

## KRISHNA TRUST

### Annual Report (2019-20)

1. The Seventh Krishna Memorial Award ceremony was held on 7 February 2020 at Hotel Sojourn, Salt Lake. As in previous years, the programme was held in collaboration with the Calcutta Research Group (CRG). Professor Samir Das, Director of Calcutta Research Group, chaired the programme. Sibaji Pratim Basu, Managing Trustee of Krishna Trust and Professor at Vidyasagar University, spoke about Krishna Trust. Sabir Ahamed, an educationist and working in Pratichi Trust and a member of CRG, presented the Krishna Memorial Awards. The Awards were conferred on:

(a) Naznin Mullick: An educationist of Howrah, Naznin Mullick was given the Award for her love for Sanskrit language. Her work assumes significance at a time when certain languages are ascribed religious and ideological associations. Thus, Urdu and Arabic in India have largely become the languages of Muslims while the promotion of Sanskrit is often associated with Hindus. Thirty-year old Naznin Mullick from Andul in Howrah district has struggled hard to not just become a teacher of Sanskrit – initially in a government run school and later in a college - but has also broken the stereotypes about existing languages. Trustees and sympathizers of Krishna Trust will find a note on her appended at the end of this report.

(b) Poonam Toppo: An Arts Graduate, Poonam Toppo is a theatre activist from Ranchi. She is a Master Trainer on theatre having a ten years long experience of stage performance. She is also a social activist and in her activities has addressed women's issues such as evils of trafficking. Poonam Toppo had received the "Best Change Maker Youth Award" in 2004.

(c) Dooars Jagron: As a spontaneous response to the incidents of large number of starvation deaths of the tea plantation workers, Dooars Jagron came into existence in November 2003 to address the plights of the tea garden workers and their families. At the initial stage the founders of this organisation carried on relief work there and subsequently they started working for raising the awareness among the tea plantation workers about their social-political and economic rights. Such a plan for mobilisation depended on the relations existing between the labourers on the one hand and the tea estate management, PRIs and the state. With the involvement of CRY, Dooars Jagron has been gradually working towards mobilizing the youths, organizing the labourers especially women on issues of rights and entitlements with a focus on child rights. Women comprise a majority of the members of this organization and its goal is to ensure basic human rights issues such as the right to education; right to adequate health care; and the right to livelihood—to food and work, within decent wage structures of the workers and the village communities. Victor Bose on behalf of Dooars Jagron received the Award.

2. On the same occasion the Seventh Krishna Memorial Lecture was delivered by Anita Agnihotri, a noted litterateur. Anita Agnihotri writes in Bengali, spanning all genres – short stories, novels, and stories for children, poetry, essays and commentaries on development. Short stories are particularly close to her heart. She has authored over forty volumes, including seven novels and over two hundred short stories. She has been translated into different Indian languages, including English, Swedish and German, and has received several prestigious awards such as the West Bengal Bangla Academy award, Sahitya Parishad Samman, Sarat Puraskar. She retired from the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in

2016 after thirty six years of meritorious service. She was Secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Housing and later in Social Justice and Empowerment. Her writing has been about the unheard realities of contemporary India and the muffled voices. In the Krishna Memorial Lecture she spoke of vast experiences in development administration relating to the education and health of women, particularly girl children. Her lecture could not be printed due to current situation. The Trust will bring out the publication of her lecture next year.

3. During the year under discussion Krishna Trust published the Sixth Krishna Memorial Lecture delivered by Manisha Bandopadhyay, titled, *Kanyashrir* Meyera. The distribution of the publication was limited as it was hampered by the outbreak of the pandemic.

4. As in previous years, other published lectures and the report on the state of girl child education in Balidweep, Sundarban were distributed widely. Also as reported last year, there was a plan to begin an adult women's education programme in Balidweep, instituting girl child prizes/fellowships in the island, and contributing to the improvement of the infrastructure of some of the schools in the island. However, Anil Mistri, one of the recipients of last year's Krishna Memorial Awards, fell seriously ill and was under treatment for several months. Anil Mistri has partially recovered. He represented the Krishna Trust in a regional discussion on vulnerabilities in South Asia held in Kathmandu in the last week of February. The shadow of the pandemic was already looming over the region and the country. As a result, the Trust could not carry out any programme following the previous year's plan and the discussion in Kathmandu. Our field visits also were cancelled – once due to floods and on the next occasion due to Covid-19 outbreak.

5. The Trust's web portal ([http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/krishna\\_trust/index.html](http://www.mcrgh.ac.in/krishna_trust/index.html)) hosted by the CRG as part of its website ([www.mcrgh.ac.in](http://www.mcrgh.ac.in)) continues to develop. New material has been added. Particular mention may be made of appreciative reviews of the book *Krishna: Living with Alzheimer's*. Trustees and friends may kindly visit the web portal. However the web presence of Krishna Trust has to be strengthened. The Trustees may discuss ways towards making the Trust more visible.

7. As in last year, the Trust acknowledges the generous help of the Calcutta Research Group and its staff in organising the annual Krishna Memorial event, and hosting Krishna Trust's web-based material. The Trust continues to look for further sources of assistance and collaboration.

8. Byasdeb Dasgupt, Anwasha Sengupta, Samata Biswas, Paula Banerjee, Anasua Basu Ray Chaudhury, Mahalaya Chatterjee, Iman Mitra, Madhurilata Basu, Sucharita Sengupta, Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury, Shyamalendu Majumdar, Rajat Roy, Anita Sengupta, and Ranabir Samaddar made donations to Krishna Trust towards the Chief Minister's Fund that was especially created to tackle Covid-19 in West Bengal. Subhas Ganguly as in last year donated Rs. 5,000/ (rupees five thousand only). The Trust wishes to put on record its gratitude for the help provided by individuals and institutions in various forms towards its goals.

9. The Statement of Accounts and Auditors' Report (2019-20) is enclosed herewith.

## 10. Annexure

### Naznin Mullick: The Muslim Sanskrit Teacher (In her words)

আমি নাজনীন মল্লিক, বর্তমানে ঝাড়গ্রাম রাজ কলেজ গার্লস উইংয়ের সংস্কৃত বিভাগে অধ্যাপনা করছি। প্রত্যন্ত গ্রামের এক গরীব পরিবারে আমার জন্ম। পরিবার বলতে আমার মা ও তিন বোন। গ্রামের অন্যান্য মেয়েদের মতোই আমারও ইচ্ছা ছিল ক্লাস টেন পাস করা। খাঁন অনুরুদ্দিন ইসলাম যিনি আমার শিক্ষক ছিলেন, তাঁরই অনুপ্রেরণায় পড়াশোনার প্রতি আগ্রহ জন্মায় এবং নিজেকে সুপ্রতিষ্ঠিত করার অঙ্গীকার করি। প্রথম থেকেই ইচ্ছা ছিল চিকিৎসক হবার। অর্থনৈতিক কারণেই তা হল না। তাই কলা বিভাগে ভর্তি হলাম ভূগোল নিয়ে পড়াশোনার জন্য। এমন অনেক দিন গেছে যখন মা দু'টাকার আচার কিনে আমাদের অন্ন যুগিয়েছেন। কিন্তু পড়াশোনা বন্ধ করার কথা কখনো বলেননি। তবে পড়াশোনার জন্য আমাকে এবং আমাদের বোনদের স্কুলের মাইনে মকুব করা হয়েছিল। ক্লাস সেভেন থেকে স্নাতক পর্যন্ত পাঠ্যপুস্তক যুগিয়েছেন স্কু দিরাম স্টাডি সার্কেল। যারা অর্থনৈতিকভাবে অনগ্রসর প্রায় সাড়ে ছয়হাজার ছাত্রছাত্রীদের পাঠ্যপুস্তক দিয়েছেন এবং তাদের মধ্যে অনেকেই সুপ্রতিষ্ঠিত। বর্তমানে আমিও স্টাডি সার্কেলের একজন সদস্য। অর্থনৈতিক কারণেই ভূগোল নিয়েও পড়াশোনা করা হল না। বিজয়কৃষ্ণ গার্লস কলেজে ভর্তি হলাম সংস্কৃত নিয়ে। ফার্স্টক্লাস পেয়ে ভর্তি হলাম কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে। মহাবিদ্যালয় ও বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের পড়াশোনার জন্য স্কলারশিপ পেয়েছি। অর্থনৈতিক সমস্যা তো ছিলোই আরও ভয়ানক ছিল পড়াশোনা করার জন্য নানান কটুক্তি সহ্য করা। প্রথম প্রথম খারাপ লাগত। পরে সেই কটু কথাগুলোই আমাকে এগিয়ে যেতে সাহায্য করেছে। আজ তারাই আমাকে দেখিয়ে বলে 'ওর মতো হতে হবে'। বর্তমানে আমি কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের ড. মৌসুমে দাশগুপ্ত ম্যাডামের কাছে 'Theory of creation in Indian, Iranian and Semitic Religion: A comparative Study' বিষয়ে কাজ করছি। বর্তমানে ঝাড়গ্রামের একটি প্রত্যন্ত শবর গ্রামে একটি পাঠশালা খোলা হয়েছে যার সাথে আমি যুক্ত। যদিও সেটা আমাদের প্রিন্সিপাল বর্মন স্যারের ব্যক্তিগত উদ্যোগেই প্রথম চালু হয়েছিল। আমি জাতি-ধর্ম-বর্ণ নির্বিশেষে মানুষের জন্য কিছু করতে চাই।

### (A biographical note in English)

Life has not been very easy for Naznin's family, comprising her, three younger sisters and mother. Her father married someone else and left them to fend for themselves. Her poor mother Shamina Mullick was engaged in odd jobs, like making rakhi, doing embroidery in local factories, etc. Often Naznin and her sisters would help mother do her job on time.

Although Shamina was herself barely educated till class IV, she wanted to see all her daughters educated. Naznin and her sister went to the local government run girls' school and studied there till class XII.

Their mother hardly made two thousand rupees a month, and there were weeks and months when there was no work. "Those weeks would become difficult for us, sometimes our younger maternal uncle would help," she says.

Because she was a meritorious student, Naznin also got minority scholarships from the West Bengal Minority Finance Corporation (WBMFC) since class VI, and her school would waive off any fees required considering her financial conditions.

“Like average girls in the village, as a child I thought I would study till Madhyamikor so, and then marry and settle down,” she says. But destiny had other plans for her.

A local tutor from whom she was taking private tuitions AnirudhIslam inspired her to take up the studies seriously and pursue a career. They say, when you really want something from the core of the heart, whole universe connives to help you.

As it was difficult for their mother to buy books for all her daughters, Naznin found out about the KhudiramBose Study Circle in Vasudevapur, at more than an hour walk from her house in Andul. Since 1980s the Circle tries to help those who drop out from school due to lack of availability of books.

“I am thankful to the KhudiramBose Study Circle that provided me books from class VII up to my graduations,” Naznin says. Earlier she would walk to the Circle to get books, but later she got a bicycle or would go by local public transportation.

It was at this circle that she discovered her love for science and at one point dreamt of becoming a doctor. But considering her financial constraints, she decided it would be very difficult for her to pursue a career in medicine. Her next option was becoming a teacher in school.

She had stood first among female students in arts stream in the Howrah district in Higher Secondary and was even declared the ‘Ideal Student’ by her school on completion of class XII. She was also district level athlete.

Meanwhile, under the influence of one of the teachers at the Khudiram Bose Circle, she discovered her love for Geography and wanted to study Geography in college. At the time of taking admission in college she realised that since did not have Mathematics in her higher secondary, she was not eligible to apply for B.Sc in Geography in many good colleges. In few where she was getting admission in Kolkata, the admission fees of about Rs 6000 was too much for her family to pay.

She hence pinned her hope in a Government Girls’ College, Howrah, but as backup option on advice of some people, had also filled the application for BA (Hons) in Sanskrit since she had studied it as an additional language in school.

### **Sanskrit Calling**

Call it her fate that she could not clear the merit list in Geography and thus began her education in Sanskrit. She gradually started enjoying the subject. However, the fees and the college and other expenses were not coming easily. Despite her application, even the WBMFC scholarship cheques were not coming, for some reason.

But she found good Samaritans every time she faced some constraints. A local newspaper had profiled her for topping among girls, becoming the ‘ideal student’ of her school, and studying Sanskrit in college. A local activist Madhusudan Manjhi (Madhusudan Kaku to Naznin) was very impressed with her story and came knocking at her door.

When he got to know of her situations, he helped her write several letters to different authorities. And finally it became clear that due to some clerical discrepancies her scholarships cheques were going back every year. He also helped him open her own account and finally she started getting the scholarship money once again.

### **Admission at CU**

And after graduating with flying colours in BA she took up admission in masters at the Calcutta University. But travelling to Kolkata from Andul everyday was a task. Naznin would come to Andul railway station by her bicycle; park it in the stand, take the local train to the Howrah station and from

there take the local bus to the College Street passing through the heavy traffic at Burrabazar and MG Road.

“Travelling to the University everyday was an arduous task, it would take me about two and half hour to reach the University, and same amount of time on return journey every evening,” she says, adding that often she would get stuck in traffic and get late for the class.

As the classes would sometimes get over by 5.30 pm, she would reach home by 9.0 pm, and if due to traffic she missed her daily train, would get even late. “I and my family sometimes had to face smirks from locals who would say all sorts of things because I was stay away from home almost the entire day,” she says. Many Muslims in her locality were also uncomfortable that she was studying Sanskrit, a language they associated with “Hindu worship”.

She had other worries too. Till college, all the sisters would eat whatever was at home go for studies, and then eat the meal only on return. They could not afford to carry any tiffin. Now that she left home early and could reach home by night, she for the first time began carrying tiffin boxes as buying lunch every day would be have been more expensive.

But visiting Kolkata and studying in University also expanded her horizon and her aspirations. A senior from the University encouraged her to aspire for higher things and not just limit herself to becoming a school teacher. “Think and strive to become a college teacher, even if you fail you will at least become a school teacher,” she recalls her nudging her.

In MA, she applied for the Higher Education scholarship which was higher than the minority scholarships and got it in 2011. After MA, she decided to do M.Phil and later PhD too. Her M.Phil.Dissertation was on Genesis, that is, a comparative study on the creation of the universe in Quran and Vedas. She is writing her PhD thesis on the creation of the Universe in Sanskrit/Indian literature and Iranian literature.

### **Dreams Fulfilled**

Meanwhile, she cleared bother NET-JRF and School Service Commission (SSC) examinations. Teachers and many others advised that although she must do Ph.D., she should join teaching job too as it is permanent compared to JRF which is only for 5 yrs. Like many in her locality, the Interview Board was surprised too at seeing a Muslim girl not just studying Sanskrit but performing so well to now become a teacher.

She did accordingly in December 2013, but within 10 months of her new job she cleared the college service commission examinations too and is now teaching Sanskrit at the government college in Jhargram.

All through Naznin and her family were living in different rented accommodations, so as she started working in school, she took a loan from the bank and bough a small piece of land in Andul and gradually they have built their own house.

Her father had left them all probably because he saw his four daughters as burden. Naznin is not comfortable talking about him a lot although she did acknowledge that he visits them sometimes now. Moreover, when her father needed the cataract surgery few years back, it was she who spent all money to get it done.

After graduation, her second sister started working in a mall in Howrah as Naznin was doing MA at CU. But as soon as Naznin finished her MA, she also completed her MA in distance mode, and later got married last year. But she is still trying for government jobs. Third sister is a trained makeup artist now, whiles the youngest one is still in school.

Naznin has not forgotten the KhudiramBose Study Circle either, and now serves the Circle as its member. Government schools now mostly provide course books to students for free, so the Circle now focuses on college level books to help other poor meritorious students.

In big city or for a middle class family becoming a teacher may not be a huge achievement. But considering Naznin's background it is no mean feat. And she has thus become a kind of role model for the young students, particularly female students, in her locality and parents cite her examples to motivate their children to do better.

Most girls in her group had started getting married by the time they reached high school. When she had reached BA, she did not have any Muslim friend left from the school time. But things are changing now. "I will not claim credit that only because of me it is happening, but now thankfully I see new enthusiasm for education and learning, which was missing two decades ago when we were students," she says. Most people in her locality are engaged in tailoring work.

Naznin is now planning to marry soon and is thankful to her fiancé for supporting her in all endeavours. But she regrets sometimes that the full time teaching job is impacting her PhD research as she is not able to devote as much time as she would have wanted to studies.

But more than anything, she still has one wish to live – her love for Geography. "I hope, after finishing my PhD, I can go back to Geography and study it even if it is in distant mode," she says.

She says that the determination is the key to success: "Not just Muslim, but she wants every girl, every human being to strive hard and create own identity and that would come through economic independence and when you do something meaningful. You will only succeed if you are determined to achieve something despite all hurdles that may come your way."