



Talk: Community, University, Aesthetic: Rabindranath, Pedagogy and the Festival

Speaker:

Amrit Sen, Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan, with Sankar Datta, Azim Premji University and Sumandro Chattapadhyay, Santiniketan

Date / Time:

February 28, 2012 - 2:00pm

Venue:

Room 307, Third Floor, Pixel B, APU

Abstract:

The theory of the festival has attracted considerable critical attention in sociology and anthropology. While Rabindranath Tagore used the festival to generate nationalistic fervor early in his career, Rabindranath subsequently imagined it as an intermediary between the community and the university, to foster not only ideas of inclusivity, but to put into practice and dissemination the body of knowledge that the university could generate for welfare. Rabindranath strove to incorporate the festival space as an integral part of the University calendar at Visva-Bharati, bringing within it joy, creativity and sensitivity towards the community. At the same time the festival space was used to infuse a dignity to agriculture in order to bridge the urban-rural divide in colonial India through its deliberate use of ritual and aesthetic imagination.

Using Rabindranath's text of *Swadeshi Samaj* (1904), various songs composed for the festivals of Santiniketan and visual representation of the festival of *Halakarshana* or Plough Festival (extant photographs and paintings), this presentation seeks to investigate the relevance and the limitations of Tagore's notion of the festival space as part of the university and reexamine the ways in which such cultural forms can be incorporated into the pedagogic process.

While Amrit takes us through a discourse of how Rabindranath used festivals as a pedagogic tool, Sankar and Sumandro will share their experience of being schooled at Patha Bhavan, Shantiniketan. Sankar will take us down the memory lane and tell about Patha Bhavan of the 1960s and '70s. And Sumandro will share his experience in Patha Bhavan during 1990s used festivals for cross-embedding the academic and the immediate society of the school/university in his experience during the 1990s.

A Note on the Speaker:

Amrit Sen is presently Associate Professor of English at Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan. Interested in Eighteenth century Studies, Travel Writing, Tagore Studies and the History of Science, he has won the outstanding research award for his doctoral dissertation, *The Narcissistic Mode: Metafiction as a Strategy in Moll Flanders, Tom Jones and Tristram Shandy*, published by Worldview in 2007. He has recently been awarded the UGC Research Award for his project titled "The Self and the world in Tagore's Travel Writings" which awaits publication. He has also edited the special issues on Rabindranath Tagore for *Muse India* and *Rupkatha*. Widely published, he has recently lectured on Rabindranath tagore at Oxford University and Paris. He is also the secretary of the Visva-Bharati Study Circle, the University's highest interdisciplinary academic forum. He can be reached at amritsen@gmail.com

Sankar Datta was a student of Patha Bhavan, Shantiniketan. He did his PhD in Economics from the Sardar Patel University, Gujarat after completing his bachelor's degree in agriculture and animal husbandry from the GB Pant Agricultural University and Post graduate studies in Rural Management from the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA).

Sankar has worked in rural development for over 26 years as both an academic and a practitioner. He is member of the National Task force of the planning commission where he focuses policy elements of two of the biggest national livelihoods programmes - NREGA and NRLM. He is a founding member of PRADAN and BASIX. He has also taught in at IIM-A and IRMA farmer's organisations and other alternate forms of organisations. He credits this ability to connect theory and practice, as a teacher, policy maker and field practitioner to the environment and teaching methods at Patha Bhavan, Shantiniketan that was embedded in the immediate society of the school.

Currently, Sankar is Dean of The Livelihood School (BASIX) and is associated with Azim Premji University in its livelihoods initiatives, both in the field interventions and the Master courses. He can be contacted at dattasankar@basixindia.com / dattasankar@thelivelihoodschool.org .

Sumandro Chattapadhyay was a student of Patha Bhavan, Shantiniketan. He studied Economics in Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan and in Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Sumandro is currently working as Project Associate at the Mind and Society Initiative, Azim Premji University, works with an inter-disciplinary team to process and visualise large scale data sets for making data more accessible as teaching, learning and decision-making tools, as well as to empirically study patterns of choices regarding well-being. He is interested in political economy and urban transformation, data visualisation and web-base mapping, and theories of space and power. He also works with MOD Institute, Bangalore and is Contributing Editor to The Pop Up City blog. He can be contacted at sumandro.c@apu.edu.in