

# In Memoriam: Dilip Basu

To: UC Santa Cruz Community

From: Public Affairs Office

March 28, 2016



**Professor Emeritus Dilip Basu passed away on February 22, 2016 in Santa Clarita, Ca. His family has asked that the following obituary be shared with the campus:**

It is with great sadness we announce the passing of Dilip Basu, Research Professor of Humanities, Founding

Director of Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection, University of California Santa Cruz, and since June 2015, Senior Research Fellow, Packard Humanities Institute, Santa Clarita, California. He passed away peacefully of natural causes on February 22, 2016 in Santa Clarita, California.

Dilip was born on August 16, 1938 in Chirirbandar, a village in East Bengal, India prior to the 1947 partition of the subcontinent. The seventh of eleven children (with four brothers and six sisters), he acquired a love of history while a student at the village school. After the partition of India in 1947 and their migration to Calcutta, the Basus became *bona fide* refugees. For a period the family was scattered, the parents moving away from Calcutta while the elder children remained in the city to attend college.

Dilip attended high school and college in Calcutta, in the process falling in love with modern Bengali poetry, then in a state of resurgence after the partition. However soon after beginning his studies at Presidency College he became seriously ill from malnutrition. As a result his parents had to return to the city, barely managing to stay together, in order to care for him. After his recovery, Dilip completed his B.A. in 1959 from Presidency College,

garnering gold medals for excellence in History and in his subsequent M.A. History degree.

This academic success allowed him scholarships that brought him to the U.S. to undertake graduate study in history, in the process becoming interested in the history of modern China. He received an M.A. from Harvard University in Chinese history and began to map out his dissertation topic. He did his doctoral studies at the University of California at Berkeley under Professor Frederick Wakeman. In 1974 he completed his dissertation on "Asian Merchants and Western Trade: A Comparative Study of Calcutta and Canton, 1800-1840." In this phase of his career, his work was focused primarily on the history of modern China and its relations with British colonial India. Dilip Basu had by this time, in 1971, joined the faculty at the University of California at Santa Cruz as Acting Assistant Professor of History, after stints as a visiting instructor at UC Berkeley and the University of Michigan.

Initially named a Fellow of Stevenson College, Basu joined Herman Blake in the founding of Oakes College in 1972. In 1989 he became a Fellow of Merrill College. In this first phase of his academic career he taught and wrote primarily about European imperialism in East Asia.

He chaired the Programs on East Asian Studies and South and Southeast Asian Studies. Publications from this period include the edited volumes *Nineteenth Century China: Five Imperialist Perspectives* (1972) and *The Rise and Growth of Colonial Port Cities in Asia* (1985). He recently returned to this subject in a widely praised article, "Chinese Xenology and the Opium War: Reflections on Sinocentrism," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, (2014) Vol. 73, 927-940.

By the 1990s Dilip's research and teaching interests gradually returned to South Asian history, initiating a second phase of his career, one in which he would invest his energies in developing a South Asian Studies program at UCSC. He reworked his South Asian courses to incorporate new cultural approaches, including dance, music, folklore and film. In this period he also helped establish the Ali Akbar Khan Endowment in Classical Indian Music and the Hasan Endowed Chair in Hindustani Music at UC Santa Cruz.

Eventually his fascination with the history of Indian film would lead him to the third and most significant phase of his career, his involvement with the films of Satyajit Ray, the great Indian filmmaker and director. In this period, Dilip's research and writing focused upon the Cinema of

Satyajit Ray and works of Rabindranath Tagore. His translation of Tagore's famous novel, *The Last Poem: A Novel*, was published in 2011 by Harper Perennial in India, where it is a best seller. Another book, Satyajit Ray's *Goddess: From Story to Film*, is scheduled for publication this year by the Packard Humanities Institute.

Basu's establishment of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Center at UC Santa Cruz ranks as his most important accomplishment. Funded by grants from the Packard Humanities Institute, the Ray FASC (<http://satyajitray.ucsc.edu>) became internationally famous as the principal archive for the work of this master of Indian film.

Among many awards he received in this period, Basu was honored by the Academy of Motion Pictures Arts & Sciences and the Cultural Council of Bengal of New York. In September 2014, the Academy Film Archive in Los Angeles felicitated Dilip for his coordination of the Ray film restoration. He was also the recipient of a major grant from the Indian Council of Cultural Relations in New Delhi for the operations of the Ray Center and for hosting major cultural events and lectures.

In 2013 the Dean of the Humanities Division appointed

him a Research Professor of Humanities Division. In 2015, he was named Steward of the Satyajit Ray Film and Study Collection, defined as part of his own research and took up an appointment as Senior Research Fellow at the Packard Humanities Institute in Santa Clarita.

Dilip leaves behind his wife, Dayani Basu and a daughter, Amiya Basu Jackling, from an earlier marriage to Cathy Shender. Other relatives include Chris Jackling; a younger brother, Asish Basu who followed him to the US; his nephews, Rishi Basu and Neil Basu; a stepdaughter Pallavi Sonia Rao and two step-grandchildren; and four surviving siblings, and their children and grandchildren in India. In addition to his family, he leaves behind numerous close friends and admirers in the US, and in India.

A memorial celebration of his life will be held at the Cultural Integration Fellowship (CIF) *2650 Fulton Street, San Francisco, CA 94118* at 4 PM May 29, 2016. Condolences may be sent to Mrs. Dayani Basu (*c/o The PHI Stoa 26155 Rockwell Canyon Road, Santa Clarita, CA 91355*) or to Mr. Asish Basu (*328 Troy Road, Rochester, NY 14618*). In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Dilip Basu's name to the Cultural Integration Fellowship. Please RSVP at any of the above Basu addresses if you plan to attend the

memorial celebration.

**A memorial gathering for the UC Santa Cruz community will also take place on Thursday, May 26, from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. on campus at the Merrill Provost House. Individuals wishing to share memories about Professor Basu's contributions to UCSC should contact Terry Burke at [eburke@ucsc.edu](mailto:eburke@ucsc.edu) to secure a place on the program.**