



## **Colloquium: Reflections on the Broom: Material Culture, Caste and Development**

Speaker:

Rustom Bharucha, Professor, Theatre and Performance Studies, School of Arts and Aesthetics, JNU, New Delhi

Date / Time:

April 10, 2014 - 4:00pm - 5:30pm

Venue:

10th Floor, Pixel A, Azim Premji University

Abstract:

Drawing on my book Rajasthan: An Oral History – Conversations with Komal Kothari and excerpts from the documentary film Jhadu Katha (Broom Stories), directed by Navroze Contractor, I will reflect on the social processes and interrelationships connecting material culture, caste and development, as represented in the most humble and inconspicuous of objects in everyday life: the broom. Outlining some of the central principles of Kothari's empirical research, grounded in a critical observation of rural material and cultural practices, I will focus on how orality catalyzes new modes of thinking through an interconnectedness of diverse contexts of traditional knowledge systems. How are these systems linked to both the hereditary and mutant manifestations of caste, and to what extent are the means of livelihood supported by these systems open to social development and new engagements with the market?

These questions will be problematized through a sharing of two different kinds of research – one linked to the writing of oral history and the other to the making of a film in which the voices of people are pivotal to the overall narrative. In both cases, 'orality' is constructed, subject to the immediacies and political choices of editing and framing. Within these protocols of different kinds of documentation, how does one tell the stories of the broom in everyday life? And how do they resonate within the larger political and social matrix of materiality, caste, and development operating in Rajasthan and beyond?

In the spirit of a conversation, these questions will be thrown open to the audience for discussion, who will be encouraged to think aloud on how an object as seemingly folkloric as a broom is actually embedded in some of the most pressing contemporary realities of our times, relating to survival, ecology, humiliation, self-respect and resilience.

A Note on the Speaker:

Rustom Bharucha is Professor of Theatre and Performance Studies in the School of Arts and Aesthetics at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. He is the author of several books

including Theatre and the World, The Question of Faith, In the Name of the Secular, The Politics of Cultural Practice, Rajasthan: An Oral History, Another Asia: Rabindranath Tagore and Okakura Tenshin and the forthcoming Terror and Performance.