

PRESIDENCY COLLEGE

PRESIDENCY UNIVERSITY

Value Added Course

Department Of Performing Arts

2023



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Dr Niladri Roy : Head of the Department of Performing Arts

Priyam Roychowdhury : Junior Assistant of the Department of Performing Arts

Sarmistha De : Junior Assistant

Debaditya Choudhury : (PU Student)

Swayam Dhibar : (PU Student)

Ajanta Basu Majumder : (VAC Participant)

Anasuya Ray : (PU Student)

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Priyam Roychowdhury
Junior Assistant

Rabindrasangeet Appreciation: Many Moods, Many Modes, Many Melodies

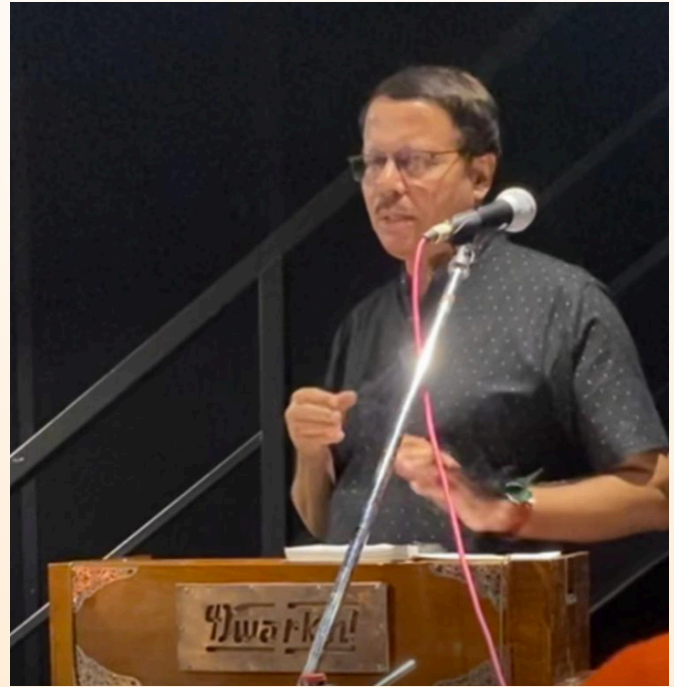
Designed & Coordinated by



Professor Sreemati Mukherjee
Department of Performing Arts
Presidency University

Sri Prabuddha Raha:

On the very first day of the VAC course, Sri Prabuddha Raha gave a brilliant lecture weaving in the necessity of swara documentation, the importance of adhering to the specific notes and gayaki of Rabindranath's compositions and not altering them. He spoke of the enormous precision of Rabindranath's swaras vis à vis the words. He also emphasized 'Sanchari' in Rabindrasangeet and how Tagore had on certain occasions artfully used Western classical music to deepen the aesthetics and appeal of his own songs. 27.07.23



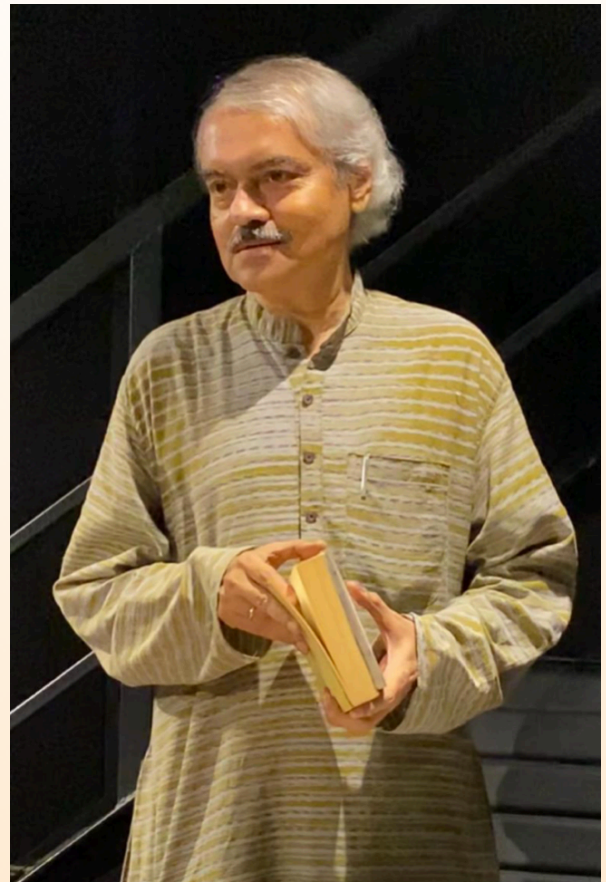
Prof. Laksmisree Banerjee:

Prof Banerjee spoke on the multi-dimensionality of Tagore. She dwelt primarily on the cultural upbringing, diverse influences of art, philosophy, languages and literary ambience of his home at Jorashanko Thakurbari, which created this iconic polymath. In the course of her lectures she also dealt with his song lyrics and poetic compositions which were enriched by his Indian mysticism, the influence of the Upanishads, the impact of English Romanticism, the Vaishnavite Bhakti cult and of course the total spirit of Sufism so evident in his Prem (Love) and Puja (God) songs, which were perfectly integrated in his sense of the cosmos. In her second lecture, she dealt with some specificities and directly demonstrated his masterly use of Indian classical Ragas to suit the layered textures and connotations of his musical phraseology and aesthetics. **27.07.23**



Prof. Ananda Lal:

He spoke on the international place of Tagore's songs, the pioneering introduction of nature and environmental awareness in them, and Tagore's contribution to theatre songs, almost one-third of his musical output. He then discussed Satyajit Ray's opinions of Tagore's original creativity and the debate on swaralipi, citing 'Ami chini go chini tomare' as one song that has 3 different scores, by Jyotirindranath. Dinendranarth and Sarala Devi respectively. Ray's question was then which one was the most appropriate one to use? Hence according to Ray, there is room for personal interpretation but the Visva-Bharati Swarabitanas must be respected as the ultimate authority. Ray had also brought up appropriate instrumentation, the application of harmony and the esraj or sarangi as ideal accompaniment. but never the Hawaiian guitar. **03.08.23**





Srimati Srabana Bhattacharyya:

It was an interactive session of discussing different shades of female characters in Tagore's dance dramas and other works. Attention was drawn to Chitrangada, Shyama, Prakriti, and others. An emphasis was laid on both aspects of poetry and melody in their characterisation. The nature of their 'voices' was analyzed. An attempt was made to link the predicament of such women to modern situations and ontologies. **10.08.23**



Dr. Saibal Basu:

Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray, both pioneers of intellectual film making, applied Rabindra Sangeet in their films. In Charulata Madhabi Mukherjee's own voice in 'Phule Phule Dhole Dhole' reminds us of the European origin of the song and the use of harmonisation in 'Ami Chini Go Chini' (piano is used as a period piece instrument) makes us realise how Ray was aware of the practice of harmonizing. Ritwik Ghatak, on the other hand, used Rabindra Sangeet as a passionate mode of cinematic expression. His association with the Communist Movement and IPTA cast deep impact on his reception of Rabindranath as a cultural and political thinker. One may surmise that Ghatak selected new voices in Rabindra Sangeet such as that of Arati Mukherjee or Sumitra Sen, as if to offer contrast to the erudite Brahma Samaj flavour of Ray's use of Rabindra Sangeet in his films.

17.08.23





Dr. Sanghita Sanyal:

In two presentations, Sanghita explored two aspects of Tagore's songs. First, the songs of solidarity featuring the country as the Mother where she traced the history of some songs and Tagore's idea of Nationalism and how the two keep complementing and contrasting each other. In the second presentation, Sanghita picks out some songs from 'Gitabitan' and analyzes the influence of Metaphysical Poetry on them thereby bringing out the universality of Tagore's idea of devotion manifesting into a fluidity of God/Lover/Friend/Companion et al.

24.08.23



Sri Srikanta Acharya:

Artist extraordinaire Srikanta Acharya gave a brilliant lecture on how to 'read' Rabindrasangeet. And that encompassed infinitesimal nuances of both swara and words and also an alertness to possible dramatic elements in the song. He spoke of how shades of Puriya Dhaneshree. Puriya Kalyan Sree and Poorvi (Purabi) were all present in Tumi To Shei Jabei Chole', in an invisible and highly powerful amalgam. He spoke of how 'sur' could access those inscrutable areas of experience where words could not reach. He added that sur was 'anirbochoniyo' or 'beyond words' or 'beyond description'. He also spoke of deepening one's interest in both Hindustani and Western classical music to understand and appreciate Rabindranath more. **14.04.23**



Sri Sounak Chattopadhyay:

He is one of the brightest stars in the Rabindrasangeet firmament!
Of the many songs he sang and analysed here is 'E Moho Aboron' set to Raag Yaman, and one of the most exquisite compositions ever made. A composition that bears the colossal stamp of the musical genius of Rabindranath Tagore. As the singer flawlessly reached the higher notes, it seemed as though the haunted yearning for the face of God, filled the entire cosmos.
Everyone in the class seemed in a state of rasa like transcendence.
21.09.23





Dr. Susmita Banerjee:

Dr. Susmita Banerjee emphasized how Rabindranath Tagore was deeply drawn to the cosmology, metaphors, symbols and bhavas of Vaishnav Padavalis. She posited that in the manner of the Vaishnava poets Tagore also thought of Radha as an 'Abhisarika' or 'the one who is on a tryst'. The persona of Radha comes across as someone who is determined to overcome all obstacles in her quest to meet Krishna -a determination we could say finds reflection in Tagore's words:

"তোমার অভিসারে যাব অগম পারে"

(I can cross the unknown to find you).

Vaishnava and Rabindra philosophy,

are not isolated from either mortal life nor from material life. This constant movement between the limited and the infinite, is repeatedly expressed with deep feeling in Rabindra Sangeet just like in the verses of Vaishnava poets.

29.09.23



Srimati Pramita Mallick:

At the close of Srimati Pramita Mallick's lecture the artist/ teacher/ researcher introduced us to the symbolic play 'Phalguni' where blindness functions as a trope for sight and light.

At the centre of the multiple interfaces of light and darkness, sight and blindness, youth and old age and wisdom versus ignorance, is the blind Baul. As the artist stated the part of the Baul used to be played by Rabindranath and his performance included Baul style dance. As Pramita -di further stated this play emphasizes the centrality of dance as a life principle. I am reminded in this context of another iconic song by Tagore on dance: 'Nritteryo taal-e taal-e hey Nataraj' (Oh, Your rhythmical dance steps Lord Shiva!).



The blind Baul leads the children in the play asserting that he 'sees' with all his senses and his song/music leads the way! **05.10.23**





Sri Prithwivev Bhattacharyya:

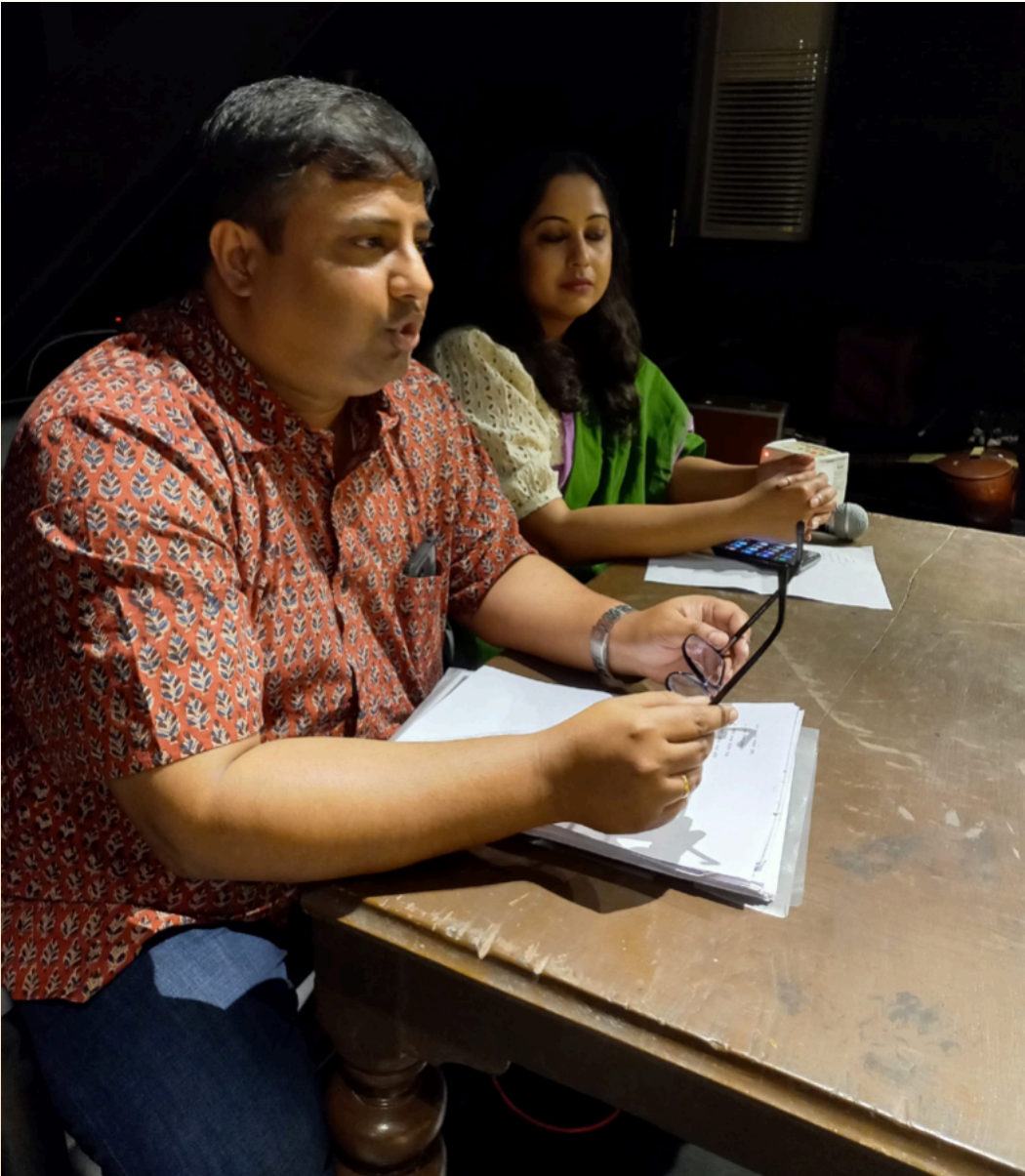
Listening to Rabindra Sangeet or listening to any genre of music, depends on the upbringing of the listener. The experiences of life, positive or negative, actually shape a person in such a way that he or she develops interest in certain activities. If we strictly talk about Rabindranath's music, then I should say, Rabindra Sangeet is such an elevated form of cultural expression that listening to it over and over again, exalts a person. Rabindra Sangeet enacts 'tension and release' by offering both the conflict of emotions and their resolution. Rabindra Sangeet is also a wonderful amalgamation of various musical genres and schools. **09.11.23**



Srimati Srabani Sen:

Srabani Sen's lecture was packed with reminiscences of her unusual parents, and Rituporno Ghosh and Debojyoti Mishra. She also mentioned how her mother had been extremely fun-loving and very good friends with Manabendra Mukhopadhyay and Ashoktaru Bandyopadhyay and that she was also a competent thumri singer. It is details such as this that create the cultural history of nations: history made alive and realized in rich specificities and layers, through oral narration. She mentioned her father who was extraordinary in promoting the talents of all the women in the house. She also spoke with admiration of her superbly talented older sister Indrani Sen from whom she learnt the technique of how to 'throw' her voice. She recounted how Debojyoti Mishra called her on behalf of Rituporno Ghosh to sing 'Amala Dhabala Paale Legechhe' for 'Utsav' and how that began a life-long relationship with the iconic film-maker and equally iconic music composer.





Sri Mainak Chakrabarti:

Mainak Chakrabarti spoke on ‘ananda’, ‘rasa’, ‘chit’, ‘mutuality’, ‘prem’ and ‘rudra’ elements of divinity (Brahman, Satchitananda, Chidananda) in his class on the ‘Upanishads’ today. Mainak is an executive at Bisk Farm and calls himself a food technologist. However, his knowledge of Rabindrasangeet is prodigious and it goes back to his mother who was a dancer. Mainak's lecture, with liberal quotes from Tagore's texts, focused on how Tagore emphasized ‘dukkha’ or sorrow as an inevitable ingredient of ananda or happiness and an essential experience in the path towards the liberation of the self. He posited that according to Tagore, ananda was the natural state of the human being. Accompanying him with song elucidations was Rohini Raychaudhuri, a young but extremely talented artist. **16.11.23**



Sri Rahul Mitra:

Rahul Mitra made some brilliant points: How singing Rabindra Sangeet meant a life of complete 'sadhana', renunciation, constant practice and embeddedness in all the forms of this genre. His lecture also dwelt on how music did not mean name and fame, but 'the thing itself'. Analogous examples are the way Omkarnath Thakur sang, or Bhimshen Joshi ji sang or how even Ustad Rashid Khan sang. Rahul Mitra spoke of how music was 'the larger picture' beyond everyday and mundane concerns. These were valuable lessons to be learnt both about the thought and practice of music. **30.11.23**

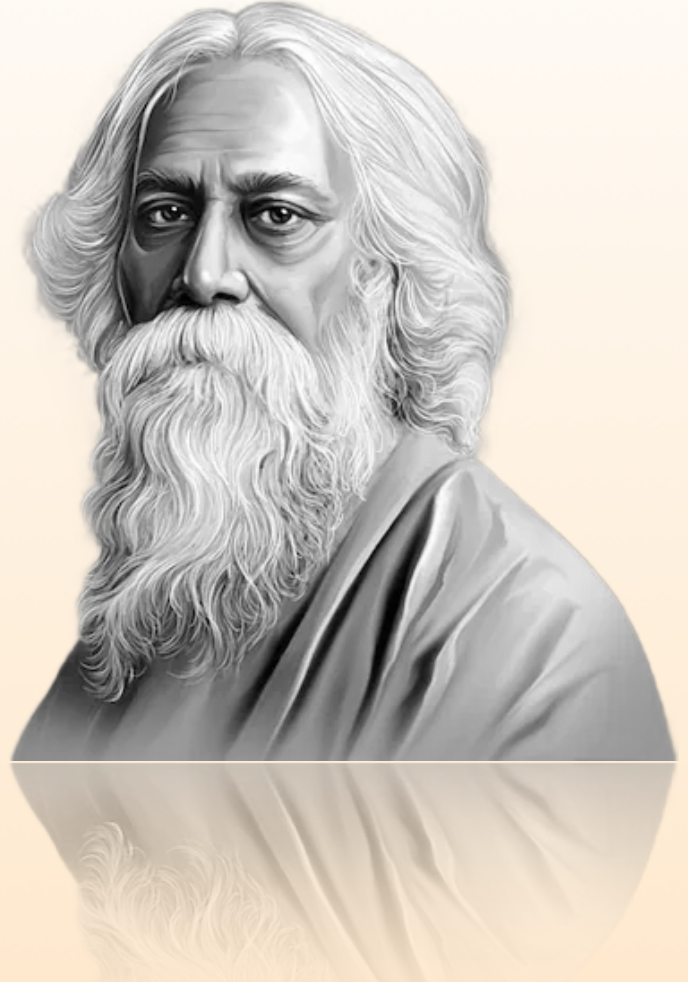
Prof. Sreemati Mukherjee:

In the 7 classes that Prof. Sreemati Mukherjee took, she spoke on various aspects of Tagore's music and lyrics. Some of ideas that were stressed were the primal quality of sound and how in 'Orality and Literacy', Walter J Ong, spoke of sound as 'anterior to sight'. She referred to Tagore's 'Ki Diwani Baaje Gahana Chetana Maajhe' (1931) in this context, which set to Raag Poorvi, explores and posits the magical power of primal sound. She also spoke of swara as extremely intelligent, so much so that the 'baanshi' or flute knew the truth which the poet did not ('Amar Ekti Katha Baanshi Jaane'-1915). She also spoke of the recursive nature of certain images in Tagore like the boat, the boatman, the sky, rain, song and the cosmic power and reach of melody. Some of these songs are 'Orey Majhi (1910), Tori Amar Hathat Dubey Jai (1902) 'Amal Dhabala Paale Legechhe (1908). Danriye Achho Tumi Amar Gaaner-o Pare (1914), 'Tumi Kemon Kore Gaan Koro Hey Guni'(1909). 'Orey Majhi' (1910) provides a very interesting interplay of light and darkness, death and life, creativity and, boats and boatmen, water and land, journeys and journey endings. There were also references to Vaishnav Madhur 'tattva' and English Romantic poetry in her lectures.



Names of Participants

- 1) Chandrima Mukherjee
- 2) Soumya Tagore
- 3) Munmun Roy
- 4) Anasuya Ray
- 5) Amit Kumar Poddar
- 6) Swayam Dhibar
- 7) Mousumi Roy Chowdhury
- 8) Joita Mukherjee
- 9) Ajanta Basu Majumder
- 10) Ruma Roy
- 11) Debasish Sarkar
- 12) Aditi Mondal
- 13) Madhusree Gupta
- 14) Kakoli Chatterjee
- 15) Swarnava Sarkar
- 16) Soumilee Dasgupta





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