

Role of refugee women in Sabitri Roy's 'Badwip'

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Lit news

Patriarchy works out new forms of oppression to establish control over female migrants. This was one of the thrusts of a literary talk, delivered by Debjani Sengupta, on refugee women in Sabitri Roy's *Badwip* at a program at BRAC University. As part of the ENH Seminar Series, the Department of English and Humanities organized the talk, "The Search for Herself: Refugee Women and Political Mobilization in Sabitri Roy's *Badwip* (1972)", at the university's GDLN Centre on Wednesday.

In her lecture, Debjani discussed various aspects of migrant women's lives in West Bengal, after the catastrophic Indian partition, with reference to *Badwip*

(The Delta), a novel written by Sabitri Roy (1918-85), a famous activist-author of that era.

In her talk, she investigated how women from Kolkata's refugee colonies participated in political and public life.

"It is a tale of the emergence of new forms of patriarchal control. As women move out of the homes, there are newer and newer ways that the patriarchy needs to control them," she said, while talking about how patriarchy evolved to oppress women in sync with the rise of India's early modernity.

Despite their displacement, migrant women act as agents of change, she said. "The refugee women changed the ideas both of 'home' and 'outside' by blurring the differences between the private and public spaces..."

To explain the migrant women's courage and aspiration for change, she added, "One of the ways in which you see tremendous intervention by refugee women is in the Food Movement in 1959. There was a huge crisis in the public distribution of food in West Bengal, and it was the refugee women who actually came out on the streets, to ensure the public distribution system was in place, so that the genuine refugees get the government help."

The program was chaired by Prof Firdous Azim, chairman of the English Department at BRAC University, and convened by Rukhsana R Chowdhury, Senior Lecturer and Coordinator, MA Program.



Debjani

Sengupta

Besides being an award-winning translator of Bengali fiction into English, Professor Debjani Sengupta is the author of *The Partition of Bengal: Fragile Borders and New Identities*. She has edited *Mapmaking: Partition Stories from Two Bengals* (2011) and is a co-editor of *Looking Back: The 1947 Partition of India 70 Years On* (2017). She is an Associate Professor at Indraprastha College for Women, Delhi University.