

Two-Day National Conference on
Exploring the Intersections: Autobiographies, Biographies and
Travel Writing in Contemporary Literature
(15-16 March, 2024)

English Teachers' Forum, Himachal Pradesh
and
Government College Karsog, District Mandi (HP)



ETF Conference Report 2024

Govt. College Karsog and English Teachers' Forum, Himachal Pradesh organised a national conference on 15th and 16th March 2024 at Govt. College Karsog. The conference provided a platform for academic exchange and collaboration, showcasing research and insights on Exploring the Intersections in Travel writing, biography and autobiography in contemporary literature. It was a resounding success, thanks to the organizers, speakers, and attendees.

The first day of the two day national conference, commenced with registration, followed by preliminaries in the conference hall. The principal of the host college Dr. J. S. Patial welcomed the attendees, and Coordinator of ETF Sir Praveen Kumar, extended greetings. After the felicitation ceremony, The etf Anthology of poetry 2024 was released. The ETF Mosaic: from Tabriz to Rumi's Soul, edited by Dr. Sangeeta Singh, Dr. Subhash Verma and Dr. Shivani Chaudhary includes contributions by 42 poets in English and Hindi.

The conference concept was read by Dr. Kulbhushan Sharma, the convenor of the conference. Dr. Anupama Sharma, steered the proceedings. Under the chairmanship of Prof. Roshan Lal Sharma, Senior Professor at CUHP, Dharamshala, the keynote session began.

Keynote Speaker , Prof. Akshaya Kumar from Panjab University, Chandigarh, deliberated on the intersection of various genres. He wove together the idea of genre fluidity through various works like *How I Became a Tree*, *History of Bees*, etc. He took a deconstructive stance to open up the vistas for understanding the intersection of travel writing, biography and autobiography.

It was followed by another Keynote address by Prof. Rajesh Sharma from Punjabi University, Patiala. His talk was based on memoir writing. He discussed a whole range of texts challenging genres, opening possibilities of blending genric categories. The session concluded with observations by the chair Prof. Roshan Lal Sharma who suggested us to engage with the ideas shared and questions raised by the two deliberations. He concluded with the remarks that we cannot remain too genre specific. The focus remained on writing self, not writing about self.

After lunch, invited papers were presented, chaired by Dr. Namrata Tiku, who retired as principal. The speakers included Sir Praveen Malik, coordinator of ETF and Sir also retired as principal, Ma'am Anuja Sharma who retired as Associate Professor from St. Bede's College Shimla and Dr. Hem Raj Bansal, Associate Professor, Central University of Himachal Pradesh, Dharamshala. Prof. Praveen Kumar unearthed the valuable insights that lie imbedded in Haruki Murakami's seemingly plain and short biographical account, titled *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. The memoir is an exquisite account of the author's passion for running, his state of mind during running, the threads that link running to literary creation, the act of living, and the process of ageing. Another idea that was touched upon was that pain is inevitable but suffering is optional. It was an engaging lecture.

Dr. Namrata Tiku concluded the talk. She appreciated the idea how passion could bring joy, and could lead to something better. The author is not recapturing a memory. So the autobiography is more believable. The talk generated discussion. Dr. Mahi, Prof. Roshan and others shared their observations. An insightful presentation was given by Ma'am Anuja Sharma who shared her experiences of travel to Israel before the war in December 2023. She described and interpreted historical sites, landmarks visited during her travel. The presentation transcended mere description and offered a narrative that intertwined personal experiences with the essence of the place. The first hand experience and the beautiful pictures in the presentation breathed life into the conference.

The third invited talk was by Dr. Hem Raj Bansal who raised and addressed research questions about the notions of home, exile and return in Dalai Lama's *Freedom in Exile*. Returning to homeland is not possible physically, it could only be done through memory route. He drew interesting comparison with Anuja ma'am presentation. The paper generated discussion and observations were made by Dr. Namrata Tiku and Prof. Roshan Lal Sharma. The Prof. Jaidev Memorial Papers session, chaired by Sir Praveen Malik, steered by Dr. Priyanka Rana featured presentations by three scholars:

Dr. Leena Vaidya, Dr. Mahi Yogesh, and Ritika Sen

Dr Leena Vaidya explored how current events influence one's memory and truths and how memory restructures, mediates and adapts the past happenings to the needs of present times, with reference to the life narratives of three hijras, one from Kullu and two from Mandi districts of Himachal Pradesh. Dr Mahi explored the life and development of the renowned spiritual Guru Paramhansa Yoganada. She studied his spiritual quest on a personal level and talked about his teachings from his autobiography, which serve as his legacy. Ritika probed the subject of how recent Western women travellers depicted India in their letters. These letters (being an important component of art and literature) depicted important concepts of foreign- native encounter, highlighted the concept of "colonial gaze", and the discomforts faced by Emily Eden, an English lady during her stay in India from 1836 to 1842.

All the contestants were asked a minimum of three questions. The session was concluded by the chair Sir Praveen Kumar. The jury members were Professor Roshan Lal Sharma, Dr. Namrata

Tiku and Dr. Hem Raj Bansal. The day concluded with a poetic and musical evening, followed by dinner, fostering camaraderie among participants who enjoyed Ghazals and Nati.

Dr. Namrata Pathania hosted the session beautifully. The following contributors of the ETF Mosaic presented their poems: Prof. Roshan Lal Sharma, Dr. Leena Vaidya, Prof. Praveen Kumar, Dr. Mahi Yogesh, Dr. Janesh Kapoor, Dr. Divya Sharma, and Dr. Namrata Pathania. The second day commenced with breakfast, followed by parallel technical sessions. Technical Session I, chaired by Ma'am Anuja Sharma featured presentations by Anjali Parmar, Divya Sharma, Kulbhushan Sharma, Namrata Pathania, Sanjay Poswal, Shivani Chaudhary and Subhash Verma in the conference hall. Ma'am Anjali presented a paper on Exploring the Self in Paulo Coelho's *The Pilgrimage* and *The Alchemist: A Study in Spiritual Pursuit*. Ma'am Divya's paper sought to study Maya Angelou's romanticized notion of the African continent which was awakened to its brutal reality during her stay in Ghana in *Travelling Shoes*.

Kulbhushan Sir presented a study of Life Narratives and Memoirs by Ruskin Bond. The paper investigated the bildungsroman journey of the writer in bridging the gap between the East and the West and serves as a basis for the convergence of the twain. Ma'am Namrata presented a paper on Reclaiming Identity by Transcending Border: A Study of Geetanjali Shree's *Tomb of Sand*. Sir Poswal's paper analysed select Dalit women's autobiographies, Aaydan written in Marathi by Urmila Pawar, translated into English by Maya Pandit as *The Weave of My Life* in 2008 and Jina Amucha written in Marathi by Baby Kamble in 1986 translated into English again by Maya Pandit, titled as *The Prisons We Broke* in 2008. These autobiographies, shed light on the threefold trauma experienced by Dalit women on the basis of Caste, Class and Gender both within their own community and in society at large due to discrimination.

Shivani Chaudhary presented a paper on "A Voyage into Reconstruction of the Self: Exploring Shivya Nath's *The Shooting Star: A Girl, Her Backpack and the World*. Subhash Sir studied The Journey of Pain and Resilience in Doris Kartinyeri's *Kick the Tin*. Simultaneously, Technical Session II, chaired by Dr. Hem Raj Bansal featured presentations by Leela Dhar, Saurav, Shubhaindu Goswami, Swastik Sharma, and Upma Sharma.

Dr. Leela Dhar's paper titled "Eco-criticism and Partition: A Study of Saadat Hasan Manto's 'Toba Tek Singh' and Intizar Husain's *Basti*" explored the psyche of the writers as well as people who were dislocated during Partition. Saurav decoded the Politics of Unraveling the Self in

Salman Rushdie's *Joseph Anton: A Memoir*. Shubhaindu analyzed the personal growth of Sally, the protagonist's psychological and moral development in *My Place*. Swastik presented a paper on Exile, Resistance and Longing for Acceptance in Behrouz Boochani's *No Friend but the Mountains*. Upma's paper examined how Rassundari Devi's writing challenges the representation of women by males in *Amar Jiban*.

Technical Session III, chaired by Dr. Mahi Yogesh, took place in Smart Class Rooms, it featured presentations by Archana, Amonika, Anupama Sharma, Jitender Thakur, Sunita Thakur and Srishty Thapa. By applying a Lacanian lens to "The Lion of Kashmir," Archana studied the complex interplay between personal and collective trauma, cultural identity, and memory in the context of Kashmiri Pandits' experiences. The paper argued that the novel served as a powerful work of literature and a nuanced exploration of the human psyche in the face of adversity.

Amonika explored the historically oppressive and submissive Dalit women's transformation into assertive voices in contemporary India through their life writings. Anupama ma'am presented a paper titled "Embarking on the Journey to Self Discovery: A Critical Analysis of Tehmina Durrani's Autobiography *My Feudal Lord*". Jitender did an Ecocritical Analysis of *Microadventures* in *Select Memoirs* of Alastair Humphreys. Sunita ma'am explored how Omprakash Valmiki used the genre of autobiography to provoke empathy and consciousness among the upper castes, hoping to inspire change in societal attitudes and behaviours. Srishti studied Third Space and Hybridity in Stuart Hall's *Familiar Stranger*.

The conference concluded with the valedictory session in the conference hall, chaired by Dr. Praveen Kumar, in the presence of Principal of Government College Karsog Dr. J. S. Patial and completed by Ma'am Sunita. Dr. Janesh Kapoor delivered the valedictory address. He shared his valuable experiences and talked about construction of his identity and grooming of his personality through his travel to Karsog college as the then Principal. He also apprised the gathering about the journey of ETF and future plans which include a workshop on the idea of research and the next annual conference on the theme of folklore. It was an intellectually stimulating and emotionally fulfilling conference.

Some Glimpses of the National Conference:



Principal
Government College Karsog