

Panel 23: Bengal Studies

Tues 27.07.2010

Room: HS4

Session 1: 9.00—11.00

9.00—9.30:

Speaker 1: **Subho Basu, Associate Professor, Department of History, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, Email: subasu@maxwell.syr.edu**

Reformed Domesticity, Juvenile Adventure Stories and the Idealized Masculinity

In the second half of the nineteenth century Bengali middle class reformers sought to redefine domesticity as part of their interaction with colonial modernity. The construction of child hood and the reform movements for the legal protection of children constituted a critical component of such attempts at the modernization of domesticity along the lines of construction of childhood as a socially delineated phase in life were also reflected in the emerging genre of children's literature in different Indian languages. Juvenile adventure stories in the twentieth century constituted an important component of such children's literature. By engaging with children's literature in Bengal, this article argues that adventure stories is written for the consumption of male children presented the idealized masculine hero as the model of socialisation. As in the course of nationalist movement reformed middle class family became the metaphor of the nation, such masculine heroes of juvenile adventure stories were transformed into the model of masculinity in action in the project for nation formation. In many ways such constructions informed both pan south Asian identity as much as making the Bengali identity.

9.30—10.00:

Speaker 2: **Gautam Chando Roy, Senior Lecturer, History Department, Vidyasagar University, West Bengal, India, Email: gautamchroy@yahoo.co.in**

Moral Education in a Colonial Situation:

A Study in Bengali Children's Literature of the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

My paper throws light upon a pioneering effort by a people whose mental world was arguably the first to be transformed through its interactions with the West. It discusses a scheme of moral education that adults in colonial Bengali society attempted through the literature they created for children. The circumstances that necessitated this, the idea of childhood that informed this endeavour, and the possible effects on the young readers will be part of my enquiry. Thoughtful and sensitive elders of Bengali society, disgruntled with the colonial school system and the demeaning influence of the West, embarked upon a scheme of education that took into account both children's proclivities and the needs of a new, self-dependent society they envisaged. The content and the method of their value instruction show how a colonized people tried to grapple with a tradition still very much evident within and a strong alien influence from without.

10.00—10.30:

Speaker 3: **Kerstin B. Andersson, School of Global Studies/ Social Anthropology, Research Assistant, Nordic Centre in India, Email: tinni.andersson@telia.com**

The Kolkata Intellectuals and Bengali Modernity

Examining the Kolkata intellectuals, their history and contemporary situation, this paper will discuss the notions of tradition, modernity and “Bengali modernity”. The concept Bengali modernity, introduced by the subaltern studies group, has been used to denote the different discourses and paradigms that appeared among the Kolkata intellectuals in the colonial encounter. “Bengali modernity” was described as something unique not comparable to western modernity, intertwined with colonialism and nationalism. According to some, it included a “second colonialisation” and inhibited the development of modernity in India. The subaltern studies group introduced postcolonial, antiorientalist and postmodern modes of analysis to grasp the new configurations. However, my anthropological exploration of the Kolkata intellectuals, based on extensive fieldwork, sources as oral history and archival material, will suggest a different conceptualisation of the notion of Bengali modernity.

10.30—11.00:

Speaker 4: **Sanjukta Sunderason, PhD Candidate, Department of History of Art, University College London, Email: sanjukta.sunderason@gmail.com**

The Anxious Subjects of Indian Modernism: Artists, ‘Modern’ Art and the Aesthetics of Displacement in Mid-Twentieth Century Bengal

This paper dwells on the impact of the catastrophic Bengal Famine of 1943 on the idioms, practices and ideologies of ‘modern’ art in Bengal. The forties as the closing decade of British colonialism in India, was fraught with heightened popular politics and mass dislocation and destitution in Bengal, beginning with the famine of 1943 and continuing through the years of communal genocide and partition. In art productions of the decade there emerged what can be called an aesthetics of hunger, with new vocabularies of ‘social realism’, ‘humanism’, ‘popular’ and ‘progressive’ art. Post-1940s this trope of trauma lingered in Bengal’s ‘modern’ art practices, making a rapprochement with the modernist promise of the new Indian nation-state difficult; while artistic modernism flourished in Bombay and New Delhi, Calcutta languished not merely in infrastructure, but in iconographic and idiomatic registers, it failed to capture the triumph of the new ‘modern’ subject. I seek to highlight the ‘social’ as a dialectic within artistic modernism in mid-twentieth century Indian plastic arts.

Session 2: 11.30—13.00

11.30—12.00:

Speaker 5: **Manujendra Kundu, Research Fellow at Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India, Email: manujendra@gmail.com**

Dramatic Performance Act, 1876: Response of the Bengali Intelligentsia

The Dramatic Performances Act, 1876 put a curb on the free exercise of theatrical representation by the native Bengalis. Although it drew severe criticism from a wide section of Bengali intelligentsia, there were still others who voiced in favour of such a strangulating law in order to maintain a kind of status quo with [and not to antagonize] the British government. They even went so far as to criticize their fellow citizens for not showing restraint and prudence in their condemnation of the British rule in India. From the accounts of the vernacular print media it is evident that a certain

section of the Bengali intellectuals was not only serving the interest of the colonizers but also protecting their own profits and future. Interestingly, the tone of their language was more didactic than censorious, which 'qualified' their effort as a generous and magnanimous effort to save the colonized race from extinction and humiliation. To write this paper I have largely depended on a number of newspapers of that period.

12.00-12.30:

Speaker 6: **Samarpita Mitra, post-doctoral fellow at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta, Email: sampitamitra@yahoo.com**

Towards a History of Periodical Readership in Early Twentieth Century Bengal:
The Case of Ramananda Chattopadhyay's Prabāsi

This paper investigates some key questions regarding the socio-cultural implications of a relatively understudied print media, the literature miscellany, its production and consumption in early twentieth century British Bengal. Through a study of Prabasi, a major literary journal of the times, edited by Ramananda Chattopadhyay, its literary innovations and editorial interventions, this paper will seek to demonstrate how periodical reading and the notions of aesthetics and culture that it fostered became intimately tied up with questions of middle class identity and class differentiations. Problematising notions of reading practices of an expanding middle class audience my work tries to show how Prabasi not only lent new meanings to ideas of sustained interest and participation amongst its readers in public life or jatiya jiban, it also came to represent a self-consciously high-brow cultural sensitivity that the Bengali bhadralok came to claim and safeguard as their own.

12.30—13.00:

Speaker 7: **Srilata Chatterjee, Calcutta University, Kolkata. West Bengal, India, Email: srilatachatterjee@yahoo.co.in**

Press, Pamphlets and Techniques of Political Mobilization in Bengal from Swadeshi to Quit India

Political mobilization in Bengal took varied forms. The press and the pamphlets issued in vernacular formed a strong medium of nationalist propaganda in Bengal. Through their skilful use of rhetoric to create an emotional link they were able to politicize the literate population in Bengal. In the countryside indigenous forms of folk art and songs were used as mediums of propagating the nationalist message through creating a common cultural identity. *Swadeshi Jatra, Kirtan* processions were extremely popular forms of art, which attracted a huge gathering. The trend which started in the late 19th century from the time of the Hindu Mela continued even in the 20th century, in fact with greater vigour. This paper seeks to examine the different forms of political mobilization in Bengal and their role in creating a tradition of political culture in a particular geographic region from the era of the Swadeshi movement to the Gandhian Satyagraha.

Session 3: 14.00—15.30

14.00—14.30:

Speaker 8: **K.M Mohsin, Professor (honorary), Department of History, University of Dhaka, Email: mohsin1937@yahoo.com**

Bengal's Political and Religious Division in Retrospection

The provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa had been a single administrative unit until 1905. The unity of the region was disrupted by the creation of a new province of Eastern Bengal and Assam, with a predominantly Muslim population. Due to Hindu agitation the partition was annulled after

six years. The political agitation associated with boycott and terrorist movements along with subsequent all India political development led to the partition of India as well as the division of Bengal in 1947. Beyond these political and religious divisions there were a number of factors that had united the region for many years. The common language, liberal traditions and the past literary achievements were submerged under the current prevailing political and religious sentiments. This paper will review how political and religious considerations override those factors and how all attempts for a unity failed at the partition of Bengal in 1947.

14.30—15.00:

Speaker 9: **Binayak Roy, Lecturer in English, Kalipada Ghosh Tarai Mahavidyalaya, Bagdogra, India, Email: binayak_roy@hotmail.com**

The Sophisticated Caveman: A Modernist Reading of Ray's *Agantuk* (The Stranger)

Monmohan Mitra, a long-time Bengali expatriate in the West, a trained anthropologist, offers to be the guest of his as-yet unknown niece Anila, his only surviving relation. This precipitates a clash between Anila and her husband Sudhindra, a clash between the two sexes and by extension between primitive and modern civilizations. Monmohan thus catalyzes the conflicts between all opposites, helps to lay bare their merits and demerits, explores such fundamentals as the ultimate cosmic mystery and man's intrinsic identity, dramatizes the gulf between appearance and reality, and finally walks out of the film leaving his critics thoroughly discomfited. Through Monmohan, Ray attempts a searching critique of modern civilization. Monmohan's is the dilemma of modern man as such. Value-free science can satisfy only the intellect; dogmatic religion, only the emotion. A personal mystical religion, as conceptualized by William James in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and embodied by Tagore in his art can satisfy the whole man that Monmohan is.

15.00—15.30:

Speaker 10: **Chandak Sengoopta, Department of History, Classics and Archaeology, Birkbeck College, University of London, Email: c.sengoopta@bbk.ac.uk**

"The Fruits of Independence": Satyajit Ray and Indian Nationalism

Satyajit Ray's films and stories are usually regarded as humanistic texts with little political or ideological content. Focusing on two films from different periods of Ray's career – *Kanchanjanga* (1962) and *Agantuk* (1991) – and illustrative vignettes from his many stories, such as *First Class Kamra* (1981) and *Robertsoner Ruby* (1992), this paper will argue that a preoccupation with Indian nationalism was an enduring theme in his work, expressed often through the staging of a debate between two characters on the "fruits of independence." Although Ray grants ample dialogic-diegetic space to the critics of nationalism, the debates are invariably resolved on a nationalist note, even when that nationalism deviates, as in *Agantuk*, from the mainstream. Scholars have missed this ideological element partly because of the complexity of its staging but also because of preconceptions about Ray's non-judgmental "humanism" and, not least, a failure to engage with Ray's literary corpus.

Session 4: 16.00—17.30

16.00—16.30:

Speaker 11: **Soumajit Samanta, Professor of English, Dept of English, North Bengal University, Darjeeling, West Bengal, Email: textament@rediffmail.com**

Sacred & Profane, Love in Medieval Bengali Vaishnava Lyrics:

A Study of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda & its influences

Medieval Bengali Vaishnava Lyrical poems are rich in "rasa". The concept of "rasa" is found in ancient Sanskrit kavyas (poems) and weaves together both the psychological & physiological dimensions of a love experience. Gita Govinda is unique as it has given way to eight expressions of basic emotions (sthayi-bhavana) and nine dimensions of aesthetics experiences or "rasas". It conflates the "syngara-rasa" (biological) and the aesthetic with the eternal "prana" (life-spirit) in nature. This paper explains how this new love poetry deals with the intricate grammar of Radha's loved with Krishna where the primal force of love (kama) as "sthayi-bhavana" is sublated in the "prema-bhakti" or spiritual love as Krishna-rati. This new strain of love poetry influenced later Vaishnava poets like Bidyapati & Chandidas in Medieval Bengal.

16.30—17.00:

Speaker 12: **Ferdinando Sardella, History of Religions, Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion (LIR), University of Gothenburg, Email: ferdinando.sardella@lir.gu.se**

Personalism in Calcutta: the Case of Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati

The colonial period in Calcutta gave rise to the bhadrakok: the class responsible for producing such transformative figures such as Rammohun Roy and Swami Vivekananda, both of whom believed non-dualism to be the fundamental expression of Hindu religious thought. As a result of these trends modern Hinduism gradually came to be identified with Vedantic non-dualism (advaita) in both India and the West—an outcome that has historically obscured modern personalist bhakti currents. The paper presents the work of the Bengali Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati (1874-1937), a Vaishnava guru of the school of Chaitanya (1486-1534), who, at a time that Hindu non-dualism was most prominent, managed to establish a pan-Indian movement for the modern revival of traditional personalist bhakti that today encompasses both Indian and non-Indian populations throughout the world. The study carries implications for the understanding of modern Hinduism and its development from pre-colonial to post-modern forms, which occurred during a time of global modernisation.

17.00—17.30:

Speaker 13: **Manjita Mukharji, Independent Scholar, Email: monjitapalit@googlemail.com**

Kal Hoyechhe Okal: Scenes from the Post-Colonial Kaliyug in Baul Songs

Sumit Sarkar has drawn attention to the ways in which the trope of Kaliyug—the last epoch of traditional Hindu temporality—was re-worked under colonialism to become a repertoire of images of social inversion. These images in turn articulated the repressed angst of the lower middle classes. A seemingly stereotypical description of the time just before apocalypse became as a consequence an eloquent site for the voicing of opinions about the colonial present. No similar account of this widely used idiom of social and political critique exists, however, for the post-colonial times. After all, what became of Kaliyug? Surely, after such wide-ranging cultural investment it could not have suddenly given way to Satyayug at the stroke of midnight at Independence. In this paper, we will attempt to chart some specific post-colonial articulations of Kaliyug—relocated now from the pamphlets of Sarkar's urban keranis to the rural melodies of contemporary Bauls.

Wednesday, 28.07.2010

Room: HS4

Session 5: 9.00—11.00

9.00—9.30:

Speaker 14: **Md. Afsar Uddin, Professor, Department of Drama and Dramatics Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka. Email: afsarju@yahoo.com**

The Oraons in Bangladesh: Identity Crisis and Decaying Culture

This paper focuses on the status of cultural identity of the contemporary Oraons ethnic people in Bangladesh. Qualitative information for the current paper has been gathered from various published sources. Findings suggest that Oraons are a distinct ethnic or tribal group that has its own ethnological, racial, religious, and cultural roots. They are descendents of the Proto-Australian race, animist, and believers of totem. The ritualistic activities, festivals, and ceremonies of the Oraons are related to their agricultural activities. *Karama Fagua*, *Sarhul*, and *Sohrai*, are some of their main festivals. *Karama* is the most prestigious and grandest festival for the Oraons. Although they have been preserving their traditional cultural practices for centuries, the impact of modernization is evident in contemporary Oraon lifestyles. Findings will be discussed in relation to the sustenance of their cultural ceremonies and identity in today's world.

9.30—10.00:

Speaker 15: **Lubna Marium, Shadhona – A Center for Advancement of Southasian Dance and Music, Email: kanchendzonga@gmail.com**

Enduring Worship of *Manasa* in Bangladesh

The enduring ritualistic performance of the narrative of 'Manasa' - the serpent Goddess - by the, mostly muslim, marginalized communities of Bangladesh validates the statement that 'in traditions like the Indian, the realities of the civilization are expressed in a spectrum of forms, where one complements, contradicts, reflects and refracts another.' The other reality of this region is the presence of dominant traditions of the literate segment of society, co-existing with the alternative traditions which 'invert, oppose, and reflect on them'. On the basis of extensive field-work, the paper tries to understand the plurality of identity, within subaltern communities, reflected through such worship.

10.00—10.30:

Speaker 16: **Arun K Jana, Reader in Political Science, University of North Bengal, India, Email: arun_jana1@rediffmail.com**

Ethnic Minorities, Identity Politics and the Demands for Separate States in the North Bengal Region of West Bengal under the Left Front Regime

The uninterrupted rule of the Left Front Government in West Bengal since 1977 is something unique and also significant in the democratic and federal history of India. However, under the avowedly pro-poor Left Front regime, ethnic minorities in different parts of the state feel neglected and have resorted to 'identity politics' since the early 1980s. Leaders who mobilise on ethnic lines allege that they and their region have remained backward and underdeveloped. Since the second half of the 1990s the ethnic forces in the plains of North Bengal have gained considerable popularity and mobilisation success. This may suggest that the living conditions of these ethnic groups have deteriorated at least relatively in the era of globalisation. The paper focuses on the condition of the minorities in the region, which seems to be the root of identity politics, and analyses the demands, nature and form of these movements in the region.

10.30—11.00:

Speaker 17: **Tiffany Hodge, PhD candidate, Emory University, West and South Asian Religions, Atlanta, GA, USA, Email: tahodge@emory.edu**

The 'Hungry Tide': Salish and the Arbitration of Land Cases

Salish (informal, community-sanctioned court) has gained increasingly negative notoriety in contemporary Bangladesh, as it has been used as a forum to violently punish women and lower class individuals who are charged with sexual impropriety. My ethnographic fieldwork in Barisal district has demonstrated, however, that Salish is not simply a tool of oppression. Scholars should have a better understanding of its complex position in rural communities. Salish in Bhola (the largest island in Bangladesh) is often utilized in land and inheritance cases by those who cannot, or do not want to, turn to the state judicial system. These cases are particularly significant on an island where land is constantly disappearing and the population continues to increase. In my presentation, I will discuss several cases observed during my fieldwork: the actors, the power dynamics present, and the legal interpretations employed to settle disputes. My analysis will consider the place of Salish as a means of adjunction in rural Bangladesh, alongside other institutions of justice.