

At the Finding your Digital Voice panel. From left, panelists Preeti Singh, and Ajit Balakrishnan; moderator Lakshmi Gandhi; and panelists Mitra Kalita, Rashmee Roshan Lall, and Sree Sreenivasan.

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In one of the two final sessions of the day dedicated specifically to different types of fiction, five authors who hail from the subcontinent or whose writing reflect life there swapped tales of their experiences writing and getting published. The panel included Sharbari Ahmed, Renu Kurien Balakrishnan, Nayana Currimbhoy, Victor Rangel-Ribeiro, Shuvendu Sen. Together their craft has included imaginative works of prose — short stories, novel and novella formats — and genres that run the gamut from thrillers, mystery, fairytale, romance, fantasy, science fiction to young adult and children's books.

"I wrote something that was curated for a very, very prestigious journal in the UK," Ahmed, author of *The Ocean of Mrs. Nagai: Stories*, shared. "They wanted the story. But they came back to me and said, 'There's two protagonists; the

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room full of fans about adapting books into screenplays.

Going into detail about how she transformed Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* from a beautifully written story centered around the identity struggle of a young Indian-American man growing up into an equally moving story about a couple and their enduring bond from the subcontinent to the US, Nair said that adaptations should make a story blossom in whatever art form they are created in.

Nair, who also recently directed the movie version of Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, is well-seasoned in the craft of adaptations, but Das and Sikka, who is actually on the other end of the process as a writer whose short story was made into a feature film, are newer to the scene.

Das directed her debut feature, *Firaaq*, in 2008, and is currently a Yale World Fellow 2014, for a four-month fellowship, among 16 other emerging global leaders.

Sikka's 7,000-word *Railway Aunt* was adapted by Ajay Bhal, and he spoke from other side, saying it was an odd experience to see characters who were only "brush strokes" in his original written work come to life on the screen, fleshed out more fully by Bahl.

The day also saw a lively conversation about digital media and the evolving field of publishing; Ajit Balakrishnan, publisher, *India Abroad* and *India in New York*, and founder, chairman and CEO *Rediff.com*; Sree Sreenivasan, chief digital officer, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; journalist Rashmee Roshan Lall, Preeti Singh, who has been in the publishing industry for years; and Mitra Kalita, ideas editor, *Quartz*, debated the best ways to transition into the modern world of literature and journalism. Sreenivasan cleverly threw out a couple of relevant phrases, such as "tradigital" — referring to the mix of traditional and digital aptitude — and "twiangulation," the theory your influence on Twitter is not based on your followers, but rather your followers' followers. Those rusty on their 140-character communication needed a moment



From left, Renu Kurien Balakrishnan, Nayana Currimbhoy, Rajika Bhandari, Victor Rangel-Ribeiro, and Shuvendu Sen at a panel on fiction.

to catch up.

Kalita stressed the importance of maintaining journalistic integrity even as media forms change, and using a more dynamic mindset to determine whether a story is most effective as a tweet, a Facebook status, a blog post, an article, a book, or something else. Writers even a decade ago, when Facebook had just come out in its earliest iteration and newspapers were still papers, did not think in these terms.

Balakrishnan, at one point asking what it says of our collective authenticity that we prefer only to trade stories in pithy bits and document our visual experiences in a way that allows the product to disappear mere seconds later without a trace — via SnapChat — said he's skeptical about how the Internet has impacted us and our propensity for truthfulness. He mused about his desire to understand the connection between technology and the broader cultural landscape: "What looks like a technological breakthrough, Twitter for example, actually has a very deep social history behind it. That's where my exploration is: What events in society create certain technological breakthroughs and how these feed back into society itself?"

main protagonist is an African American male. Could you focus more on the Bangladeshi American protagonist because I don't think that readers would really accept this.' And I asked, 'Is the voice inauthentic? Does it not sound like I have authority to write in his voice?' And they said, 'No, it's a perception thing.' This is 2014."

Again, the question of voice, position, and authenticity arose, a running theme throughout the weekend. And of course, the concept of blurred lines between memoir and fiction came up, but as writers, they all felt this ambiguity was natural: Everyone pulls from autobiographical knowledge. Rangel-Ribeiro, whose own work, in particular his novel *Tivolem*, is influenced by his time in Goa, mentioned that many of Charles Dickens' books were based on his personal experiences as a child.

"The *place* is real," Renu Kurien Balakrishnan stressed, regarding the setting of her book *The Four Aleys*, which takes place in a metaphorical Kerala.