Monsooners in Kolkata

Sarah Z H

MONSOONLETTERS, an emerging group of literary exercisers has recently attended a colloquium on Media, Religion and Mediation together with a pack of other programs like the writer's workshop celebration at Rabindranath Tagore Centre and an active discussion on South Asian literature and media. All this as you can possibly take as read took place in Kolkata where we the Monsoonletters team (G. Sumdany Don, Saria Ahmed, Jessica Munshi, Mushira Habib, Saneem Fahad Amin, Minu Ahmed, Hassan Qamrul, Zahirul Islam Mamoon and myself) became conscious of many of our life's epiphanies and I for that matter will gladly share with you a part of our exciting discoveries. As we made our journey through the identical roads of Kolkata as locals of Dhaka, we came across many things that reminded us of home.

The first morning after a stately breakfast at the hotel, we were welcomed by Shreya Ghosh, a postgraduate student at Jadavpur University to talk about how religion persuades our personal and social lives. The discussion, moderated by Shreya and scrutinized by an Islamic scholar from Bangladesh called Alimur Rahman Khan encouraged us to speak out our feelings on religion. Often religion is seen to play a decisive role in ascertaining who we are in different spheres of life. We are also expected by the society to perform many religious rites and most of the times religion does not suffice for our doubts leaving us in question. However, Prof. Alimur Rahman Khan advocated that dialogue is indeed the best way of keeping all tracts open to thoughts and ideas.

In the afternoon, we had a delightful encounter with P. Lal, a legendary publisher and Surendra Nihal Singh, senior journalist and former chief editor of The Statesman and The Tribune, India. The cosy little auditorium at the Rabindranath Tagore Centre was buzzing with life as writer's workshop celebrated its 50 anniversary with the launch of an anthology edited by the publisher of Monsoonletters, Rubana Huq and 'Holy Cow' by Nihal Singh. Later that evening we drove to the Palladian lounge for dinner which was hosted by the Chairman of Broadcast worldwide and TV Southasia. The dinner was an intimate view of the highborn social life of Kolkata which was intently new for us.

The last day of our stay was made fully worthwhile as we received a chance to meet journalists like Jawed Naqvi, correspondent Dawn, Pakistan and many others like him. The colloquium started around ten in the morning as guests formed small groups in order to carry out group thinking. Each group set out to confer on Media, Religion and Mediation had one journalist, one activist and two students or young professionals. The discussion groups mainly approached issues like the stylisation of media, whether media should construct knowledge, if media has been fuelling anti Islam sentiments, is it practicing a dangerous shadow projection by indulging in ethnic, religious and racial stereotypes. Other subjects such as helping to stage identity by information technology mediation and contextualization and avoiding media representations which are organized and made systematic through news frames were also argued. The dissemination went on for quite a while as the participating journalists, students and young professionals singled out the related problems working in groups.



The rest of the evening, namely the last few ours of our stay was felt by anxiety and disappointment as we had to leave early next morning due to various put outs. Yet we were able to manage a quick visit to College Street and the new market for a hurried shopping spree. There it all was our little adventure of meeting some remarkable people, a raised area to voice our thoughts at the colloquium about something as vital as religious uniqueness and it's portrayal in media and dodging the gloom of not being able to get out of the hotel in the land of Lays!