

As a people's university dedicated to "Reaching the Unreached" and empowerment of the masses through the means of Open and Distance Learning, Netaji Subhas Open University struck a new chord when its Centre for Language, Translation and Cultural Studies (CLTCS) on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017 signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the English Discipline of Khulna University, Bangladesh to collaborate on a research project titled **"Mapping Partition Memory, Amnesia and Literature in Middle and Southern Bengal: An Indo-Bangladesh Perspective"**.

As the title of the project suggests, the envisaged path is a pronounced departure from much chronicled grand narratives of India's "Partition-Independence". By its very nature, the collaborative research project purports to be a channel to bring out people's narratives – written/ oral, mnemonic, and even those slices that have been buried under the existential realities of living in new lands. Evidently, and again a first of its kind in the domain of the Humanities, this will be a field survey based research project wherein student researchers from both countries will reach out to select districts to record narratives in all forms and thereby prioritise real-life stories of common people who have undergone the trauma of partitioned lives.

Going against the grain of any pseudo-romantic utopia as to whether partition can be undone in the minds of people, the project intends to trace in a pragmatic manner the evolutionary trends in partition memory across generations, so as to study how temporality and spatiality have served as triggers to either hold on to memory or bring about a sense of amnesia. In that sense, both first and third generations of partition survivors are integral subjects of this study. Being collaborative at an international level, researchers of both countries will come together to exchange notes on findings of migrancy both ways. As an off-shoot of this, we shall also be in a position to uncover how cultural contours too have undergone spatial shifts, have travelled across borders and have also entered new permutations between migrants and settlers.

While it is a fact that partition in the western part of India is much better documented than has ever been the case in the eastern as far as official action and archiving are concerned, it is important to realize that Bengal partition is more eventful in the sense that it has subsequently given rise to a new nation – Bengali nationalism being the primary spur behind this. A unique aspect of this project is that it does not stop at the frontiers of the negativity

of partition; our collaborative venture with Khulna University will also study with equal zeal and enthusiasm the Liberation War and the formation of the independent nation of Bangladesh. Thus, while on the one hand we retrace the angst of loss of homeland in myriad ways, on the other we also partake of the euphoria of deliverance in the victorious culmination of the struggle of a people to carve out a national identity of their own. Coming out of the heart of Bengal, and thereby of India (that has had a major role to play in the liberation of East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh), the common man's perception of liberation, the struggle that it has entailed upon civilian life, the expectations out of the newly emerged nation state as also its critiques – are all aspects that this project will try to access and address through primary sources. The collaborators are of the opinion that by charting the expanse from 1947 through 1971 right up to the present times, this project can be threaded through the forward looking and unifying factor of Bengali nationalism that has ever been a vital link across our borders.

By its very nature, the project has an interdisciplinary flavour, and it is believed that in an age of digital humanities, the respective institutions will make significant contribution to this area of studies by taking recourse to the best means of recording, archiving and publishing the narratives of the grassroots that will be obtained through field studies conducted by researchers.

As a Centre under a university that is dedicated to the philosophy of Open Learning, CLTCS is glad to invite interested researchers to participate in this project in a spirit of true seamlessness in building an academic fraternity in the Humanities.