

Devin Choudhury

12/2/2022

Bhushan & Santosh Khashu Research Award for Tagore Studies Fellowship Summary

The Bhushan & Santosh Khashu Research Award for Tagore Studies allowed me to travel to India and spend just over three months performing research in Kolkata and Bolpur. Landing in Kolkata, I was initially occupied with logistical work: first, obtaining the documents necessary to access the Directorate of State Archives and the National Library, and, second, completing the required documentation for my visa. I also met with my advisor at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Manabi Majumdar, who was kind enough to introduce me to one of her colleagues, Rajarshi Ghose. At Professor Ghose's recommendation, I attended the Kolkata International Book Fair, where I was able to obtain a number of Bangla- and English-language books that I otherwise would not have been able to. These included works on Tagore's rural reconstruction program at Sriniketan; the history of famine in Bengal; the history of the Naxalite movement; as well as several general collections of essays. I was also able to attend a number of panels at the book fair.

In mid-March, I traveled to Bolpur. There, I performed archival research at the Rabindra Bhavana of Visva-Bharati University; and, with the assistance of the Agricultural Extension department at Visva-Bharati, I conducted interviews with local cultivators, in which I explored their personal histories, as well as the history of the local agricultural scene. I also met with several professors at Visva-Bharati. The archival research was extraordinarily productive, as I gained new insight into Tagore's political thought and enjoyed the opportunity to examine his personal papers. The interviews, too, were helpful, as I learned quite a bit about the lives of local cultivators—particularly their labor practices—as well as about the history of the region more broadly. It was an extraordinarily interesting way to track to the influence of Tagore's work in rural reconstruction: the ways in which its present-day material effects coincide with and depart from the poet's original vision.

I returned to Kolkata at the very end of April. After a week in Darjeeling—a welcome respite from the heat of Birbhum—I began research almost immediately at the Directorate of State Archives, where I gathered information about the famine policy of the British Raj. My time

in the archive was enormously intellectually productive. What's more, I was able to find some useful sources—mostly contemporaneous accounts of the 1943 famine—at the National Library. My visit to the archives of the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences were also quite helpful: with the assistance of Abhijit Bhattacharya, I was able to locate a number of early magazines that will be useful in exploring the ideology and practice of agrarian improvement in colonial Bengal, as well as contemporary media accounts of the 1943 famine. I concluded my time in Kolkata at the CSSS conference on Rammohun Roy, a wonderful cap on my time in India.

I would like to thank the Khashu family for their extraordinarily kind support, without which I would not have been able to enter nearly as deeply into Tagore's life and legacy. I hope that the work that I have been able to produce as a result can serve as a worthy contribution to Tagore scholarship and to efforts to bring the poet's thought to US audiences, academic and otherwise.