

Jamia Professor Delivers Prestigious Pundit Neelkantha Das Memorial Lecture

Pundit Neelkantha Das Memorial Lecture organized by Odisha Sahitya Akademi has become a memorable annual event in the cultural life of Bhubaneswar, eagerly awaited by the literati here. Das was a “yugpurush”, a maker of Odia literature and culture – a writer, statesman, visionary and lexicographer. Every year a reputed scholar is invited to deliver this lecture. Last year it was Sri Indranath Chaudhury, Former Director, Nehru Centre, London. This year it was Prof M Asaduddin, English Professor and Dean, Faculty of Humanities, Jamia Millia Islamia, and a multi-lingual scholar of great repute.

Prof Asaduddin spoke on the topic, **Women Writing in India and Muslim Women Writing Themselves**. He began his speech with the statement that in all literary traditions of the world, writing by women is invariably preceded by writing about women by men. In the Indian context he showed how Bankim Chandra Chattarjee, Saratchandra Chatterjee and Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali and Nazir Ahmad and Rashidul Khairi in Urdu tried to imagine and construct a new image of the Indian woman before women started writing in a substantial way. Coming to Muslim women themselves he discussed the life and works of Begum Rokeya Sakhawat Husain and Begum Sufia Kamal in Bengal and those of the ‘quartet’ of Isabella Thoburn College in Lucknow – Rashid Jahan, Ismat Chughtai, Qurratulain Hyder and Attia Hossain. It may be mentioned that Asaduddin has translated a substantial segment of Ismat Chughtai’s works in English, including her autobiography. He has also written several articles on Qurratulain hyder.

The lecture was attended by the who’s who of Bhubaneswar. The audience also recalled the occasion 2 years ago, when Prof Asaduddin had delivered Basantha K Satpathy Memorial lecture where he charted a new way of approaching literatures from Indian languages through translation into English in our quest for a holistic understanding of Indian literature and culture.



Report and Photo: Courtesy – Shubhendhu Mund