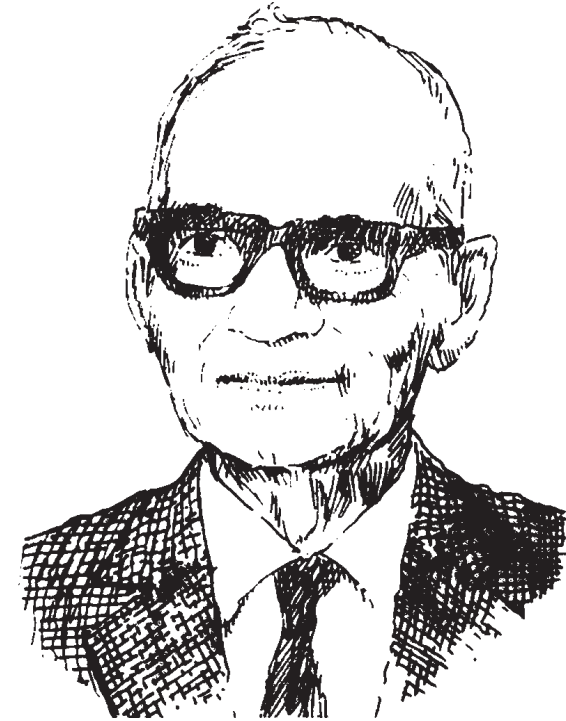


NCERT

B. M. PUGH
FIRST MEMORIAL LECTURE
2008

RATAN THIYAM

Memorial Lecture Series



1897-1986

1890

शिक्षणं ऽ मृतमश्नुते



एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH AND TRAINING

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NCERT
MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES

B. M. Pugh First Memorial Lecture

at

Laitumkhrah, Women's College, Shillong

Organised by

NERIE, Shillong

11 March 2008

SHRI RATAN THIAM

शिक्षणं ऽ मृतमनुते



एन सी ई आर टी
NCERT

राष्ट्रीय शैक्षिक अनुसंधान और प्रशिक्षण परिषद्
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OBJECTIVES

The National Council of Educational Research Training (NCERT) is an apex organisation, assisting and advising the Central and State Governments by undertaking research, survey, and development, training and extension activities for all stages of school and teacher education.

One of the objectives of the Council is to act as a clearing house and disseminator of ideas relating to school and teacher education. We have initiated the Memorial Lecture Series in order to fulfil this role and to commemorate the life and work of great educational thinkers. Our aim is to strive to raise the level of public awareness about the seminal contributions made in the field of education by eminent men and women of India. We expect that such awareness will set off a chain of discourse and discussion. This, we hope, will make education a lively subject of inquiry while simultaneously encouraging a sustained public engagement with this important domain of national life.

The memorial lecture series covers public lectures commemorating the life and work of nine eminent Indian educational thinkers and practitioners.

Title Series and Venue of Memorial Lecture Series

<i>Title</i>	<i>Venue</i>
Gijubhai Badheka Memorial Lecture	Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education Bhubaneswar
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education Mysore

Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education Bhopal
B.M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	North East Regional Institute of Education, Shillong
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	SNDT, Women's College, Mumbai
Marjorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	Regional Institute of Education Ajmer
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	Presidency College, Kolkata
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	National Institute of Education New Delhi

We invite men and women of eminence from academia and public life to deliver these lectures in English or any other Indian language. Our intention is to reach a large audience consisting in particular of teachers, students, parents, writers, artists, NGOs, government servants and members of local communities.

The Annexure I (Memorial Lectures–2007-2008) and Annexure II (Memorial Lectures–2008-2009) provide a summary of the lectures organised in the years 2007-08 and 2008-09.

In due course the lectures will be made available on Compact Discs (CDs) and in the form of printed booklets in languages other than English or Hindi in which it is originally delivered for wider dissemination. Each booklet consists of II sections : Section I highlights the purpose of the memorial lectures and provides a brief sketch of life and work of the concerned educational thinker and Section II gives the lecture in full along with a brief background of the speaker.

I acknowledge the contribution of Ms Konsam Diana, *Junior Project Fellow* for helping me in finalisation of this manuscript.

We hope these lecture series will be of use to our audience as well as the public in and outside the country in general.

ANUPAM AHUJA
Convenor

SECTION I

B.M. PUGH

REV. BRANSLEY MARPNA PUGH: A PROFILE

PROFESSOR DEBASISH CHOWDHURY¹

INTRODUCTION

'Laitkynsiew' is a tiny sleepy hamlet located at the edge of the Khasi Jaintia Hills at the far eastern part of India some 3,300 feet above sea level. Now, a part of Meghalaya, India's twenty-first state, this village a little more than a hundred years ago, like numerous such other villages, was under the ravines. Some of these waterfalls, though noticeably slimmer now than what they used to be in the distant past, are major tourist incentives of the place while some others, courtesy the ever growing human interventions on the surrounding nature, have now become a part of the history. Once in the past, this part of the land being an interface between a highly productive plains land and hills rich in mineral and forest resources used to be a rather active market like connect between the people living in the plains and the hills. Now since the plains belong to one sovereign nation while the hills belong to another, the intervening international border practically renders such commercial transactions at individual or group level virtually non-existent. As such, the once busy river transport through Surma is dead. One would therefore fail to locate the searchlight like beams of the steamers ferrying people and goods at night on the river flowing through the two nations that a few decades earlier were integral partners in a common identity.

* Debasish Chowdhury is Principal, Women's College, Shillong

EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

It was in this tiny hamlet placed amidst bountiful beauty of nature that Bransley Marpna Pugh was born on 24 September 1897. His father then stationed at the Laitkynsiew village was an employee of the Welsh Presbyterian Mission and was looking after the activities of the mission in four of the neighbouring churches. Originally belonging to a fairly well established landed family in Shella, a place located on a typical hill-plain interface now bordering Bangladesh, Pugh's father was constrained to take up an assignment with the Welsh mission to support his family consequent upon the devastating earthquake that rocked this part of the land on June 12, 1897 causing large-scale destruction of life and property that along with a host of others robbed him too of his landed resources. Pugh's father had never been able to actually recuperate this loss at a later time. That devastating earthquake, in fact, in a matter of minutes, transformed many well-to-do families into paupers thereby compelling them to completely reset their agenda of life and livelihood to the bare needs of survival. Pugh's father too was no exception.

Laitkynsiew as a village, however, was privy to a have a Middle English school where Pugh received his primary education. Shri Eleazer Pugh, the headmaster of this school happened to be Pugh's eldest step brother who died while Pugh was in that school. It was his last name rather than their father's title Singh that eventually became the surname of the family with the surname of their mother 'Marpna' added to it as its middle name. In the early part of 1911, Rev. J. M. H. Rees and his wife came to Laitkynsiew as missionaries and took over the charge of the school that failed to manage a headmaster since the demise of Shri Eleazer Pugh. In that year Pugh along with one of his school mates made their maiden visit to Shillong to participate in the all district Middle English School Examination. Both Pugh and his schoolmate did well in the examination and won government scholarship of

Rs 5.00 a month. It indeed was a remarkable achievement for the boys from a remote village who literally walked their way to the town by covering 64 km on foot. It was even more important for Pugh for without this scholarship support it would have indeed been difficult for him to pursue his further studies later at Shillong.

His success at the middle school examination brought him to Shillong as a student of the Government Boys' School at Mawkhar. Pugh was fortunate to have U Soso Tham amongst others as one of his teachers in the school. To young Pugh, U Soso Tham, then an emerging poet who eventually rose to become one of the greatest exponents of Khasi poetry, appeared to be the most inspiring of all those who taught him in that school. Pugh, however, was also candid in admitting that his inspiring presence notwithstanding, U Tham often preferred dreaming over teaching while taking a class. During his initial days at Shillong he first stayed with his sister-in-law Ms Eleazer Pugh and later temporarily with his eldest sister Ms K. Hadem who used to reside then at the mission compound prior to finally moving in to the school hostel that remained his final abode at Shillong till he completed his schooling. It was during these hostel days that he along with his scholarship co-awardee from Laitkynsiew, made their maiden delegation to Mr Cunningham, the then Director of Education seeking a raise in their scholarship quantum and succeeded in convincing him to extract a hike in their monthly scholarship amount to Rs 7.00 from the Rs 5.00 that they used to get. In fact, the rate of the Middle School scholarship was revised to Rs 7.00 in place of the Rs 5.00 with effect from that year. In 1916, four years since joining the school at Shillong, Pugh appeared in the Matriculation Examination under the Calcutta University and came out in flying colours being placed once again amongst the first three tribal students who won the government scholarship. The call for higher education lured him to make Calcutta his next learning stop and he succeeded to somehow make it a reality overriding the

financial limitations of his family to support him in this venture with the help of a few friends and well-wishers.

Pugh left for Calcutta to begin his collegiate education in Science at Scottish Church College which at that time used to be the most favoured institute for students hailing from this region. After appearing in his final year degree examination in 1920, Pugh returned to Shillong to see his ailing elder brother Shri Granville who was serving then as the first pastor of Mawkhar Church in Shillong. Granville succumbed to his illness at the age of 26. Meanwhile, Pugh learnt that his first attempt at graduation was an unsuccessful one. In Pugh's own candid admission, the result did not surprise him much since he was aware of the fact that during the fourth and final year in the college, he had hugely neglected his studies by wasting a lot of precious time with a girl studying nursing at Campbell with whom he fell deeply in love. Being persuaded by two close friends of Granville, his deceased elder brother, to complete his studies, Pugh returned to Calcutta to once again appear for his final examinations. After attempting to sit for the examinations that got cancelled twice due to leakage of question papers, Pugh shifted his examination centre to Cotton College at Gauhati (now Guwahati) where he could rejoin his lady love for the evening strolls they had been missing since they left Calcutta. It was during this time that Pugh's family came to know of his relationship with the girl and being totally opposed to the prospect of that relationship made matters difficult for Pugh. At one stage, the matter in fact turned so sore that Pugh, being unable to handle the pressure, left for Cherrapunjee quitting his family home thinking that he would never ever return there. Caught between the personal dilemma of whether to marry first or to sit for the degree examination, Pugh was finding it a tough call to decide on his next move. Being persuaded by his lady love and a few well-wishers, Pugh, after some initial vacillations, left for Gauhati to sit for his degree examinations. This time, however, the interim personal problems notwithstanding, he came out in flying

colours obtaining his degree in science from Calcutta University securing distinction.

It was when all these things were happening that Professor K. J. Saunders, an Englishman teaching Buddhism in a school of religion at USA whom Pugh met at Calcutta some time ago, through a cable sent to his parent's address, informed that Pugh may be granted a scholarship to study Agriculture at the University of California provided he agree to take some theological courses at the Pacific School of Religion, a few furlongs away from the university of California. Pugh was drawn to the study of agriculture after listening to a talk at YMCA, Calcutta of the contribution one can make to the solution of the food problems faced by the country through use of scientific agricultural methods. Once this invite to study agriculture at USA reached Pugh at Gauhati, things started moving fast. After having some discussions with his friends and family, Pugh decided to accept the opportunity. He then got married first and after a brief honeymoon returned to Gauhati from where he left for USA via Calcutta. On being approached, the then Director of Public Instructions, Mr Cunningham agreed to sponsor Pugh's trip to USA in the lowest fare from any port in India and Pugh was so delighted at the prospect of his imminent voyage that he declined to defer his journey a little to avoid the sea at monsoon. On a late evening of July 1921, Pugh boarded a small boat at the Outram Ghat at Calcutta to set sail for his voyage to USA via Hongkong. Two American Missionary couples namely the Witters and the Fielders helped Pugh a great deal in the last minute preparation for this voyage.

Pugh's initial plan to support him in his studies at America by working part-time did not work out to expectations and after some initial attempts through the help of Professor Saunders, he ultimately took an apartment at the Pacific School from where he thought he would be able to supplement his meager resources by working on Saturdays or other holidays. By that time,

Pugh had started taking his courses at both the university and the Pacific school with a fairly hectic schedule. He was required to take 12 lectures a week at both these institutes and was satisfied with the work load he was expected to handle. In view of his intention to specialise in agriculture, he was admitted to the College of Agriculture with Agronomy as major. Though, Pugh graduated from India with Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics as his subjects of study, he took up his studies in agronomy with great enthusiasm in spite of having no basic knowledge of the subject he choose to study. After two years of study at the college, Pugh, in order to gather first hand experience in his subject of study; a mandatory requirement of the university for award of the degree, moved to a farm house called the Davis farm some 120 km off Berkeley which was then developing fast as a sister institute of the University of California. At the end of the year of his practical training at Davis where he had to take practical courses on subjects like farm engineering, animal husbandry and cattle feeds, he took a trip to Yosemite Valley.

By the time he returned from his trip to the world famous park, Pugh's term tenure at California was drawing to a close. He was, however, aware that he would be entitled to get his degree in agriculture only after he gathers some practical experience in a recognised farm. Accordingly, after some efforts Pugh moved in to the Mills Orchard, a farm owned by a company of which Mr Mills, a regent of the University of California was a partner with a job there. After a two month long fairly rigorous training at this farm, Pugh returned to the university which, then being satisfied that Pugh had successfully completed all necessary formalities, awarded him the degree thus paving the way for his to return to India. Pugh, however, stayed back there for about two more months in an effort to raise some money to meet his expenses towards the return made his maiden landing at the passage. It was on an evening about four years after he shores of USA; Pugh boarded 'Tokyo Maru', the Japanese liner to begin his return voyage to India, his beloved homeland.

AS AN EDUCATIONIST

On his arrival at India, Pugh started to desperately look for a job with a view to get settled. Administration in India, still a British colony then, was under the Montague-Chelmsford reforms regime in which agriculture happened to be 'transferred subject' meaning thereby that the concerned ministry looking after agriculture was headed by an Indian. Pugh in his effort to get a job even approached the minister in charge without success though since he was told that the department had no position to accommodate him. Since he had studied theology at the Pacific School, he tried to obtain a teaching assignment in a local theological college but even that did not materialise for in Pugh's own assessment, *the foreign missionaries in Assam then did not look with favour the appointment of any national who might sooner or later replace them.*

Dr Clausen was then engaged in some research studies in and around Shillong During those trying days when all efforts to manage a job for him was failing to materialise, Pugh met Dr Curtis P. Clausen, an American entomologist at Shillong involving certain parasites of a Japanese beetle that were causing heavy damages to the apples and other deciduous fruits in the United States. Dr Clausen incidentally was the elder brother of a renowned Geneticist and a Professor of Pugh who taught him while he was at California. Inviting a reference to that link, Dr Clausen asked Pugh to join him in his research studies. Pugh did not have a job at hand till that time, and as such readily agreed to accept the offer. As a research associate, Pugh worked with Dr Clausen for about two years during 1926-28. With a laboratory set up at the apple orchard of one Mr Holder, both Dr Clausen and Pugh had been working hard in the project in which Pugh, barring short trips at the city outskirts to collect samples, remained mostly stationed at Shillong. The project, unfortunately though, ran into rough weather after some time as a section of the local populace became suspicious of their research activities thinking that they were collecting useful insects

from the hills and exporting them to USA. All attempts to explain and make them understand that they were only involved in research studies seeking to destroy harmful insects using other insects yielded no result. The project that fortunately was nearing completion had to be wound up after a while with Dr Clausen leaving Shillong immediately after to take over as the Director of the Riverside Experiment Station at California, USA other job avenues. Pugh by the end of 1927 sense that the project in which he was engaged would no more remain in operation and as such started looking for understanding that a teaching position was lying vacant at the Allahabad Agricultural Institute, Allahabad (AAIA). Pugh got in touch with the institute offering himself as a probable candidate for that position. The institute which was then looking for the position of a Professor of Agronomy found the credentials of Pugh fitting to their requirements and accordingly invited him to join the institute as Professor and Head of the Department of Agronomy from the beginning of the 1928-29 academic session. Accordingly, by the end of June 1928, Pugh left Shillong for Allahabad to take up his new assignment as Professor and Head of the Department of Agronomy at the Allahabad Institute of Agriculture. It obviously was an assignment that Pugh had been looking for ever since his return to India. Pugh's coming to Allahabad, a city then at the centre court of activities relating to India's struggle for independence being the head quarter of Indian National Congress, initiated a lasting relationship between Pugh and the AAIA during which both the institute as well as Pugh himself could mutually grow in stature. The city of Allahabad, barring some temporary and short time interruptions, remained Pugh's second permanent home for long twenty years or so.

On his arrival at Allahabad, Pugh was received by Mr W. B. Hayes, the Vice-Principal of the institute as Dr Sam Higginbottom, the Principal of the college was off to USA. On his meeting the Principal, Pugh came to know that the

institute was going through some financial crisis at that point of time and the Principal's tour to America was to campaign for funds to run the institute which did not meet with much success. In fact, he was asked by his mission authorities in America to close down the institute. Somehow, an English friend of Dr Higginbottom provided him with some financial support to run the affairs of the institute for some time. Any way, the institute with difficulties on financial front continued on with its work. During October at commencement of the first vacation since his joining the institute, Pugh returned to Shillong to spend the holidays with his family. At the end of the holiday Pugh returned to Allahabad along with his six years old son since his wife could not accompany him at that time owing to some family engagement. At the end of the first academic year at the institute and after the examinations were all over, Pugh again returned to his native place and stayed there till the end of the holidays after which he returned to Allahabad along with his wife. By the end of the first academic year at the institute, Pugh's involvement with it grew significantly and he was asked to dispense with additional responsibilities of the librarian as also the hostel warden of the institute besides his regular teaching responsibilities. Since, Pugh studied Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics during graduation he was also assigned the responsibility to teach Physics in addition to his other teaching loads. Pugh was assigned to teach the subject 'Soil Science and Climatology' at the institute and it is at this time he approached Professor Meghnad Saha, then Professor of Physics at Allahabad University, seeking his guidance in teaching this subject. Armed with the guidance and advice he received from Professor Saha, Pugh started teaching this subject and had taught it for as long as he remained in the faculty of the institute.

Allahabad in 1920-30, being headquarter of the Indian National Congress then spearheading India's struggle for independence, used to be the hub of activities relating to the struggle. It was only, therefore natural that it invited a

host of leaders to visit the city and some of them also made some time to visit the institute on various occasions. On one such occasion when Mahatma Gandhi visited the institute and noted with keen concern the activities of the institute, Pugh made his first encounter with Gandhi. Jawaharlal Nehru, Sorojini Naidu also visited the institute at certain time and their encouraging comments and visions of a free India moved Pugh so much that at later points of time, he broached the issue of India's independence at great length to the leaders of the hill region inviting them for a pro active role in the struggle for independence. Meanwhile in 1934, the AAIA, which at the time of Pugh's joining it, was teaching Intermediate Science in Agriculture and a two year Diploma course on Indian Dairy got upgraded to a degree college. Two years since introduction of the B.Sc. Agriculture course at the institute, it upgraded its teaching contents further by introducing specialisations in Agronomy, Horticulture and Dairying. It was at this time that Pugh in order to prepare himself appropriately for teaching the specialised course on Agronomy took leave for a year from the institute and went to the Institute of Plant Industry at Indore. Sir Joseph Hutchinson, one of the most distinguished British agricultural scientists to have worked in India, was then working at that institute spending his last year India prior to taking up his new assignment as the Chief Geneticist of the British Empire Cotton Growing Corporation. Pugh considered himself fortunate for having had the opportunity to work with a person of the repute of Sir Hutchinson who still later became the Professor of Agronomy at Cambridge University, England.

Pugh's work at the institute of Plant Industry involved studying the variability of Juar of the Malwa plateau and to learn use of Statistical techniques in agricultural research. It was while working on that project under Hutchinson, Pugh persuaded his co-researcher at that institute, Shri C. P. Dutt to take up writing a textbook on agriculture. 'Principles and Practices of Crop Production

in India', a textbook jointly authored by Shri C. P. Dutt and Pugh that was first published in 1940 by the Mission press was an outcome of that effort. This book incidentally remained a textbook on agricultural studies at many colleges and universities offering courses on agriculture in India for many years. The book was later revised and published under the name 'Farm Science and Crop Production in India' by Kitabistan in 1947. By the time Pugh returned to the AAIA from the Institute of Plant Industry, he had gained enough experiences and was regularly called upon by the various agricultural colleges and universities to be in the list of its examiners on Agronomy. As examiner of Agronomy, Pugh visited Dacca University on several occasions and used to be in its list of examiners even after Dacca became a part of the then east Pakistan following the partition of India. It was during this time only that the AAIA planned to publish a monthly magazine by the name *The Allahabad Farmer*. Mr Hansen, a colleague of Pugh at the institute became its first editor while Pugh became his assistant only to eventually take over as its editor after Mr Hansen had to leave for Canada a year or two later. Pugh discharged his editorial responsibilities with devotion till his last day in the institute.

In 1939-40 while Pugh was officiating as Principal of the college, the Director of the United provinces Department of Agriculture invited him to be a member of the U.P Government Commission for the Re-organisation of Agriculture in that province. The commission headed by Chowdhury Mukhtar Singh also brought Pugh in contact with Shri Vishnu Sahay, the then Agricultural Secretary of the U.P government. In 1944, when Allahabad University commenced with the M.Sc. course in Governor Agricultural Botany, Pugh, besides being asked to frame a portion of its syllabi, was also invited to teach the subject 'Genetics and Plant breeding' in the university, an assignment that he delightedly carried out for about two years during 1944-46 prior to his availing a study leave from his institute to work at the Indian Institute of Genetics

and Plant breeding, New Delhi with a view to write a book on genetics and plant breeding, some portions of which were already written while lecturing on the subject at the Allahabad University though somehow the book did not materialise the way it was planned. Prior to leaving for Delhi, Pugh, however, planned a short trip to his native hills. During this visit, Pugh took time off to discuss political matters concerning India with some of the prominent citizens such as Rai Bahadur D. Ropmay, a former magistrate, Dr H. Lyngdoh, a retired Civil Surgeon, Mr Wilson Reade, Headmaster of a School to name a few and was himself also getting involved in local political developments.

During this holiday trip at Shillong when getting slowly associated with the political developments unfolding in the then Khasi Jaintia Hills, Pugh was offered the post of an Agriculture officer at North East Frontier Agency(NEFA) by Mr J. P. Mills, the then Advisor to the Governor. Pugh, initially reluctant to accept the offer, later decided to accept it after some rethinking. On his joining the post, Pugh was categorically informed that since he joined government services, he must no more take part in political activities. Pugh, on his part, was convinced that his appointment was one with a political undertone either at the instance of some of the local leaders who presumed him a potential threat to them or Mr Mill himself took the initiative to consolidate his scheme of things for the region. After taking over his new responsibilities as an Agricultural Officer that involved extensive touring, Pugh failed to remain any more linked to the local political developments that were then unfolding in the Khasi-Jaintia hills. It may not, however, be out of place to mention here that during that period at least two political outfits; one by the name the Federation of Khasi States and the other known as the Federated state of Khasi and Jaintia Hills comprising mainly of the local chiefs; came into being with Rev Nichols Roy leading the former while his illustrious brother Professor Rowland Roy Thomas joining the latter camp. It may not be far off the

point if one seeks to trace the root of the tussle that even now keeps surfacing time and again between the district council and the traditional chiefs on the slightest of pretexts.

Travelling in NEFA in those days used to be extremely difficult in view of its poor and often non-existent communication network and as such jobs requiring an extensive tour assignments in that part of the country generally used to be a formidable one involving long trekking, walking for miles through dense forest infested by leeches and other dangerous animals. Yet, after assuming charge of the Agricultural Officer, Pugh, defying advice from his friends and other fellow colleagues set out on an extensive tour with a view to have an overview of the region he was assigned to look after and prepared the detailed necessary report of the areas covered by him. In view of the fact the job assignment did not clearly demarcate the region Pugh was supposed to look after, he, in addition to NEFA, had also undertaken tours in other hills districts of the north eastern region. It was during one such tour programme while camping at Dibrugarh on his way to the land of the Khamtis; Pugh received a telegram asking him to immediately return to Shillong to initiate measures towards establishment of an Agricultural College at Jorhat. Pugh returned to Shillong abandoning his proposed trip midway though his final transfer to the Assam government to enable him to actually commence with his new assignment could not begin until another three months or so. Since the government of Assam had decided that the Assam Agricultural College be made functional from the 1948-49 academic session, Pugh along with Shri M. N. Bora and D.K. Goswami joined the project at the beginning of 1948. After completing the initial paper formalities at the government headquarter, Pugh, along with his colleagues, moved to Jorhat to take possession of the building in which the proposed college was to be housed which incidentally was a Second World War American Army camp.

By July 1948, with basic works completed for a start, the college was ready to admit students. In its first batch, the college was allowed to admit only thirty students. Pugh, however, was of the opinion that a few more students could be accommodated, and pleaded for this to Shri Gopinath Bordoloi, the then Chief Minister of Assam when he visited the college later in the year. During that visit Pugh also requested Shri Bordoloi to help the college to acquire more land in addition to the 300 acres that it was holding then. Pugh's taking up these matters directly with the Chief Minister obviously was not taken very kindly by the officers handling the department as they felt it to be an act of overstepping the brief. Pugh was accordingly let known about their displeasure on this count. Pugh, who by then was already contemplating to return to AAIA as it could not arrange a substitute professor of Agronomy in his place for three years since he left it, was peeved at the reaction of these officials and being personally convinced that the newly founded college would face no difficulty in managing its affairs under the competent leadership of Dr M. C. Das, a Mycologist, scheduled to take charge of the college should Pugh leave it, decided to return to AAIA. By early 1949, Pugh returned to Allahabad to resume his work at the institute. Affiliated to the Gauhati University at the beginning, the college later switched over to Dibrugarh University as its affiliate after the University was set up only to subsequently evolve as a full fledged university by the name the Assam Agricultural University. Pugh's connection with this institute was renewed again when a few years later he permanently returned to Assam and during a more than two decade long association with it continued to visit the institute whenever called for. As an educationist, Pugh considered it a matter of immense pride that Dr S. R. Barooah, the first Vice-Chancellor of the Assam Agricultural University, was once his student.

During his stay at the Assam Agricultural College, Jorhat, Pugh bought a small residential property at Shillong and built a house there for it was his long standing

plan that after retiring from the service he would be living in Shillong. The developing trends at Allahabad post independence left Pugh somewhat disillusioned and after some initial hesitation he finally decided to return to Shillong quitting the AAIA permanently when in early 1952, the Assam Christian Council resolved to start a college on a rural setting with a request to Pugh to take up the responsibility of building the college up as its founder Principal. The newly founded Union Christian College at Barapani in the outskirts of Shillong with Pugh as its founder principal formally commenced with its academic activities from 16 August 1952. With eleven boys and one girl in its first batch and faculties drawn from various part of the country as also from abroad, the college even in its first year was privy to have as many as 14 different language groups present in its campus that at that point had only three thatched huts located amidst thick lantana bushes in a hilly terrain overseeing the Umkhrah river. With a mission to use this college as an effective tool towards uplift of the rural people through the use of scientific methods in agriculture that was the mainstay of the people residing nearby, Pugh volunteered to associate people like Rev. Milton E. Windham, an American Missionary in his project. Looking at the fully residential college today that stands on a sprawling 900 acres of land with buildings aesthetically placed amidst lakes and hills in a well guarded campus, it would be difficult for one to imagine that at start in 1952, the college had only three thatched huts of which two were blown off by storm to manage its academic and other activities. While in this college, Pugh was once invited to preside over the science section of the *Asom Sahitya Sabha* and to deliver the presidential address. His returning to Shillong, however, revived his interest in politics as well as some of his old political linkages. Opting therefore to retire from the college a year before the due date, Pugh chose to contest in the autonomous district council election scheduled in 1957 as nominee of the Eastern India tribal Union.

Following his decision to contest election, Pugh, for sometime, opted to move out of the academic arena only to be called again into it after a little more than a decade when inspired by the success of the Union Christian College, the Synod or the Church Council of the Presbyterian Church of Khasi Jaintia districts mooted the idea of having a college under its own auspices. A five member Church Committee with Mr Wilson Reade, a veteran educationist as its chairman was appointed to prepare and publicise the plan for starting another college at Shillong. Pugh also was a member of that committee and when the college, now known as the Synod College, actually began functioning from 1965-66 academic year, Pugh was called upon to be the Principal of the college. At 68 years of age, Pugh once again embarked upon the task of building another institute that to begin with started to function from Shillong Government School since it then did not have any accommodation of its own to run its affairs. It was while in this college Pugh lost his wife and he himself also fell sick and had had to be hospitalised more than once. Failing health and growing disillusionment with the pattern and quality of education on offer gradually prevailed over Pugh to compel him to finally come out of the institutional bindings and obligations. By the end of May, 1970, Pugh relinquished his responsibilities as Principal of the Synod College.

IN ACTIVE POLITICS

In 1957, the Eastern India Tribal Union of which Pugh was the President then won the election with big majority and Pugh was elected the Chief Executive Member (CEM) of the District Council of the then United Khasi Jaintia Hills District with Shri T. Cajee and Shri Henry Cotton as his colleagues in that executive committee. People in the hills by then were getting increasingly disillusioned at what they felt was uncalled for dominance by the Assamese people from the plains. A perceived sense of growing discriminations against the tribals residing in the hills

region of the state contributed to a shimmering tension that slowly started to emerge as a shrill voice demanding a separate hill state for the tribals living in the region. The State Reorganisation Commission that visited the region at that time, however, did not appreciate the idea of creating a separate hill state which according to Pugh was the result of a prejudiced view of the commission that should such a state be created it would primarily become a Christian state. In 1958 when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the then Prime Minister of India visited the region Pugh led a delegation to him to present their grievances. The delegation returned from Pandit Nehru with the impression that he was sympathetic to their cause and would try to do whatever possible to ensure a greater degree of autonomy to the tribal people living in the hills. During his tenure as the CEM of the District Council, Pugh also had the opportunity to interact with the Prime Minister again when on a government of India invitation he went to attend the Republic Day function in Delhi wherein he could present his views for the development of the tribal areas he was representing in a more forthright manner and succeeded to elicit favourable responses from him. Pugh's term as the CEM, however, came to an abrupt end when following a division in the Eastern India Tribal Union, the vote of no-confidence motion brought by the opposition during a requisitioned session of the district council was carried.

Though relieved from the responsibility of the CEM, District Council of the United Khasi Jaintia Hills consequent to losing the confidence of the house, Pugh, did not exactly retire from public life. The time when Pugh initially dabbled with in active politics was somewhat turbulent with chauvinism running high on the agenda. Introduction of the Office Language bill in Assam seeking to introduce Assamese as the official state language was one such act that triggered large scale protest throughout the hills region including the plains in southern Assam. Once again the demand for statehood gained a fillip and

to give a voice to the protest movement against introduction of the Assam Language Bill, An All Party Hill Leaders Conference was convened. Pugh was elected the first President of the APHLC and held that position for about a year. Pugh right from the days of his association the Eastern India Tribal Union was vocal in spearheading the cause of a separate and composite tribal state for the people residing in the hills of the then Assam thought of APHLC as another opportunity to have a go at it. The idea flopped again when one by one people started dropping out from the Conference. The first to go out of it was Congress. The Mizos from Lusai Hills followed suite. The signal that the hill state of Pugh's desire shall not materialise was loud enough and Pugh consoling himself that only Congress as national party would be able to address the language dilemma decided to join the party.

Pugh did not identify himself with the idea of many hill states and expressed his disillusionment with the idea in by publishing an article entitled *Hill States Galore* in a local Khasi daily. During a visit to Shillong by Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the then Prime Minister of India, Pugh, on behalf of the APHLC met him in a delegation at the Raj Bhavan and submitted a Memorandum demanding establishment of a hill university at Shillong. In Pugh's understanding the hill university, besides being of particular help in spreading education to the hill tribes was expected to gel the different language speaking tribes into a common bond through universal spread of English education and was likely to eventually consolidate his vision of a separate hill state for all in the days to follow. The university of Pugh's idea of course was realised when North Eastern Hill University(NEHU), the first ever central university of the region came into being in 1973 but by then the history of the land through a lot of turns and twists got segregated into what we now euphemistically call the land of seven sisters with the idea of composite hill state in the region disappearing permanently into the thin horizon.

AS A PUBLIC PERSON

In his chequered career, B. M. Pugh has occupied many responsible positions but has never lost his humility primarily identifying himself always as an educationist and agriculturalist who struggled to see his people a little better off while he himself preferred to live the life of a normal ordinary human being. A refreshing frankness and natural leadership abilities with a vision to follow transformed a once shy and sloppy boy belonging to a little known village into a persona of the stature of Bransley Marpna Pugh, who for the people of this far eastern hills of India shall always be fondly remembered as Rev. Pugh, a pioneering educationist, a visionary and also perhaps the first ever formally trained agriculturist belonging to these hills. Amongst a few of the many distinguished positions held by Rev. Pugh remains the Membership in the Board of Governors of the Regional Engineering College, Durgapur, Membership of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Membership and later Vice-Presidency of the All India Lac Cess Committee, a Trustee of the Gandhi Smarak Samiti in which Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India were also trustees, Member of the Gauhati University Enquiry Commission, Membership in the various academic bodies of the Gauhati University and a host of other educational institutes in the country in addition to being members in other scores of committees at the state down unto the village level.

CONCLUSION

Born in a colonised land, Rev Pugh lived through a time that was witness to the struggle for independence of a subjugated people and their subsequent liberation from the clutches of the colonial rulers. Himself not a very pro-active participant in India's struggle for independence, Pugh did get involved in matters concerning uplift and well being of the people he felt dear to his heart in his own way as a thinker educationist. Pugh's father was amongst

the early converts to Christianity and Pugh, in his autobiography, explained this as the reason why he was a Christian too. A devoutly religious person, Pugh, however, was candid in his understanding that *the religions we profess, like the languages we speak, are accidents of birth*. A student of theology, a church leader in his own right and an accomplished person with gifted family members down the line, Pugh in his dying days, however, was a fairly disillusioned man as far as the state of affairs involving the country as a whole was concerned.

The inability of free India to aptly negotiate with the aspirations it generated for its suffering millions, in particular for the tribal people living in the eastern Himalayas in a reasonable way, during its struggle for independence saddened him to a great extent. The economy as also the pattern and quality of education on offer no doubt are sad commentaries on the state of our societies. The ever widening divide amongst people on grounds of ethnicity, religion, language and what have you certainly was a concern that sunk his heart a great deal. "I never knew that I was a tribal", Pugh commented in the preface of his autobiography, "perhaps until the constitution of this country was being hammered out." It indeed is an irony that while professing support to the cause of the underprivileged, our constitution unwittingly perhaps steered us in making the perceived 'other' so vivid in our vicinity. The countless disturbing ordeals that beset our society these days notwithstanding, personalities of the like of Rev. B. M. Pugh would, however, remain relevant and contemporary to us for the inspiring roles they had played in the society at least till such time we succeed in fully negotiating the troubles that beset us at the level of our basic societal existence.

SECTION 2

B. M. PUGH MEMORIAL LECTURE THEATRE, LANGUAGE AND EXPRESSION

SHRI RATAN THIAM

Everybody knows what theatre is – theatre is an art form. Theatre is like an illegitimate child. Theatre is also like an orphan because nobody knows from where theatre comes and how and where it goes. Theatre is not like any other art form. There is no theatre without other art forms. Yet, theatre is one of the strongest and most powerful expressions in an art form.

Theatre is also a composite art. It is because of the quality of the literature behind theatre; it is because of the designs, which are painting, art and sculpture – everything is involved here. It is also about dance, movement, mime, martial arts and many other things. It also involves lighting and soundscape, and fine art, like music.

The other thing is that everybody can attempt theatre. You cannot dance if you are not well trained for a long time, may be ten or twenty years. You cannot sing classical unless you have been trained for 10 - 12 years. You cannot be a painter if you are not a master of the art of painting or have some sort of degree from a college, say, an art college, and so on. But you do not need anything for theatre.

Therefore, everybody can take a shot at theatre, and that is where it gets complicated, because everybody can do it. During rehearsals, if one is a part of an amateur group, if one person fails to turn up for two or three days, you could call another person and he might be able to

deliver the product within a couple of days or with some practice. So, the theatre goes on.

But real or actual theatre is one of the most complicated things in art. That is because one has to, at least, know all the art forms of theatre, whether they are archaeology, modern art forms, architecture, science or something else. One can go for anything because it involves everything. That is why it is so complex. Not just this, the expression and the language that it uses and portrays is also very difficult.

Theatre is the most rapidly changing art form if we compare it with other art forms because the kind of theatre that we are now witnessing will change within a span of five to ten years. It changes. It does not happen like in films because there is a screen and that screen, has continued for the last one hundred years. But in theatre, the changes in the soundscape, in space, in design and in the expressions have become extremely important.

People might be under the wrong impression that theatre has been the same for the last two or three decades or that it is boring. That is because unless there is a daily process of change or being prepared for change, keeping the speed at which the environment around us is evolving in mind, we cannot really produce theatre of superior or very good quality. So, this is the kind of art form that is being discussed here today, and it is called theatre.

What does theatre mean? I actually do not know what theatre is. And that is the most difficult thing. I do believe that the moment I come to know about it, I will leave theatre because it is a kind of daily search for a product that may be unavailable or intangible. It is a search for art, for politics, for economy, for history, and for geography, and it is a quest for religion.

It is a search for myriad things. So, theatre always involves socio-political, economical, religious and cultural factors. Without that, it cannot happen. All these factors impact theatre as it is an art. One might know a few things to a certain extent. In fact, I do not know many things

around the world and that is why I do theatre. If I thought otherwise, I would not be doing it at all.

Well! The other interesting aspect is that from the very beginning of human civilisation, Theatre was not always there. Yet, we have seen it in Greek theatre, in Indian Classical theatre, in the Japanese or Asian theatre and in Chinese theatre. We have seen that theatre was also an ensemble of people, at that time for various reasons. But when it is attacked, it becomes very difficult for it to survive. and I will speak of and illustrate how it has been attacked.

Theatre needs to be explored all the time in India. Indian theatre does not really bear a very sound economical structure. So, in today's world, Indian theatre is really struggling quite hard to survive. In the last 60 years of our Independence, the theatre economics have never changed, and that is why we cannot really come up with very high quality performances although we have many eminently talented people around. These are some of the basic aspects.

When we come to theatre as an expression, this is how it goes, not in terms of acting or in terms of lighting or in terms of design and sound or any such thing, but in terms of the human expression that comes from inside. When I say it comes from inside, I mean that we could have a faulty system or an efficient system anywhere in the world. But what happens in theatre is that the discordant system is attacked and the good system is supported. Without this, theatre cannot function.

That is why we look at certain things in the nooks and crannies of what is happening around this world. This is called the contemporary nature of theatre. This means that whatever we experience is expressed through a kind of language. I will talk about certain things that I have experienced in the last many years, on this account.

For many years now, I have been doing different kinds of theatre productions but in the last thirty years, I have concentrated upon some of the major productions, which

have had more to do with trying to convey something against violence, war and terrorism. It is because I do not want to be involved in a kind of theatre which is not really very powerful in terms of its thematic content. The thematic content has to attract me. That is imperative. It has to enthuse me and kindle my passion and curiosity, without which I cannot do theatre.

I do not involve myself with productions just for the sake of doing them. I do not participate in a play for the sake of merely doing that play. I have certain expressions and ideas to portray through that play. It is very important to me not to do theatre for the audience. I do theatre for myself, first. The audience is a great friend. It is, in fact, a beloved friend.

I want to share only the best with it. Therefore, I will experience it first. I do it for myself first, and savour it, and if I like it, I share my experience with the audience. Sharing these feelings and sentiments with the audience, in today's world, is not only about sharing the expression of one's production, it also has to do with sharing the experience of the audience with the performer. That is where the connection lies. There should, ideally, be an encounter and an interface.

Theatre is not film because theatre does not happen only on stage. Theatre, a drama, has to happen in the audience's mind, as well. Otherwise, it becomes very difficult and that is how the expression called 'theatre' comes out as an art form. Why is it known as theatre? Why is it different from film or television? In fact, I'd like to say that theatre is also the business of sharing. It sharpens the imaginative powers of the audience and coaxes it to think.

Thereby, it has more to do with discussions and interactions which follow. I am not the kind of theatre person who would say, 'Advise people'. I do not advise people. As an artist, I have no right to do that nor am I an intellectual. I do not know many things about this world. How can I be an adviser, and suggest anything to people?

The only thing that I can do is to share my experiences, to include the experiences that I have had in life, and that is how my theatre reaches the audience.

Why is it different from television and films? It is because TV or film making has more to do with realistic proportions, which are given to the audience, already. For instance, you have a moon in the background. – You say, Here is the moon! – The moon that is being projected by the projector. And you say - You are looking at the moon which is about 20/20 feet. Thus, everybody shares this moon – one moon on a screen – one thousand people in the audience sharing one moon and looking at it.

But theatre does not do that. What theatre does is nothing similar. The performer comes on stage and says, 'Look at this beautiful moon' and the audience knows that he or she is talking about something that may not be physically present there. 'Look at this beautiful moon and the beautiful sky', says the artist, and there are one thousand moons that the audience thinks of or imagines. That is how the sharing business takes place, and that is how all expressions are conveyed or that the language of expression is made understandable.

Otherwise, what happens is that because it is neither an advice nor a suggestion that is being delivered, it is always a sharing kind of art or a kind of sharing business, which we do in terms of the mind and by trying to connect through mind, body and soul, This is why after seeing the performance, the impression remains in the mind for much longer. The longer it persists, the more successful the production becomes, in theatre.

But taking up theatre as a profession in India is difficult. That is because there is no money in theatre. Film making is an industry but there is definitely no money in theatre, and there is no fame here, either, to a large extent. It takes a lot of time to make a journey from the north-east to reach Delhi, if you want to become popular. It takes quite a long time. It is an arduous journey. So, it is really very difficult to do theatre. This is why we do not have many –

professional companies who give salaries to their artists in India.

The Government of India has schemes of salaries for artists, of course, which do not really provide much in terms of production cost demands. It does not cater to the needs of companies for organisational matters, either. So, we do not get too much help but we try our best. When I took up theatre, I said to myself that I needed to become a professional in theatre – even with just bread no butter. That would do for me. So, I carried on for so many years, and now, you are looking at me. I am still surviving in theatre.

But time changes. The greatest tragedy is that this world is no more – as we expect it to be, and everybody knows that. Many things have changed – some for the better, some for the odd and yet others for the worse, due to the depression. But one of the most dangerous things is war – War is with us always. War and terrorism are always there with us. Our lives are not secure anywhere in this world, today.

From the very beginning of human civilisation, say, from Homo erectus, there was a stage when things were shaping-up; human beings were shaping-up. And, when they became homo sapiens after millions of years, they turned out to be the most intelligent creatures in the world, and the so-called intelligentsia or the intellectual class, and that is how society was formed.

But, suddenly war began from that very point. It is to grab power, to grab food, and to seize many things. But, when it came in terms of the First World War, we saw that something had happened. What happened during the First World War was wrong. But, if you check after that, you find the Second World War. And, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings were the climax of war and we are all aware of this painful fact.

We all thought that this would be the end of everything and that from thereon, normalcy would resume and that history would unravel itself smoothly but that has not

happened. In fact, the situation has worsened. Many of the genocides, including the Rwanda and Kampuchea genocides; whatever happened at the World Trade Centre on 9/11, what happened in Israel between Hamas and the Israeli soldiers and whatever is happening in Iraq, and in Algeria, started with war.

In fact, we never learnt from the fact that from the very beginning of civilisation, whether it is the Mayan civilisation or the Incas civilisation; the Roman civilisation, the Egyptian civilisation or the **Mohenjo-Daro** and **Harappa** or Indus Valley civilisation, only very few of these civilisations collapsed due to natural calamities and starvation; most of them collapsed due to war. We have not learnt from the collapse of the civilisations, which has already taken place. And, theatre is one art form, which must portray and express and share these experiences with the world.

What is my daily routine? My daily routine is that I want to have a hot cup of tea in the morning. You open the newspaper and what you get is the horrible kind of things, the shocks, how many people were killed or murdered and other gory details. This has been our daily routine for so long. And, that is how theatre follows the daily routine, as a contemporary observer of expression. Unfortunately, we have never learnt from the past of our civilisations.

Let us take what happened in Greece as an illustration. The Greeks are said to be one of the most civilised communities of the world. Their civilisation began nearly 3000 years ago. They started their theatre over there with the temple of Dionysus. But due to the invasion during the war by the Turkish people, 700 years ago, the Greeks suffered and struggled under the Turkish regime. And, that is how they lost their own identity and their traditions among many other things.

The other factor about India is that theatre, which is really meant for the masses, and which must share its experiences with the audience did not do so. That was because in India, during the classical period it was

concentrated in palaces and could not really go out to the masses. The language used was very complicated. It was Sanskrit, which was meant only for the intellectual class and for scholars.

Therefore, even though one of the most powerfully written books on Art called 'Natya Shastra' is by Bharat Muni, Indian classical theatre could not really survive. It has only survived in the form of folk tradition. Folk traditions in India are like broken mirrors of the Classical Indian theatre. Sometimes, theatre is in the throes of a predicament. In the case of Indian theatre, the classical treatment and the systematic treatment of Natya Shastra, which was carried out in the classical period became the folk traditional theatre because it was broken like a mirror – all those pieces of the mirror are scattered around everywhere and you will find that in our folk theatre or traditional theatre.

You will see these as the Tamasha of Maharashtra, the Yakshagana of Karnataka, the Therukuttu of Tamil Nadu, the Pala Jatra of Orissa, the Bhand Pathar of Kashmir, and the Ram Lila of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and so on, or even in the Ankiya Naat of Assam or the Jatra of Bengal and the Nacha of Madhya Pradesh. They are all scattered like the broken glasses. This is because theatre wanted to share with the masses, with the audience in mind, which could not happen in the Indian classical theatre, and that was the most important factor.

But the only classical theatre, which has survived till today and which started in the 14th and 15th century is the classical theatre of Japan called 'Noh'. That is why civilisation also plays a great role in making theatre. If a civilisation is on the verge of collapse, theatre also collapses. But nowadays, what we are looking out for in theatre is something more than that. The most difficult thing in this age in doing theatre is that it is not just art. We are not talking of just the Natya Shastra of Bharat Muni; we talk also of Aristotle's poetics in Greek theatre, and about Zeami in the classical theatre. But it is not only that, that is not the limit of theatre.

Nowadays, it has become more complicated because of technology. The technological development in the so-called modern world has made us think of survival, and that is a very difficult thing to do in theatre and may be, in other art forms, too. There was a time when everybody used to enjoy art with a little bit of aesthetics, with a little bit of characterisation, and with a little bit of humour and so on. Everybody used to enjoy that, and it has suddenly changed. Why? Because it took not less than about a million years from Homo erectus to the Homo sapiens days and from Homo sapiens to the modern world; a long journey, indeed, in history. But civilisation, on the one hand and technology, on the other changed within a span of fifty years. Because of technology, there was more speed and everybody started either enjoying or worrying about this development.

So, in this world, what will art really do? This is because it has changed suddenly and art is a tradition all the time and it depends on many traditions. I do a certain kind of theatre, which is my identity, my signature. It is an experiment and a process between traditional performing art forms and modern theatre. We, as human beings, have our own ritualistic traditions, our own folk traditions, our own dance, music and many other things which are good in theatre. How could we change a tradition in fifty years and what is a tradition, after all? Should we keep it in the museum as a piece on display? Or are we trying all over again to regain the power of tradition through our own expressions in contemporary times? It has virtually become a question for us.

But for me, tradition is like a stream of water; the flow comes down from the water fall and it faces many types of rocks called the rocks of century; some of these rocks are known as 2008, 2009, and 2010. Some of these rocks are known as socio-political-economical, religious and historical, among others but the tradition flows down and takes different paths, and it changes its own course according to time. That is how I see tradition. But following

these changes, what we are facing now is that the audience does not enjoy that kind of work or theatre production or the dance or painting or sculpture or music that used to be the ethos or essence of our culture. But there was a time like that, once.

What we are looking for in the time of technology is nothing but art plus aesthetics plus professionalism, and more than that, a miracle. So, miracle and marketing become so important that the entire part of art and aesthetics is gone. You cannot look after that because for a miracle, you have technology, and now, here is a fight, a very severe kind of attack from technology. What it will do? I believe in a different kind of theatre, which is being handed down traditionally and believes in experimenting. And, day by day, I try to change according to the need of the hour, and according to the mental outlook and the patience of the audience that exists today in this modern world. But that is not enough. It is not going to be very easy, because miracles can only happen with technology.

Many of the productions in this world are full of technology, so much so that sometimes, they are only technology. If we look at commercial theatre and that too, in Broadway or off Broadway, it is like that. There is too much technology. That is how it attracts people and captivates the audience's mind. This is because the audience wants to see. Theatre buys and sells them dreams, and that is how it sinks. But in terms of art, it is of poorer quality. The more that technology comes in to support us, the more theatre becomes less aesthetic. Why is it that technology is unable to provide proper support?

If you look at tradition, and at the contemporary nature of the expression of the art form, nowhere will you find that without the original energy, there cannot be any kind of art because technology is an artificial energy. It is the artificial energy which is really trying to disturb. If one does not check that in the field of art, the original or artificial energy that we have in a human being, say, in a dancer or as an actor; an actor is a human being; it is nothing more

than that; it is a human being with animal energy. Animal energy also has imagination and senses. We have five senses and we need the sixth sense for an expression, and we have that kind of energy.

Now, the artificial energy is challenging that and that is how balance has to be achieved in the field of art. But how can it be done? It is a very difficult question now because, we are mostly looking for marketing and miracles, which are not really meant for art and aesthetics. Given this context, what will happen not only to theatre but also to the other art forms in the future? This is a crucial question. Now, in theatre, what we are trying to do is to bring a quality of expression, which is more related to the human space – the available space, and the other thing which is more important for us is that it is a kind of language which takes support from the artificial energy.

That is where the spiritual state of the actor comes from. One has to practise art as a modern man. Who really is a modern man? What does a modern man know? A modern man knows about Shakespeare; he knows about Mahatma Gandhi; he is aware of Da Vinci and his – Monalisa; he knows about Galileo Galilei; he knows about Newton; he knows about Archimedes' principles; he knows about Kalidas, Rabindranath Tagore, Goethe and Karl Marx; he knows about Mao Zedong, and he says that I am an intellectual and also, a modern man.

It is also very difficult to define, in the post modernist period as to what could happen to this earth if things do not work. Nothing on this earth will sustain its, ideas, including the last one. Even now, it has not been able to sustain very much, and we can see that the most powerful things including powerful philosophies could not sustain because of the overwhelming changes, not in the philosophical order, but in the life-style and the growing demand of human beings for the betterment of their own living status. You know- nobody bothers.

So my theme, my thematic content, in my expression, in my language of doing theatre has been concerned with

these things, all the time. This includes the ecological suicide that we are heading for and deforestation. These have become a matter of grave concern for me. They also worry actors and writers. I believe that a sensitive writer will always write about these issues. I also believe that a sensitive modern audience will always think about them, and if we do not think about problems such as ecological suicide, it is high time to think about deforestation because it is a joke, all the time. We must be less indifferent and more pro active about such issues.

I was just telling Dr. Bhattacharjee that it is rather amusing to me that we do not know what a rose is. You do not know what a raindrop is, and you have never felt that; not a single raindrop could penetrate your skin for the last twenty or thirty years because you were too busy. Over the years, you have never tried to understand the changes in the environment. You just look around – you look at the sky, and the sky is there, and it will always be there. That, sadly, is the attitude of human beings, today.

So, when we do not look at a rose, what happens – you do not know the fragrance of the rose; you do not know the colour of the rose; you have never started looking at the flower. It is only on Valentine's Day that you see a rose, and you say, 'Here is a rose' – and buy it for fifty rupees – so, that is the only thing – well, without knowing what a rose really is, you are giving it. The person, who is taking it, without knowing it either, will say, 'Thank you', and that is all. It is a very fast, reciprocal kind of thing that we enjoy in our life. A case of instant gratification and no quest for the profound, perhaps.

One has to know about nature because nature is the energy that gives us everything – the raindrops, the earth, the smell, the fragrance of the flowers and everything else. So, unless and until we know them, how can we get energy? We cannot get energy. We are looking for artificial energy all the time, and that is how our thinking processes have gone astray, and what really happens because of globalisation and the pollution in life, was not our own culture, but it has been imposed now.

If you look around, the latest phenomenon afflicts the nuclear family. You do not want to feed your parents; you do not want to share your affection and love with your sister or brother, anymore. There is no joint family. It has dissipated. That is how deterioration takes place in society. There is degradation in human thinking and for what? Why? These questions upset me. They may not hurt many people but they hurt me a lot. So, that is how I want to make my theatre; to be able to express and speak my own language and also portray the negative aspects of the system in the empty space, and discuss with the audience about how, where and why we have gone wrong.

We have to think that, in art,- art becomes much stronger in the modern times when it attacks wrong systems; Otherwise, it is not strong enough. It is only a particular kind of thing in art, which gives pleasure, but art is not always for pleasure. Art is also sharing the pain, the struggle and the suffering of human beings. If an artist cannot portray that, then, it will not be an expression of the artist, and it will not really be very helpful for the public when it looks at art as merely an exhibition or a production.

That is what we have been trying to do for the last many years in art, and particularly, as I work in theatre, I have been trying to do that. As a matter of fact, the normal phenomenon in the development of art is also another difficult aspect to understand because most exhibition houses and most of the auditoriums in this world are in the major cities, where the best products of art are showcased. You have MOBA in New York, where we can see everything, including all the collections.

In India, in Delhi, you see everything, which is not a decentralised position. The best of the auditoriums where you want to perform are not available everywhere. How can I share with you my experience? Everything needs to be decentralised, and particularly, in a large country like India, we need several types of exhibition halls and auditoriums so that we can feed the hungry masses. People are not really famished for want of food; they also are

thirsty for knowledge. They want to know what is happening around them. And, to help them, we need decentralisation of the exhibition halls and auditoriums, which we have not got.

I do not know how much I will talk about my production because unless you see it, you cannot experience anything. I do not want to waste your time, listening to a person who is not known earlier. For how long will you be able to listen to a person? Because it is also applicable in theatre, I tell you; the longest concentration that a person can make nowadays, is hardly one and a half minutes. Then, after that, what he or she does will not matter very much.– People will be thinking about the phone, the mobile, the cats, the dog and cars, art, food and everything else.

Someone from the audience will roam around and come back and sit there. He or she will walk away and come back again and ask, 'What is he speaking of?' or 'What are you looking at?' They will be told, and they will respond with an 'Okay.' Then again, one gets one and a half minutes, and again and again. You know, this is what happens. But what we are trying to do in terms of experiments in theatre is to make the audience concentrate hard.

This is a big challenge in art – making people concentrate, for which, we need the strongest and the most powerful actors with great energy, stamina, ability, talent and calibre – just about everything. So, the challenge in today's times is to devise, a kind of language and expression which ensures that the actor becomes the language and the director, delivers the product. There was a time, when theatre happened to be a drama, a story. You delivered the story to the people; you narrated the story from the very beginning – you said 'Ram was born and he was like this. These are the characters, and so on and so forth. It was a biographical kind of thing for all the characters, and you narrated everything.

But for several years, we have stopped that and the kind of work that I do now is no more concerned with the

folk or the traditional structure. I do not tell a tale; I do not tell a story; I do not have a story line to tell you. It is my experience because when I am here, whatever I am thinking can be a play, and it is not a story. It is a mixture of my personality and my own experiences of life.

In my recent trilogy for Manipur, I have written three plays: one is the 'Prologue', the other one is known as 'My Earth, My Love' and the third one is called 'Nine Hills One Valley'. In these three plays, I have tried my best not to narrate the history or the story. I have tried to communicate the history or the tradition with a lot of the contemporary world, linking it in a very different way, because what happens is that narrating a tale is something which the writer gives or a text is given to you but you have not explored that; you have neither done anything concrete nor have you extracted any good work out of that. It would, in fact, be better if the writer or the actor challenges the director and if the director challenges the actor. There should be a challenge all the time, and without a challenge, good things cannot happen in and for art. This has been my way of thinking for very long now, and that is why, though I am doing many types of plays, my concentration is there.

My thematic content is war, violence or terrorism. War has no end. War has no court. What has war given us, after all? What war has given us is very much my concern. War has given us – orphans, invalids, physically challenged people, widows, prostitutes, economically collapsed situations and starvation. Despite all this, why do we not think about it seriously? War is not always about missiles. From the point of view of human civilisation, it has always been iron and steel products, which have been quite dominating, and civilisation is with iron and steel because iron and steel would yield much more food and many more weapons to them.

But in modern times, we have to fight back and fight everything. We do not feel much. The main problem with us is that we have become so individualistic selfish and

subjective that we do not think for others. We have no idea of what is happening. If oil is burning in Iraq or in Kuwait, we feel that it is not our share or that it is not our problem. Geographically, it is there, it is burning. But economically, when the truck comes with the oil, it is already here; the fire is inside, it is reaching us at great speed. So, the ideas are more important than the other physical kind of thing because war is everywhere now, and there is a war everywhere.

Are we thinking of leaving behind a darker world for the younger generation? Are we thinking collectively to wipe out everything? And, each and every person, wherever he may be and whoever he or she is, must know that it is now time to think about this. And, that becomes my thematic content. It has to be a collective war against war. A kind of collective thinking, which gives peace to us. Otherwise, we will be leaving behind a kind of civilisation, which is full of darkness for the younger generation and for our progeny. Is this what we have become and can we call ourselves modern men or human beings of 2008 or 2010? Or is it a beautiful garden that we must create for the younger generation?

For the generation to come, a beautiful garden will make this earth beautiful with plenty of flowers blooming and quite a lot of food for them. Are we thinking about that? Or are we giving something else to the new generation? Are we writing a history of modern times with that? These are some of the things that I consider to be crucial in my life and that I have experienced around the world. This also becomes the thematic content, language and expression in my theatre.

I feel very lucky to be from the north-east. In the north-east, what really happens is that we need many things together but we are not getting them. The infrastructure is less. We do not have factories; we do not have industries, and we do not have many corporate houses. We do not have anything, and yet, if we could think of a good thing for this world, in spite of all these things – a good thing for

the peace of the world, and make a collective effort, and offer a deeper input of a spiritual quality in thinking, it would be quite gratifying.

As modern men, who know everything, everybody is well educated now; everybody has scope; everybody has their future life, and in that, we could include a portion of thinking for human beings and for our future generations. I think we could share our expressions together, and that is what I have been trying to do, in a very humble way because I do theatre, and I do not have much money to do anything else. But I try my level best, although I live in a very small state called Manipur. I have been trying, trying and trying. Wish me good luck!

Transcribed by Dr (Mrs) F. G. Dkhar, Reader in Education at NERIE Shillong

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

BACKGROUND

Writer, director, designer, musician, painter and actor Ratan Thiyam is one of the most important and influential theatre makers at work in the International performance scene. His Chorus Repertory Theatre, founded in 1976 in Imphal, Manipur, India has toured to the world's most prestigious venues and festivals during its 31 years tenure. Thiyam's works are tapestries of rhythm, music, poetry, light, speech and colour. Thematically, Thiyam is concerned with historical and contemporary events, issues and mythologies. His works explore universal concerns of personal responsibility, cognizance, good, evil, and community obligation through the lens of his native Manipur, a remote hill state of North-East India that has been in political and economic turmoil for decades. Renowned for its disciplined performance practice, spectacular aural and visual esthetic, and potent thematic explorations, Thiyam's work has placed him in the company of Suzuki, Brook, Barba and Grotowski.

CONTENT, STYLE AND AESTHETIC

Ratan Thiyam draws on epic themes, historical figures, and cultural practice to explore issues of personal responsibility, cognizance, good, evil and community obligation. Mesmerising tapestries of rhythm, music, poetry, light, speech and colour. Thiyam's works reflect an intensive and holistic production style. All the members are trained in dance, acting, martial arts, stage craft and design which embrace traditional Manipuri forms (such

as the martial art *Thang Ta*) as well as other methods, developed over time to support Chorus Repertory Theatre's aesthetic approach. Emphasis on vocal and breath techniques, and in physical stamina and control, provides the means to accomplish impressive aural and movement feats. Thiyam's works are tightly choreographed; his actors must physically push the limits of character. "I have always found human expression more convincing when it is physically portrayed, when there is a body rhythm."

In Thiyam's productions, the empty stage space is filled and magnified through complex and changing use of movement, saturated color, light, props, costumes and mobile set pieces. Each element is essential to completing the whole.

The aural environments created for Thiyam's productions are an encompassing mix of text (sung, spoken, chanted, spit out), music, stamping feet, whispers. Like film score, sound is used to foreshadow, comment on and accelerate action. It reinforces intent and clarifies meaning.

Language in Thiyam's plays goes beyond the simple conveyance of text. While written in Meitei, the native language of Manipur, Thiyam evolved his own language of theatre. Words are as important for their acoustic power as for their actual meaning.

RATAN THIYAM'S CHORUS REPERTORY THEATRE

The Chorus Repertory Theatre was established in the valley of small hill state, Manipur encircled by nine folds of hills in the easternmost part of India in April, 1976 under the able and dynamic guidance of Ratan Thiyam.

Located on the outskirts of Imphal, Manipur's capital city, Chorus Repertory Theatre's two acre campus has been slowly built (and six times rebuilt after disastrous monsoons) to accommodate a self sufficient way of life with housing and working quarters for the company. It is now an important regional and national centre for contemporary theatre. On its anniversary season - 25th

years of existence, the company dedicated its first permanent theater called "The Shrine", 200 seat auditorium conceived and designed by Ratan Thiyam with space for set construction and storage.

Thiyam's 1984 ***Chakravyuha (The Wheel of War)*** performed more than 100 times around the globe, thrust the company into the global spotlight. With ***Uttar-Priyadarshi (The Final Beatitude)***, ***Hey Nungshibi Prithivi (My Earth, My Love)*** and ***Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama (Nine Hills One Valley)*** are equally acclaimed as masterpieces, Thiyam continues his examination of the human condition, expanding his explorations of war and power to embrace the search for enlightenment, reconciliation and peace.

Equipped with its most outstanding performances in many International festivals in India and abroad, this repertory has able to earn the prestigious ***"Fringe Firsts Award, 1987" from Edinburgh International Theatre Festival, "Indo-Greek Friendship Award, 1984" (Greece), "Diploma of Cervantino International Theatre Festival, 1990 (Mexico).***

Participated in Pan-Asiatico Festival, 1984 (Rome), Indo-Greek Symposium, 1984 (Greece), East-West Encounter, 1986 (Mumbai), Dublin theatre Festival, 1987 (Dublin), Festival of India in USSR, 1987 (USSR), Cardiff International Theatre Festival, 1987 (Cardiff), Glasgow Festival, 1987 (Glasgow), Mitsui International Theatre Festival, 1992 (Japan), Toga International Theatre Festival, 1994 (Japan), Festival d' Avignon 1995 (France), International conference on Culture of Peace: The experience and experiments, 1996 (New Delhi), Festival of India in Thailand, 1996, South Asian Theatre Festival, 1997 (Bangladesh), 50-years of Indian Independence Day celebration in Sri Lanka, 1997, Festival of Perth, 1998 (Australia), Telstra Adelaide Festival, 1998 (Australia), New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, 1998 (New Zealand), Festival of Nations, 1998 (Switzerland), 7th International Festival of Scenic Arts, 1998 (Brazil), Indian

Trade Fair Exhibition at Dhaka, 1999 (Bangladesh), 50-years of Indian Independence Day Celebration in Nepal, 2000, the Fall 2000 North American Debut Tour in the following cities –

Kennedy Center (Washington DC), University of Massachusetts (Amherst), Ordway Center for the Performing Arts and Walker Art Center (Minneapolis/St. Paul), University of California (Berkeley), UCLA Performing Arts (Los Angeles), University of Arizona (Tucson), Duke University (Durham, North Carolina), BAM-Brooklyn Academy of Music (New York).

And BeSeTo International Theatre Festival, 2001 (Japan), Barbican International Theatre Event, 2001 (BITE: 01), London (United Kingdom); 3rd International Spring Arts Festival 2002, Shizuoka (Japan) and Toga Festival 2002, Toga (Japan), festival of Bangladesh High Commission of India, 2004 (Dhaka), IIC Experience – A Festival of the Arts, 2005 (New Delhi), Third Asia-Pacific Arts Forum, 2005 (Taiwan), Biennale Bonn: Indien 2006 (Germany), Fall 2006 USA Tour presenting public performances at six major cities/venues including Kansas, Berkeley, UC Davis, Lawrence, North Carolina and recently been to United Kingdom for the Barbican International Theatre Event, 2007 (BITE:07), London, Toga Festival, 2007 (Japan), Dr. Neelan Tiruchelvam Memorial Cultural Event, 2008 (Sri Lanka) and India's Republic Day Celebration at Sri Lanka, 2008

The repertory has also performed with great success in various places and cities including - London, Delphi, Kalamata, Thessalonica, Kavala, Athens, Yaroslov, Leningrad, Minsk, Barisova, Southampton, Omag, Amsterdam, Gainsborough, Bradford, Querentaro, Guanajuato, Cruz-A-Zul, Guaquil, Quito, Havana, Manizales, Cuba, Bogotá, Lima, Peru, Holland, Columbia, Thimpu, Haa, Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Wellington, Zurich, Kathmandu, Tokyo, Toga, Shizuoka, Toyama, Taipei, Yilan, Bonn, Colombo etc.

ANNEXURE I
Memorial Lectures : 2007- 2008

Name	Date	Venue	Speaker	Theme	Chairperson
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	17 January 2007	India International Centre, New Delhi	Professor Christopher Winch Educational Philosophy and Policy, Kings College London, U.K.	Individuals Workers or Citizens Reflections on the Limits of School Based Educational Reform	Professor Mrinal Miri <i>Former Vice-Chancellor</i> N.E.H.U. Shillong
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	19 January 2007	R.I.E Mysore	Dr Radhika Herzberger, <i>Director</i> Rishi Valley School Chittoor Andhra Pradesh	Religion, Education and Peace	Prof. B.L. Chaudhary <i>Vice-Chancellor</i> MohanalSukhadia University, Udaipur Rajasthan
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	17 August 2007	R.I.E Bhopal	Prof. Karuna Chanana <i>Former Professor</i> at Zakir Hussain Centre for Educational Studies School of Social Sciences, J.N.U.	Women in Indian Academe; Diversity Difference and Inequality in a Contested Domain	Prof. R.S. Sirohi <i>Vice-Chancellor</i> Barkatulla, University Bhopal
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	11 March 2008	Laitumkhrak Women's College Shillong	Shri Ratan Thiyam <i>Chairperson</i> , Chorus Repertory Theatre Imphal	Theatre Language and Expression	Professor T. Ao <i>Dean</i> , School of Humanities, N.E.H.U. Shillong

Name	Date	Venue	Speaker	Theme	Chairperson
Majorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	8 April 2008	R.I.E. Ajmer Jawahar Rang Manch., Ajmer	Ms Medha Patkar Social Activist	Socialisation vs. Politics of Education	Professor M.S. Agwani Former Vice Chancellor, J.N.U.
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	2 July 2008	Dorozio Hall Presidency College Kolkata	Shri Manoj Das International Centre of Education Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry	Education for a Faith in the Future	Professor Sanjib Ghosh Principal, Presidency College, Kolkata
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	19 July 2008	R.I.E. Bhubaneswar	Professor N.R. Menon Member, Commission on Centre State Relations	Realising Equality of Status and of Opportunity: Role of Government, Judiciary and Civil Society	R.I.E. Bhubaneswar
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	11 September 2009	R.I.E. Mysore	Shri U.R. Ananthamurthy Jnanpith Awardee	My Writing My Times	Professor G.H. Nayak
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	12 December 2008	S.N.D.T. Women's College Mumbai	Dr Sunderaraman Director State Health System Resource Centre	School as a Preventive and Promoting Health Centre	S.N.D.T. Women's College Mumbai Chairperson

ANNEXURE II
Memorial Lectures : 2008- 2009

Name	Date	Venue	Speaker	Theme	Chairperson
Mahatma Gandhi Memorial Lecture	28 January 2009	N.I.E. Auditorium N.C.E.R.T. New Delhi	Shri Anupam Mishra Gandhi Peace Foundation Delhi	Raj Samaj Aur Pani	Professor M. H. Gureshi <i>Former Professor</i> Geography, Centre for the Study of Regional Development J.N.U.
Zakir Hussain Memorial Lecture	30 January 2009	R.I.E. Mysore	Professor Padmini Swaminathan Madras Institute of Development Studies Chennai	Literacy and Levels of Formal (General and Professional) Education of the Indian Population: A National Report Card	Professor B. Shaik Ali <i>Former</i> <i>Vice-Chancellor</i> Mangalore and Goa University
Mahadevi Verma Memorial Lecture	5 January 2009	R.I.E. Bhopal	Ms Kalpana Sharma Former Chief of Bureau, The Hindu Mumbai	Can Media teach us anything?	Dr Pushpendra Pal Singh <i>Head, Department of</i> <i>Journalism, National</i> <i>University of</i> <i>Journalism and</i> <i>Communication, Bhopal</i>

Name	Date	Venue	Speaker	Theme	Chairperson
Rabindranath Tagore Memorial Lecture	14 January 2009	R.I.E. Bhubneswar	Professor Swapan Majumdar Director Culture and Relations Vishva Bharati	Education as Empowerment Twins in Search of an Alternative Education	Professor Shantanu Kumar Acharya Eminent Writer
Gijubhai Badekha Memorial Lecture	20 January 2009	M.I.D.S. Chennai	Professor T. S. Saraswathi, <i>Former Professor</i> , Maharaja Sayaji Rao University Baroda	Culture and Development Implication for Classroom Practice	Professor S. Jankarajan <i>Director</i> Madras Institute of Development Studies
Savitribai Phule Memorial Lecture	29 January 2009	S.N.D.T. Women's University Mumbai	Professor Sharmila Rege Director Kratiyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Study Centre, University of Pune	Education as Tritiya Ratna: Towards Phule Ambedkarite Feminist Pedagogies	Professor Chandra Krishnamurthy <i>Vice-Chancellor</i> S.N.D.T. Women's University
Sri Aurobindo Memorial Lecture	27 March 2009	Presidency College Kolkata	Professor Jasodhara Bagchi, <i>Former Professor</i> Jadavpur University	Education for Women and Women for Education : the Case of Bengal	Professor Sanjib Ghosh <i>Principal</i> Presidency College Kolkata
B. M. Pugh Memorial Lecture	27 March 2009	Don Bosco Youth Centre Shillong	Shri P. Sainath <i>Rural Affair Editor</i>	India in the Age of Inequality : Farm Crisis, Food Crisis and the Media	Ms Patricia Mukhim <i>Editor</i> , Shillong Times
Majorie Sykes Memorial Lecture	28 October 2009	R.I.E. Ajmer	Professor Kamal Dutta <i>Former Professor</i> Department of Physics Delhi University	What should we teach? An Examination of Issues underlying the College Curriculum.	Yet to be finalised

NOTES