a language is to create livelihood, opportunities for those who speak the language. Otherwise they will migrate to another language zone and their own language will disappear." Internal and external migrations across the region have made languages one of the most vulnerable cultural aspects that require attention. Art is a potent vehicle in achieving that.

India is one of the 4 countries in the world to have a large number of languages and multiple language families. Northeastern India itself has huge language diversity but here too languages are declining. This then becomes the first ever festival and a repository to study, document and visualise a region linguistically that was the ancient bridge between the two most populous regions of the world- South Asia and Southeast Asia.

The last two years have been tumultuous with a wounded nation divided over issues of citizenship and a controversial register of population that started in Assam but spilled across the country. In Assam, however, the protests rally primarily around language and fear of large-scale immigration that people see may destroy the "indigenous" cultures and languages. Language in this case has been a political weapon for mass mobilisation and othering of ethnic minorities.

ArtEast 2020 turned to the voice of resistance all around us as a means of finding a language and discovering a new vocabulary to resist the emergence of a dangerous assertion feeding in large part on anti-immigrant sentiment and belief in cultural superiority.

The fierce participants of this festival are in quest of a language for a common humanity and a refusal to give in. Festival collaborator Lalsawmliani Tochhawng and I have tried to put together work that are both statements against oppression and of bearing witness- of personal experience and the search for empathy.

The movement on the street today is being led by the youth. In many of the exhibits it is the young who have conceptualised and visualised language. Performers and poets have given voice to the margins. Filmmakers have documented languages. And linguists have come together to decipher whose language is it anyway?

Rita Dove in Kenyan Review of Nov-Dec, 2019 asks, what does one do when language "has been commandeered and manipulated by the forces of political and cultural power?" When "propaganda has become bold-faced lies, with its vocabulary repurposed Orwellian-style, nowadays perhaps more nefarious in its relentless denials of truth than the crude cries of Joseph Goebbels.... Even "orange" has lost its innocent blush. To be muzzled is one thing; having language stripped of verity, having words denied their meaning is another challenge altogether."

"Even "orange" has lost its innocent blush. To be muzzled is one thing; having language stripped of verity, having words denied their meaning is another challenge altogether."

Rita Dove, The Kenyon Review, Nov/Dec 2019 Volume XLI Number 6

God's Language

I cannot do God's work
I have never known its language
In one Gita it wants to make love- in another scripture,
overthrow tyrants- then devote itself to penury later.
God has no mind made up
God, therefore, is: just is.
Why run after the mist, the wind through the bamboo,
the water over pebbles?
Just chill out: watch it flow.

By Abner Pariah

*Avner Pariah is a poet and chronicler of Khasi Jaintia Hills.

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India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi
C D Deshmukh Auditorium

feb/2020
6:30 P.M. ONWARDS

WITNESS US

A Reading of Miyah Poetry

Miyah poetry is the name given to a collection of poems written by the Bengal-origin Muslims of Assam. The name comes from the street slur 'Miyah' used against this community. When Miyah poetry started in April 2016, the earliest poems tried to re-appropriate this slur, divest it of its negative connotations, and by using it as a badge of honour, turn the word on its head. Over the last four years Miyah poetry has taken different directions- it has talked about the lived experiences of the poets, their shared experiences of living in the chars or fallow lands of Assam, their struggles with constant demands to prove their citizenship and to spread the message of the need for a more inclusive and equal Assam. Today more than 30 poets write Miyah poems across various languages including Assamese, English, Hindi and their own regional dialects. The body of Miyah poetry consists of more than 200 poems. There is no organisational structure to Miyah poetry and the poems are shared via electronic, print and social media according to the discretion of the poets. As such, it is impossible to estimate the exact number of Miyah poems currently in existence.

POETS
ASHRAFUL HUSSAIN
REHNA SULTANA
KAZI NEEL
MIRZA LUTFAR RAHMAN
SINGER: AMIN NOZMUL ISLAM

WIDE OPEN SPACES

CONCERT BY MHADEMO KIKON

Presented by New Imaginations, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication in collaboration with India International Centre

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Miyah Poetry

I Want to See the World

MIRZA LUTFAR RAHMAN

I raise myself just a little, brother;
I want to see the world.

I want to see the largeness of Mandela's heart
And how reason strutted out of Bob Marley's guitar
And stirred hearts gone yellow.

I want to read history again-
How did the English become a nation?
They were many jatis once.

Miyahbhai hears me and is livid-
'First learn about Hitler's concentration camps
Then we will tell you what songs Paul Robeson sang on the road.
Find out everything about everything
And then talk to us about our camps'.

Miyahbhai doesn't know
That I want to see the world
So that there can be no camps anymore.

When Miyahbhai plants his staff in front of the plough
And lights a beedi I try to explain.
Miyahbhai looks at me and an Eiffel grows in my heart.
Napoleon's Marengo licks salt off my fingers.

Later when I follow Miyahbhai's furrows
I feel like jumping on the horse
I feel like seeing the world.

On digging a grave

KAZI NEEL

On digging a grave
I find fossils of my previous life.
I see my spine bent under two centuries of slavery.
Under my ribs I smell the smell of wet earth,
And in my fist the debris of a broken plough.

Digging the grave I take out my sunless past.
Everybody has a history of moving, it seems.
I see a starving droopy-headed multitude marching-
Everyone has a history of drifting.

I find a bloody river when I dig the grave.
I see my corpse, full of bullet holes
Floating on stagnant waters.
On digging my grave I find... fire?
Or a red hot excitement.

Digging my grave I carry my own corpse to the graveyard.
And don't care if they have declared me a martyr.

Whatever be the case,
before this land is sold,
before this air is exhausted,
before these rivers are poisoned,
I want, just once, to be
Completely destroyed by war.

My Mother

REHNA SULTANA

I was dropped on your lap my mother
Just as my father, grandfather, great-grandfather
And yet you detest me, my mother,
For who I am.

Yes, I was dropped on your lap as
a cursed Miyah, my mother.

You can't trust me
Because I have somehow grown this
beard.
Somehow slipped into a lungi
I am tired, tired of introducing myself
To you.
I bear all your insults and still shout,
Mother! I am yours!
Sometimes I wonder
What did I gain by falling in your lap?
I have no identity, no language
I have lost myself, lost everything
That could define me
And yet I hold you close
I try to melt into you
I need nothing, my mother.
Just a spot at your feet.
Open your eyes once mother
Open your lips
Tell these sons of the earth
That we are all bothers.
And yet I tell you again
I am just another child
I am not a 'Miyah cunt'
Not a 'Bangladeshi'
Miyah I am,
A Miyah.

In the Name of My Dead Mother

ASHRAFUL HUSSAIN

When our poems strike their hearts
They scream so loudly it's as if
Their pain is greater than ours.

Should we remain silent then
Or let their high voltage drama
Stifle the fires in our heart?
Should we let go of the thread that binds
Our century-old heritage?

When my mother takes to the street
With an old rag around her waist
With an old bag of old papers
One which is written
The history of fourteen generations

When my sister has her children
In a detention camp
When I grovel for my rights
Before the man in a black suit
Then no one is left for me except
My mother, father and sister.

I have grown a bud and two leaves on my hands
I have learnt to write two lines
I have learnt to open my mouth and say
That they bit me and that
I will squeeze the poison out of their teeth.

They say, rein it in man
No, I won't rein it in.
In the name of my mother who died
In a detention camp, I swear
That this voice in my throat will grow louder
And some day rustle the folds in your ears.
I swear sir, I swear on my dead mother.

The poet is the youngest legislator elected to the 2021 Assam assembly.

at East

India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi
C D Deshmukh Auditorium

feb/2020 21 6:30 p.m

why our languages are declining?

Language is the most central and mutually binding feature of communities. During the past few decades, the world has started experiencing language decline on an unprecedented scale. This talk will focus on the reasons for the decline. It will outline the process of language evolution from the beginning to our time and explain the nature of the evolutionary turn human communication has taken. It will present a perspective on the nature of the transformation occurring within human languages and within the human society. The talk will illustrate the perspective by using examples of Indian languages

Keynote by **Ganesh Devy**

Presented by New Imaginations, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication in collaboration with India International Centre

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Keynote Speech

by Ganesh Devy

Had I been here with you, I would have spoken without a text, bearing out the turmoil in my mind and seeking a sense of my thoughts 'as they well up in my head' through your corroboration. But since I am not here, I request your permission to present Three Notes.

The first of these Notes was written in July 2018. It juxtaposes two murders. One of them was murder of a 'voice-er', the other was that of 'voice' itself.

The second Note belongs to July 2019. It juxtaposes two lies. One of them related to the economy of words and the other related to economy as we understand the term in its normal sense. I should add that that Note is not against any language, but is against the use of language for dividing people.

The Third Note is about the clash between the idea of diversity and the onset of collective aphasia.

The three notes together may well represent what I would have offered if I had been here personally.

Devy could not travel to deliver the address that was read out to the audience by Kishalay Bhattacharjee

1. The Threatened Speech

Two apparently unrelated yet deeply inter-connected events of July invite serious reflection. One belongs to an unending story of crime, the other a not so interesting bureaucratic muddle. One will continue to fetch headlines for long and the other will survive, if it does at all, in footnotes for researches. Yet, both are of a piece in a larger plot threatening our republic. One is a murder story, the other not so eloquent and yet sordid saga of a genocide of a kind.

Throughout the month of July reports of arrests of those suspected having involvement in the Gauri Lankesh murder featured in news. The SIT constituted by the Karnataka government deserves praise for getting closer to cracking the conspiracy of killing several intellectuals. Those involved in the Guari murder are believed to have a hand in killing Dabholkar, Pansare, and Kalburgi. The press reports tell us that many others have been on the hit list. Some reports say that the list includes about fifty names. The SIT will be able to ascertain or deny this. As a result of the recovery of the list of 'to be murdered' writers and thinkers, more than fifteen writers in Karnataka, Goa and Maharashtra had to be provided special security. In recent weeks, I met several writers and thinker who had to move wherever they go with these security men accompanying them. The whole sequence of murders and their fall out sends a clear signal to writers, media persons and thinkers: 'do not speak or write anything that will critique the Hindutva forces and the government that tacitly supports them.' It is another thing that many writers and media persons still show the courage to speak when it is necessary to do so. Yet, the atmosphere of intimidation and fear is pervasive. Earlier this week, the Goa assembly witnessed a discussion on the threats given to writers. While the CM assured that security was being provided to them, he avoided to answer why the organization located in Goa and so clearly named by the investigating agencies in Maharashtra and Karnataka is not being banned or restricted. And, there lies the rub. Several times, the PM has stated that violence and mob-lynching will not be tolerated. That is admirable. The only difficulty is every time the assault takes place, it is the victim that is placed in the dock. The perpetrators continue to roam all over, unhindered, free.

I now turn to the relatively less eye-catching event of July 2018. The Census of India 2011 data related to languages was released by the Census office. With all its tables and charts, it looks perfectly harmless. But, scratch the surface and you find that it is heavily doctored. It tells us that in 2011, our countrymen stated a total of 19569 'raw returns' (read, non-doctored claims). Out of these close to 17000 were outright rejected and another 1474 were dumped because not enough scholarly corroboration

for them exists. Only 1369, roughly 6 per cent of the total claims, were admitted as 'classified mother tongues'. Rather than placing them as languages, they were grouped under 121 headings. These 121 were declared as languages of India. One may ask, but how does this matter? It matters because the data for Hindi has been bolstered up—shown at 52 plus crores-- by adding to its core figure of speakers, the speakers of nearly fifty other languages. These include Bhojpuri, claimed by over five crores, many languages in Rajasthan, Himachal Pradesh, Uttara Khand, Haryana and Bihar, claimed by close to a total six crores. AT the same time seventeen of the twenty two scheduled languages are reported by the census as showing a downward trend in their rate of growth in comparison to the growth in the previous decade. The architecture of the presentation of the language census data has at its foundation the principle of exclusion. And the exclusion is imposed on the languages that people of India have claimed in the census exercise as being their languages. To use a term from medical sciences, this act amounts to imposing an involuntary aphasia on citizens. In this instance, the numbers on whom it is imposed run into crores. And that is no small matter.

Since our Constitution gives us the fundamental and non-negotiable right to free expression, and since it not only accepts but encourages the idea of a multilingual India, is there not something profoundly unconstitutional in intimidating writers and thinkers or in willfully suppressing people's languages?

The UNESCO brief for language rights describes denial of mother tongues or any willful concealment of mother tongue by the members states as equivalent to a genocide. A strong word, indeed, but, necessary, thinks UNESCO. Quite ironically, the justification for both these actions is drawn from a common source; and that is, a deeply flawed idea of nationalism. It holds that anyone critical of the current regime is an enemy of India, an anti-national trying to 'spread disaffection towards the state,' in simpler words, seditious. With respect to languages, the argument says that if we have any large multiplicity of languages, it may result in disintegration of our national territory. The love for the nation and its integrity are of course of prime importance. But a nation becomes great by the thought and knowledge it produces, by nurturing the freedom of mind and by the fearlessness of its citizens. States that consciously encourage creating societies incapable of producing critique of the system generate what the ancient Latin described as hegemony. And, governments that become intolerant of difference of opinion become heavy with hubris. Hubris and hegemony produce a pervasive mediocrity. Excessively proud rulers, intellectual mediocrity and lynching mobs form a combine that threatens speech and forces civilizations to closes their minds.

2. Chasing the Improbable: Language as a Divisive Strategy

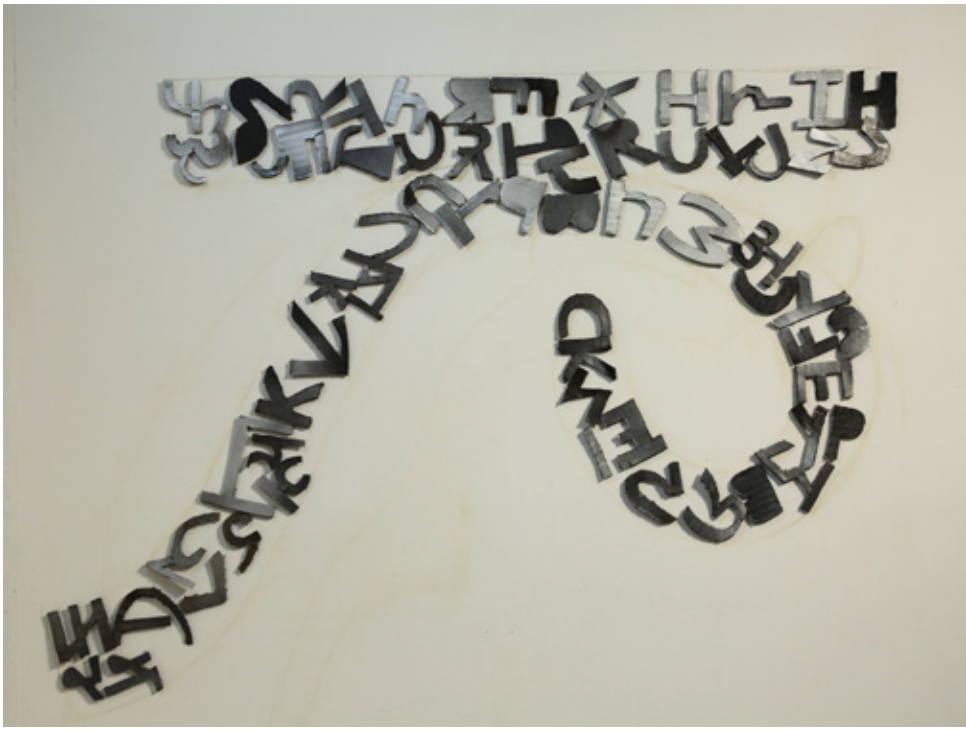
The term 'nation' was drawn by the English language during its historical phase known as Middle English from the Latin root '*nationem*' signifying birth and ancestry. In its semantic trajectory within the English language 'nation' was initially rooted in the idea of 'belonging to a geographical area or location'. It decidedly referred to an area, territory and the people who inhabited it. The idea that a nation should ideally have a single language that will keep the people bound together was added to its range of signification during the early nineteenth century. This was the time when a new kind of longing for the past was emerging among the English painters and poets as a result of the devastation of the country-side due to a rapid industrialization. In that mood of nostalgia, ancient poets—Homer and Aeschylus, in particular—started getting described as '*vates*' or prophets and language –more particularly, 'the original' language—as spiritually potent agency of human liberation. For instance, in P. B. Shelley's essay *A Defense of Poetry* (1821), he lauds poetic language as a means of providing 'harmony and unity' to the prophetic vision of poets. This was precisely the time when the struggle for creating a united Italy had started. The unscientific association between a given language and a given people as 'nation' started emerging during this post-Napoleon era of European politics. By the time Germany emerged as a nation during the 1860s, the idea that, in addition to a shared history and a 'cohesive people', a common language too is an essential feature of a nation. With language, there were other features of intangible culture and history that got added to the prevalent meanings of the word nation. For instance, the Irish Home Rule League decidedly revolved around the Catholic Christianity; and in Spain and Germany, musical heritage and metaphysical philosophy too came to be part of their idea of nationhood.

There is no doubt that the Indian struggle for national independence was influenced by all of these varieties of meaning associated with the term nation.

Towards the turn of the century, some of the influential leaders of public opinion in India had started imagining 'nation' for anchoring the complex economic and political struggle towards independence. Lokmanya Tilak and Sri Aurobindo tried to base it on what they thought were the foundations of Indian culture, and they tried to describe the nature of that foundation by harking back to India's ancient past. It is true that for over a century, since Sir William Jones launched the Asiatic Society as an enterprise in cultural archeology a lot of that past had been episodically described. Yet, the work of European Indologists, the break in Indian tradition was the centre point. In the work of the nationalist leaders, the main thesis was based on the twin principles of the longevity and the continuity of Indian culture. However, as events shaped, following the First World War, the idea of nation in Indian politics went through a significance-shift. Just as the Home Rule League, catalyzed in India by Annie Besant of Irish origin, was side-stepped, so was quietly dropped the idea of the Aryan past in the face of the rise of Fascism in Europe. Hence, in 1920s, public figures in India had to engage with the language issue in the context of the possible formation of India as a free nation. The first major manifestation of the collective thinking on this issue was the Congress resolution on setting up Linguistic States (1927) which was a clear acceptance, not so much as the desire for a multilingual nation, but certainly of the need to preserve linguistic identities of the territories that would eventually join the nation. Previously, the Congress had set up its provincial committees along linguistic lines; and after 1927, the election manifestos of the Congress often included preservation of multiple linguistic identities as one of its obligations. By this time, the eleven volumes of George Grierson's massive Linguistic Survey of India had been published; and it was well-known to the opinion makers that India had at the beginning of the twentieth century an amazing wealth of languages. Grierson had detailed 189 languages and several hundred others considered by him as 'dialects'.

The debates in the Constituent Assembly were, therefore, mindful of the need to imagine India as a nation with many languages and the dangers in straight-jacketing it within a monolingual or bilingual administrative apparatus. Not surprisingly, the Constitution made space for 14 languages in its 8th schedule as specially designated languages, the Scheduled Languages. Through a series of additions to the list, the number of Scheduled Languages at present is 22. The years from 1947 to 1956 were quite tumultuous from the language perspective. First there was a committee set up in 1948 by Dr.Rajendra Prasad to examine if linguistic states would be a viable idea. Then, another committee set up the same year including Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Pattabhi Sitaramaya examined the proposition. Dr.

Ambedkar too submitted a memorandum asking for a state for Marathi. Pottu Sriramalu, asking for an Andhra Pradesh for Telugu, died in a fast unto death. Finally, a States Reorganization Commission was appointed in 1955; and on its recommendations several states were created with language as the core of the state identity. However, throughout this process the idea of India as a nation with many languages had been firmly accepted by people, the state and most importantly was enshrined in the Constitution. Five years later, when the Census for 1961 was conducted, it showed a remarkable degree of confidence in the idea by listing 1652 mother tongues as being in existence and claimed by the people of India as their mother tongues.



As a result of the extensive debates on the language issue, the Constitution took an extremely nuanced stand on the language issue. Article 120 provided for the use of Hindi or English for business in the Parliament. Article 210 provided for the use of the state language or Hindi/English for the business of State Assemblies. Article 344 provided for a Language Commission for the upkeep of all languages included in the Eighth Schedule. Article 343 stipulated a fixed period of fifteen years for replacing English with Hindi, but in a sub-clause also provided for further extending the period if such an extension was found necessary; and Article 347 empowered the President to recognize any languages not included in the 8th Schedule as 'State Languages' if a substantial number of people made such a demand. Thus, while the Constitution laid down the objective of replacing English with Hindi, it also underscored the improbability of doing so within a very short period and also validated the democratic aspiration of various language communities to have their languages included in the 8th schedule or, at least, recognized as the 'State Languages' within their own state. By accepting language as the back-bone in the state reorganization process soon after Independence, the government of India clearly upheld the idea of a nation that can be one but speaks in many different tongues. This is not to say that the promotion of Hindi as a possible replacement for English was overlooked. That objective was indeed stated many times in speech and through grant making policy. A Hindi 'kosh' (compendium) for providing terminology was mooted and a yearly Hindi week was made mandatory. It is another matter that the *kosh* soon *became* a butt of ridicule owing to its preference for Sanskrit-based terminology that was found literally 'unpalatable' and ignored the ease of communication.

Language, like other prominent identity markers, is an emotive issue. No government so far had the courage to openly accept that a complete replacement of the English language by Hindi in the working of the Parliament and administration, in the communication between the states and the Centre, in higher education and research and in industry and business is a near impossibility. Besides, the Indian demographics are such that owning the reality can be politically suicidal for any party or government. Therefore, successive governments have presented the official language data to show a constant growth of Hindi. In 1971, out of 54.82 cr. population, 20.28 cr. was reported as Hindi speaking. In successive census counts, the figures for Hindi were shown as on a steady rise: 1981: 25.77 cy out of 66.52 cr.; 1991: 32.95cr

out of 83.86 cr.; 2001: 42.20 cr. out of 102.86; and 2011:52.83cr. out of 121.08 cr. The decadal growth was placed at 36.99 percent (1971), 38.74 percent (1981), 39.29 percent (1991), 41.03 percent (2001) and 43.63 percent (2011). What the census does not mention is that since 1971 several 'other' languages have been brought under the rubric of the Hindi language. The 1652 'mother tongues' mentioned previously were reduced to a mere 108 'Languages' by introducing a cut-off point of 10,000 for any group of speakers to have their 'mother tongue' listed in the published data. The cut-off point has no scientific basis either in Linguistics or in Statistics. Its justification is drawn from politics of an electoral democracy. It would be interesting to see the language data of the most recent census that was carried out in 2011. In it, the speakers who claimed Hindi as their mother tongue totaled 32.22 cr. But, in order to bolster it up the following 53 other languages, most of them completely independent as languages and some like Banjari even mutually unintelligible with Hindi were shown as sub-sets of Hindi: Awadhi 38,50,906; Baghati/Baghati Pahari 15,835; Bagheli/Baghel Khandi 26,79,129;, Bagri Rajasthani 2,34,227; Banjari 15,81,271; , Bhadrawahi 98,806; Bhagoria 20,924 ; Bharmauri/Gaddi 1,81,069; Bhojpuri 5,05,79,447; Bishnoi 12,079 ; Brajbhasha 15,56,314; Bundeli/Bundel khandi 56,26,356 ; Chambeali/Chamrali 1,25,746; Chhattisgarhi 1,62,45,190 ; Churahi 75,552; Dhundhari 14,76,446; Gawari 19,062; Gojri/ Gujjari/Gujar 12,27,901; Handuri 47,803; Hara/Harauti 29,44,356; Haryanvi 98,06,519; Jaunpuri/ Jaunsari 1,36,779; Kangri 11,17,342; Khari Boli 50,195; Khortha/Khotta 80,38,735; Kulvi 1,96,295; Kumauni 20,81,057; Kurmali Thar 3,11,175; Lamani/ Lambadi/Labani 32,76,548; Laria 89,876; Magadhi/Magahi 1,27,06,825; Malvi 52,12,617; Mandeali 6,22,590; Marwari 78,31,749; Mewari 42,12,262; Mewati 8,56,643; Nagpuria 7,63,014; Nimadi 23,09,265; Padari 17,279; Pahari 32,53,889; Palmuha 23,579; Panch Pargania 2,44,914; Pando/Pandwani 15,595; Pangwali 18,668; Pawari/Powari 3,25,772; Puran/Puran Bhasha 12,375; Rajasthani 2,58,06,344; Sadan/Sadri 43,45,677; Sirmauri 1,07,401; Sondwari 2,29,788; Sugali 1,70,987; Surgujia 17,38,256 and Surjapuri 22,56,228. If one were to take these out of the Hindi language, the ratio between the total population under the Census, 121.08 cr and the population of the Hindi speakers 32.22 cr to just a little less than 4:1. All of this cold data, otherwise fairly uninteresting, goes to show why no government so far has been able to replace either the regional languages or the English language entirely by Hindi.

India has traditionally been a multilingual area. Neither the Sanskrit language in ancient India nor the Persian language during the 17th century were able to displace the large variety of languages that India had been using for communication and imaginative expression. During the colonial times, the English language entirely replaced the native languages of North America and Australia; but despite such efforts, it did not displace Indian languages. On the contrary, the contact with Sanskrit strengthened Prakrits, the contact with Arabic and Persian brought rich vocabulary- bounty to Indian languages and the presence and influence of English resulted in an unprecedented efflorescence of literature in Indian languages. The open spaces and ambivalence in the Constitution on the language issue is a testimony to the deep understanding of the cultural and social history of India.

The BJP has made the formula 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan' its main political plank. Whereas numerically the Hindu population in India is overwhelmingly larger than the population professing other religions, that is not exactly the case with the Hindi speaking population in relation to the population speaking other languages. Hindi is neither the oldest among the major Indian languages----Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Gujarati, Kashmiri and Bangla having a much longer past – nor it is the richest in terms of literary production –many others like Kannada, Bangla, Marathi and Malayalam being more or equally prolific and with varied literary genres. Therefore, as an instrument to divide the Indian voters in terms of a large majority against a smaller minority, the Hindi language does not offer as deadly a strategy as Hindutva may offer. It is not surprising that Amit Shah's posturing in relation to the Hindi language met with a backlash from most parts of India. It would be naïve to believe that the BJP expected anything but such a backlash. Probably, the posturing was more for assuaging the unemployed youth in the Hindi belt and the voters there, sharp enough to know that the economy has not stopped sliding downward. In a way, the expressed love for Hindi was an indirect confirmation that the voter support, even in the Hindi heartland, is not guaranteed forever.

3 Between Diversity and Aphasia: The Future of Language

Archaeological and historical researches during the last two centuries have made it possible for us to know something about the complex linguistic transitions and migrations that took place over the last five millennia, roughly from the early Harappan times to our time. During this long period, the Indian subcontinent accepted language legacies as distinct as the Avestan of the Zoroastrians, the Asutro-Asiatic of the Pacific the Tibeto-Burman of the East and the Northeast Asia. The Indic (or the Indo-Aryan) languages in the northern states together with the Dravidic languages in the south and the Tibeto-Burman languages in the Northeast, each with a great variety of sub-branches -- make for the larger bulk of the Indian languages. Throughout the known history of the subcontinent, there has been an active exchange and cultural osmosis between the indigenous languages and the migratory languages, producing in the process great literature in many tongues.

The People's Linguistic Survey of India has estimated that there are nearly 780 living languages in the country at present. Scholars claim that there are approximately 6000 living languages in the world. Thus, India is home to 1 out of every 8 languages on earth. The diversity is impressive not only in numerical terms. A language is not just a communication system, it is a unique worldview. Thus, though one can translate a given meaning from one language to another, there are always shades of meaning and nuances in any language that simply cannot be translated into other languages. Hence, the great diversity of languages in India needs be seen as the diversity of world-views, of the unique ways of perceiving the world.

Over the last two decades, scientists have come up with mathematical models for predicting the life of languages. These predictions have invariably indicated that the human species is moving rapidly close to extinction of a large part of its linguistic heritage. These predictions do not agree on the exact magnitude of the impending disaster; but they all agree on the fact that close to three quarters or more of all existing natural human languages are half in the grave**.** There are, on the other hand, advocates of linguistic globalization. The processes of globalization have found it necessary to promote homogenized cultures. The idea has found support among the classes that stand to benefit by the globalization of economies. They would prefer the spread of one or only a few languages all over the world so that communication across national boundaries becomes the easiest ever. Obviously, the nations and communities that have learnt to live within only a single language, whose economic well-being is not dependent on knowing languages other than their own, whose knowledge systems are well-secure within their own languages, will not experience the stress of language loss, at least not immediately, though the loss of the world's total language heritage, which will weaken the global stock of human intellect and civilizations, will have numerous indirect enfeebling effects on them too. Since it is language, mainly of all things, that makes us human and distinguishes us from other species and animate nature (Blench, 2012; April, 2013), and since the human consciousness can but only function given the ability for linguistic expression, it becomes necessary to recognise language as the most crucial aspect of the cultural capital. It has taken human beings continuous work of about half a million years to accumulate this valuable capital. In our time we have come close to the point of losing most of it. Historians of civilisation tell us that probably a comparable, though not exactly similar, situation had arisen in the past some seven or eight thousand years ago. This was when the human beings discovered the magic of nature that seeds are. When the shift from an entirely hunting–gathering or pastoralist economies to early agrarian

economies started taking place, we are told, the language diversity of the world got severely affected. It may not be wrong to surmise that the current crisis in human languages too is triggered by the fundamental economic shift that has enveloped the entire world, north or south, west or east. This time though the crisis has an added theme as a lot of the human activity is dominated by man-made intelligence.

The technologies aligned with artificial intelligence have all been depending heavily on modeling the activity of the human mind along the linguistic transactions. The intelligent machines modeled after entirely neurological or psychological systems are still not commonly in use. The language based technologies are now well entrenched partners in the semantic universe(s) that bind human communities together (Gillespie, 2007). Therefore, the universe is being re-shaped. Language today is as much a system of meaning in the cyberspace effecting communication between a machine and another machine as much as it has been a system of meaning in the social space achieving communication between a human being and another human being. Neurologists explain the current shift in man's cognitive processes by pointing to the rapidly changing ways in which the brain stores and analyzes sensory perceptions as well as information. Linguists have raised an alarm about the sinking fortunes of natural languages through which human communication has taken place over the last seven millennia. They have started noticing that the use of man-made memory-chips fed into intelligent machines make heavy dents in the human ability to remember and even the tense patterns of natural languages. Technologists, particularly those astride the leading glory of technology—the ICT—have been talking of network communities as a substitute for civilizations. All in all, there is excitement in the air, and there is alarm in the minds. This is so on all fronts of knowledge, in all aspects of social organizations and all branches of human experience. Collectively, for all nations all ethnic and cultural groups of humans the vision of a life well beyond our imagination has started appearing on the horizon even if it has not become fully manifest. This makes a mockery of all that the human brain and mind have so far held as being natural and permanent. Probably just as the Industrial Revolution and the associated rise of capitalism in European countries placed the traditional agrarian society at risk, giving rise to the long drawn conflicts between labour and capital, this great transition facing us globally will create strife and, consequently, violence of an unprecedented order. This time too, the post-human societies are likely to get divided between those with access to the digital and those without it. Already, some linguistic laboratories have started publishing lists of 'digitally dead languages', with over 98 per cent of Indian languages included in the list. Already, the communities not networked are being described as 'non-civil' (and internet based communication is called 'social networking'!). The economies of the world seem to have already resolved that the citizens without unique digital identities can be written off, like characters in Sadat Hassan Manto's stories, as the nowhere people. In our excitement for the utopia of the 'beyond imagination' life and world, it would be tragic if we forgot to look at the struggles and the plight of those who are on the digital fringes. Aphasia, therefore, appears to be spread out for the future of Memory. For a very long portion of the human history, language continued to retain its character as a predominantly 'free' system that is sturdily resistant to government controls, market regulations and cultural oppressions. However, over the last few centuries, particularly since the rise of technologies that apparently function as assistance to language transport – printing, photography, electronic-language-storage-and-reproduction, digital-encoding-and-decoding of human language—language acquisition, languages transmission and language use have started getting rapidly monetized. Today, as never before, the economically dispossessed classes all over the world are finding it difficult to access language acquisition as per their needs and desires. Thus, throughout the world, we now notice a digit-powered linguistic class and another print and digit deprived linguistic class. The divide is too deep to bridge by following any conventional or prevailing economic ideologies. A technological reversal in the evolution of languages too is a hugely unrealistic proposition. The only hope for ensuring any future for 'linguistic homo-sapiens' is to envision together and integrate economic development and linguistic federalism. If the rural landscapes and marginalized communities can be safeguarded, the currently threatened languages will find a safe passage to the future; and only if those languages continue to survive shall we have access to the knowledge that helps us to build a sustainable future society. The two are so intimately interlocked.

When Langston Hughes Visited My Home

BY NABINA DAS

The name was strange and the
book was shiny dark
Thin, freckled jacket, like my
angry pre-teen face
on the table
The title kept calling in a
jingle-jangle Assamese
refrain I kept saying it out
loud:
"Hey Xurjo Uthi Aha"!
Why it exhorted the sun to
rise accept the challenge of
a new dream that flamed
brighter and purer
And why the smaller typeface said:
poems by dark-limbed poets, a
collection, I had no idea then
Dark limbs were not
seen on our book
covers
only limbs were, but
then Krishna is just not
a word for a god, it
dawned on me
but skins and cheeks
and strong arms of
poetic force
history on my table
Also the end of crowing
nights when a poet came
home inside the covers of a
book, smiling: That day is
past!
Rise, O sun!

NABINA DAS is a poet and writer based out of Hyderabad. She has three books of poetry and two of fiction. *Sanskarnama* from Red River Press is her latest poetry collection

Gallery Exhibits

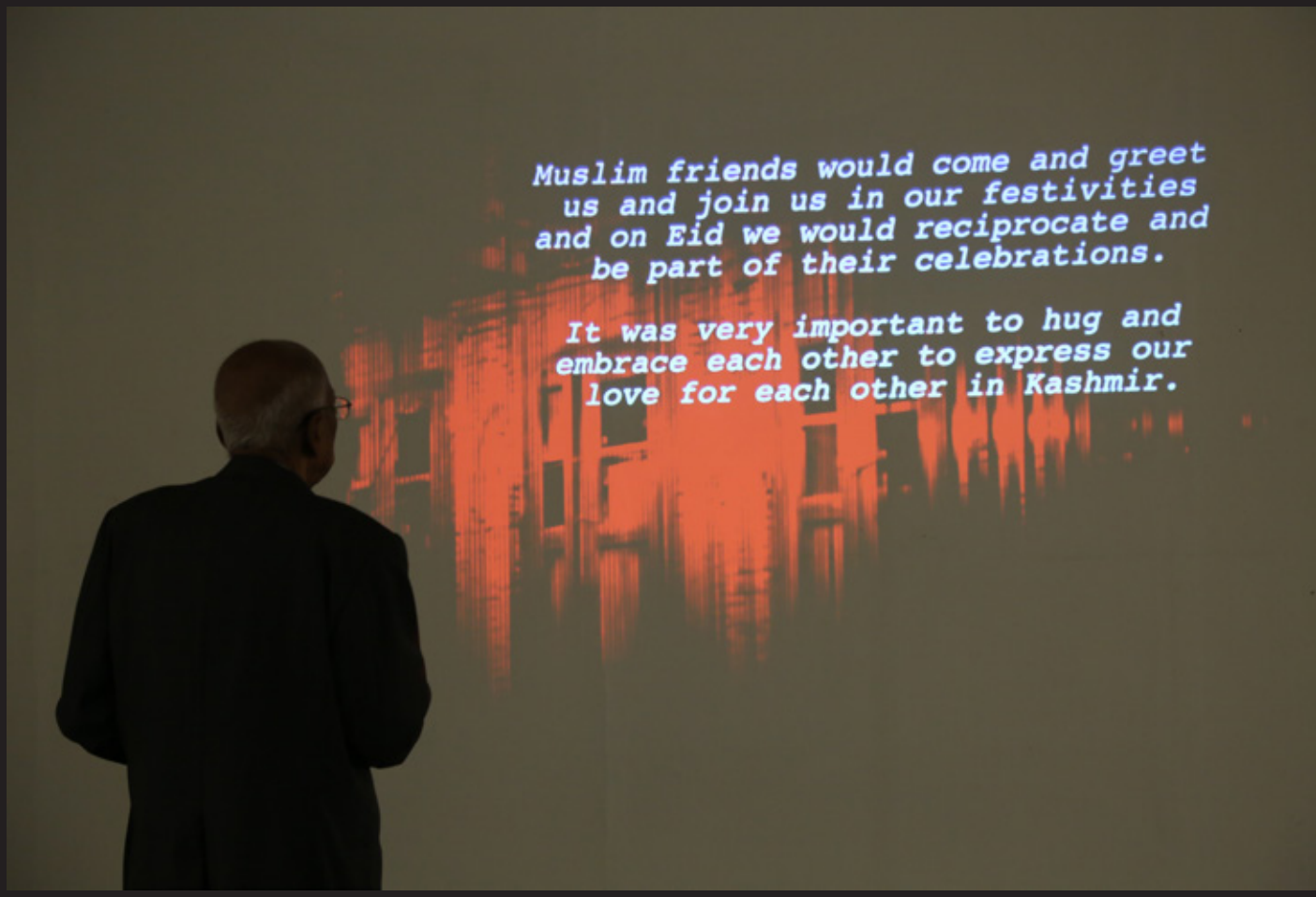
The Exiled Tongue

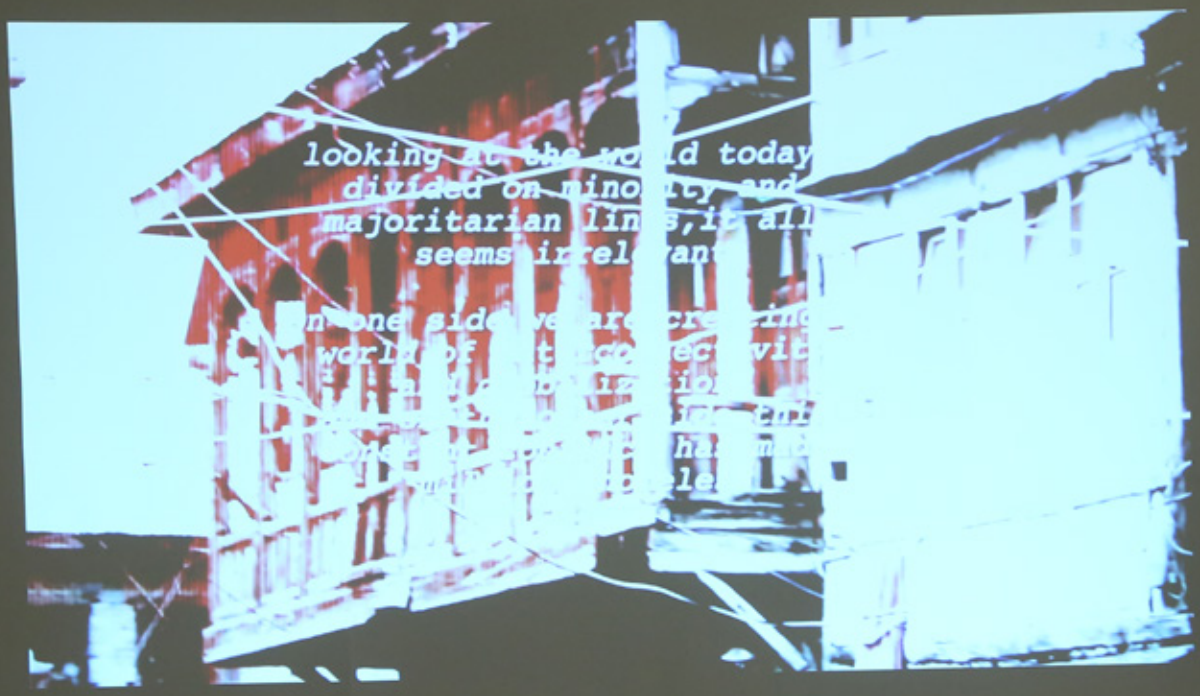
PARASHER BARUAH, CINEMATOGRAPHER

It is impossible to visualise exile in the language of the exiled. Which language can claim to include the essence of exile, its language? Is it conceivable that exile has its own language? If it does, wouldn't this language have to be so terrifying, that it would destroy those who speak it? The language in which we speak lives as long as we speak it. Once we fall silent, the language is lost too.

The Chakmas, amongst the first climate refugees, the Rohingyas, amongst the most persecuted communities in the world, the Kashmiri Pandits, exiled in their own country, the Miyahs of Assam perceived as "illegal

> No one should become the object of derision or the victim of discrimination on account of his birth or the way he chooses to regard himself - even if such discrimination is condoned, openly or in secret, by the powers that be." Imre Kertesz





citizens", Brus mostly unknown in their own land and the Tibetans who still hope to return to their land someday –they all belong nowhere.

In this video installation, cinematographer Parasher Baruah listens to the voices of the exiled in languages that are falling silent. The piece gives expression to what it means to be away from home, memories, longing, and loss, anger and pain. The visual language here is broken, fragmented, exilic with images of uprootedness, diasporic and displaced existence.

Kok Sam Lai

SAKSHI PATHAK
STUDENT, NID
KURUKSHETRA

This series of fifteen sketches of Meitei Mayek fəˈnɛtɪk* visualises the transmission of linguistic messages and acoustic characteristics of speech. These are consonants from the language that the artist used to conceive this series of utterances.

Words are formed through speech that becomes language. Pronunciation expresses identity and tells us the speaker's ethnicity. But we hardly ever notice the formation of the sound, how the lips and the face move to create the sound. We listen but rarely see.

**phonetic*

पहचान*

**Identity*

SAKSHI PATHAK,
NAAZ BHARDWAJ,
NANDITA LELE

In the confluence of the mind and sound lies language, breathing and very alive, holding on to its people as they move away from where they uttered their very first words, hoping for its existence.

As India's diversity rich Northeast is taken over by the ghosts of migration, it becomes imperative to reiterate the enmeshed nature of Language and Identity.

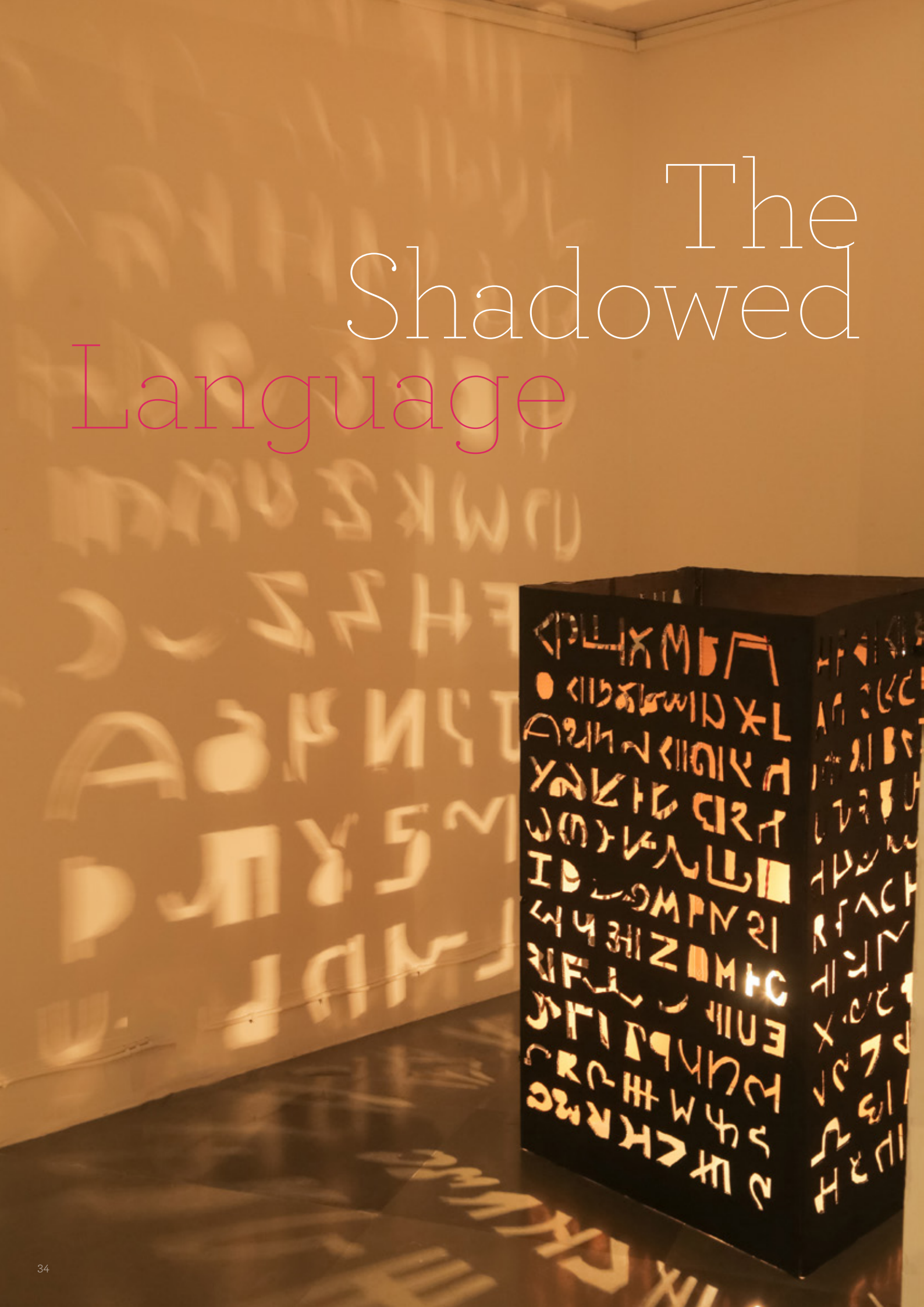
The beauty of the human mind exposed to different languages is in creation and expression. In the face of disappearing languages, we fear the loss of several cognitive and cultural universes now, more than ever in the face of migration.

The concept of language and identity are so interdependent that they themselves are a part of the other. The installation serves to make the viewer feel the inseparability of two very living things, the language and its speaker. It pushes the viewer to ponder over the immeasurable loss of the way of living a community witnesses, when a mother tongue, which is something, that comes to an individual as easy as breathing, starts disappearing.

Qamar dagar Calligraphy


Exploring Languages

The Shadowed Language

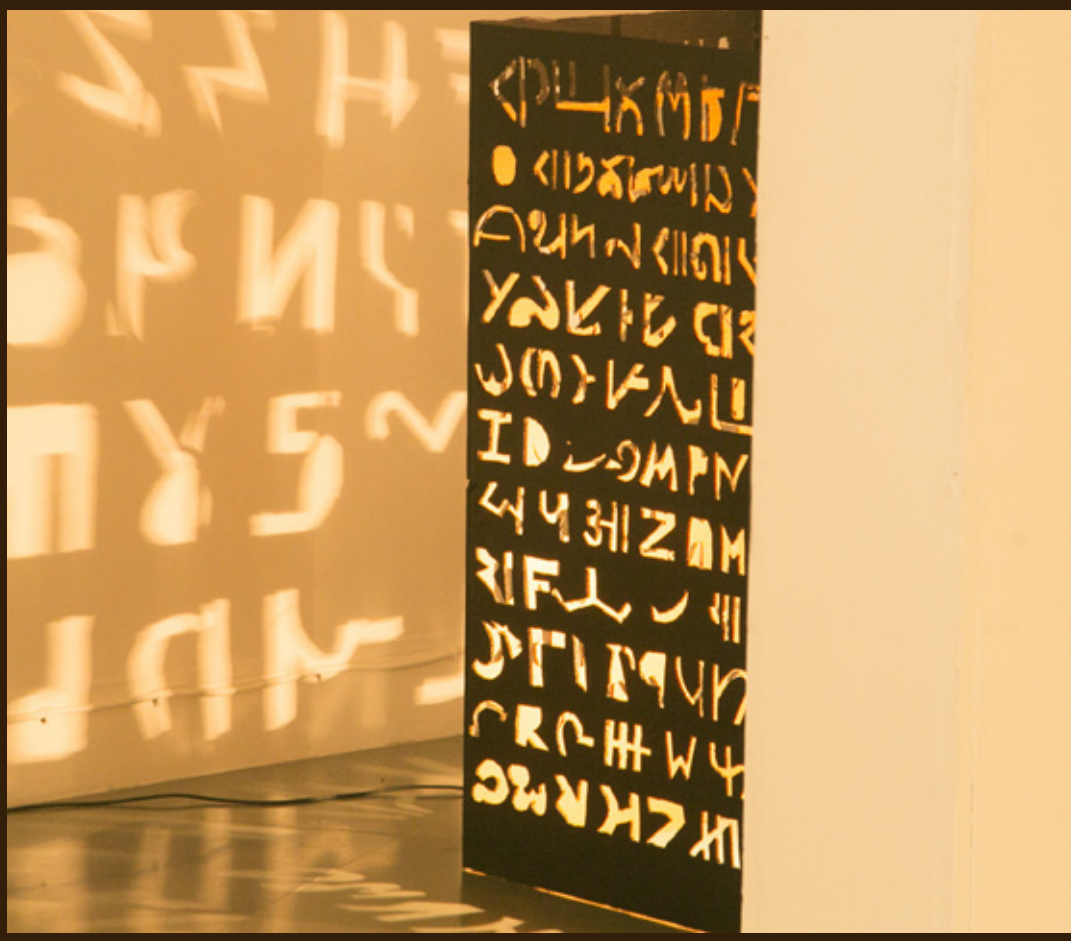


Who are we? What are we about?

ASHIMA SHARMA AND
AKSHITA CHEMBOLU

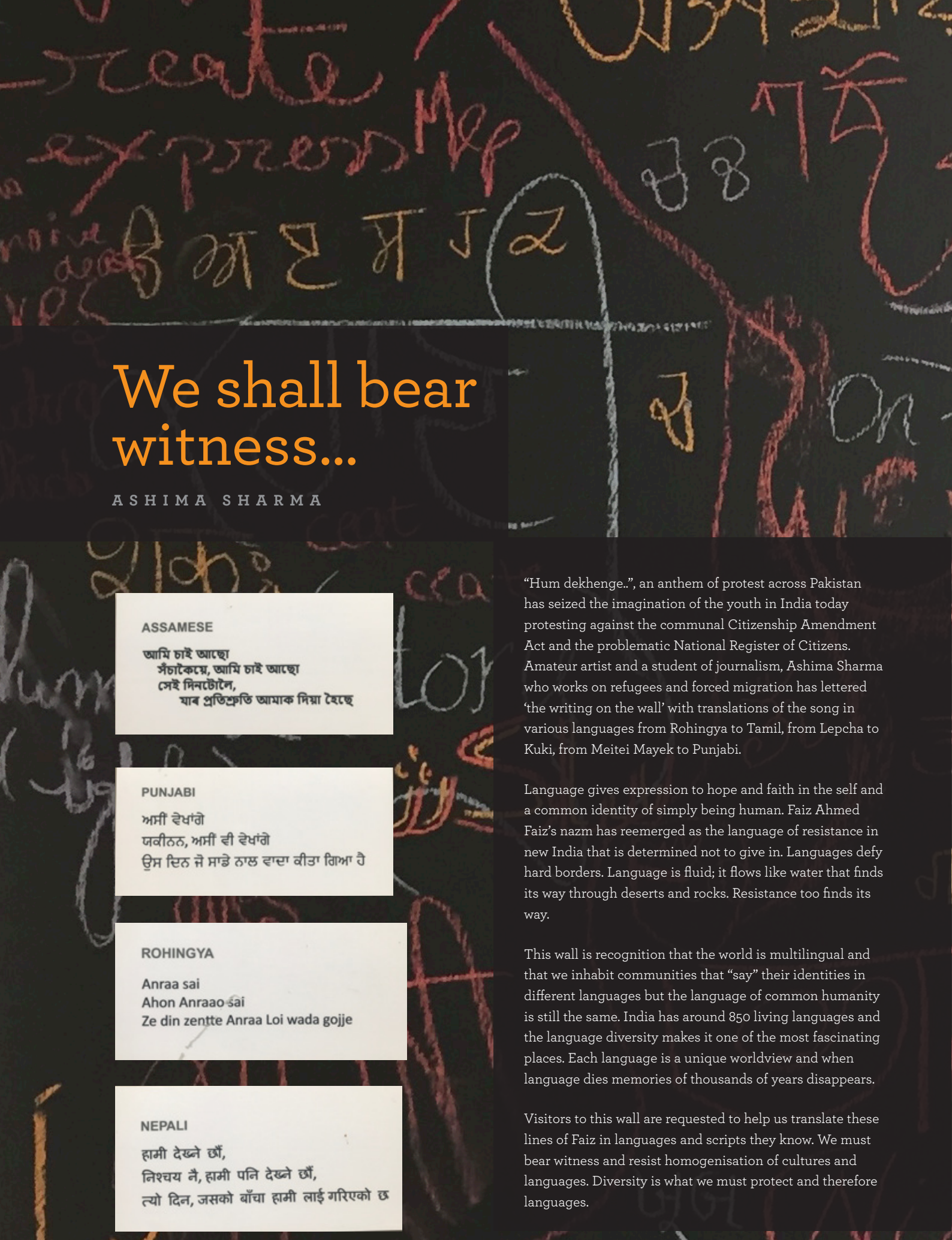
Through the light and shadow on letters of the alphabet of different languages, the artist here is interested in the interplay of diverse cultures and linguistic traditions.

Half of the world's languages are expected to die by the end of the century. There are some estimates that one language dies every fourteen days. We lose knowledge and history when a language is lost. But there are languages that are silenced due to persecution and discrimination. This installation is a reminder that languages are repositories of culture and thousands of years of memories. Language is the truest history.



We shall bear witness...

ASHIMA SHARMA

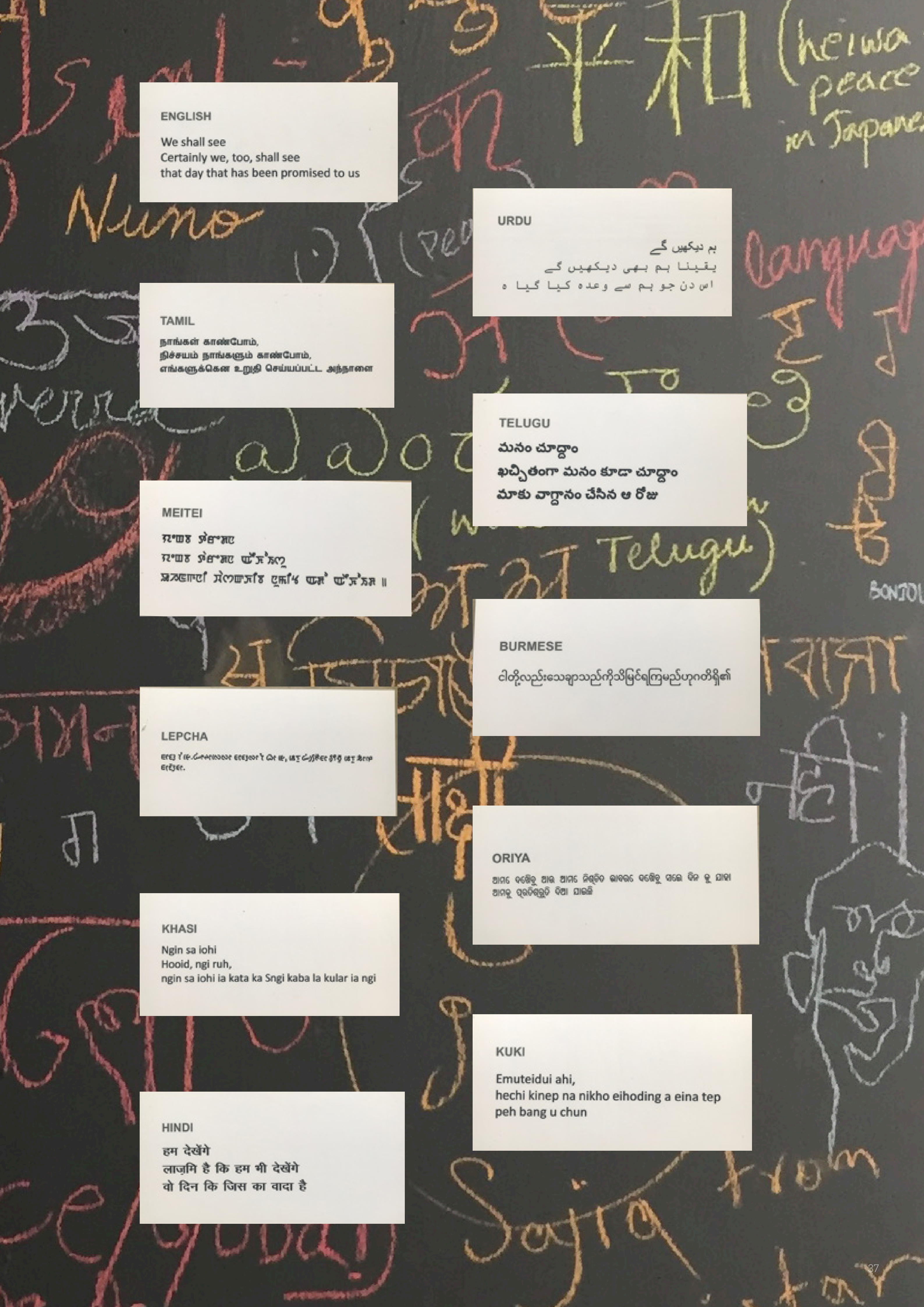


"Hum dekhenge..", an anthem of protest across Pakistan has seized the imagination of the youth in India today protesting against the communal Citizenship Amendment Act and the problematic National Register of Citizens. Amateur artist and a student of journalism, Ashima Sharma who works on refugees and forced migration has lettered 'the writing on the wall' with translations of the song in various languages from Rohingya to Tamil, from Lepcha to Kuki, from Meitei Mayek to Punjabi.

Language gives expression to hope and faith in the self and a common identity of simply being human. Faiz Ahmed Faiz's nazm has reemerged as the language of resistance in new India that is determined not to give in. Languages defy hard borders. Language is fluid; it flows like water that finds its way through deserts and rocks. Resistance too finds its way.

This wall is recognition that the world is multilingual and that we inhabit communities that "say" their identities in different languages but the language of common humanity is still the same. India has around 850 living languages and the language diversity makes it one of the most fascinating places. Each language is a unique worldview and when language dies memories of thousands of years disappears.

Visitors to this wall are requested to help us translate these lines of Faiz in languages and scripts they know. We must bear witness and resist homogenisation of cultures and languages. Diversity is what we must protect and therefore languages.


ENGLISH
We shall see
Certainly we, too, shall see
that day that has been promised to us
URDU
ہم دیکھیں گے
یقیناً ہم بھی دیکھیں گے
اس دن جو ہم سے وعدہ کیا گیا ہ
TAMIL
நாங்கள் காண்போம்,
நிச்சயம் நாங்களும் காண்போம்,
எங்களுக்கென உறுதி செய்யப்பட்ட அந்நாளை
TELUGU
మనం చూద్దాం
ఖచ్చితంగా మనం కూడా చూద్దాం
మాకు వాగ్దానం చేసిన ఆ రోజు
MEITEI
BURMESE
ငါတို့လည်းသေချာသည်ကိုသိမြင်ရကြမည်ဟုဂတိရှိ၏
LEPCHA
ORIYA
ଆମେ ଦେଖିବୁ ଆଉ ଆମେ ନିଶ୍ଚିତ ଭାବରେ ଦେଖିବୁ ସେଇ ଦିନ କୁ ଯାହା
ଆମକୁ ପ୍ରତିଶ୍ରୁତି ଦିଆ ଯାଇଛି
KHASI
Ngin sa iohi
Hooid, ngi ruh,
ngin sa iohi ia kata ka Sngi kaba la kular ia ngi
KUKI
Emuteidui ahi,
hechi kinep na nikho eihoding a eina tep
peh bang u chun
HINDI
हम देखेंगे
लाज़िम है कि हम भी देखेंगे
वो दिन कि जिस का वादा है
heiwa
peace
in Japanese
Telugu

The Strangeness of Repeating

BY POORNIMA LAKSHMESHWAR

The term -
recoil,
rebound,
rewind,
redo
can make me inhale a breath of sorrow. "RE" makes me want to go back to those rain clad days when I could curl myself into patches on quilts or be the brown dots on my lazy cat resting on old books stacked in the corner, under the lampshade – unopened.

"RE" is a word that takes me to Ajji and her love for repetitive words – *pata pata, ghasa ghasa, bhada bhada.*

Remind haunts me like a shadow I want to shed, and I have been walking so aimlessly to unshackle my coloured senses and see beyond the shades of blue.

Recollect jokes me into traps of bygone times I seek to hide from without unravelling the tunes playing in the parched land of my nerves, now gone mute.

Reminisce opens the wounds on the flesh of circumstances cut with a precise diameter while the lotus blooms with the sunrise, out of routine.

Remember whispers the secrets of the seasons, the green tea bags in sunflower yellow mugs, tangled legs, unnecessary blanks in words.

But I, I refuse
To recreate another chain of mountains
To reuse your memories for a living
To relate to love again

I want to REWRITE this poem.

*Poornima Lakshmeshwar resides in Bangalore and works as a technical writer for a living.
Her recent book of poems, *Strings Attached* was published by Red River Press.


"You have broken someone's land,
You have broken someone's tin house,
You have broken my budding love."
Nodir Kul Nai
A Film by Parasher Baruah
OFFICIAL COMPETITION
IDSFFK
INTERNATIONAL DOCUMENTARY & SHORT FILM FESTIVAL OF KERALA
2019
idffb
2019
September
27th to 29th
Editor - Zedrin Phukan
Research - Shalim M Hussain
Sound - Rukmajit Baruah,Nayan Bhuyan
Cinematography - Parasher Baruah,Chandra Kumar
Producers - Kishalay Bhattacharjee,NFI, Ava Films.
Ava
Films

Nodir Kul Nai

Nodir Kul Nai is a short documentary that features singers, boatmen and everyday life of the chars or the sand banks that dot the river *Brahmaputra*, the Red River. The inhabitants here Bengali Muslims also known as Miyahs some of who may have migrated from erstwhile East Bengal, or Bangladesh now, or may have lived here for generations. After all, this was one land, and it is the same river on either side.

The river doesn't know boundaries, It just flows. In the film through songs and poetry, the Miyahs explore their relationship with the river, their struggle for survival and the larger issue of migration and identity. "They are as much outsiders, as water is to land".

The film was directed by Parasher Baruah, produced by ABHA films, commissioned by Art East 2019 edition and premiered in 2020 at the India International Centre. It was first screened at ArtEast and then selected in the competition section of the 12th international documentary and Short Films Festival in Kerala.

The film was shot with the help of people from Arikati, Purangao and Sontali in Kamrup, Assam on the banks of the river Brahmaputra. The crew comprised of Rukmajit Baruah and Nayan Bhuyan on sound, Chandra Kumar on camera, Zedrin Phukan in editing and Mayuri Rajkonwar as executive producer. Shalim Hussain, poet and scholar helped out with the research and Mirza Lutfar Rahman and Amin Islam provided location support.

You mad river
In a strange illusion you have trapped me
In a life of happiness
You have drawn a ravine.
You mad, mad river....

"I must have been 10-11 when I started singing. My name is Kujarat Ali. I am from Boro Arikati. Let me tell you about the bhatiyali songs. When the river carries away our homes, when we go from one char to another, with our things on the boat, that's when we sing bhatiyali songs to express our grief. Manik Kana (Manik the Blind) used to sing. When Goruchar was eroded by the Brahmaputra he came to this char and sang these songs. I learnt from Manik Kana. Manik says, You mad river, you have created a rift in our lives. When the river banks get eroded, the people living on the bank get separated. All of us go in different directions looking for land to live on. There's no knowing who goes where. We become friendless. That's why we call the river 'Pagla Nodi' or 'mad river'. "

You mad river
In a strange illusion you have trapped me
In our happy lives
You have drawn a ravine.
You have broken someone's land
You have broken someone's tin house
You have broken my new love.
You mad river
In a strange illusion you have trapped me
In our happy lives
You have drawn a ravine.
Some go to Mondira
Some go to Goruchar
Some go to Norikata reserve
You mad river
In a strange illusion you have trapped me
In our happy lives
You have drawn a ravine.
In our happy lives
You have drawn a ravine.

I have charred my bones
As black as my skin
Charred my soul too
I have charred my bones
As black as my skin
Charred my soul too
I have charred my bones
As black as my skin
Charred my soul too
I have charred my bones
As black as my skin
Charred my soul too
The farmer's plough is bent
The waters of the river are bent
The farmer's plough is bent
The waters of the river are bent
The farmer's plough is bent
The waters of the river are bent
The farmer's plough is bent
The waters of the river are bent

"This song... I am speaking in Assamese now.

This song... we sing this song when...

(Switching to Assamese) we live on the river.

Around us is the river. Sometimes the river takes away our homes. Then land rises in the middle of the river and we shift there. During the monsoon there is only water around us. Then the erosion begins from upstream. Some houses are washed away and then some more. We get separated. Then we end up in a perplexing state. Our minds turn to God who is the only one who can help us. Then we look up to God. Our songs come from that perplexity.

These songs are called 'Paar Geet'. The gist of the songs is that even if we can't make it to the shore, may there be place for us in God's land. These songs have been passed down to us by our forefathers."

"When water fills the lands around the river, the river becomes boundless like a sea. Even our boat is broken. We don't have the heart to travel from one bank of the river to the other.

Out of fear we sing these songs. These songs are messages to God. We call out to him and say: this river that has turned into a sea, which bank do we go to? There's water inside the house, water outside the house, water all around. Out of the pain in our hearts we sing our songs."

The river has no bank, no edge.
Which bank should I leave and where should I go?
Who do I ask?
Which bank should I leave and where should I go?
Who do I ask?
Which bank should I leave and where should I go
Who do I ask?
Which bank should I leave and where should I go?
Who do I ask?
The river has no bank, no edge.
The big river's waters rock my boat
The big river's waters rock my boat
Now I see the face of beauty and now's it gone
Now I see the face of beauty and now's it gone
The river has no bank, no edge.
The winds are roaring and my boat is broken
The winds are roaring and my boat is broken
How can I reach the bank?
Have mercy on me o merciful Allah
and take me to the bank.
Have mercy on me o merciful Allah
and take me to the bank.
The river has no bank, no edge.
The river has no bank, no edge.
Now I see beauty and now it's gone.
Now I see beauty and now it's gone.
Have mercy on me o merciful Allah
and take me to the bank.
The river has no bank, no edge.

Nodir Kul Nai

POST-FILM DISCUSSION

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: Hello Parasher.

PARASHER BARUAH: Hello Kishalay, thank you for having me here. It feels great to be back in IIC, though now in 2020 as a zoom chat.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: If you could tell us a little about how the film was shot, where did you shoot it. Why did you shoot it?

PARASHER BARUAH: In 2019 I was trying to find out how to look at the river in a different way and how to understand the communities living by the river. Since I've already done extensive work in Majuli, I thought of looking at it from a completely fresh perspective. The Miyah community and their story came to my mind. This community has always been an othered community. The recent news about the National Register of Citizens (NRC) got me thinking about the larger issue of identity. So I felt this was a great opportunity to look at a riverine community by the Brahmaputra. And at the same time, maybe look at answers or bigger answers from me as an Assamese. I thought their songs would be a good beginning and a fresh way to explore or engage with this community.

Songs, traditionally, carry their stories. Stories of migration, stories which have been passed on from one generation to the other. So I felt, if I can say it through their songs, or explore their songs, I think I may gain a perspective.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: You met them in a very volatile climate as Assam at that point of time was going through the contentious NRC process, and a majority of people who did not find their name, who are still out of the list are from that community. No one really knows the exact number of people or composition of people now. Was there some kind of resentment or suspicion of why you were doing that film at that point of time and your own personal dynamic?

For the viewers who are not familiar with Assam and the landscape of Assam, the political landscape is very different because though

Parasher is a film professional from Mumbai he grew up in upper Assam. The area that we are talking about is actually lower Assam. The two are divided just like any other part of any other state or any other part of the world. But in this, the differences are extremely sharp.

So for you it was also a new experience, a boy who grew up in Dibrugarh in upper Assam, is now on the banks of the Brahmaputra in lower Assam, so how did you negotiate that?

PARASHER BARUAH: I grew up with this, this is my history. I mean, the history of the political struggle that we have had in Assam is also my history.

Forget upper Assam and lower Assam. The whole issue of illegal immigration has been a large part of who we are as Assamese and what our politics has been about.

I grew up being affected by it, even though I've stayed away in Mumbai. Or probably because I've been away in Mumbai I've gained a new perspective on this issue.

When the NRC issue came up that got me thinking of my basic claim as an Assamese. When that itself was being questioned about who and what makes me an Assamese or rather the fact that you now have a committee set up to decide who is an Assamese.

My most basic claim as a person, after being a human being was the fact that I was an Assamese.

In my almost 40 years, that is what I have always carried around. The fact that I am an Assamese, that very existence got questioned. That got me thinking about how it was so difficult for me to prove who I am because of this whole NRC process and how difficult it is for a community who anyway has been historically vilified and othered.

So my decision was to first engage and understand. As I always believe that migration is not something that stopped at any point of history, it has flowed, it will keep flowing.

So, what makes their claim to this land lesser or higher than my claim?

It's a process that I want to start talking about because these are questions that I have in my mind. I felt that from making this documentary or from meeting them, I took the first step to know them.

When you ask whether it was difficult, no it wasn't difficult in fact they were very welcoming.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: Just to interrupt you, to put it into context for the viewers. How did you identify these singers? We know boatmen are there. When I watched the film I was introduced to a new genre called pargeet because we are familiar with bhatiyali.

Presumably, pargeet and bhatiali will be similar, but still different genres. So how did you get introduced to or familiar with these people and to this genre of music?

PARASHER BARUAH: What got me interested in this community is actually the Miyah poetry. In 2016 there was another movement which was a new voice that was coming out in this community. That got me interested in this new form of expression. Scholars like Hafeez Ahmed and Shalim Hussain got me interested in what they were trying to do.

So I felt, rather than just talking about the context and the way they were trying to do something which is very political, I wanted to go back a little and find out where this community came from and what their stories were and that's why the songs.

We've always grown up knowing that bhatiyali is of Bangladeshi origin or of Bengali origin. It's actually just like the river Brahmaputra. It evolved on banks of the Ganga and the Brahmaputra. It migrated. So there is no one particular geographical area which you can say that it comes from.

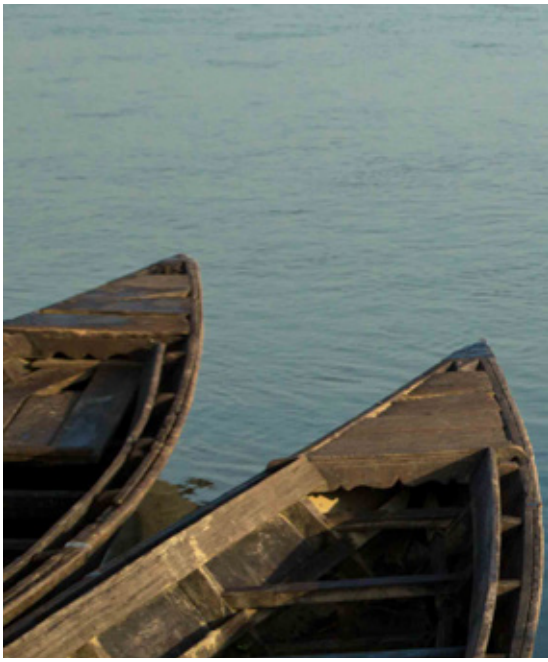
So, this region where this community is from is the village Santoli or Arikati.

So they have also been singing songs that have been passed down from their own ancestors. Their ancestors came and settled in those villages. No, they are not only singing Jasimuddin songs, they're not singing only songs that are sung by boatmen in Bangladesh or in Bengal.

They are singing songs that have actually been sung by their own ancestors in this particular region. That made it very topical to know or to understand that these are songs that talk about their own history.

The history and their connect with the river, of how they had to cope with the river, how they had to develop this relationship, this understanding with this mad, massive mad river. During the winters is calm, it's fine, but during the floods, It knows no boundaries. It just flows.

So the fact that they have learnt to adapt themselves or learn to live with this river was a great story in itself. I felt that these songs that are interesting, that you saw featured in the film, talk primarily



about their relationship with the river.

One song describes the river as a 'mad pagla nodi'. The same song talks about how they have been displaced and they've lost their homes due to erosion and they have to move to the other island.

This has been their story, this has been the story of these very villages. The person who was singing it, Kurajat Ali, endures the floods every year.

So these are songs which are very personal. At the same time, they're talking about their history, their history of migration, their history of displacement.

I felt this was a perfect representation of the Miyas. If you notice, this film doesn't have too many interviews. I felt that the songs are powerful enough to tell the story. So I just let the songs speak for themselves.

The setting was very basic. This was a winter night where we filmed about 20 to 25 songs. It was just free flowing.

This was not just pargeet or bhatiali, they were singing bhajans, they were singing baul songs

I regret I could only choose three songs for the particular cut, but there are many songs we recorded.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: They also sang an Assamese song. Unfortunately this is not part of the Assamese musicology.

PARASHER BARUAH: Absolutely not. The fact is, in 2019, this was a discovery, even for me. The fact that I go to another corner of my own state and get exposed to a whole new genre of songs, a whole new community that was singing it, which has never been accepted or never been brought out and acknowledged is also part of Assamese culture.

Language has always played a very important role, especially in Assam. There is a large clash between the Assamese and Bengali culture, traditionally. But if you notice, this is also true about this community. There has always been a constant battle, about their language and how that affected their identity as an Assamese.

Over the years we have had many different censuses and now the CAA(Citizenship Amendment Act) is here. So there was this whole thing of why they were taking Assamese as an official language, yet in their homes they still speak a dialect which is largely Bengali.

So, this dichotomy is there constantly, which I felt was also a great way of showing multicultural identities we have had in Assam. Most of the indigenous Assamese, tribals, or ethnic groups have their own language. They have claims to the land.

It might have been too subtle but if you notice in the film, one of the singers actually switches between Assamese and Bengali. I felt that actually said everything to me.

I didn't want to over qualify it. I didn't want to underline it any further because people who knew, would know this was actually something about being multilingual, about being bilingual, speaking both in Assamese and Bengali. That actually is their story.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: The film opens with Kurajat Ali, walking down from his village to the cart. He sits on the boat, and he sings. It's almost an exotic experience for an urban city dweller. However, to remind the viewers and to remind ourselves that Assam is yet again going through a wave of floods. We know how devastating the river Brahmaputra can be.

However poignant it can be, when this film was being shot, these people, Kurajat Ali and others were actually holding on to whatever they had. Despite the floods, they protected the papers required for the NRC citizenship process. That is something you witnessed.

How difficult was it to actually talk to them about it during a time when they are going through floods and at the same time, trying to prove their citizenship?

PARASHER BARUAH: Well, in fact, not just then but even the whole year after that, I mean the struggle to hold on to their paper is a bigger struggle than holding on to their own material possessions because they know if they lose those pieces of paper which talks about their legacy talks about their claim to something which could be a certificate issued by the local government or could be a school leaving certificate. These are precious. So last year, when most of the villagers were going through this flood they were asked to move into the relief camps. They held on, they didn't go because they knew that if they moved out of that place, their claim to that place would be gone.

So they held on to the piece of paper, in high ground, in their own villages because they didn't want to move out. I saw that, over the end of last year when the CAA debate was going on and they were called for NRC hearings.

Unfortunately, in fact, villagers from one of the neighboring villages lost their lives in a bus accident when they were called to upper Assam overnight to appear for NRC.

So, the piece of paper becomes very important and things that we as Assamese take for granted, has become their lifeline. So, that piece of document has become the most critical document for their future.

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: Now that the area is again flooded. Are you filming the area again? Are you planning to do a sequel to this documentary or, you mentioned that you believe in how the community can be actually enabled to document and archive their own lives?

PARASHER BARUAH: I do want to do a longer film because I feel there's so much that needs to be explored. Right from their songs to the history to the current political struggle they're going through and about identity.

I want to spend some time with them during the floods. Unfortunately this year (2020) it's been quite challenging. Otherwise the best thing that has happened is the community has started documenting themselves. Two of the boys who helped in making the film have started documenting their lives there.

They've started a YouTube channel, and they've been filming stories from the community about the hardships that they're going through during the floods. Although I'm not documenting them myself, there's documentation happening as we speak.

That's really heartening to know that they don't need us any longer, they're doing it themselves. Not that I claim to be an enabler but that has happened in the last one year since my film was shot.

So somewhere I'm glad that I have been associated with being part of some technical change there. Their films are very direct. I keep telling them that they need to tell their own stories then they will be heard.

Documentation by the people: "The whole of Assam is now affected by severe floods. Lakhs of people are affected. They are facing endless trouble at this time. In Assam, flood is no more a natural phenomenon. Floods in Assam are now a natural calamity which bring every year limitless adversity to the common people. The conveyor of calamity is the mighty Brahmaputra river which has thousands of chars (river islands), where the people are now living a wretched life as they are badly affected by the floods. The floods have already ruined their crops completely."

"How many times can you borrow someone else's boat?

I don't have my own banana grove. Where will I get banana plants to make a raft?

My husband went with other people and got these slender banana stems.

I sit indoors all day. Today I ask my husband to go in someone else's boat so that I can go on the raft . Today I'm seeing the world outside my house after a long time.

We don't have a cow shed. All our livestock are at the camp. We don't have our own boat. We have to depend on other people's boats. All crop were submerged and ruined. Everything gone."

"What will you live on this coming season?"

"God knows."

"Bad luck has become the lifelong companion of these char people. Decade after decade the floods have been causing disasters and endless trouble to the char people.

God knows when these endless troubles will be resolved. This is the major question of char people at this time."

(Transcript of the discussion following the primiere of the film at IIC. Transcribed by Sumedha Maheshwari)

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art East

India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi
C D Deshmukh Auditorium

feb/2020
22

Films

2:00 pm

Fading Ink

The Dying Art of Naga Tattoos

(60 min/2010)

Directors: Design Stash

3:15 pm

Sabin Alun

The Broken Song

(52 min/2015)

Script & Direction: Altaf Mazid

Film courtesy: Public Service Broadcasting Trust

Recipient of the Cinema Experimenta Award, John Abraham National Film Awards, Signs, Kerala 2016; Indian Panorama 2016

4:15 pm

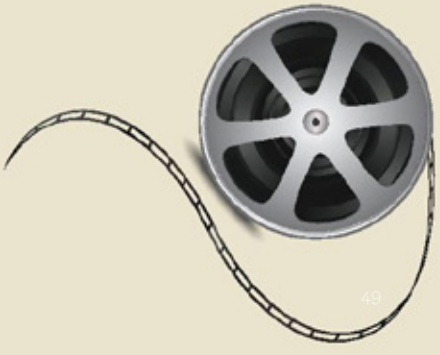
Rong'Kuchak

Echoes

(30 min/2015)

Director: Dominic Sangma

Recipient of the Volumina Special Awards, Short Ca'Foscari Short Film Festival 9, 2019



Presented by New Imaginations, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication in collaboration with India International Centre

NEW IMAGINATIONS
Jindal School of Journalism and Communication

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

Design support

aspire design

Language

Artwork by Aarya Yadav

history is theirs whose
language is the sun

art East

India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi

Seminar Halls I-III
Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Complex

feb/2020
22, 6.30 p.m.

Whose Language is it Anyway

Harish Trivedi Lalnunthangi
Chhangte Ganesh Devy
Shobhana Chellaiah

Language is the most central and mutually binding feature of communities. During the past few decades, the world has started experiencing language decline on an unprecedented scale. This talk will focus on the reasons for the decline. It will outline the process of language evolution from the beginning to our time and explain the nature of the evolutionary turn human communication has taken.

It will present a perspective on the nature of the transformation occurring within human languages and within the human society. The talk will illustrate the perspective by using examples of Indian languages.

Chair
Anvita Abbi

Presented by New Imaginations, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication in collaboration with India International Centre

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"Whose Language is it Anyway?"

KISHALAY BHATTACHARJEE: This time, the theme of ArtEast is 'The Story of Telling', about the story of language. Each year we try and explore the Northeast region. It's easy to say Northeast region, for people to understand, but the term 'Northeast' sits very uncomfortably with me. Firstly, I don't see the Northeast as one homogenous region. Secondly, it's important to decolonize the borders and try and see the region as a much larger space. When we discuss language with reference to that region, it becomes clearer that is not one small region really. There is such a diversity of languages out there, it's virtually impossible to club them together. When we conceived this festival back in 2017, we said that we would work and explore around the areas of art, migration, livelihood, and displacement. What I didn't realize then or didn't see then, is that when people migrate, languages are lost as well. I think one of the huge losses that we are witnessing in our time is the decline of languages or the loss of languages due to migration. In this edition of the festival, we try to highlight the idea of language federalism.

One of the largest internally displaced people are living in that region, say, in the part of lower Assam which borders West Bengal on one hand and Kamrup and Guwahati on the other. Lakhs of internally displaced people came out there as indentured labourers working in tea gardens 150 years ago. In 5 waves of very violent ethnic violence that wrecked lower Assam, several millions of these people were displaced. One of them are the Miyahs.

Miyah is a term that has become a pejorative in Assam over a period of time. And the situation that we see in this country today with the Citizenship Amendment Bill and the National Registrar of Citizens really takes off from there, from that part of the country, with the Miyahs. Now, there is a new genre of poetry called Miyah poetry, where these people talk about exile, homelessness, uprootedness, statelessness, and while we were grappling with the Miyah problem in Assam, what erupted in the neighbourhood was, of course, the Rohingya crisis, the largest, stateless and most persecuted people in the world. Which language, we thought, can claim to include the sense of exile? Is it conceivable that language has its own language, that exile has its own language? If it does, wouldn't this language have to be so terrifying that it would destroy those who speak it? The language in which we speak lives as long as we speak it. Once we fall silent the language is lost too.

The Chakmas, amongst the first climate refugees, the Rohingyas amongst the most persecuted communities in the world, the Kashmiri pandits exiled in their own country, the Miyahs of Assam perceived as illegal citizens, Moos mostly unknown in their own land, and the Tibetans who still hope to return to their land someday, they all belong nowhere. So, the art that we have in the gallery and the various programs that we've had and the films that we've screened really gives expression to what it means to be away from home: memories, longing, loss, anger, and pain. And the visual language here is broken, fragmented, exilic, with images of uprootedness, diasporic, and displaced existence and we thought that the final session which we usually call the 'Intersection', should address the question of 'Whose language is it anyway?'.

Thanks so much for the speakers and the participants of the session. We have Shobhana Chelliah, Lalnunthangi Chhangte, Harish Trivedi who will be in conversation with Anvita Abbi.

Anvita is an eminent linguist and social scientist, and her work on tribal and other minority languages of South Asia has been exemplary. She has bagged several national and international awards including the Padma Shri in 2013, and the Kenneth Hale Award in 2015 by the Linguistic Society of America for standing lifetime contributions to the documentation and description of languages in India. An editor and author of 22 books, she has worked on all six language families of India, extending from the Himalayas to the Andaman Islands. She taught linguistics at the JNU for 38 years. She also identified a new language family of India named the Great Andamanese later corroborated by geneticists. Currently, she's been busy documenting endangered languages of the Nicobar Islands. I'm handing this over to Anvita.

ANVITA ABBI: Good Evening. India, as we know, is linguistically a very diverse country and the major contribution to this diversity is from the Northeast. As we know, the states are called the Seven Sisters – Arunachal

Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. But if we add Sikkim, there are eight sisters. So, these eight states provide the largest numbers of linguistic diversity to India. But in addition to diversity, they are also mainly unintelligible. So, the communication between them is now being established by contact Hindi. Hindi is emerging in this community so there's an Arunachali Hindi, a Nagamese Hindi and there's a Meghalaya Hindi. So, it's very interesting how the contact languages have now taken root. The Hindi there is very different from the standard Hindi that we speak. But it is not only making communication possible across different States and different tribes, it has made inroads to the extent that I attended some religious congregation which was conducted in some contact Hindi and attended by various different tribes. Not only that, but inter-marriages are also taking place. Because of Hindi, people can now communicate with each other.

You would be surprised to know that most of the languages that are there in the Northeast are also, now, being written down. We generally know that the languages of India, the large number of 800 languages were never written down. But in the Northeast, in all these eight states, quite a few languages are being written down, and they are being used as a medium of instruction in school or sometimes as a second or third language which is a very happy situation. However, the fact that India has retained or maintained its languages so far is also because the oral tradition has been continuing. If the oral tradition had not continued, we would have lost many languages because a large number of languages in India are transferred inter generationally through oral transmission. When I talk of oral tradition and oral transmission, it brings in a very interesting question that when the language dies, what happens to the power of narration and the songs stay in your memory for a very long time? The diasporic community is an indicator of that. People who migrated from this country to Trinidad and other places still remember their songs, but they don't remember the language after maybe 50 or 100 years if it is not transferred orally. So, the narrative powers are a very important power that sustains your language and my experience working with a large number of tribal languages in this country indicates that this is one genre of literature that has to be sustained to preserve languages.

The one narration that every society has is a creation tale. This is an interesting aspect. When I was working on Sikkim's Lepchas, I realised there was a very interesting tale about their origin of the fresh snow of the Lepcha Mountains, and the Lepchas believed that they are actually the offspring of these two big peaks – the Tian Shan and the Kanchenjunga – which are husband- wife and gave birth to the Lepchas. Not only that, each and every peak of Kanchenjunga is associated with a clan which they call Moos. So, there are 108 Moos amongst Lepchas, and each Moo is associated with one particular peak, and you have to identify your peak because that's where you're supposed to go after death. These are very interesting beliefs and values.

One of the reasons of language death is that there's a massive language shift. Once the language shift takes place, languages die. But as a linguist, we are also more concerned about the vitality of the language. It may happen that the language does not die, despite having a dislocation, because some of the features or some of the realms where languages are used are intact. But as I said, the narrative

power goes first so maybe it is retained in some other form, some day-to-day conversation. Vitality indices have also been prepared against which we measure the health of a language, so it is very important to understand not only the language endangerment in totality or as a generic, rubric term but also as the vitality of the languages. Each language in the Northeast is not at the same vitality scale. Having said that since we have among the panellists here, the linguists and translators. Linguists are also translators because when we work on unknown or lesser-known languages, we have to give a very appropriate translation so that the community who don't belong to that linguistic community understand.

Harish Trivedi, has been a Professor in English Studies at Delhi University for a very long time. He's widely known for his Postcolonialism and translation studies. I think his prominent contribution had been to hone the distinction between cultural translation and translating cultures. The former being the instrument to kill diversity because he thinks that when there's a cultural translation, it kills the multiplicity of the thoughts, it leads to a monolingualism or monolithic aspect of the language. So, there are various issues that when you translate, that come up. But I would be very happy to know what he thinks of the oral traditions, the languages which are preserved in the oral forms. When you translate, what kinds of challenges do you face? Because when I tried to do it, I realised I cannot translate the subjectivity of the narrator or the speaker. Other than the fact that there are very culture-specific words, a lexicon is still easy to handle. More difficult as a linguist for me is to handle the translation of the structures of the language, the grammatical component as we say. I also had experiences across cultures, which need no geographical boundaries. In the simple story I told you about the creation myth of Lepchas, I realised this myth is shared across countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and parts of Darjeeling. All these communities share the same story of belonging to the same two peaks of the Kanchenjunga, so there's no geographical boundaries which bind these cultures. I would be very happy if Harish could share his thoughts on this, including the work that he's already done.

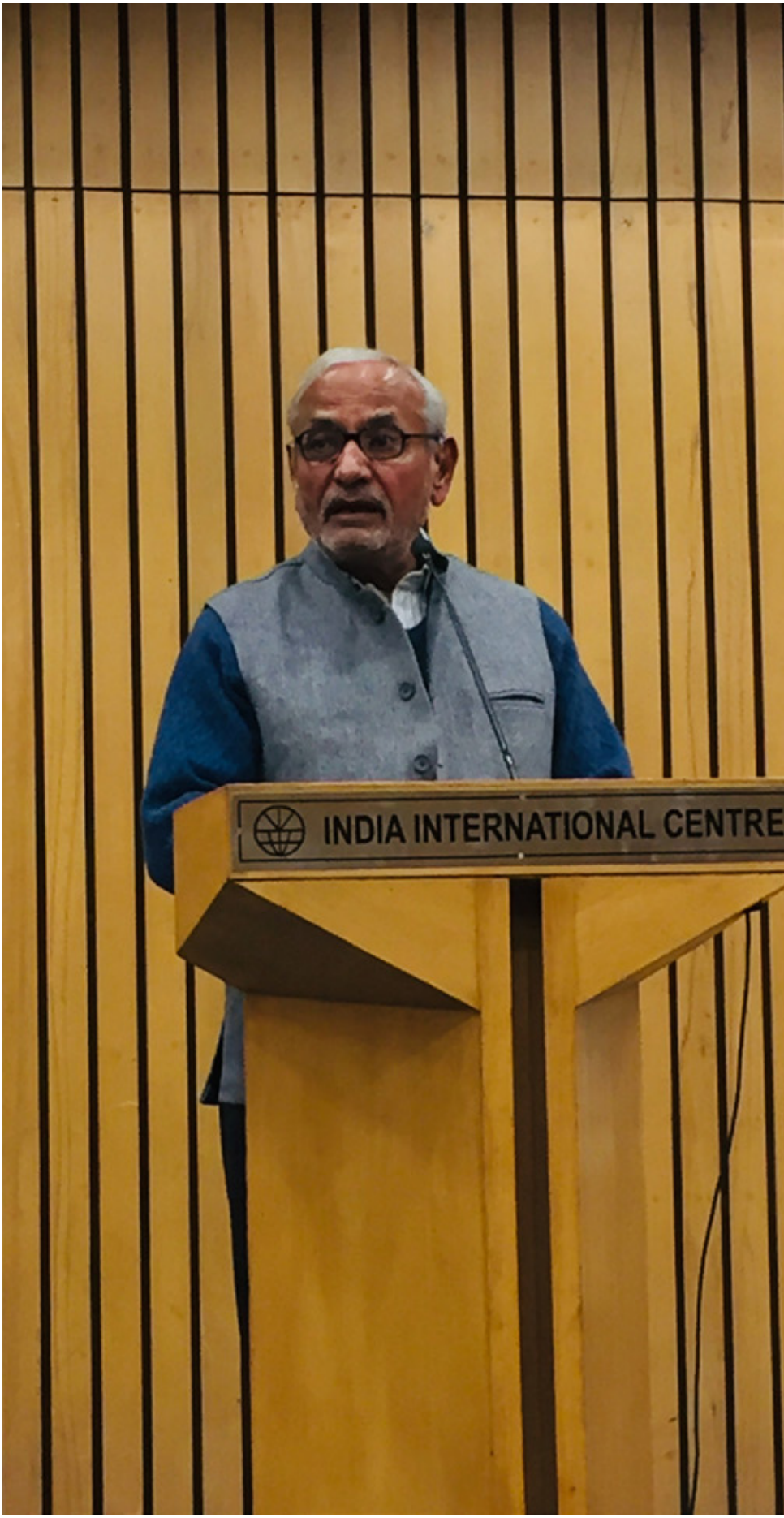
HARISH TRIVEDI: Thank you, Anvita. It's a privilege and honour for me to be invited to this panel and to contribute some of my thoughts about language, some of my perplexities and contradictions and paradoxes in my thinking, as indeed in everybody's thinking. One cannot wrap one's mind around the complexity of language and the complexity of several languages existing together and sometimes perhaps at the expense of each other. Yesterday was 'Ekushe', the 21st of February which triggered off a major linguistic and political movement in a subcontinent, especially in the East. That was the day 15 students of Dhaka University were shot dead because they wanted their language, Bengali, protected and they wanted to flourish against the imposition of Urdu by West Pakistan. We all know what that led to. It began with language and the World Mother Tongue Day, which was also yesterday. They decided to make it the 21st of February for the very good reason that 15 students, champions of their own language in Dhaka, were shot dead that day. Language can transcend, as in this case, many other affiliations of identity like region and religion, which is the basis on which Pakistan is formed. All kinds of identities give way to language sometimes, because that may be one of our primary loyalties when it comes to figuring out who we are. At the same time, we are talking about smaller languages talking about smaller, oral languages, talking about languages which do not communicate amongst themselves.

I like the reference to Hindi not only because I'm Hindi-wala and therefore in everybody's eyes I'm a Hindi chauvinist. Everybody believes that Hindi is oppressing other languages. Maybe we are, but it's not me. We are not aware of it. All the languages in India feel threatened by Hindi, including the Ekushe language, Bengali, which is the second biggest language. Yet it's very nice to know about people falling in love, people intermarrying because of Hindi. Once when I was in Bangladesh, I heard this from an English teacher there who said her students speak Bengali all the time except that they speak English in class and they fall in love with Hindi. Why? Because of Bollywood. Because of the songs. A popular language of expressing love has evolved through Bollywood, which is very odd. Indeed, it seems to me. As for translation and orality, translation is basically bluff. All translations are bad. Let's begin with that assumption, and translation is bluff because translation is meant for somebody who does not know the original language, so how would you judge?

Once I spoke to the great Hindi novelist Agyeya who, himself had translated quite a few works. He translated a short, slim novel by Jainendra, a very great novelist himself, and I said to him that I've been asked to write on it. A new edition had come out, and I had been asked to review it. I had not read the original of that novel. I'd only got the translation, and Agyeya smiled and said to me, "You may have wondered why I left out one whole chapter." I had not wondered. Because I had not read the original at that point. I was going to before I wrote about it, but I had not at that moment. You can do something like that; you can get away with murder, except that the reader takes no interest.

As for orality, an oral translation would amount to interpretation. People are speaking and to translate that instantly is another branch of translation which is much more difficult. So many heads of state meet. Even if they know English, they pretend not to know English, speak in their own languages, and there's usually a young lady sitting behind, and the fate of nations hangs on her competence as to what he said, or she said. It's a very difficult task. But orality in India does not have the same significance, same place, as orality in the West for the last so many 100 years. Even now ours is largely an oral society and not only in remote areas like the North East or the Andamans.

I have grown up with a lot of oral transmission coming to me, which I retained without ever having to read it. I remember many verses of poetry in Hindi, not so much in English, but in Urdu and Sanskrit and there is a Sanskrit verse which I once quoted in an article of mine – 'पुस्तकस्था तु या वद्या,परहस्तगतं च धनम् | कार्यकाले समुत्तपन्ने न सा वद्या न तद् धनम्' (Knowledge that is written down in a book and money that you have lent to a friend, is not knowledge, is not money, because



when you need it is not there). So, I quoted this in an article on orality in India. I have never seen it. It's just recited to me by somebody in my childhood. I liked it and remembered it. Now that book was being published to which I contributed this essay in London. The copy editor seized upon it, and she said, "But you haven't provided a footnote." I hadn't provided a footnote to something saying that which is printed is no good; it should be oral. So, I said I don't know where to look for a footnote because it was transmitted orally to me. But she insisted, and the editor turned out to be on her side than mine. Why? Because he wanted the book out. So, I had to go hunt, and I began from scratch.

So, when you migrate, do you migrate away from your language, or do you clutch to your language? Is it one of a few positions that you hold dear to your heart even while you migrate? I think both are true. We are very upset by migrants being treated badly, and we should be. We should speak up for them. At the same time, I think a fair proportion of migration in the world is voluntary to some degree. There's some that is coerced, some that is forced, one can't draw the line very neatly. And those who choose to migrate to another country are migrating to another languages as well very often, and this is part of the territory, part of the package. Sometimes they migrate in distress, without credentials, without permission. Sans-papiers, as the French, say, without papers. Papers are in much debate and headlines now. The term for migrants, those who have come without papers, illegal migrants, they don't call them illegal migrants. They don't have documentation. So if one takes the decision to improve oneself economically or to save oneself politically from political threat, what is the bargain involved there? It's a very tricky question.

Earlier in Greek society, if you're leaving the Republic and going out, it was only because you had been banished for some very serious crime. There was only one punishment. Either you could be put to death, or you could go outside the Republic and live your life away from your language, away from your linguistic community, and many people preferred death. To migrate like that, to be banished like that, was the fate literally worse than deaths in their eyes. So, there is a tremendous amount of complexity which of course has risen out of evolution. The word evolution is mentioned

repeatedly in the write up for this evening's program that there is an evolution of languages, of the linguistic situation, and so on. But evolution also involves the survival of the fittest. Why are we speaking in English about dying languages? English certainly is not a dying language. If there's one language killing off other languages, it is not only Hindi. It is also English.

A couple of days ago I was in Lucknow at something called an Awadh conclave, and one of the panels I participated in was about Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb. Our moderator was a High Court judge, so he wanted to frame the issues as they say, in legal reasons. And he says that in Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb, let's decide what is Ganga and what is Jamuna. It's a question nobody asks. Because in Ganga-Jamuni tehzeeb, the two participants are Hindus and Muslims, Hindi and Urdu. Would we like to name which is which? No. Again we fuzz it. It's a fuzzy area. If we say Ganga Jamuna as Hindu – Muslim, Ganga will obviously have to be Hindi, though Jamuna is equally Hindi. So, I don't know where we're going with that. There is another thing wrong with that metaphor which we all take for granted because we cannot confront reality. We live behind these pleasant metaphors. One other complication is if you look at the map, Ganga and Jamuna, keep a respectable distance from each other for much of their course. They meet at only one place which is my city Allahabad, in this context aptly called Prayagraj. That's where they meet. They don't meet in Allahabad. They meet in Prayagraj. And after that, what happens to the confluence between two languages? One language disappears altogether. After Allahabad, is only Ganga. So, the metaphor is totally inappropriate. And yet we are beguiled by this metaphor. So, I don't know whether I should advocate some hard thinking. I'm myself a bit scared of that. Whether at the confluence or other rivers, one should not rock the boat, specially in difficult times. And yet I think unless we frame the issues somewhat mercilessly we're not going anywhere except to repeat pious cliches. That's where I am. As would be obvious to you. Entirely confused on both sides. But that's how far I have got, no further. Thank you.

ANVITA ABBI: The confluence is a good example. These languages after the Sangam are called Milli Jhooli in the local parlance so Hindi, Urdu are not two different languages, they are Milli Jhooli languages. Because it's very difficult to segregate how much is Urdu, how much is Hindi in the spoken language. I would like to call upon Professor Lalnunthangi Chhangte. She's worked on the Kuki-Chin languages of the Tibeto-Burman family. She, herself is a Mizo. She has been a documentor, a linguist, translator, translating several languages of the Kuki Chin branch of languages into English. We would like her to share her experiences of how much language is retained in translation or lost and the challenges she faced.

LALNUNTHGTI CHHANGTE: As you can see, my name is very long and extremely difficult for a lot of people to pronounce. Over the years since I started school, I've been asked to change my name, and I've refused, and I've said you can mispronounce my name, but you cannot change it, because it is my identity, it is given to me by my grandfather, and that's how it stays. So that's where my story begins, coming from Mizoram. When I was growing up, no one spoke Hindi. My parents couldn't speak Hindi. We had no TV back then because India had a very strict policy about television, and so it was only radio, and there was not much of a movie theater or most of the movies were English. And so even though we had to study Hindi in school, it was written Hindi. So, we could read and write, but we could not speak and we just barely passed the exams because we never heard it spoken. We had no idea of how to pronounce a lot of the words, and now as an adult, I am frequently scolded by people for not knowing Hindi. And I've had people tell me that how could I be an Indian citizen and not know Hindi? And I feel like telling them that my parents don't know Hindi, how was I supposed to learn Hindi.

In the area where I come from, Mizoram, even today lot of people are not comfortable even in English, let alone Hindi. But a very interesting phenomena, I have found, is that a lot of the young people watch TV serials, and they follow it. I think Chhota Bheem was very popular among children and in a lot of these Hindi serials for children and young adults. They watch that, and I don't know how much they absorb from the conversation. So that's a huge generational difference, from my generation to those you know from the next generation. I studied linguistics not really knowing what I was going to do with it, and when I was in graduate studies and later on after I finished my PhD abroad and came back, I naively thought that I would come back

and look for languages that did not have a written system. Because I loved books while growing up, I read every single book in the house. Finally, in 8th or 9th grade, I asked my father, "I have read all the books in his house. Can you give me another book?" He gave me Aristotle and Plato. And that was the end of my searching for books. I didn't quite understand at that age. But I thought everyone should have books to read, and they should be able to have books they could understand in their language. So, I started studying languages in Arunachal, and I worked with the Nyishi and Adi. I made alphabets for them, and interestingly people are using those alphabets. At that time, there was no talk of endangered languages or preserving languages. In fact, in those days most linguists were only interested in theory and didn't know what I was doing. They thought what I was doing was rubbish. They didn't really care for my work. Because in those days language documentation, that's what we call studying languages now, was not at all in fashion. So, I started this way before this trend was popular in the linguistics circle. I just did that because I just love books myself and I thought everyone should have a good book to read.

I've really been surprised to find that all of those orthographies or alphabets that I have created are still being used today. Because I did them using linguistic principles. In those days people still used typewriters so I wanted them to have an alphabet they could type on the typewriter and later on I've been working with the younger generation using fonts that they can pull up on their phone apps. So that's how things have changed for me. That is my experience in languages. Even though I'm from Mizoram, I never grew up there. My father worked in the government service, so we were always travelling outside, and we spent a lot of time in Assam. But I never studied Assamese though I can speak colloquial Assamese very poorly. I can communicate in Assamese rather than Hindi. Now that people are doing language documentation and creating orthographies and scripts, I'm realising what I've been doing all my life is actually not what a lot of people would call rubbish, but

something that was going to be useful.

This way I'm really grateful for technology because when I started out, we just had those cassette tape recorders, and I had several boxes which we have just digitized this summer. Professor Shobhana will explain that part of it. So it was very difficult, and I had to carry this big, heavy thing with the microphones. But now it's so much easier. It's not just video cameras anymore, it's just your cell phone, and that's all you need now. You get a fairly good sound with a lot of things, and if you have the right technique you can actually record very suitable, I won't say good quality. I say good enough for the villagers because they don't need the high-quality sounds.

It's good enough for them if they can listen on the phone and we now have ways of developing phone apps. So, they can pull it up quickly on their phones. And I have travelled in areas where there is no phone signal. You don't even get half a bar. You have no electricity to charge the phones, but somehow people find a way to charge their phones, and you have a gathering, and all the adults are up taking pictures of the children singing and dancing, and that's what the phones are used for in the villages.

ANVITA ABBI: You have been involved in translating several languages of Arunachal?

LALNUNTHANGI CHHANGTE: Yes, I have been helping the translators and also developing dictionaries in the different languages and publishing for them. I found a very simple and cheap way to publish. I just copy them back to front from our copier. And then we just staple and cut it and take it to the press, and they can bind it for us. They can print something that would cost one lakh in less than ₹5000.

ANVITA ABBI: These languages that you've worked on like Adi and Nyishi and other languages, they're very different from each other. Nyishi and Adi together make up half the population of Arunachal. And the difference lies in their linguistic structures. So, when you translate one language to another, how would you establish a perfect or close relationship to the original?

LALNUNTHANGI CHHANGTE: I haven't done a whole lot of translation myself. Actually, I'm helping the native speakers to translate different literatures into their language, and I help check them. We also check for meaning to make sure people understand what they translated is correct. Also, with the dictionaries, it helps us a lot. Actually, we're still at a very initial stages because we still have to figure out spelling, whether or not to join words, and the words to use. So these are still issues that we're dealing with. We are on our way to develop literature. But I'm from Mizoram and Mizoram has a very rich heritage of literature. It has the third-highest literacy rate in India, and it would be higher except for the unmanned border crossings or unchecked border crossings. Because Mizoram is surrounded by Burma and Bangladesh and both countries having been unstable, we have a lot of people coming into Mizoram, and a lot of them were not literate. So that has reduced the literacy rate of Mizoram.

ANVITA ABBI: Did these people learn Mizo?

LALNUNTHANGI CHHANGTE: Not all them. Some of them do, but Mizo is the lingua franca in Mizoram state itself. Other languages like Hindi and English are not used very much in public.

ANVITA ABBI: Thank you. You've discussed more about the publication problems that you have. Is it because the language is so different in tonal languages that the English translation or the publication also becomes difficult? Because you don't have diacritics for tones?

LALNUNTHANGI CHHANGTE: That's not so much the problem. The problem is with the community deciding what they like, and even now there are several versions of writing systems, orthographies and last year I was

invited to a literature festival in Arunachal where we discussed all the issues. I said the issues we're discussing today were the same issues that we discussed 20 years ago. We still haven't made progress, and I'm sorry I'm very disappointed in that. That is really the main drawback we're facing.

ANVITA ABBI: Thank You, Chhangte. I will now move on to Professor Shobhana Chelliah. She's a linguist, a very famous one in fact. And she has been working on the Tibeto-Burman language family specially the language known as Meitei or Manipuri. She has written a grammar which I read many years ago. But she had also been working on the other aspects of the Meitei language. She is currently working on creating a lexical database and grammatical sketch to contribute to the revitalization efforts of the Lamkang language, again it's a language which is spoken in Manipur and another Tibeto- Burman language. In the past, she served as the program director for the Documenting Endangered Languages Program at the National Science Foundation. She, along with the students and colleagues is visiting India from the University of North Texas where she's a professor and Associate Dean to run a workshop on language documentation and archiving in collaboration with the IGNCA. So, this is how she has been brought to India. And since she has a very widespread experience working on not only just these two languages, like Meitei and Lamkang but other languages we'd like to know - What is your experience with language sustenance by these small communities? What you think about translating such different kinds of languages when you come across into English or any other language?

SHOBHANA CHELLIAH: Thank you very much for having me. Last time I came was with my father about 25 years ago, we had nimbu pani and pakodas outside the hall, and they wouldn't let me inside. So let me tell you that I got my Bachelors and Masters here in India and Dr. Trivedi does not remember me but I was one of his students at St. Stephens. I wasn't a troublemaker, so that's good. I am a documentary linguist, as you said. Just let me connect by explaining what documentary linguistics does with the translation aspect. So, what we are doing is trying to create a long-term preservation of a rich heritage of all of our cultures, by recording for posterity, linguistic information. Which, of course, embodies a lot of the cultural information for communities whose languages are being lost. This is the process of creating long-term repository places where information can be stored. Long term means that you have to start with very good data. A lot of that has to do with audio-visual data, so we do audio recordings, video recordings. We save those things in formats that can be repurposed and reused, so technology is a big part of it.

This past month I've been here with my students and some of my colleagues. Mark Phillips is here, he's the Associate Dean for digital libraries from my University. Chhangte was with me.

I had several people working on trying to teach how to do good metadata, how to do metadata on audiovisual information. So once that is done, and you will have a story from the culture that hadn't actually recorded itself or had a writing system. We would record something, save that as a file and then use certain technologies to do translation. Our first step is always transcription, and we use a lot of native speakers' help to have them repeat the things slowly so that we can write it down in either International Phonetic Alphabet or some practical orthography. That then seals it. It gives us something to work with. We then take that and put that into a program that helps us go and translate word for word.

We still haven't gotten the great translation yet.

We really don't know what's going on, and a lot of times the speakers themselves can only give us a feeling because we may have some contact language. It may not be English; we may make it up. For example, if I'm working on Lamkang, which is the language spoken in Chandel farther down from Imphal. So the word for word gives us a sense. Then we work through the story and are able to kind of piece together what the different sentences mean. And as we get farther along in that process, we can at some point, maybe after 10 years of working on a text, feel like we get some literature out of it. Really all the way through, we're doing very close linguistic analysis. What are the sounds? That's the transcription part. What are the words like? That's the word for word, how the words put together? How are the sentences put together? That's the linguistic analysis then leads to the kind of rough sentence translation and at some point we're going to get to a literature. Then what we want to do is to save all that in a place where people can access it, whether it's us or community members. Or people who want to know more about translation. They can get it, and then he can work further to create, you know, great anthologies of anthologies of oral literatures.

And how do we do that? We need very good archives. We need accessible archives, long-term archives and places where people can go without having to pay. So, this is what we're working on as documentary linguist- to create a long term accessible repository of original first hand data that has a handle on it that can then be used by the rest of us to understand these cultures, and by the cultures to revive and reclaim and assert identity, to celebrate their identity. Even if it's not going to be a flourishing language, you have 300 speakers of Purum just outside of Imphal. They probably won't ever have 40,000 or a million speakers, but at least they can go back in a certain time and look and see what their ancestors did. So that's the translation part. But the trick for us linguists, and I think we're all cut from the same cloth, we're excited by the science of it. How are the words put together? But by the time we get to 10 years, we're also excited by the translation part of it. Like, I get the joke now. A lot of these stories are really funny, and you go like,

huh? Why is that funny? It takes a while to get then to that part where you can laugh with the communities at these jokes. So that's it to answer the translation part.

Then I wanted to just tie into the migration issue that was brought up by Kishalay. The problem that the Kashmiri pundits have undergone or the Muslims and people in northeast India, is the violence that these kids and adults have felt has been constant and slow and almost always there. It has not been there for just a few years. It's been since the 1950s. You could say even since 1947. You could say before that. But that constant violence has led to the kind of migration that is constant and also a trickle. We sometimes don't think about it, but many Manipuri kids are outside of Manipur, they aren't what we call the mainland. So, the idea also that you brought up Dr Trivedi of people migrating by choice, of course, sometimes that's not entirely true. So, what does that do to their language and culture?

And so, we studied that again, from a very scientific perspective. We record, for example, the Lamkang of the people who live in the villages. And then we compare it with the Lamkang of the kids who live in Hyderabad. We wanted to see what kind of attrition has gone on. Are they really losing their language? Is it changing? We find a lot of simplification of highly complex structures of the agreement going away for those kids. And also, they don't feel very comfortable with many of the older terms. So, they've come down to very basic interactions that they can do. So, they are losing their language. And it's unlike when Chinese people go to the US, there's a constant wave of new Chinese migration. So, the language is constantly being replenished and that connection with the motherland, if you want to say, is always there. That compared to, say, Italian Americans where that migration has stopped. Many people who have Italy as their roots, have forgotten their language. Coming back to Lamkang, they're going to lose their language because the community, only has young children, 20 to 25 years old. They only use it to say, "Hey, should we have a party, and what should we bring for the party?" That's like the extent to what they need to use the language for. So that slow violence has caused that one thing.

Another thing that it's caused is a kind of unrootedness, where people really need something to hang on to. They need something to make them feel like our communities' matter; we are worth saving, we have a future together, we need to be celebrated, and so on. And the language seems to be the conduit for that. I'm involved in a project called Language Endangerment and Political Instability. We're trying to become aware that of one of the root causes of language endangerment is political instability and trying to put that into our textbooks because, for us, as linguists, we don't often talk about it, because we don't do politics. We should be teaching and studying politics and if not, then at least political history and putting that into our analysis of why these things happen. But the Northeast is, unfortunately, an example for some of that. I think if we could put that into our understanding, we could maybe do a better job of helping do the intervention to save some of these languages. We're working with political scientists to figure out how we can bring the stories of the people who have been undergoing these kinds of negative experiences to our databases that we're collecting so that those can also be available for people like

us to understand how migration has been affecting language stability and vitality.

ANVITA ABBI: Thank you Shobhana, you discussed at length about the issue of dislocation, and all of us are very concerned these days in India for good reason. As far as dislocation is concerned, it all depends upon the kind of community that is dislocated and the kind of circumstances under which they are dislocated. I remember when I was in JNU, we did a couple of studies on this and we studied a community called Naikan community who migrated from Andhra's Telugu speaking region, 600 to 700 years ago, to Kerela's Palakkad region. They learnt Malayalam so well that it was difficult to distinguish whether they were native speakers or not. However, they were bilinguals, so we compared the tone they used to speak Telugu to the modern Telugu, which brought up a lot of differences that were expected. The interesting aspect was that there was a whole life cycle pattern in these dislocated communities. The Naikan community started with Telugu speaking monolingualism. They moved to bilingualism – speaking very good Malayalam and Telugu. But when they become old, they go back to the monolingual aspect of Telugu, and no matter how much you coax them, they all will say, "We've forgotten our Malayalam." But I'm sure they have not. So this was one community.

But then we also studied another community called the Goans, the Konkans, who migrated from Goa to the Kerala region. These Saraswat Brahmans who migrated and took the Kudumbis with them, another Konkanese speakers, but of lower strata, the servant class. The current Kudumbis in Kerala have completely merged with the local community, and they speak very good Malayalam. But the Saraswat Brahmans, at the highest level of the social strata or the higher caste, have retained their Konkani and are very proud of this fact. But Kudumbis do not bother. They think that forgetting their language is the best thing. So even someone in Deccan College of Pune, studying these dislocated tribes, after the Narmada Andolan, which was fruitless and the tribals were still dislocated, are saying that it is not only that when you forget your language, purposely or forcefully, but also that you forget the context of the language. So, the entire contextualization is lost, and that's the most agonizing and painful experience. That's what these communities are reporting that "We just don't want to even think of where we were." So, dislocation is bothering politicians, cultural artists, literature people, and linguists for very different reasons. I'm very happy that, in a very short while, we could discuss a couple of issues.

AUDIENCE: Professor Trivedi, you mentioned people who are simultaneous translators. I went through that training, and I found it to be a very interesting thing. But you mentioned that it's terribly difficult. We are so trained and formulaic that I remember that I did not have to think. I remember passing three weeks in the conference and thinking once. Because it was like a formula. But when you translate something that is creative and poetic, you have to use your brain and think. There was only one poetic thing that I had to translate. Not only is the translator facilitated in this way, but the people who write the text that gets read out, end up also working for formulas. So, it's just amazing you know three words into it, you're also predicting ahead. So, it's actually made easy for you.

About what language one uses in the context, yesterday everyone said I should write in Creole. I'm an Indian from the Caribbean who knows Bhojpuri and Creole. I just could not do it because no one in this room knows Creole, no one in this room is part of the 'mauhal' (environment) in which I speak Creole. Whereas when I was writing my book in Bhojpuri and I had to translate it for my publisher, I couldn't translate it into English. These people know Bhojpuri and Creole, so I was translating, and my publisher was unhappy at seeing Creole. I was quite happy, though because I think you could have followed it. But it just went against their notion of style of whether the two went together. I really can't translate Bhojpuri into English, or Creole to anything else, they have a context.

HARISH TRIVEDI: Is that Trinidadian Bhojpuri you were talking about?

AUDIENCE: Yes.

HARISH TRIVEDI: Right. I've been to Trinidad, and I've found this very interesting. I've been forewarned about it. The Bhojpuri that they still use in Trinidad is by and large the Bhojpuri that they travelled there with from 1840 onwards. And I also found that the Tamils who went there from South India also use Bhojpuri. Bhojpuri is the lingua franca of Trinidad. This time warp, language being arrested without organic growth, because

its being exported is one of the more fascinating phenomena. It's the kind of thing that you were talking about Anvita and the attachment to the language community that one has left behind used to afflict people only in older ages as you were saying. And if this is true in my case, I'll soon forget all my English and speak only in Hindi. But at the same time, it seems to be even younger people, specially second generation. Shobhana would know this better than I do since she lives there, they are called heritage kids because they come and enroll for Hindi, Marathi, and Bengali. Sometimes they form the majority of the class in which these languages are being taught in the South Asia departments in the USA. The locals may not want to learn it, and the Pentagon funds it for strategic reasons – they call it critical languages, and it is done for greater defense of the US, but it is our people who benefit from it. At least the hankering that they have for their lost languages can be revived. So, there are many complexities.

I am not persuaded at all by people enumerating to me what is lost in translation. I have taught translation in classes, I've supervised students doing translations, I myself translate. Against all the losses one could add up, there is this tremendous gain that now you can read a text that you could not have without translation. Much of the time translations work extremely well. I think translators have become more and more sophisticated and aware of what they are doing. There is such a thing as a translation fairy floating around. Even people who just get up one morning and feel inspired by some divine force to begin translating, I think they imbibe some of what's going on about the sophistication of translation and the dangers and opportunities that it offers. So, I feel that translations are actually getting better and better. I'm very sorry to say that even Google translation is getting better.

AUDIENCE: I came to India to live in India in 1979. And I've been here often since '74. At first, people said the same thing you said, "Oh, you're in a time warp. Nobody talks like this. This is really strange Bhojpuri." And I felt that their Bhojpuri was very fragmented, there was no one Bhojpuri. Nowadays, when I'm called to the podium to speak, I've not changed, I still speak

Trinidad Bhojpuri, but you guys speak like me because you've come together and I find that Lalu Prasad Yadav sounds so much like me, it's amazing.

HARISH TRIVEDI: Well, then, you have a bright future.

SHOBHANA CHELLIAH: I've been thinking of a great response to Harish's witty and pertinent comments on the Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb. So, I've been thinking about that for a while, and I wonder that despite the association with Krishna, is Jamuna connected with Muslims because it flowed through Delhi, which was the Mughal capital, and Ganga flows from one tirtha sthan (Hindu tirtha sthan) to another? The other puzzle though which I've got no answer to is Lucknow, as far as I know, is supposed to be the heart of the Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb and neither of the rivers goes there.

HARISH TRIVEDI: That's right. I made myself immensely popular there, at that discussion by saying "Na aap ke pas Ganga hai, na aapke pas Jamuna hai, aapke yaha Gomti behti, hai thodi dur me Sarayu hai, ek aur badi zordaar nadi waha behti hai jiska naam sirf Keki Daruwalla wala jante hai aur mai jaanta hu kyuki wo Barabanki mein posted the. Uska naam hai Ghaghara" (You don't have Ganga or Jamuna. Gomti River flows here. A little far away is Sarayu. There is another river whose name only Keki Daruwalla because he was posted in Barabanki, and I know. It's name is Ghaghara.) He has a poem named *The Ghaghara in Spate*. The Ghaghara in flood looks mightier than Ganga in flood. Agra is also near Jamuna. It's not just near Delhi, the first Mughal capital. But what is to be done about God Krishna? He's different. So, I don't think rivers can be identified like that.

It is as I've said, why does Lucknow claim to be the center? The answers are not very pleasing or politically correct. Because for a long time, even after the disintegration of the Mughal Empire after Aurangzeb, they became a very strong center of Muslim rule. They also promoted culture. This was not true of Kanpur or Banaras or even of Aligarh, which was again a strong Muslim center but not in the same sense of talukdars and zamindars' vested interest in the land and therefore, high culture even after the Nawabs went. So, there is a very complex economic, cultural, and social history behind Lucknow identifying itself as Ganga Jamuni. While the Ganga Jamuni language is used all over the vast Hindi area in all the ten states, there is a politics behind it being called Ganga Jamuni. There is a politics behind Lucknow claiming to be the epicenter of that. In the 1920s, when Hindustani was being promoted in a big way by both Gandhi and Premchand and many others, the Hindustani Academy was founded in 1927, what were they saying? They were saying, "Language should be mixed and commonly understood." So much for Ganga Jamuni. So, it all depends on where you come from in these matters. They are very difficult to argue with. Because you have to examine your own subject position. And then having done that, you have to examine other people's subject position equally relentlessly and with equally open eyes.

SHANKAR RAMASWAMI: Professor Trivedi, could I just add on to this question?

HARISH TRIVEDI: Have I said all the wrong things?

SHANKAR RAMASWAMI: Something also I have not quite understood about Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb, because most of my friends use it as a good

expression for many things, including communal harmony. But I've always felt as if it had a somewhat elitist sentiment to it—top-down kind of understanding. I wasn't sure if you'll agree with that or not because I'm not sure if people on the ground, the peasants of Premchand, are they also repositories of Ganga Jamuni tehzeeb? Or does it come from above and is it attributed below? Is it a democratic understanding?

HARISH TRIVEDI: That's a very good question. People think that only the top layer can formulate all these concepts or are idealistic or syncretic while the opposite very often is true. One of my best guides to understanding what was going on in the villages all over UP and perhaps also in the adjacent states is they speak either Awadhi or Braj or Bhojpuri or Magahi or whatever. There is a wonderful scene that I really love in Rahi Masoom Raza's Adha Gaon, and there is Muharram in a big way. All the people who have migrated to the cities come back home to the village to celebrate or mourn Muharram together. So, there is a mix of the urban and real locals. And they all are seated, and there is one old man sitting there at the back, someone sitting at the front goes out for a while and comes back in 5 minutes, and he finds that this old man who was seated at the back is now seated in his place. So, he says, "Aap meri jhagah kaise baith gye?" (Why did you sit in my place?) and the old man just looks up at him and smiles and says, "Tu Urdu kaha ka bole lageo? "(It's a small matter. Why are you standing on your urban dignity and speaking in Urdu?) So, for them, Urdu is foreign.

Throughout the rural landscape, there's one thing about Urdu which people don't recognise sufficiently that Urdu is always an urban and courtly language. It was never spoken in the villages. Urdu was not only urban but urbane, and it had a tremendous advantage. It reaped a wonderful harvest of sophistication, specially in poetry, but it had a price to pay at the same time. You can't have everything in a language. Hindi was thought to be rural, dusty, ganvaar. Ganvaar is the word used. But it can mean two things. Ganvaar is rustic of course in a depreciatory sense but in Umrao Jaan Ada, the novel, "Humlog jaa rahe the sadak pe toh hume dikha ki waha se panch ganvaar aa rahe hai," (We were walking on the street and we saw five villagers coming our way). Umrao doesn't know them. Panch ganvaar means five villagers. So, it begins literally and then it becomes more and more pejorative. It's a complicated thing again, but you were right Shankar. In the villages, it's very different.

ANVITA ABBI: Let me add to your impression about Urdu. This is based on the scientific linguistic study we did at JNU again on how Urdu is perceived by a common person. Unlike what the present government thinks that Urdu is the language of Muslims, it is certainly not the language of Muslims. We went to the various areas, and we interviewed the illiterate people. They said, "How can we speak Urdu. We are illiterate." So, Urdu has always been associated with the highly cultured and educated elites. Not like the general masses. Now, this has been proven without a doubt, because we had a very massive database.

HARISH TRIVEDI: Can I say one thing about JNU?

ANVITA ABBI: Yes, of course.

HARISH TRIVEDI: JNU is one of our most democratic campuses. And therefore, one of the most liberal campuses. Part of it derives from the fact that they have a very different admissions system. They actually go looking for the underprivileged. They have a very complicated point system, but it has worked. It brings people who could never have dreamt of coming to University in a place like Delhi to JNU. Having said that, there is a poem that I translated a couple of years ago by Kedarnath Singh. Kedarnath Singh was a Professor of Hindi at JNU. He came from the Bhojpuri area. It's a long poem of 2 to 3 pages. And it's title is *JNU mein Hindi*. Now, look at the difficulties of translation. This is such a simple phrase, but I can't translate it without distorting it. I'll have to say – Hindi in JNU.

The order, priority, and stress changes completely. I don't want to say Hindi in JNU, because the poet is saying *JNU mein Hindi*. But I have no option. The English language will not do it for me. If you have any suggestions, please offer them later on.

But what is the poem about? The poem is about staff quarters in JNU. And how people observe tremendous cordiality and non-sociability of the highest order, not interfering in other people's affairs, keeping to themselves. Kedarnath lived on the JNU campus. He won the Jnanpith Award and was one of the best poets of the last 50 years in Hindi. He sees a man walking along this road with an angocha (towel) on his shoulder and wearing a dhoti (long loincloth). That places him immediately. He's going away somewhat dejected.

The poet constructs a backstory and thinks that he had come to meet someone, and he didn't know how to find him. But the only people he met and could've talked to, he did not dare to speak to them. He was so daunted by their presence and now dejected, having admitted defeat, he is going back, and he says, "I wanted to say to him 'Look, you can speak in Hindi in JNU.' And I wanted to stop him. I thought I was doing that. But no. I was only imagining it. Even I was not doing that." And that man has faded away and gone beyond the gate. It's a chilling poem. Who would have thought that even in a deliberately democratic space, this kind of thing could be imagined? And this is obviously by a poet and a JNU Professor who knows what he is talking about. The complexities in language, as I said, are unfathomable.

Multi- Grained Dosa

BY MAITREYEE B CHOWDHURY

My daughter's friend dropped in during lunch,
while dosas were in the making.

"Do you want some" I quizzed authoritatively -
it's the perfect ploy
for showing off a Bengali's sense of acquired tastes,
to a bedazzled cross-cultural brat.

My multi grained batter is red though,
from fields of summer in Birbhum,
dusted with Palash,
on the side road to Bankura.

A handful of Musur goes in with the Tur-
some Ragi, Methi and Millets later,
a spoonful of pounded Jeera
and Dhania swim afloat
in the taste of the Bramhaputra
I had left behind.

In the corner of the verandah is a curry leaf plant-
the house won't smell of it
I reassured myself
besides dosas need flavouring,
I reiterated.

My multi grain dosa
is an immigrant's map.
Soaked overnight
and painfully grounded each morning,
while my tongue slowly thickens
to a Nati Kannadiga's frame.

The girl ate in astonished silence,
in imaginary understanding, and discovery-
from coffee-stained breath,
to the memory of coconut chutney at home,
with black mustard seeds
tempered in Sambar.

I had assumed strange dimensions in her mind-
a hybrid bird,
people admire
but no one understands.

Embarrassingly fair,
like the cooks one finds
in cheap pahadi restaurants,
on the roads just ahead of Kurseong.

The orphaned waters of Kaveri
flow from my taps now.
The waters sweet and without direction-
It belongs to the memory of nether land,
happy somehow in an migrant's home.

I ask her on a whim then,
can you recognise
the colour of your language
in these waters?
In my mind I rephrase the question
without propriety and tact,
and my history of rootlessness
summarised.

Water is thicker than blood here,
they even bear surnames
from both the warring lands.
Like my Idiyapam,
they are cross pollinated
with trials, and new found love.

It's my second river, this Kaveri
and the third bank-
on a journey across rivers,
and the quest to find home.

Like our ancestors,
I live on river banks-
grow, seed, and die around water.
Life assumes new shapes meanwhile,
like Idly balls-
my language rises,
falls and finds flowers new.

MAITREYEE B CHOWDHURY is a poet and writer. Her latest book The Hungryalists, is about a poetry revolution in the sixties

art East

India International Centre
40, Max Mueller Marg, New Delhi

Opening on 20th February 2020 5 p.m.

Art Gallery,
Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay Complex

21st-29th Feb 2020
11:00 a.m. - 7: p.m.

Qamar Dagar Sakshi Pathak Naaz Bhardwaj Nandita Lele Parasher Baruah Ashima Sharma

Utter ances

Installations *Letters*
Painting *Resistance*
Speech *Language*
Script
Sound Memory
Identity Persecution

Presented by New Imaginations, Jindal School of Journalism and Communication in collaboration with India International Centre

NEW IMAGINATIONS
Jindal School of Journalism and Communication

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

Design support

aspire design

Participants

WITNESS US: A READING OF MIYAH POETRY
Poets- Mirza Lutfar Rahman, Kazi Neel, Rehana Sultana
Ashraful Hussain
Singer- Amin Nozmul Islam

WIDE OPEN SPACES
Concert by Mhademo Kikon

WHY OUR LANGUAGES ARE DECLINING?
Keynote speech by Ganesh Devy

THE EXILED TONGUE
Parasher Baruah, cinematographer

KOK SAM LAI
Sakshi Pathak, NID Haryana

PEHCHAAN
Sakshi Pathak, Naaz Bhardwaj, Nandita Lele
(NID Haryana)

CALLIGRAPHY
Qamar Dagar, Calligrapher

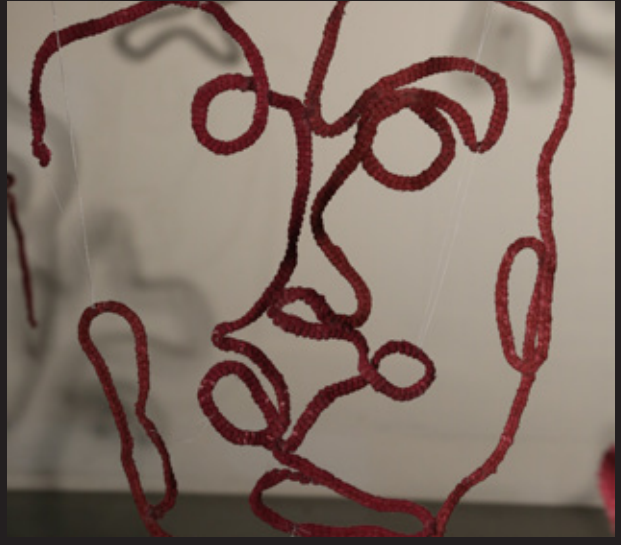
THE SHADOWED LANGUAGE
Ashima Sharma and Akshita Chembolu

WE SHALL BEAR WITNESS
Ashima Sharma

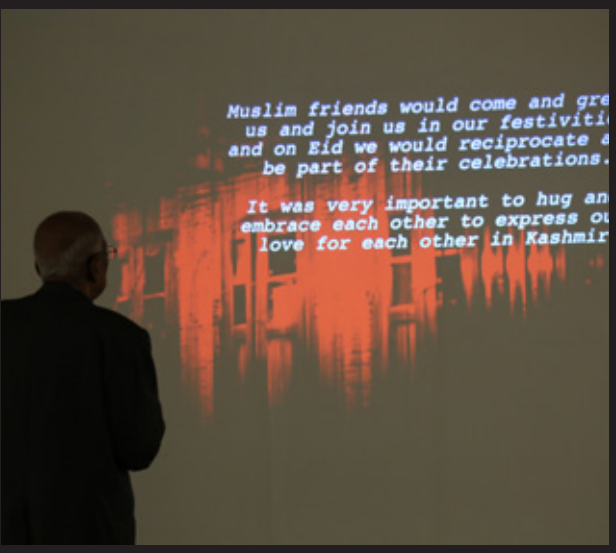
NODIR KUL NAI
Parasher Baruah

LANGUAGE
Artwork by Aarya Yadav

WHOSE LANGUAGE IS IT ANYWAY?
Harish Trivedi, Lalnunthungi Chhangte, Shobhna Chellaiah, Anvita Abbi




WITNESS
languages
declining


Muslim friends would come and gre
us and join us in our festiviti
and on Eid we would reciprocate
be part of their celebrations.
It was very important to hug an
embrace each other to express ou
love for each other in Kashmir


Please share your language
(Story)

FILMS

Fading Ink- The Dying Art of Naga Tattoos
Directors: Design Stash Team

Sabin Alun- The Broken Song
Script and Direction: Altaf Mazid

Rong' Kuchak- Echoes
Director: Dominic Sangma

Sikhirini Mwsana- Dance of Butterfly
Director: Subasri Krishnan

POETRY

Maitreyee B Chowdhury
Poornima Lakshmeshwar
Nabina Das
Abner Pariah

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Lalsawmliani Tochhawng