

Press Note:

Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2015 – Day 3

Event: Panel discussion- ‘Literary Commons: Indigenous Literatures’ with Australian indigenous writers- Ali Cobby Eckermann and Lionel Fogarty & writers from Northeast India- Mridula Chakraborty, Esther Syiem and Robin Ngangom

Kolkata, 16th January, 2015: Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival 2015 hosted a one of its kind discussion on artistic and creative development of indigenous writers and storyteller, with Australian indigenous writers **Ali Cobby Eckermann** and **Lionel Fogarty**, in conversation with **Mridula Chakraborty**, **Esther Syiem** and **Robin Ngangom**, writers from Northeast India. Owing to their diverse backgrounds, the writers broke barriers and prejudices, giving the viewers food for thought. The conversation was moderated by **Tilottama Tharoor**, professor of humanities at New York University.

About the Panelists:

Ali Cobby Eckermann: Ali Cobby Eckermann is a Yankunytjatjara/Kokatha kunga (woman) born on Kurna land. As a baby Ali was adopted into the Eckermann family. She has received great success as a poet and verse novelist. Her work consistently reflects upon her personal journey and her reconnection with her Aboriginal family. Ali has won several awards. In 2013, 40 poems and 1 short story were translated into Bengali at Jadavpur University and published in Kolkata. Ali runs an Aboriginal Writers Retreat in Koolunga, SA, where she now lives. The retreat provides a creative, relaxed, and enjoyable environment for artistic projects and the advancement of Indigenous literacy.

Lionel Fogarty: Lionel Fogarty is an Indigenous Australian poet and political activist. He was born at Barambah (now called Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve) in Queensland where he grew up. He has been involved in Aboriginal activism from his teenage years, mainly in Southern Queensland on issues such as Land Rights, Aboriginal health and deaths in custody. His brother, Daniel Yock died at the hands of police in 1993. His poetry, while in no way dismissible as simply 'political poetry', can be seen as an extension of these activities on another front. Common themes are the maintenance of traditional Aboriginal culture and the everyday realities of European occupation. Among the most 'experimental' of contemporary Australian poetry, his work has sometimes been described as 'surrealist'. Fogarty has been involved with not-for-profit poetry organisation, The

Red Room Company, participating in Unlocked, a program for inmates in New South Wales correctional centres, as well its creative projects including Clubs and Societies and The Poet's Life Works.

Esther Syiem: Esther Syiem teaches English Literature at the North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong and has been working on Khasi Folk and Oral Literature. Some of her publications include Oral Scriptings (a poetry collection), Ka Nam (a Khasi play), of follies and frailties of wit and wisdom (a poetry collection), and The Oral Discourse in Khasi Folk Narrative. She writes in English and Khasi.

Robin Ngangom: Robin Ngangom was born in Imphal, Manipur, in North Eastern India. He is a bilingual poet who writes in English and Manipuri. He studied literature at St Edmund's College and the North Eastern Hill University Shillong, where he now teaches. His books of poetry include Words and the Silence (1988), Time's Crossroads (1994) and The Desire of Roots (2006). His essays include Poetry in A Time of Terror which appeared in The Other Side Of Terror: An Anthology Of Writings On Terrorism In South Asia. He received the Katha Award for Translation in 1999.

Mridula Chakraborty: Mridula Nath Chakraborty is a Lecturer with the Writing and Society Research Centre, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, at the University of Western Sydney, Australia. She is the editor of *Being Bengali: at home and in the world*. In 1997, she won the A. K. Ramanujan Award for translation from two Indian languages and has translated and co-edited, with Rani Ray, *A Treasury of Bangla Stories*. Her translations have appeared in *The Lotus Singers: Stories from Contemporary South Asia*, *The Table is Laid: the Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing*, *The Picador Book of Modern Indian Literature*, *Katha Prize Stories* and *The Wordsmiths*. She curated the Australia-India Literatures International Forum in Sydney 2012 and is now convening the project LITERARY COMMONS! Writing Australia-India in the Asian century with Indigenous, Dalit & multilingual tongues in India and Australia.

Tilottama Tharoor: Tilottama Tharoor is a humanities professor at New York University. She studied at Loreto House and Loreto College, Kolkata, where she was known for her debating prowess. Her special focus is on Indian writing in English.

About Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF):

Apeejay Kolkata Literary Festival (AKLF) is Kolkata's pioneering literary festival. Instituted in 2010 by the Apeejay Surrendra Group and its heritage Oxford Bookstore on Park Street, AKLF grows out of the bookstore's year round involvement with books, writers & publishers. In the six years since Kolkata saw her first literary festival in AKLF, literary festivals have mushroomed across the country, but AKLF stands apart with its unique identity as the only one with a now 94-year-old bookstore as its nucleus. AKLF offers an atmosphere of warm, welcoming intimacy, favors depth over size, and includes a variety of subjects from history to the environment. AKLF also celebrates Kolkata's magnificent public monuments and heritage sites as settings for Festival events and eminent literati and cultural stalwarts from across India and overseas join the festival scheduled every year in the second week of January. In 2015 AKLF explores literature as part of our tangible and intangible heritage, a theme that runs through several sessions of the festival. AKLF focusses on younger writers, newer voices and fresh audiences in its ongoing attempt to build an audience

for books and reading. Prominent personalities attending will be Hanif Kureishi, Naseeruddin Shah, Charles Allen, John Elliott, Mohammed Hanif, Leila Seth, Michael Buckley, Upamanyu Chatterjee, David Davidar, Shekhar Gupta, Shashi Tharoor, Asish Nandy, Ramachandra Guha, Kishwar Desai, Nabaneeta Dev Sen amongst several others. There are some firsts in AKLF 2015. A heritage literary walk, a literary 'adda', a Young Adult litfest for high school students, a bloggers' meet, a children's bookfest crammed with activities, even a standup comic for the college crowd and a leadership training session for young teens on importance of character, karma and individual social responsibility™. Add to that our signature heritage site evenings at The Indian Museum, National Library, Victoria Memorial, Lascar War Memorial, indepth discussions, top of the line authors, thinkers and performers, and you have a literary experience not to be missed. And all absolutely free for Kolkata and her culture-loving audience.

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