

International Tagore Conference

Rabindranath Tagore in the Mirror of Our Times

(Special Focus on Europe's Interaction with Tagore and Tagore's Interaction with Europe)

Halle (Saale), 02.–03. August 2012

The conference's aim was a reappraisal of Rabindranath Tagore (Rabīndranāth Ṭhākūr; henceforth: Tagore) in the light of new insights gained through the multitude of events during 2011, the sesquicentennial anniversary year of his birth, and with a focus on Continental Europe.

The keynote address "The Expansion of the Interior Landscape of Poetry: Tagore's Contribution," was given by Hulkunthemath Shivamurthy Shivaprakash (India). For centuries the overall matrix of Indian poetic imagination had remained confined to Jambudvīpa. Tagore, not the least through his extensive travels, integrated the whole new "outside" world, creating a new paradigm for other Indian poets.

Turuvekere Subbanna Satyanath (India) reflected on "Mirrors as Windows: Understanding Tagore in Indian Languages." After presenting a bibliographical database of translations of Tagore into Indian languages, he took up two important issues with reference to translation into Kannada: Tagore's concept of universal humanity and the musical translations of songs and dramas, recreated in terms of local conventions.

Harish Trivedi (India) spoke on "Orientalism, Secularism and Post-colonialism: Tagore as Reflected in Some Western Discourses." The focus lay on the fact that Bengali und Western discourses have hardly communicated with each other.

Bernd-Peter Lange (Germany) dealt with "Tagore in the Diaspora: Presence, Ritual, Nostalgia." Anglophone diasporic writers such as Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh and so on exemplify their deep-rooted familiarity with Tagore's poems and songs, together with their awareness of the narrowing and waning of his image in the West and its complexity within the South Asian diaspora. The whole is creating a complex constellation which is reconstructing Tagore's viable but ever changing cultural presence.

Ananda Lal (India) spoke on "Tagorean Theatre and Europe: Then and Now." Significant European productions during Tagore's lifetime, partly by famous contemporary directors, were in focus. During the literary epoch of expressionism accompanying efforts to build a humanistic society, Tagore's plays were very popular. To revive them on European stages, imaginative performances would be needed.

Martin Kämpchen (Germany) reflected on "Rabindranath Tagore and Berlin." No other German city impacted as much on spreading his fame as poet and painter.

Lydia Icke-Schwalbe (Germany) spoke on "The Perception of Tagore in Dresden." Drawing from the newspaper archives of that time, a vivid description of the atmosphere of Tagore's visits was given. It was his wish to meet young people coming from music, dance and painting, as well as from the reformist education movement.

Christian Weiß (Germany) discussed "Stories for 21st Century People: Tagore's Prose Writings Rediscovered." He highlighted some of the short stories in which with much sympathy people from the lower strata of society are portrayed, and also the discrimination of women is criticised. Such stories were seen as being of potential interest to a modern German audience.

Georg Lechner (Germany) dealt with "The Creative Character of Commemorative Events: A Critical Enquiry into Selected Programmes Celebrating Tagore's 150th Birth Anniversary in

Germany.” Selected programmes were reviewed, identifying their creative character as open-ended and artistic, with a strong generative potential.

Swapn Majumdar (India) talked on “Germany in Tagore’s Perception.” Tagore tried to read Goethe, Schiller and Heine in the original. His personal contact with Germany later deepened his reverence for German intellectual life, enduring even through the aberrations of Nazism.

Mirja Juntunen (Sweden) reflected on “Tagore’s Nordic World.” Although the presentation dealt prominently with Sven Hedin, it also mentioned less-known persons like the young Swedish student Karl Hammargren, who played an active role in Visva-Bharati University and the Brahma Samaj.

Klaus Karttunen (Finland) spoke on “Hundred Years of Tagore and Finland,” reviewing the translations of Tagore’s works in Finland from 1913 on.

Renata Czekalska (Poland) showed in “The Wonder of Inspiration: The Poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and Polish Culture” how the translation of Tagore’s poetical works caused a gradual change in their reception. After a first stage of understanding the works together with their allegorical and symbolical styles, there was a new phase of transferring the sign system of language into the sign system of music. Thus, a generation of Polish composers beginning with Szymanowski has renewed and modernised the poems.

Tagore’s reception in the Spanish speaking world was dealt with by Shyama Prasad Ganguly (India) in “Tagore, The Kindred Voice: Some Reflections on the Hispanic Reception,” and Guillermo Rodríguez Martín (Spain) in “Rediscovering Tagore in Spain.” In 1921 Juan Ramón Jiménez and his wife Zenobia Campubrí, the translator of Tagore’s works, had prepared a programme for Tagore’s visit to Spain, later to be cancelled. Numerous Spanish intellectuals, artists and educationists eagerly awaiting Tagore were disappointed, temporarily causing a reduction of Tagore’s influence in Spain, though he was subsequently instrumentalised by the nationalist government. As regards Latin America, Pablo Neruda was influenced by Tagore.

Klara Gönc Moaçanin (Croatia) spoke on “Rabindranath Tagore’s Religious Thought and his Reception in Croatia.” Unfortunately Tagore’s religious and spiritual works were not translated into Croatian. Nevertheless, through the translation of the English version of *Gitanjali* Croats became acquainted with some aspects of his thoughts on religion and spirituality.

Blanka Knotková-Čapková (Czech Republic) interpreted “Archetypes of Fertility and their Critical Reflections in Selected Poems of Tagore.” She discussed motherhood as both impersonal (Mother India) and personal, woman as mundane beauty, and woman as the victim of a discriminative social order.

Arabella Unger (Germany) spoke on “Education for Social Responsibility: Tagore’s Unique Experiment,” dealing with the role of the volunteers in the village uplift programme around Santiniketan.

Prabodh Parikh (India) visualised his own engagement with Tagore as painter-artist in “The Poetics of (Dis)embodied Self: Face to Face with Tagore’s Paintings.”

Arabella Unger