

## Tagore, Pedagogy and Contemporary Visual Cultures

### Workshop 2 Santiniketan

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#### Notes from discussion on last day of our visit to Santiniketan:

#### SOME OF THE EXPERIENCES AND IDEAS WE HAVE DISCUSSED AS WE'VE BEEN TALKING WALKING AND LOOKING

AP: Santiniketan. Sriniketan. Santhal museum. What is the relation between our research ideas and some of the things we've learned about here?

We want to think about the life of this research project and how we might work together. Some of the things I have thought about:

- Alternative modes of pedagogy and whether Santiniketan is an alternative form? How it has changed?
- Indian neo-liberal economy and how that affects pedagogy in HEI but also Santhal Informal School (primary).
- Tagore was interested in children and his thinking about creativity – art and poetry and how these skills and ethos don't just develop as art but make demands of ideas about the social and sociality.
- Institutions: how can they survive and if they should survive and in what form: what have we learned from Santiniketan?
- Artworks: Indian modernisms, artifacts in Santhal museum
- What are the stakes when something is understood as art? Hierarchies of legibility.

GW: question of internationalism. Trying to reflect in an international institution (difference between Iniva and Practice International).

- The attraction of Santiniketan is its cosmopolitan character in the 1920s. Vocabulary: importance of the way that Rustom Bharucha analyses the word cosmopolitanism – cosmopolitics – and the effect of his time with us here.
- No curriculum. No nation. Offering them up and deconstructing them.
- Poetic approaches to knowledge via Tagore who made poet's history. Allowing other forms of knowledge to occur – how does this relate to European idea of practice-based research? We want think about this.
- Institutions: how can this research be practically thought about in terms of our own? How can they be transformed by this research?

WvO: I've been very passive here. I see and hear a lot that I can't immediately process. Not ready to talk yet. How do you come to a place where you don't know anything? It is important to be patient.

AP: 'I come to a place and I don't know about it'. No curriculum. As we get older we are more empowered to say 'I don't know about this'. Frightening and difficult to say you don't know something under conditions of neoliberalism. Can we imagine an institution that sets out from a position of not-knowing?

My reading of Tagore is that he spent his time withdrawing from power.

Withdrawing from Knighthood – formal – but also in just stepping back (in the letters etc): he's in the limelight, stepping away. Poet/politician.

AD: He could afford to as he had already opened his institution. Now subjected under political power. He is sitting in his village with one telephone. The primary Indian phone company of the time advertised Tagore as its premier client! What is historicity for Tagore? He says it's a poet's history. His last published lecture says this.

From Hegel's universal historicism to Tagore: 'light falling from the window in my room brings the message from outside world into my world': that is poet's history today; poets sense of time – not universal constructions.

AP: there's ambivalence there. Ours but also in Tagore. Parts that seem suspicious.

AD: yes hazy like a veil.

GW: Rustom discusses Tagore's text 'An Indian Folk Religion' from his book Creative Unity (1922). In it Tagore describes a woman picking up dead flowers that have been thrown out of a vase on Tagore's table and praising them. We find this difficult due to its spirituality. Tagore's spirituality connects to everything but leaves out layers of institutional structure. How does one operate? Tagore did his thing. We can't wholly celebrate him as he is guru but he functions in a poetic idea of where you are and what you do – not being subjugated by other structures.

AS: Santiniketan always in my life due to my dad who left India in frustration with the teaching of the place. History of Indian artists who left and wanted to find a different relationship to what they had learned and also the West – living on the margins. I respect that. This sense of drawing a circle around yourself and not being subsumed by the violence of the artwork is important but it's still surprising when that happens. This place exists in its own temporality outside the Delhi art world. It's an inspiration. I'm thinking about filming and wanting to explore signs in the landscape and the art through the images we produce. The film can produce a subtle argument that is poetic and unfolding. Questioning the image.

Non violence: wanting to protect oneself but to act nonviolently – I'm reminded of Annand Patwardhan. Clever tactical move in India these days. Institutions that acts ethically but act without violence.

Other kinds of forms and affinities need to be produced: reassertion of institutional ethics / self organisation: commitment to focus on political affinities (non-alignment).

GW: this question of the art world: how do you use your energy? Do you make affiliations that make sense to you or do you grieve over the capitalized examples that exist? Leela Gandhi – non nation non violence - how can we think this through at a theoretical level with practitioners? Affiliations between unlikely people.

AP: problem we encounter when the non aligned movement becomes aligned through us and before our eyes – when it becomes the (art) world. How can we stave off that moment? Sanchayan Ghosh, Anshuman and I talked about the gentrification of Santiniketan: the fencing of the campus; Kolkata money coming in and rich Kolkatans buying second homes. Lots of property speculation over land that historically was Santhal territory.

AD: Geological survey proves how much land was gifted to Tagore for Santiniketan. This was done under the ethos of the Brahmo Samaj by local zamindar – an ethos of non-caste based community spirituality.

AP: But the cultural offer produces gentrified globalisation which is in our reading of Tagore the opposite of cosmopolitanism. There is new money here? Network of affinities to a network of financial alignments?

<http://content.magicbricks.com/industry-news/kolkata-real-estate-news/designer-cottages-gated-communities-spring-up-at-tagores-shantiniketan/50136.html>

AD: Yes retirement homes and symbolic values. Now caretakers are paid. Money has been flying for 15 years. Marxist intellectuals built houses here. Dignity of labour is not established here. Bolpur boy can be caretaker but Kolkata boy cannot.

AS: Indian snobbery and caste-ism.

GW: In Tagore's lifetime the school becomes increasingly bureaucratized and Tagore was outvoted concerning whether or not Santiniketan should adopt more formal principles.

AD: Yes, four in favour; three of whom were European and one his biographer. Six against - all Indians who he employed. Motion was: for or against implementing curriculum and regular rules of universities including giving degrees. Tagore was utopian but they were losing students.

G: institutional bravery. You could go against the agreed terms. In our institutions there is little bravery. Missing in European institutional landscape (an exception might be Maria Hlavajova).

AS: But no curriculum is not always good. The Freedom Theatre in Jenin, MASS school in Alexandria, ArtSchool in Palestine: it would be useful for them to have more curriculum.

WvO: what would that mean? No curriculum. What about people who come from no educational background that wish to go further. Interesting that it was Europeans that were supporting Tagore. Easier to think in this way when there is an excess.

AD: Sriniketan had a real pragmatics. How to get it going on everyday process of production.

WvO: Santiniketan was not meant as a model. You have to look at circumstances of the time and place. But it needs skills to teach.

AD: Santiniketan also needs to be understood in relation to Gandhi's village self development programme. Tagore learned about and implemented malaria removal programme; he sent his son to Chicago to learn about agricultural reform in order to set up Sriniketan.

GW: In practice based research you produce your own curriculum. There isn't a given set of text. The criticism is that it is not rigorous.

AP: you need to think the thought.

GW: Paradoxical questions. Aporias. Geeta Kapoor invested in idea of nation as a way of staving off exterior forces and maintaining Indian economy against global capitalism. Next generation against this.

AD: yes tension. Cosmopolitics was not to be had in post independence India. Alignment with Marxist movement in this generation. The dilemma continues. Foreign Direct Investment in Indian capital market trying to be prevented by the non-aligned movement. There are nodal points of resistance created by the Indian left to nationalism and transnationalism. Kapoor grew up with that. Post 1980s generation were on the other hand product of neoliberal economy.

GW: What is no nation in relation to art? Good place to explore those questions before weight of statistics and facts loads it down. The idea of nation state is not singular - it does protect but it also blocks people - flows of migration. In *Another Asia* Rustom paraphrases EM Forster's idea that in moments of crisis (such as war) one should have the courage to 'betray nationalist sentiments in favour of sustaining the ideals of a particular friendship' (52).

AP: I was struck by conversations between DAI and Kala Bhavan students – the material practices of KB very different from DAI. How to think that alongside the Santhal Museum. Extraordinary for all of us. The conditions of the materials. Their historical and contemporary presences. I want to try to think this in relation to the curatorial through the idea of no nation. That's the stake of this research.

GW: How does no state not get relativized?

AS: Community centres: working class people making art and getting small shows and not being forced to be an art star.

AP: The Santhal museum is an arts centre.

GW: how will our research communicate this to audience in Berlin?