

A kangaroo in Barrackpore: Inventing fictive forms about 18th-century animals

Sohini Basak

5-6pm, Thurs 12 March

Cornwallis East SR1, University of Kent

In this talk and reading, Sohini Basak (Charles Wallace India Trust Fellow) will discuss her forthcoming novel. Set in her hometown of Barrackpore, India, it explores how the East India Company created a menagerie, now considered one of the earliest Asian zoos. Her writing asks how we can decentre human narratives and bring animal and plant life to the fore in fiction.



Kent Animal Humanities Network



Date March 12th, 5-6pm
Venue: Cornwallis East Seminar Room 1

Sohini Basak, *A Kangaroo in Barrackpore: Inventing fictive forms about eighteenth-century animals*

Abstract: As the Charles Wallace India Trust writing fellow at the University of Kent, I'm writing and researching my second novel about a plot of land in Barrackpore (my hometown), partly set in the 1800s where the East India Company began integrating it into their pleasure grounds, building country houses and even setting up Gothic cages to house what would become the Company's famous menagerie, now acknowledged as one of the earliest Asian zoos. In my presentation, I would like to share some of my findings about the menagerie. One of the central questions I'm asking as I gather material for the novel is: What are the ways we can decenter human narratives and bring animal and plant life to the forefront of the novel? What does time look like without clocks and calendars? I will be reading excerpts from my work-in-progress during the presentation.

Sohini Basak is a writer of fiction, poetry, and the in-between. Her first poetry collection *We Live in the Newness of Small Differences* was awarded the inaugural International Beverly Manuscript Prize and published in the UK in 2018. Recent writing prizes and honours include the Charles Wallace India Trust Writing Fellowship at the University of Kent (2026), a McCormack Writing Center scholarship (2026), a Desperate Literature Short Fiction shortlist (2025), a Speculative Literature Foundation Gulliver Travel Grant (2024), a Vijay Nambisan Sangam House fellowship (2022), a Toto Funds the Arts writing award (2017), and a Malcolm Bradbury Grant for Poetry from the University of East Anglia (2015). She is working on two novels and currently serves as the poetry editor at the international journal of literary translation, *Words Without Borders*.

Website: sohinibasak.com