

Department of English  
&  
Other Modern European  
Languages

VISVA-BHARATI  
Santiniketan



Beyond *Gitanjali*:  
Tagore, Poetry and Poetics

UGC DRS International Conference

14-16 February 2014

## Call for Papers

The 150th birth anniversary of Tagore and the years since have witnessed a worldwide surge of interest in the relatively less explored areas of Tagore's prodigious creative output. New interpretations of Tagore's paintings, dance drama, fiction and music have been in the vanguard of this concerted cultural move to make Tagore our contemporary all over again. Academic explorations in their turn have sought to historicise Tagore's discourse, re-locating his creative works and his polemics alike in the infinitely complex, richly dynamic cultural history of 19th and 20th century Bengal and India. His poetry, though, has remained more or less the bastion of conservative old-school literary engagement. It is the one genre that seems to have resisted the afterlife of appropriation and acculturation that his other more obviously time-travelling genres have yielded to. The disproportionately excessive preoccupation with *Gitanjali* and its legacy has probably impeded deeper engagement with the totality of Tagore's poetic oeuvre, early, middle and late, and its relevance in the new millennium. Has Tagore's poetry been a prisoner of its own "aura"? Has its status as a sanctified classic, uncomfortably and inaccessibly pre-modern in its representational, stylistic and, most importantly, linguistic registers been a deterrent to re-readings and retellings? That acutely self-conscious futuristic vision, "Aji hote shatobarsho pore" (A hundred years from today/ who are you, sitting, reading a poem of mine,/under curiosity's sway - a hundred years from today?" in Ketaki Kushari Dyson's translation) betrays Tagore's own anxiety about the longevity and posthumous reception of his poetry. Tagore seems to have felt impelled in some of his late letters to project a schizophrenic split between his poetic consciousness and his painter-self? Why else does he cast the modernist avatar of the poet in such demoniacal, Dionysian colours in *Shey*? Why at all in a poem like 'Patra' (*Punashcha*) does he seethe at "the monster of the printing press and at lumps of poetry hydraulically pulverised" (our translation)? How reliable and representative, we may ask, is the poet's voice when in poems like 'Kalidaser Proti' and 'Kavya' (*Chaitali*) he records his unabashed wistfulness for Kalidasa's rarified, transcendent brand of poetry: "tobu shey shobaar urddhaye nirlipto nirmal/ phutiyachhe kavya tabo shoundorjyokamol/anonder shurjopane": "yet it stands pristine, imperturbable towering over all/ The lotus blossom of your exquisite poetry/craning towards yonder sun" (translation ours). The relentless process of self-revision that informs not only Tagore's later experiments in *Punashcha*, *Prantik* and *Rogshojyae* but also early and middle works including *Sonar Taree*, *Balaka*, *Lipika* and *Banabani* presents a profound challenge to academic schematisations. In this, the centenary year of Tagore's Nobel Prize in Literature, the Department of English and Other Modern European Languages, Visva-Bharati, is hosting a two-day conference titled 'Beyond *Gitanjali*: Tagore, Poetry and Poetics' from 14 to 16 February 2014 under the aegis of its UGC DRS Programme on Tagore: The East-West Confluence. The proposed conference will seek to redress the critical lacunae outlined above and invites scholars to address the following areas of critical inquiry or other related issues of their choice in papers of 15 minutes' duration:

- Authorial self-construction in Tagore's poetry
- Tagore the auto-critic
- Formal verbs to colloquial verbs: the politics of Tagore's diction
- Tagore and ecological poetry
- Poet successors and the anxiety of Tagore's influence
- Tagore and his contemporaries in Bengali, Indian and world poetry
- Tagore and his poet predecessors
- Critics of Tagore's poetry Western and Eastern
- Tagore's poetry and his other genres

- Tagore's poetry and colonial self-hood
- Poetry and resistance in Tagore
- World poetry in Tagore's translation
- Women in Tagore's poetic imagination
- Tagore's poetry and digital textual scholarship today
- Tagore and Theory
- The afterlife of Tagore's poetry in other Indian languages and cultures
- Tagore's poetry and the Bengali reader today
- Tagore's poetry, school textbooks and university curricula
- Tagore, anthologies and editorial politics

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