

Cultures as Continuum

TALK: *Biography as Continuity*

Speaker: Ritu Menon

Chair: G. Arunima

Collaboration: Lila Foundation

August 20

The genesis and realisation of a biography echo the way we deal with the relevance of others' lives. But what, exactly, is at the centre of a biography? Is it the life of an individual, liberated from her own cautious confessions? Or, is it the continuous presence of an actor of change within the larger dynamic of a society's history?

As part of the second edition of the LILA PRISM Lecture Series entitled 'Cultures as Continuum', publisher and feminist researcher Ritu Menon reflected on the discontinuous–continuous space of interaction that the genre of biography draws into focus. Seeking to rescue its subject from her past by bringing her into the middle of the present, a biographer's preparation intensely studies

history, its politics as well as its unsuspected roots in the realm of the personal.

Menon shared some of the challenges and insights that she encountered in the making of *Out of Line: A Literary and Political Biography of Nayantara Sahgal* (2014). The work presents Sahgal, whose life and multi-generic writing spanned from India's freedom struggle to the Emergency through the years of liberalisation and beyond. 'To understand continuity in a biography is to recognise the simultaneity of the past and the present, but also to engage with the discontinuity, which is part of their telling,' said Menon.

Like the country's politics—her family's very business—Sahgal's life events have evoked a sense of discontinuous continuity, through the decades of her prolific and politically-charged literary career on the one hand and her unhappy marriage on the other. It is through the discovery of this ironical connection that the biographer's own work permits continuity across discontinuities, Menon concluded.

■ SAMUEL BUCHOUL

Forging Friendships

MEET: *Fusion*

Collaboration: Silver Linings

August 3

Fusion is an innovative effort towards raising awareness about the abilities of disabled people; facilitating and speeding up all-round inclusion; and altering negative mind sets and attitudes to allow diversity to actually become the preferred scenario in mainstream society. Fusion is a face-to-face social network launched by Silver Linings to break barriers and build two-way bridges of friendship, relationships and partnerships between the disabled and the non-disabled world. At this meet, 33 members participated, 21 of whom were disabled.

In the first session, participants shared elaborate details about themselves and their personal experiences in facing day-to-day life in educational institutions, at the work place and social spaces. This sharing of true life happenings had an overpowering impact on all the non-disabled people, making them look at life with a new

vision about the lives of disabled people. The brother of a visually impaired young girl said he had always thought that problems were unique to his sister's life, but after listening to others he was filled with unlimited hope and encouragement.

This was followed by a motivational talk by Ashish Singh, a visually impaired banker, and a talk by Rishi Kawalramani, also with impaired vision, on 'Maintaining Loving and Harmonious Relationships'. This was followed by an engaging discussion on marriage and relationships. Mr. Anirban, a member of Fusion from its inception, suffers from cerebral palsy. He was helped by a co-Fusion member, Nikita, to find a job and he is now employed at Eyeway.

These were very valuable sessions as most of these subjects get left out of any rehabilitation programme and yet are the essence of a complete, productive and happy life which we all deserve. Fusion has directly touched the lives of over 100 people; we hope it will soon become a movement and spread across the country.

■ PREETI MONGA

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