Singing the Modern: Music, Cultural Memory and Urban Space
By Prof Tejaswini Niranjana

Date : 22 Mar 2016
Time : 16:00 - 17:30
Venue : Asia Research Institute Seminar Room
        Tower Block Level 10, 469A Bukit Timah Road
        National University of Singapore @ BTC

CHAIRPERSON

Chua Beng Huat, Asia Research Institute, and Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

ABSTRACT

The talk will discuss the formation of the public domain in the non-western city, using the example of Bombay in India. From the late 19th century onwards, the centrality of music helped form a distinctive kind of public-ness, manifested in how urban spaces were organized, as the growth of an urban musicophilia or a love for music created a culture of collective listening, in turn bringing people of diverse social and linguistic backgrounds together. The talk focusses on this condition of collective listening, and how it may be understood in the present.

Available Euro-American writings on the formation of the public sphere tend to present a normative picture of this process, as they do of modernity, democracy or social transformation in general. But what do we do when there is no clearly defined archive or comprehensive repository of cultural documents? How do we read against the grain of commonsensical notions of ancient and unchanging cultural forms? Drawing on sources such as extant private live recordings of concerts in people's houses as in major public venues, from postcards, advertisements and anecdotes, I will show how we can assemble a sense of cultural memory, and of the public domain, through unconventional means. Engagement with the performing arts in Asia, especially those claiming a long history, could afford new insights into the process of contemporary meaning production that is central to Cultural Studies.

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Tejaswini Niranjana is co-founder of the Centre for the Study of Culture and Society in Bangalore. She is currently Chair, Centre for Indian Languages in Higher Education, Tata Institute of Social Sciences Mumbai, and Distinguished Adjunct Professor of Humanities at Lingnan University, Hong Kong. Her most recent monograph is Mobilizing India: Women, Music and Migration between India and Trinidad (Durham: 2006). A co-edited volume (with Wang Xiaoming), Genealogies of the Asian Present: Situating Inter-Asia Cultural Studies (Delhi: 2015), has just been published. She is conceptualler and co-producer (with Surabhi Sharma) of Jahaji Music: India in the Caribbean (2007) and a forthcoming 2016 film on Hindustani music in Mumbai. In June-July 2015, she curated an exhibition titled Making Music-Making Space, based on her research.

REGISTRATION

Admission is free. We would greatly appreciate if you RSVP to Ms Tay Minghua via email: minghua.tay@nus.edu.sg.