

Tagore as an Educationalist
A Celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Poet's Birth
Wednesday 2nd May 2012
A Cumberland Lodge Colloquium

Introduction

At this Cumberland Lodge Colloquium invited participants reflected on changing ways in which Tagore's work has been understood in the 150 years since his birth. Special emphasis was given to Tagore's educational ideas, and the way Tagore has 'educated the world' through his writings. In addition, those attending the colloquium had the opportunity to hear some musical and literary performances of compositions by Tagore. The presentations of all those who gave papers on this occasion can be now be read in full, and are available from the Cumberland Lodge website www.cumberlandlodge.ac.uk. This paper is meant to serve as an overview and brief introduction to the speakers' own papers.

Proceedings

The conference began with a welcome by **Dr Alastair Niven**, Principal of Cumberland Lodge, who has written extensively about Indian literature. Dr Niven had conceptualised and planned the colloquium.

The first speaker was **Dr William Radice**, poet, writer, scholar and translator of Bengali literature. He spoke on 'Gitanjali a Hundred Years On: Tagore for Today and for the Future.' In his recent translation of this most famous book

of poetry, Radice reveals the ambiguity and musicality of Tagore's work, which are central to its power. Radice also highlighted the tension Tagore often felt between his poetic vocation and the organisational demands made upon him by his school and university. This tension was part of a deeper conflict he felt between the creative and moral sides of his nature.

The second speaker was **Dr Ketaki Kushari Dyson**, who addressed the topic: 'Tagore's Poetry: What it can teach us'. Dr Dyson is a poet, novelist, playwright, essayist, translator, scholar and critic. Her reflection on Tagore's poetry was powerfully informed by her life-long love of the poet; as his stories and poetry have lived with her, she has found in them wisdom, inspiration and moral guidance. Tagore's poetry educates in diverse ways, as does the work of poets in general. In the future this will depend on us showing a renewed sense of respect for poetry in our schools.

Professor Ursula King, formerly Professor of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol, gave a fascinating presentation on 'Tagore and Dartington: Some Hidden Connections'. The unlikely friendship of Tagore, an American heiress, and an English gentleman led to the founding Dartington Hall and Schumacher College. Their pioneering educational work was based on a belief in Tagore's ideal of 'a civilisation of the universal.'

After lunch **Naomi Calligaro**, Founder, Alternative Defence Forum gave a dramatic reading of 'The Parrot's Story', translated by Palash Baran Pal and accompanied by a tropical soundscape. This short story by Tagore is a powerful metaphoric expression of his own educational experiences. This was followed by a beautiful presentation by **Manoj Shiva**, playing the *tabla* and **Ganga Thapa** playing the *sarod*, in a programme of Rabindra Sangeet, compositions by Tagore, with some classical Hindustani Raga.

Dr Imre Bangha, Lecturer in Hindi at the University of Oxford and Head of the Alexander Csoma de Körös Centre for Oriental Studies at the Hungarian

University of Transylvania, Romania, spoke on 'Folk, modern, oriental, dramatic or communist: The case of Tagore translation in Central Europe'. Dr Bangha gave a rare insight into various ways in which Tagore's work was appreciated in Central Europe: he was first celebrated as one of the first non-Europeans to win the Nobel prize in 1913. After the First World War he gained popularity for having denounced the warmongering of the Europeans, and then, he was re-discovered in 1955 for his anti-imperialistic stance. Some communist translations of Tagore's poetry presented him as the poet of the workers.

Andrew and Maggie Alexander, teachers, educational theorists and founders of the Links with India project, together spoke on 'Tagore and Education, his relevance today'. The powerful thought was offered that although the specifics of Tagore's educational policy are only followed closely in a small number of schools, various aspects of Tagore's thought can and should infuse modern education: the sense of education as a joyful adventure; openness to the cultural diversity of our modern world; and respect for young people's capacity for creativity and independence of thought.

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