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## DARTINGTON AT 100

A black and white photograph showing a man in a suit and a woman in a long coat standing outdoors. The man is on the right, looking towards the woman. The woman is on the left, looking towards the man. In the background, two children are visible. The scene is set in front of a stone wall and some trees.

**CELEBRATING  
TAGORE & ELMHIRST'S  
VISIONARY THRIVING  
COMMUNITIES**

# THE TAGORE CONNECTION

**Dr Kaberi Chatterjee & Obhi Chatterjee FRSA**

“Why are actions to prevent pandemics or climate disruptions so shockingly inadequate? Are economic systems driving industrial societies in a direction that’s impossible to change? Is it even possible for everyone, whether eight or ten billion people on Earth, to prosper within planetary boundaries? Is societal collapse inevitable? Or can we find a way to value and invest in our collective future here on Earth?”

*Earth for All: A survival guide for humanity (Club of Rome, 2022)*

**F**acing the challenge of navigating businesses, governments and other organisations through an increasingly volatile world, decision-makers need to equip themselves with the reflexes and mindset to be able to provide strategic leadership. While there are theoretical frameworks which could help them, there are very few real-world examples like Dartington where people can see and experience the impact of applying such holistic approaches in a community long-term.

The Dartington centenary offers an opportunity to reconnect Dartington with its philosophical and philanthropic roots while promoting it as the blueprint for thriving communities it was designed to be, including a circular economy where people’s wellbeing takes priority.

## THE ROOTS OF “THE DARTINGTON EXPERIMENT”

Dorothy Straight (the philanthropic daughter of wealthy industrialist WC Whitney and widow of Willard Straight) introduced Leonard Elmhirst to Indian Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore in New York in 1920, Tagore invited him to be his rural

development advisor in Santiniketan, India. It led to the creation of two visionary thriving communities: the first in Sriniketan, where Elmhirst helped Tagore to create the Institute for Rural Reconstruction, the second in Dartington, which the newly-married Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst purchased in 1925.

Both Tagore and the Elmhirsts aimed to revive village life through a holistic approach, combining social and economic regeneration with creative self-expression and spiritual growth. However, as Leonard Elmhirst wrote to Dorothy in 1922, when it came to solving the 'world problem', 'little was to be hoped for from politicians, governments, treaties and conferences'.<sup>1</sup>

As Oxford-based economist Kate Raworth has explained<sup>2</sup>, a change of mindset is needed to stay within planetary boundaries to focus on wellbeing, rather than on unrealistic expectations of perpetual economic growth. This is also a first step towards the 'Giant Leap' scenario of the Club of Rome's report *Earth for All: A survival guide for humanity*, which reviewed the (lack of) progress in averting the climate crisis predicted by the 1972 Club of Rome report *Limits of Growth* and illustrated that the predictions had been correct and remain valid in the 'Too Little, Too Late' scenario humanity faces without a change of mindset.

One of the most effective ways to help people understand how this should happen in practice is by providing an immersive experience of how such a holistic approach can work. Dartington at 100 provides an opportunity to promote the original aims and achievements of 'the Dartington experiment'.

## DARTINGTON AT 100

2025 marks the centenary of the acquisition of the Dartington Estate by the Elmhirsts. Based on various conversations during and since our first visit to Dartington since Kaberi was exploring the Dartington archives at High Cross House 20 years ago for her doctoral thesis on the dance style created by Rabindranath Tagore, there is a lot of goodwill towards the Estate in and around Dartington, especially among those who grew up on or around the Dartington Estate.

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Neima: *Dartington Hall and the Quest for 'Life in its Completeness', 1925–45* (History Workshop Journal, 2019)

<sup>2</sup> Kate Raworth: *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to Think Like a 21st Century Economist* (2017)

Several aspects appear to be worth highlighting in the centenary celebrations, such as:

- the emphasis on arts and crafts to stimulate creativity (and entrepreneurship)
- the need to live in harmony with nature, rather than seeking only to exploit it
- the collaboration with the local community (Dartington being an early example of a circular economy)
- the freedom to experiment and to innovate

The Elmhursts established Dartington Hall as a centre for integrated living, combining education, arts, agriculture and spirituality. Rabindranath Tagore's philosophy of holistic living deeply influenced the educational programmes there. They emphasised creativity and self-realisation, reflecting Tagore's belief in 'life in its completeness' and the interconnected nature of all aspects of life and fostering a learning environment where students engaged in diverse activities, promoting a sense of community and holistic development.



## TARGET AUDIENCE

With the world facing multiple crises and increasingly stressful working environments, decision-makers throughout public and private sectors are searching for strategies to ensure that their organisations can thrive in such challenging circumstances.

At the same time, the growing global wellness tourism market (of which lodging services account for 50%) was valued at approximately \$880 billion in 2023, potentially reaching \$2.3 trillion by 2033.<sup>34</sup> The increasing awareness of health and wellness, alongside the rise in lifestyle-related health issues, is driving demand for wellness tourism experiences.<sup>5</sup>

Both target audiences could be attracted to Dartington by immersive, residential seminars. Courses aimed primarily at a corporate audience could address topics such as collaborative leadership, strategic thinking and regenerative economics. These and other courses could be designed to appeal to travellers who seek experiences that enhance their physical and mental well-being, such as arts and crafts courses in the beautiful, natural setting of the Dartington Estate which encourage participants to rediscover all five senses, as well as their emotions.

Promoting the centenary as a celebration of Tagore and Elmhirst's visionary thriving communities could attract both audiences to Dartington, especially with supportive local, national and international partners. To encourage a wider, potentially international audience to visit Dartington, the course offer and the events calendar should allow both live and recorded online participation. Those who are not able to visit Dartington in 2025 should be inspired to experience it in the future.

## POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

### ARTS & CRAFTS

The Barn Cinema offers a convenient venue to screen films, such as our film versions of the three dance-dramas created by Rabindranath Tagore (*Chitrangada*, *Chandalika* and *Shyama*)<sup>6</sup>, including live question-and-answer sessions after each screening. Depending on their timing, these screenings could be accompanied by the launch of the English version of Kaberi's book *Tagore Dance*, which includes behind-the-scenes photos from these productions.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.factmr.com/report/342/wellness-tourism-market>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.grandviewresearch.com/horizon/outlook/wellness-tourism-market-size/global>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/rogersands/2023/11/17/the-global-wellness-tourism-sector-surpasses-814-billion-market-share/>

<sup>6</sup> Distributed by Inner Eye Films



Peter Nicolson has been preparing a film to mark the centenary of Dartington, with material from the Dartington archives. Perhaps its screening could be supported by talks by others who have written books about Dartington, such as Anna Neima and Sam Richards, as well as Dartington alumni such as Etain Kabraji and former teachers such as Dr Frances Shepherd.

A popular tradition originally established by Tagore in Santiniketan is an annual craft fair, including live performances. A craft fair in the grounds of Dartington Hall could include stalls from local artists and craftsmen, as well as those from further afield in the South West. The atmosphere could be similar to that in archival films of Dartington Foundation Days.<sup>7</sup>

As in previous years, we will be helping the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust to celebrate the birth anniversary of Tagore, whose bust stands in the garden of Shakespeare's Birthplace. On 4 May 2025, with our London-based cultural group Prantik, we will be performing selected Tagore songs and poems as part of a script about the female characters in Tagore's works. Prantik could perform the same programme in Dartington on 5 May 2025 - Tagore's actual birth anniversary is on 7 May.

At least one event should highlight the impact of Dartington as a hub for artists, musicians and writers, including the International Summer School, which has hosted renowned figures like Igor Stravinsky and Ravi Shankar. Kaberi could propose a Tagore dance workshop, perhaps in connection with the Tagore-style tree-planting ceremony proposed below. She could also give an *alpona* workshop.

<sup>7</sup> [Dartington Foundation Day 1948](#) & [Dartington Foundation Day 1969](#)



Related to the next theme of Harmony with Nature, there could be art workshops which use natural materials, such as leaf printing or crafting with twigs. There could also be performances in natural settings, such as under trees or near water features (whether in the gardens or near the River Dart) to create an immersive atmosphere reflecting Tagore's poetic spirit.

## HARMONY WITH NATURE

A programme of guided walks (which could include the current tour of the gardens) and outdoor meditation sessions could help to connect participants with the natural surroundings.

Workshops on natural decor could show participants how to use materials such as wood, flowers and plants for decorations. Kaberi could host a workshop to prepare floral 'jewellery' to be worn during a Tagore-style tree-planting ceremony. The photo above was taken during such a ceremony in Santiniketan, which we have been able to recreate with the help of local students in Spain, Romania and at the 150th Tagore birth anniversary celebrations of the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust at Anne Hathaway's Cottage.

Another type of workshop, perhaps in partnership with the Riverford Field Kitchen, could offer farm-to-table dining experiences featuring local produce, emphasising sustainability and seasonal ingredients.

## COLLABORATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Perhaps such activities are best defined and organised through a co-creation workshop at Dartington to which Dartington members and others could be invited. They could include historical exhibitions featuring old photographs and artifacts of Dartington, inviting locals to contribute their collections and stories. Local musicians and artists should be invited to perform and conduct workshops.

Local expertise and organisations like the Devon Doughnut should be invited to lead workshops on regenerative economics and sustainable living. For example, the owners of the Barns at the Hood should be invited to share how they have rebuilt a former barn into an ecological home and solar power station.

Local artists and performers should be invited to showcase their talents at a festival combining music, theatre, literature and art, perhaps alongside the craft fair proposed above.

## FREEDOM TO EXPERIMENT AND INNOVATE

Alongside the above, it would be useful to offer scope for experimental and innovative workshops during the centenary celebrations. These could be organised in collaboration with partners with a wide international reach. One possibility could be to have a limited number of open days/weekends during the year for workshops or activities to be proposed by partners to address a particular issue.

Promoting an open call on social media to invite proposals for activities which could be included within the centenary celebrations would help to generate a buzz around the centenary as well as ensuring a diverse range of activities. Those making proposals would need to include information such as the target audience, their promotional pitch, their technical requirements, the maximum capacity as well as the costs involved. The Dartington Trust should establish a panel to review the proposals to select those which fit best within the spirit of the centenary celebrations.

## INSPIRATION

Since its inception, Dartington has been inspiring people by allowing them to experience what is possible through a holistic approach. Dartington Crystal is just one of the businesses which emerged from the “Dartington experiment”. There have been many other illustrious examples, including alumni.

Among those inspired by Dartington was Aldous Huxley, whose last book *Island* introduced its readers to the Pacific island of Pala, which “has been the scene of a unique experiment in civilisation. Its inhabitants live in a society where Western science has been brought together with Eastern philosophy to create a paradise on earth.” Dartington was the inspiration for Pala, its curator was modelled on Leonard Elmhirst and the Raja was modelled on Tagore.<sup>8</sup>

So a key objective of *Dartington at 100* should be to inspire not only those who attend but also beyond. This is likely to require a strong social media strategy as well as the prospect of repeating successful activities in future years. Only in this way will Dartington become a catalyst for change.

## POTENTIAL PARTNERS

To achieve a higher profile for *Dartington at 100* and to underline the role of Dartington as a blueprint for sustainable living in other communities around the world, the centenary celebrations should include partners such as the following:

- [Devon Doughnut](#)
- [Earth for All](#)
- [Global Collaboration Institute](#)
- [Impact Leader](#)
- [The RSA \(Royal Society for Arts, Manufactures and Commerce\)](#)
- [Shakespeare Birthplace Trust](#)
- [Unlock Democracy](#)
- [Zoe Institute](#)

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<sup>8</sup> Parsons, D. (1987). DARTINGTON: A PRINCIPAL SOURCE OF INSPIRATION BEHIND ALDOUS HUXLEY'S ISLAND. *The Journal of General Education*, 39(1), 10–25. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27797098>