



Diversity and Social Justice

*Arts Education: "To strive, to seek, to find,
and not to yield"*

The Artist and Education: Diversity and Justice

February 3 & 4, 2012. National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore

Greetings from Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan & India Foundation for the Arts (IFA)

The Goethe-Institut is the cultural institute of the Federal Republic of Germany with a global reach. Known in India as the Max Mueller Bhavan, the Institute promotes knowledge of the German language abroad and fosters international cultural cooperation. Among other goals in the cultural arena, the Goethe-Institut lays major emphasis on executing and supporting projects that focus on capacity building and infrastructure.

IFA is an independent, professionally-managed philanthropic organisation, based in Bangalore. IFA enriches the practice, knowledge, public access to, and experience of the arts in India, by providing strategic support for innovative projects and capacity building across the arts.

Over the past three years, IFA, in partnership with the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan, has intensively focused on the empowerment of the school teacher under one of its major funding programmes, Arts Education. This far-reaching initiative called '**Kali-Kalisu**' has brought multi-pronged Arts Education workshops to over 500 teachers in rural and small-town Karnataka.

As an extension to this project, the Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan and IFA are jointly hosting a major **Arts Education Conference on 3rd and 4th of February, 2012, at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Bangalore.**

Participation in the Arts Education Conference is open to key stakeholders in Arts Education in India and abroad. Artists, teachers, educationists, policy makers, donors and organisations interested in issues related to diversity and social justice. Please read the concept note that follows.

We sincerely hope that you will be able to participate in the conference. For more information, please contact:

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The theme of social justice has often been central to development sector programs and initiatives that aim to create an inclusive society by empowering marginalized communities. But rarely has the topic of social justice been addressed within the realm of arts education, a significant omission as artists and artistic practices have been at the forefront of promoting the vision of a just and equitable society. Arts education has always engaged the ideals of social justice, defined especially around a mandate of empowerment, exchange of shared values, and cultural relativism. Within the space of the classroom both address the gaps in curriculum, pedagogy, and the imagination that emerge from the putative “banking concept” of education with its hierarchical and unilateral dispensing of information. Even the official report on “Nali-Kali,” the state-sponsored art education program, has remarked upon the transformative effect of introducing arts into the classroom, where “[t]he relationship between the Deputy Project Coordinator, District Project Office, the teachers and the Resource Persons appeared devoid of a fear of hierarchy—a feeling that the boss had come for inspection did not seem to exist.”¹ In the Kali-Kalisu² regional conferences as well, teacher testimonials have consistently emphasized the mediating role the arts have played in addressing complex issues about students’ lives: in one example, a simple art exercise of mapping village streets allowed a child to address his everyday reality of living in an impoverished neighbourhood . But over and beyond the democratizing effect, the arts have advanced ethical values by tapping into the aesthetic and imaginative capacities of subjects. The opening up of fixed and fast-frozen sensibilities—of the teacher, students and the community at large—to the arts for personal enrichment has a direct correspondence with the dismantling of fixed and internalised ideological (dis)positions that allow social inequities to fester and multiply within and outside the classroom.

While the Third Developmental Goal from UNESCO’s 2010 Seoul Conference—to “apply arts education principles and practices to contribute to resolving the social and cultural challenges facing today’s world”—attempts to bridge the work of arts education with the ideals of social justice, the transformative potential of this re-orientation for both art practices and the constituencies served remains underexplored. As we adapt this objective to the Indian context, especially in light of the recent Right to Education Act of 2009³, a number of philosophical, political and practical questions come into play, ranging from those of equity of access to arts education for the underprivileged, to ways in which arts education can shape the cultural imaginary of a just and equitable society within the space of the classroom and beyond. Equally important is the parallel transformation of artistic and pedagogic practices when the artist/teacher encounters the worlds of the marginalized and the dispossessed. It is in recognition of this dialogic relationship between the classroom and society that the National Council for Educational and Research Training has issued a call for “innovative pedagogies [that are] to be grounded not just in learning new games, songs and activities but developing in the teacher a conceptual and lived understanding of all that experiential knowledge and learning has to offer.”⁴

¹ Nali-Kali: Not So Silent Revolution for Joyful Learning by Tasqeen Macchiwala

² The Goethe-Institut/IFA sponsored arts education teacher training programme. Visit <https://sites.google.com/site/kalikalisu/> for more information.

³ Look at <http://www.rteindia.com/> and <http://righttoeducation.in/> for more information.

⁴ Position Paper: National Focus Group On Gender Issues In Education, NCERT, 2008.

Arts Education: "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield"

IFA's Third International Conference, "The Artist and Education: Diversity and Justice," will draw out the possibilities and challenges emerging from the Third Developmental Goal and NCERT's directive by initiating a conversation between the parallel worlds of researchers, practitioners and teachers. It calls upon the artist to consider "the varied role [they] can and do play in society, including that of social critic, researcher, inventor, poet, provocateur, philosopher, visionary and activist."⁵ Framed by the Right to Education Act's (2009) stated mandate, "[T]o ensure that the child belonging to weaker section and the child belonging to disadvantaged group are not discriminated against," the conference will investigate a whole range of artistic practices and pedagogical strategies in both formal and non-formal educational institutions that address the following key areas:

1. EnGendering Equality in the Classroom—From Retention of Female Students to Reclamation of Gender Identity.

A recent NCERT report on the topic of gender inequities in the classroom narrates the story of a rural teacher in Madhya Pradesh who drew up a simple image of a man and woman working in the kitchen of a modest home to explain a scientific concept, only to face resistance from students about the collapsing of gender roles enacted by the image. Raising questions such as, "If man does house work, then who will go out to work and earn money?" and "Will women take ploughs and go to the fields?" male students defended the gender roles that they encountered in their everyday lives, while female students sat as silent spectators.⁶ The anecdote allows a clear glimpse into the gender stereotypes that students carry in their heads (something that the curriculum is underprepared to address), and the degree to which they have internalized socially constructed roles as determinants of identity. But also interesting is the fact that it is the medium of a visual image that allowed direct and unfiltered access to students' "customary consciousness," alerting us to the fecund possibilities of voicing egalitarian initiatives in the classroom through the language of art. One of the big achievements of Kali-Kalasu—the IFA/Goethe Institut sponsored arts education programme for government school teachers— has been the opening up a gender-neutral space for teachers: In the words of Asha Deshbhandari, a Block Resource Person in Sirsi, Karnataka, "It was the first workshop where her colleagues were comfortable with each other and did not hesitate to hold hands during group activities."

The urgency for and the complexity of interventionist initiatives is clearly spelt out by the report that highlights a plethora of problems and bleak statistics when it comes to gender equality in the classroom. There are, on the one hand, problems of access and retention of female students. NCERT reports that the dropout rates of girls, specially from the marginalised sections of society and the rural areas continues to be grim— 9 out of every 10 girls ever enrolled in school do not complete schooling, and only 1 out of every 100 girls enrolled in Class I reaches Class XII in rural areas. At the other of the spectrum, curricular content and pedagogies tend to reinforce, rather than resist, gender stereotypes; educational institutions largely function as apparatuses for normalising unequal power relations between male and female students within the classroom and society. Further, there are economic factors, such as the household's ability to bear the costs of schooling, and the demand for the child's labour that limit the presence of girls in the classroom.

⁵ David Darts, "Invisible Culture: Taking Art Education to the Streets," *Art Education*; Sep 2011; 64, 5.

⁶ Position Paper National Focus Group On Gender Issues In Education



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Some of the themes examined by this panel will include: In what ways can an intervention through arts education reshape the classroom experience, create pedagogies that challenge gendered construction of knowledge, and reshape the specular idea of learning, particularly for girls, into a more engaged one? What are the ways in which the language of art can enable the voicing of alternate experiences, aspirations and identities that lie outside socially accepted norms?

2.From Cultural Relativism to Shared Values

It is no exaggeration to say that the sixty-plus years old schooling system has had only a limited success in dismantling the legacy of caste and ethnic inequities inherited by post-independent India. One doesn't have to look far to see how schools across India have, rather than leveling the playing field through access to education, functioned as sites for enacting a whole range of discriminatory practices, from frequent verbal and physical abuse of Dalit children to rendering them inferior or invisible in the classroom. One report highlights the example of two Dalit children in a primary school in the village of Sahpur in Gujarat who, upon voicing an interest in furthering their education, were told by their teacher "that they [were] Dalits, that they were never going to go to secondary school and that they should lower their hands."⁷ The failure of state-run schools to integrate minority communities has resulted in low literacy and high dropout rates, as well as low self-esteem and reduced economic prospects for individual victims. The India Education Report suggests that Dalit literacy lagged behind the general population by as much as 15%. That arts education has a significant role to play in creating an egalitarian classroom is evident from the experience of a secondary school teacher from Gulbarga, Karnataka, whose village school had a mix of students from upper-caste Lingayat and Dalit communities. When the teacher initiated plans for play for the school annual day, he found his students unwilling to participate, as it would involve an intermixing of the two communities. But by engaging them in theatre games and creating a circle-time for shared reading activity, he successfully propelled them to break free of their social constraints and to take ownership of the project. The success of the play production spilled over into the entire community as it opened up the performance space of a temple courtyard to the Dalit community who had been denied to the temple premises for years. The teacher reported that the lead Dalit child became a show stopper and the villagers could not stop applauding the team for such a wonderful production, all of which helped the village forge the ideal of inclusiveness in the village.

This panel will address the significant absence of shared values in the classroom that suggests a huge lacuna within the actual practice of the democratic goals of the RTE act. Here, the ways in which arts education can work to incorporate a diversity of experiences and value-systems within the classroom will be of interest. What role can the arts play in sensitizing teachers and students towards "others" and promoting respect for alternate cultural traditions? How do artistic practices enable agency for the subjugated?

⁷ Ellyn Artis, Chad Doobay and Karen Lyons, "Economic, Social And Cultural Rights For Dalits In India: Case Study On Primary Education In Gujarat," Princeton University, 2003.
http://www.princeton.edu/research/final_reports/wws591c_1_f02.pdf

*Arts Education: "To strive, to seek, to find,
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3. Voices from the Margins

This panel will address artistic interventions within disenfranchised communities of children such as displaced children, working poor/street children and children of “weaker sections” of society that are cut off from the conventional classroom.

UNICEF estimates that at least 11 million children live on the streets in India; their lives capture the full horror of being underprivileged in India, from child labour, to malnutrition, to sexual exploitation. Cut off from formal schooling and other state institutions, the invisible culture of the street—of rag pickers, beggars, street vendors, child prostitutes— offers the potential of a potent counternarrative to conventional civic and artistic habituses that can be (and has been) captured through the artistic medium. This panel opens up a space for considering arts education within a double register: art interventions that infiltrate into the lives of the poorest of the poor for restoring them within the “discipline” of schooling, and interventionist art that, through its voicing of alternate realities and aesthetics, relativises customary artistic expressions.

A second thread of investigation can consider a whole range of counterhegemonic artistic practices and approaches that question the assimilationist tendencies of the “free and compulsory education” mandate. What are the aesthetic, ethical and philosophical fallouts of the neo-liberalisation of the Indian education system in the last few decades, especially from the perspective of indigenous peoples?⁸ For tribal communities across India, the formal schooling system, with its market-friendly emphasis on literacy goals, functions as a disruptive agent of acculturation that conducts an epistemic violence on native languages and ways of life. In what ways can the “art” of tribal learning reevaluate and reshape the mandate of education in India? Also of interest is the work of the so-called alternate urban schools and the centrality of arts education in their curriculum and classroom for creating civic consciousness among students.

4. The Art of Disability in the Classroom

Though the “Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act” of 1995 mandates “appropriate governments and local authorities to ensure that children with disabilities have access to free education in appropriate environments,” and has funded special education schools and vocational training facilities for addressing the issue, a recent NCERT report admits that these efforts have had but a “marginal” impact.⁸ In the absence of adequate training and resources, it is often left to the teacher to make an intervention: Chitra, a school teacher from Dharwad in Karnataka, reports about how she had to creatively think of ways of integrating a child with a learning disability in her eighth standard classroom by giving extra time and attention during after school hours. Within the human rights framework, the experience of disability stretches out in two directions: the statistical gap in terms of equity of access (more so for the disabled within female, minority, poor, and rural communities), and the segregation-integration dilemma of charting a course of action that at once institutes respect for disabled students by

⁸ Position Paper: National Focus Group On Education Of Children With Special Needs, NCERT, 2006.
http://www.ncert.nic.in/new_ncert/ncert/rightside/links/pdf/focus_group/special_ed_final1.pdf

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emphasizing sameness, while being cognizant of their “difference” from others. That arts education is central for closing the gap between “regular” and disabled students is clear from NCERT’s example of a nursery school that involved its students in “three-dimensional teaching–learning materials, masks, and puppets for storytelling, [and engaged] classmates as a peer tutors during rhymes, games, and the like,” to achieve a close bonding between special needs and mainstream students. But equally exciting and important, and away from the challenges of mainstreaming disabled students and the pathologizing gaze of society, is the potential of disability arts and culture to reorient our aesthetic, and not only social, consciousness by galvanizing a whole new economy of representation.

This panel will explore the various meeting points between arts education and disability in the classroom, within a multiplicity of registers—aesthetic, philosophical, social and ideological.

The conference panels will address the above topics through a combination of voices and modalities—an international perspective on arts education and social justice will enter into a conversation with teachers and arts practitioners from Karnataka and around the country, and bring research interests and field experiences into a productive exchange of ideas. IFA will work with individuals and organizations embedded in the field to shape specific questions about the above areas.

The International Conference will be preceded by a two-day seminar that will capture the successes and challenges of IFA’s arts education program—Kali-Kalasu—and set the tone for the conference. The seminar will bring together art practitioners who have been involved with arts education and provide a valuable space for them to collectively reflect upon their successes and challenges, as well as renew their commitment to the objective of bringing arts to education and giving back to the community.