Public Lecture

Imaginaries of Ignorance:
Five Ideas of the University and the Place of the Humanities Within Them

by Rukmini Bhaya Nair

Abstract of the Lecture

Much has changed since Thomas Carlyle declared with magisterial certitude in the nineteenth century that “the true university of these days is a collection of books”. This paper seeks to imagine the contours of a ‘true university’ in the 21st century by examining five templates of higher education, each of which conceptualizes the role of the humanities in somewhat contradictory ways. Can the height and heft they accord to the humanities be the principle pathfinder that helps decide which, if any, of these frameworks might emerge as prima inter pares in the future? The question is discussed here with special reference to the history of the modern university. When this ‘western’ narrative is placed within the challenging context of an extremely plural India, a host of conceptual difficulties seem to arise since institutions adjudged the best purveyors of ‘true and certain knowledge’ cannot always be said to be humane and those that may be humane tend to escape the strict Cartesian criteria by which ‘true knowledge’ is conventionally determined.

About the Speaker

Rukmini Bhaya Nair is Professor of Linguistics and English at IIT Delhi. She received her PhD from Cambridge University and has since taught at a number of universities across the globe. Her research interests are in the fields of cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, English Studies, the philosophy of language, technocultures, literary, narrative and postcolonial theories, gender studies, and creative writing. She is a widely published essayist and academician.

Her publications include Poetry in a Time of Terror (2009), Narrative Gravity: Conversation, Cognition, Culture (2003), Lying on the Postcolonial Couch (2002); Translation, Text and Theory: the Paradigm of India (2002); and Technobrat: Culture in a Cybernetic Classroom (1997). In 2013, she published the first novel—Mad Girl’s Love Song—of a trilogy. Her novel was long-listed for the prestigious DSC prize. She is also a widely published poet, and her several volumes of poetry have been extensively translated as well.

Date and Time

October 30, 2015; 4:00 PM

Venue

C.V. Raman Auditorium, IISER Pune