

# TEXT, PRE-TEXT, AND CONTEXT

EXPLORING THE LAYERS OF LITERARY MEANING

*A 2-DAY WORKSHOP ORGANISED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF  
HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES*

*IIT JAMMU*

7-8 NOVEMBER 2025

LOCATION  
IIT JAMMU, JAGTI CAMPUS

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REGISTRATION LINK

## Our speakers



**SUKANTA CHAUDHURI**  
*Professor Emeritus  
Jadavpur University*



**SUPRIYA CHAUDHURI**  
*Professor Emerita  
Jadavpur University*



**RITA KOTHARI**  
*Professor of English  
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**RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR**  
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**SOUJIT DAS**  
Independent Art Historian & Curator

## TEXT, PRE-TEXT, AND CONTEXT: EXPLORING THE LAYERS OF LITERARY MEANING

A TWO-DAY WORKSHOP IN IIT JAMMU; 7-8 NOVEMBER 2025

What makes up the text, and how? Sukanta Chaudhuri, in his *The Metaphysics of Text* (2010), addresses this question in the spirit of a philosopher, suggesting that we investigate the ontology of a text “as a metaphysician investigates what makes up the apparent reality of our experience.” Bertrand Russell famously argued, a century ago, that the real physical object is a “logical construction” out of sense-data furnished by our sense experience. This was a metaphysical argument on a philosopher’s part, and a shocking one for the non-philosopher to hear that the *real* physical object, or the *physically* real object, is not an objectively given entity that we experientially encounter in the world we live, but is actually a “construction” out of something subjectively given to us in the mental space in the form of sense-data. Objective reality is a metaphysical construction out of subjective data.

Is the “being” of a literary text likewise a constructed reality, a product of some properties of language or sign systems and other associated factors that are analogous to the metaphysician’s sense-data?

Professor Chaudhuri’s project is a meta-textual enquiry, which amounts to engaging in a text that refers to and examines its own being. Is the text an abstract conceptual entity of signification, or does it also necessarily have a physical or material embodiment? Such a question makes the matter of textual identity—the core identity of a text—problematic. What happens to an oral text that subsequently becomes a written text, once the spoken words are inscribed on the pages of a book? Furthermore, what happens when that very text in the “book” form finds its new incarnation in the electronic medium, resulting in a digital text? Does a single textual message undergo a process of clear transmission through multiple media, retaining its “original” content-identity?

Professor Chaudhuri and other theories of contemporary and poststructuralist persuasions have tended to deconstruct the uncritical belief in the identity or being of a text as determined by its “original” meaning-content. Although these critiques have not gone so far as to say (with Marshal McLuhan) that “the medium is the message,” they have argued that the changing media make a substantive difference to the identity of the text. Professor Chaudhuri has strongly argued for the position that a text is more of a process than a finished product. Like the metaphysician’s “logical construction” theory of physical reality, Chaudhuri has also

argued for a constructionist view and considered various forces of signification as complex constituting factors in the textual process.

Given this constructionist view, the concept of textual identity across time would have to be modified into “changing textual identity,” necessitating a distinction between a **work** (authored originally by someone) and its multiple **textual incarnations** in the course of time. This distinction between **work** and **text** is therefore mapped onto the *one-many* relational nexus: one work “begetting” many texts in an endless process of signification. In this theoretical scenario, there is one work of which there could be many different texts in different periods of time, inscribed in different media, hence constituted in different material embodiments.

The present workshop, **Text, Pre-text, and Context**, is an engagement with the indeterminate ontology of textuality, foregrounding the issue of continual change of media and material embodiment that inevitably reshapes the abstract, conceptual work of literary signification. The ontological indeterminacy is perhaps an inevitable consequence of the embeddedness of literary texts within an intricate network of pre-existing discourse, traditions, and interpretative frameworks. Modern literary theory has consistently drawn attention to the layered constitution of textual meaning. For example, questioning the original identity and authorial creativity of a work, Roland Barthes views the text as a “**tissue of quotations**” drawn from multiple other writings. Barthes’s “multidimensional space” of textual creation through mixing and blending diverse “quotations” is conceptualised by Julia Kristeva as “**intertextuality**,” the transposition of one sign system into another. Likewise, Hans-Georg Gadamer’s hermeneutics foregrounds the “**historicity of understanding**,” where both the text and the reader are situated within evolving horizons of meaning, leading to “fusion of horizons.”

The workshop takes its central focus on the triadic relationship between **text**, **pre-text**, and **context**. Whilst text refers to a literary work as a structured, signifying artefact, pre-text encompasses sources, traditions, canonical antecedents, cultural archives, and discursive formations that condition the formation of the text. Context involves the historical, social, political, ideological, institutional, and other cultural frameworks within which texts are produced, circulated, and interpreted.

By exploring the dynamic interplay of text, pre-text, and context in literary creation and interpretation, the workshop will examine how texts are shaped by preceding narratives, cultural frameworks, and interpretative environments. Attention will be focused on how meaning is constantly negotiated through this dynamic interplay of the different layers of this triad.

By examining how meaning emerges at the intersection of these three domains, this workshop aims to deepen critical engagements with literature. It seeks to demonstrate that literary close reading is not just a formal exercise but an exploratory approach that is historically alert, intertextually aware, and theoretically informed.

The two-day workshop is structured into different sessions of presentation of views by individual experts, ending with a panel discussion on the theme.

## INVITED SPEAKERS :~

- **Professor Sukanta Chaudhuri**, Fellow of the British Academy, Professor Emeritus, Jadavpur University
- **Professor Rukmini Bhaya Nair**, Honorary Professor of IIT Delhi, Global Professorial Fellow, Queen Mary University, London
- **Professor Supriya Chaudhuri**, Professor Emerita, Jadavpur University
- **Professor Rita Kothari**, Head, Department of English, Ashoka University
- **Dr. Soujit Das**, Independent Art Historian & Curator, Kolkata & Delhi



**SUKANTA CHAUDHURI**  
*Professor Emeritus  
Jadavpur University*



**SUPRIYA CHAUDHURI**  
*Professor Emerita  
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**RITA KOTHARI**  
*Professor of English  
Ashoka University*



**RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR**  
*Professor of English &  
Linguistics, IIT Delhi*



**SOUJIT DAS**  
Independent Art Historian & Curator

## SCHEDULE :~

### FRIDAY 7 NOVEMBER 2025

9:30 am – 9:50 am	<b>Inauguration and Introduction</b>
9:50 am - 10:35 am	<b>Prof. Sukanta Chaudhuri – Texts in Time and Space</b>
10:35 am - 11:00 am	<b>High Tea</b>
11:00 am - 11:45 am	<b>Discussion</b>
11:45 am - 12:30 pm	<b>Dr. Soujit Das – Artworks as Texts: Exploring Renitent Voices in the Visual Landscape of Colonial Bengal</b>
12:30 pm - 1:15 pm	<b>Discussion</b>
1:15 pm -3:00 pm	<b>Lunch Break</b>
3:00 pm - 3:45 pm	<b>Prof. Rita Kothari - Scripting Caste</b>
3:45 pm - 4:30 pm	<b>Discussion</b>
4:30 pm - 4:55 pm	<b>Tea and Convivial Afternoon</b>

### SATURDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2025

9:45 am – 10:30 am	<b>Prof. Supriya Chaudhuri - Allegory, interpretation, and literature in a time of crisis</b>
10:30 am - 11:15 am	<b>Discussion</b>
11:15 am - 11:40 am	<b>High Tea</b>
11:40 am - 12:25 pm	<b>Prof. Rukmini Bhaya Nair - The Literary Text as an Empathy Machine: Prehistory, Pre-texts, and the Performative</b>
12:25 pm - 1:10 pm	<b>Discussion</b>
1:10 pm -2:30 pm	<b>Lunch Break</b>
2:30 pm - 4:30 pm	<b>Panel Discussion</b>
4:30 pm - 4:45 pm	<b>Valedictory</b>
4:45 pm	<b>High Tea and Convivial Afternoon</b>

## BIOGRAPHY OF SPEAKERS :~



**SUKANTA CHAUDHURI**  
Professor Emeritus  
Jadavpur University

Sukanta Chaudhuri is Professor Emeritus at Jadavpur University, where he founded the School of Cultural Texts and Records. He is the author of *The Metaphysics of Text* (Cambridge, 2010), coeditor of *Global Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minnesota, 2022), and chief co-ordinator of the online Tagore Variorum Bichitra, <https://bichitra.jdvu.ac.in/>. He is currently chief co-ordinator of *Shabdakalpa*, <https://shabdakalpa.com/>, a historical dictionary of the Bengali language (under development). Professor Chaudhuri has published extensively on the English and European Renaissance and edited many Renaissance texts, including the Third Arden edition of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He has translated extensively into and out of Bengali, English and Italian, and edited *The Cambridge Companion to Rabindranath Tagore* (2020). He is an International Fellow of the British Academy, an Honorary Fellow of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, and a former Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, among other distinctions.



**SUPRIYA CHAUDHURI**  
Professor Emerita  
Jadavpur University

Supriya Chaudhuri is Professor Emerita in the Department of English, Jadavpur University, India. She has held visiting appointments at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge and Paris-Sorbonne, among others. Her research interests include Shakespeare and Renaissance literature, Indian cultural history, modernism, theory, cinema, sport and urban studies. Among recent publications are her edited/co-edited books, *Envisioning the Indian City: Spaces of Encounter* (2025); *Religion and the City in India* (2022) and *Commodities and Culture in the Colonial World* (2018). Recent journal articles have appeared in *Études Anglaises* (2024), *Spenser Studies* (2024, 2023), *BioScope* (2023), *Thesis 11* (2021), *Postcolonial Studies* (2021), and *Literature Compass* (2020). Published book-chapters include contributions to *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Indian Literatures* (2024), *the Bloomsbury Handbook of Postcolonial Print Cultures* (2023), *The Form of Ideology and the Ideology of Form: Cold War, Decolonization and Third World Print Cultures* (2022), *Machiavelli Then and Now: History, Politics, Literature* (2022), *The Cambridge Companion to Tagore* (2020), and *The Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (2019); translations appear in the *Oxford Tagore Translations series* and *The Essential Tagore* (Harvard UP).



**RUKMINI BHAYA NAIR**  
Professor of English &  
Linguistics, IIT Delhi

Rukmini Bhaya Nair is Professor (Hon..) of Linguistics and English at the India Institute of Technology Delhi (IITD). Currently Global Professorial Fellow at Queen Mary University of London (QMUL), she received her PhD from the University of Cambridge and was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Antwerp for her contributions to narrative theory. Author of 10 books and around 150 articles, her widely acclaimed academic books include: *Lying on the Postcolonial Couch: The Idea of Indifference*; *Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture*; and *Poetry in a Time of Terror: Essays in the Postcolonial Preternatural* (Oxford University Press, 2002, 2003, 2009). Her most recent book is the reference volume (co-edited with Peter de Souza) *Keywords for India: A Conceptual Lexicon for the 21st Century* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2020). Her most recent article is "Archewriting: The Symbolic Evolution of Script and Narrative" in *The Oxford Handbook of Human Symbolic Evolution* (2024). Nair's research interests lie at the intersection of literary, linguistics and cognitive studies, including AI. Her work attempts to bring together what we know of the human mind in its evolutionary aspect and its everyday patterns of behaviour with what we know about current cultural patterns of social inclusion and exclusion on the Indian subcontinent and worldwide. Nair's latest major grants have been from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to conduct basic research on 'Language, Culture and Emotion' (2009-2013) under its Cognitive Sciences Initiative (CSI); and the

Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) on ‘Cognitive Capabilities in Education’ (2014-2016). She was Indian Team Leader for the nine-country project on the “Geography of Philosophy” (2017-2023 <https://www.geographyofphilosophy.com/teamleaders>). Currently, she is part of a team of international researchers who have received a significant grant from the British Academy for research into the multidisciplinary area of temporality and its connections with understandings of, and action on, ideas of justice. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/projects/the-times-of-a-just-transition/>

Nair is on the boards of several international journals, such as *Language and Dialogue*, *The International Journal of Language and Culture*, *Literary Semantics*, and *Text Matters*, as well as on the Consultative Boards of the International Pragmatics Association (IPRA) and *Biblio: A Review of Books*. She also writes widely on social issues in national and international popular print and electronic media, and has contributed regularly to forums such as Mark Tully’s BBC Program ‘*Something Understood*’ and ABC Australia’s ‘*The Books Show*’ as well as an NDTV Opinion Column, e.g. <https://www.ndtv.com/opinion/my-encounterswith-stephen-hawking-in-delhi-1823729>. In addition, she is an award-winning poet who has published three volumes of poetry with Penguin: *The Hyoid Bone*, *The Ayodhya Cantos* and *Yellow Hibiscus*. The Oxford Companion to Modern Poetry (2014) writes that her work “widely admired... for its postmodern approach to lyrical meaning and feminine identity”. Her writings, creative and critical, have been included in the syllabi of Chicago, Delhi, Harvard, Kent, Toronto and other universities. Her poem ‘Gargi’s Silence’ is on the syllabus for all entry level Humanities and B. Com students at Delhi U. Three forthcoming books in 2025-2026 are: *Deception: Mind, Metaphor, Memes and the Mimicry Machine*; *In the Name of Rushdie: Postcolonialism, Prophecy and the Platonic Censors* and *Postcolonial Pragmatics*, as well as a book of poems titled *Shataka: The Quarantined Tongue*. Nair believes she does research in linguistics for the same reason that she writes poetry – to discover the limits and possibilities of language.



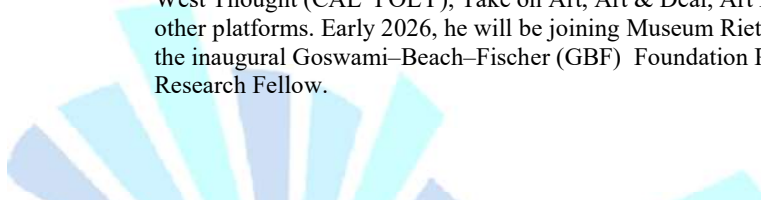
**RITA KOTHARI**  
Professor of English  
Ashoka University

Rita Kothari is Professor of English and the Head of the Department of English at Ashoka University. She earned her MPhil and her PhD in Literary Studies and Translation from Gujarat University, Ahmedabad. She has previously taught at St. Xavier’s College (Ahmedabad), MICA (Ahmedabad), and the Indian Institute of Technology, Gandhinagar. She is a multilingual scholar and translator whose work spans across different disciplines such as literature, cultural studies, anthropology, sociology, and history. Her questions emerge from observations of regions and communities in the western part of the Indian subcontinent—Gujarat, Kutch, and Sindh. Her ethnographic research on marginal communities—through religion, caste, occupation, and gender—focuses upon narratives of identity, raising questions of both linguistic and cultural translation. Professor Kothari has translated extensively from Gujarati and Sindhi into English and occasionally vice versa. Her translations, as well as her edited volumes, have made significant contributions to the field of language politics and translation. Her latest book, *Uneasy Translations: Self, Experience and Indian Literature*, interweaves her personal journey as an academic into reflections around self, language, and translation, with an eye upon the intangibly available category of experience. Her teaching interests include language politics, caste and communalism, Bollywood, Indian literature, translation studies, Partition, border studies, Gujarat studies, and Sindh studies. Movements across languages, contexts, and cultures form the fulcrum of her interests, making translation the prism through which she sees the Indian context.



SOUJIT DAS  
Independent Art Historian & Curator

Soujit Das is an independent researcher and curator working between Delhi–NCR and Kolkata. Trained at the Dept of Art History at Kala Bhavan, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, he further earned his PhD from the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT Roorkee, with a dissertation exploring Occidentalism in imperial Mughal paintings. He has previously been associated as a full-time faculty member at the Government College of Art and Craft Calcutta and Amity University, Noida, and also served as guest faculty at the College of Art, University of Delhi, and the Department of History, Lady Brabourne College, Kolkata. His research centres on cross-cultural artistic encounters in early-modern India. Current projects investigate the intersections of art history, death studies, and religious studies, that include a long-term documentation project of *‘Armenian Christian grave markers across India’* and *‘Imaging Death in Mughal Paintings’*; he also works on the peripheral visual cultures of colonial Bengal. His recent scholarship has appeared in *Indo-Asiatische Zeitschrift* (Museum of Asian Art Berlin), Lalit Kala Akademi publications, Springer Singapore, *Journal of East West Thought* (CAL POLY), *Take on Art*, *Art & Deal*, *Art East* and several other platforms. Early 2026, he will be joining Museum Rietberg, Zurich, as the inaugural Goswami–Beach–Fischer (GBF) Foundation Post-Doctoral Research Fellow.



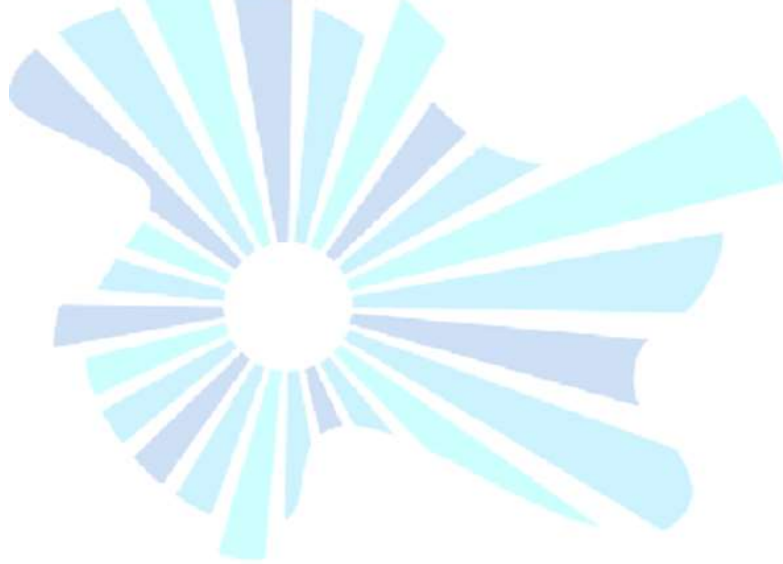
## REGISTRATION FEES :~

For Scholars & Students	₹ 200 (including GST)
For Faculty	₹ 400 (including GST)

On Spot Registrations will be available.

## CONTACT US :~

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