



Recent Projects

“A School Without the Arts is Like a Place Without Water”

A two-day conference jointly organised by Goethe-Institut/Max Mueller Bhavan Bangalore and IFA—*Arts Education: Contexts, Concepts and Practices in Schools*—brought together a fascinating range of perspectives drawn from educational policy, classroom practices and artist-led interventions.

Held over December 11 and 12 in Bangalore, the conference was aimed at showcasing and extending IFA's 'Kali-Kalisku' initiative, a series of Goethe-Institut-supported arts pedagogy training workshops which have brought arts education to over 500 teachers in rural and small-town Karnataka.



Speaking at the conference, Mallesha M Pavagada, a teacher in a village in Karnataka's Dharwad district who has participated in the Kali-Kalisku workshops, described the challenges of working in a school which lacks essential facilities and where an arts teacher is looked down upon by his colleagues. On the other hand, he has been able to turn to his advantage the fact that he does not have the luxury of teaching only the arts—this enables him to use the arts to make the 45 minutes of any class effective.

While Mallesha represented the teacher's voice, social scientist Prof Shiv Visvanathan approached arts education through a critical examination of concepts such as 'constitutional right', 'citizen' and 'the school'. He identified diversity as the key to a robust understanding of culture in the Indian context. Prof Visvanathan tells us more about his views on culture, arts and education in our **Slant/Stance** section below.

For [more](#) on the conference visit the IFA website. And read media reports in the [The Hindu](#) and [Time Out Bangalore](#)

Mapping the Arts and Humanities

IFA has been commissioned by the Research Councils, UK (RCUK) to map the domain of research and funding in the arts and humanities in India. The UK Research Councils established an RCUK Office in India in 2008.

IFA will put together a preliminary shortlist of 60-70 institutions/centres of excellence, following which it will narrow the focus and concentrate on digging deeper into the profile and activities of a set of short-listed institutions.

This is the first time that an exercise of this kind is being undertaken with regard to a field that has in the last three decades significantly reformulated itself and become much more inclusive and interdisciplinary.

Evaluating Asia-Europe Cultural Exchange

In collaboration with the Fitzcarraldo Foundation, IFA recently produced an evaluation report on Asia-Europe Foundation's (ASEF) Cultural Exchange department.

ASEF was established in 1997 following the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting summit in 1996 and its mission is to promote greater mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe.

ASEF's Cultural Exchange department commissioned this independent evaluation of its programmes and activities between 2004 and 2009. The evaluation report contains a range of recommendations towards creating a new role for this department.

Database and Guide on Indian Arts

On behalf of the British Council, IFA undertook a yearlong research project to produce an information bank on Indian artists and organisations with an interest in collaborative practice, as well as a 'How To' guide for international artists hoping to work in India.

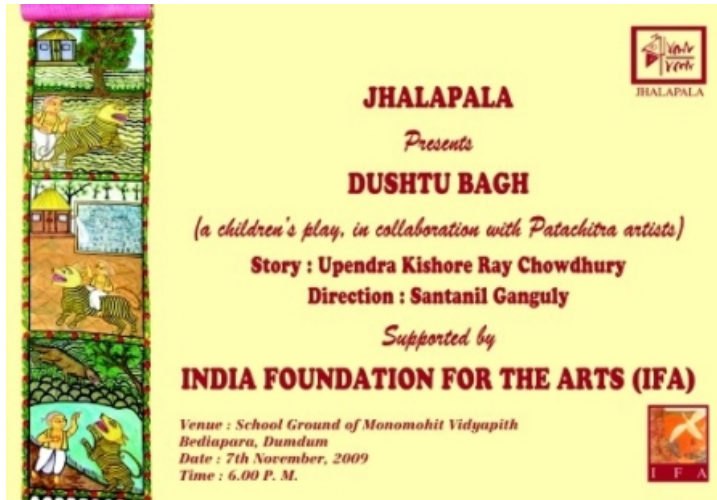
This database and guide is now available online on the British Council website. See [Indian Perspectives on Collaboration](#) and [How to Guides to India](#).

The **Guide to Indian Artists, Institutes and Festivals** will soon be uploaded on the British Council website.

Scroll Painting meets Children's Theatre

IFA-grantee Santanil Ganguly, of the Kolkata-based theatre group Jhalapala, has been working with children and *patachitra* performers to create a performance based on a story by well-known Bengali writer Upendra Kishore Roy Choudhury, the grandfather of Satyajit Ray.

The performance, *Dushtu Bagh*, premiered on November 7.



The poster is yellow with a vertical strip of colorful scroll paintings on the left. The text is centered and reads: **JHALAPALA** Presents **DUSHTU BAGH** (a children's play, in collaboration with Patachitra artists) Story: Upendra Kishore Ray Chowdhury Direction: Santanil Ganguly Supported by **INDIA FOUNDATION FOR THE ARTS (IFA)**. At the bottom, it lists the venue as School Ground of Monomohit Vidyapith, Bediapara, Dum Dum, the date as 7th November, 2009, and the time as 6.00 P. M. There are two small logos: one for Jhalapala and one for IFA.



New Issue of ArtConnect

Issue 5 of *ArtConnect*, IFA's magazine of the arts, has been described as "a readable magazine with academic depth".

Read a [review](#) of *ArtConnect* on the blog of art critic Johny ML.

And click [here](#) to browse this issue and to subscribe to *ArtConnect*.

IFA-supported Performances at National Festival

Four IFA-supported performances will feature in this year's edition of the National School of Drama's national theatre festival, [Bharat Rang Mahotsav](#), which will run from January 6 to 22.

These are:

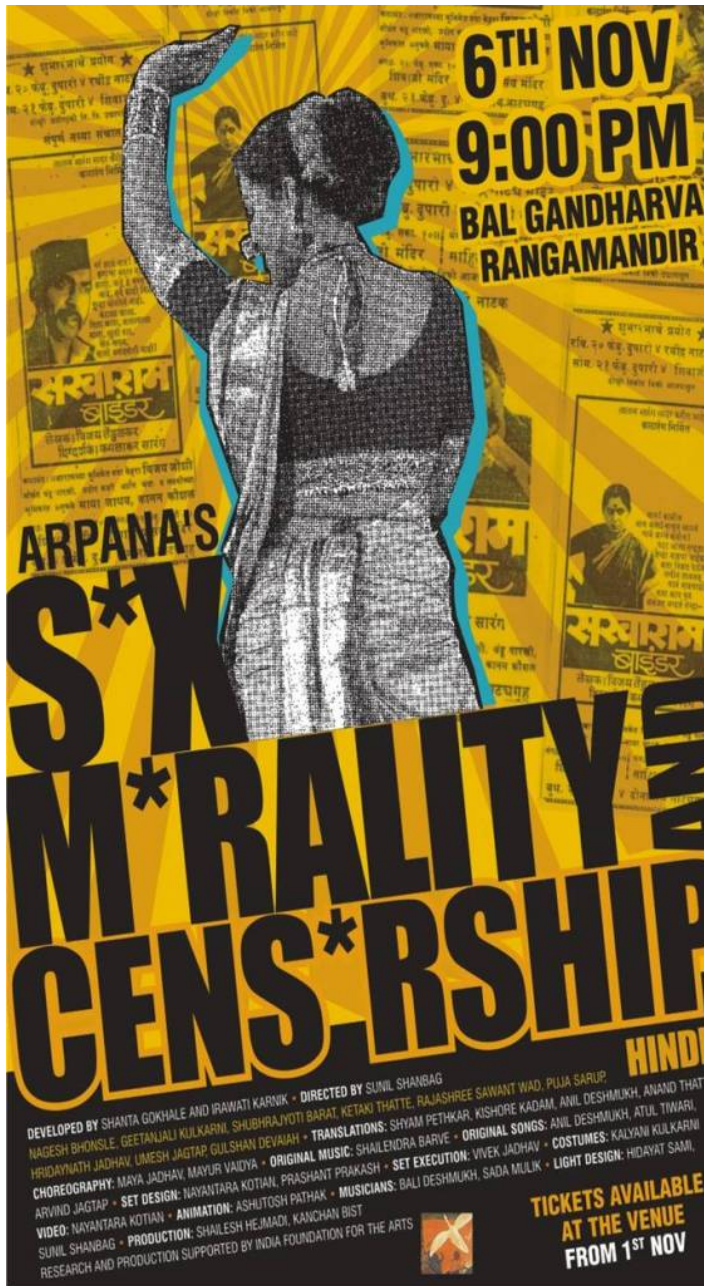
Sunil Shanbag's *Sex, Morality and Censorship* based on the history of theatre and censorship in Maharashtra;

Attakalarari's *Chronotopia*, a multimedia dance work based on the Tamil epic *Chilappathikaram*;

Quick Death, directed by Sankar Venkateswaran, which depends on written transcriptions of physical actions and gestures to construct theme, plot, character and spectacle;

And Jyoti Dogra's *The Doorway*, which is an exploration of real and imagined stories in the tradition of Grotowski's Theatre Laboratory.

Announcements



Bangalore Premiere of *Sex, Morality and Censorship* on March 13 and 14

“A modern seduction of ideas exploring one of the most controversial issues of our time—morality and censorship.”

The Sunil Shanbag-directed *Sex, Morality and Censorship* will be performed at Ranga Shankara on March 13 and 14.

The play is an outcome of Shanbag’s exploration—funded by two IFA grants—of the history of censorship and theatre in Maharashtra.

Read an in-depth review of the play in [The Hindu](#).

Call Joyce Gonsalves on 080-2341 4681/ 82/ 83 for details.

Naseeruddin Shah Back in Bangalore: February 20 & 21

Naseeruddin Shah’s Motely theatre group returns to Bangalore in support of IFA with *Waiting for Godot* and *Manto Ismat Hazir Hain*.

At Chowdiah Memorial Hall, February 20 and 21, 7.30 pm.

Call Joyce Gonsalves on 080-2341 4681/ 82/ 83 for details.

Bishar Blues in Bangalore on January 23

Amitabh Chakraborty’s IFA-supported *Bishar Blues*, a documentary film on the fakirs of Bengal, which won the Golden Lotus award for the best film in the non-feature film category at the 54th National Film Awards in 2008, will be screened at the Bangalore International Centre on January 23.

Bishar Blues examines the music of the fakirs and their deeply spiritual everyday life as representative of a living practice of radical syncretism.

Call Joyce Gonsalves on 080-2341 4681/ 82/ 83 for details.

Moving On

After a long tenure, Communications Editor Anjum Hasan will be leaving IFA on January 15.

Bangalore-based writer CK Meena will replace Anjum as the editor of *ArtConnect*. A Communications Officer will also shortly join the staff.

Slant, Stance

Social scientist and philosopher of science, Shiv Visvanathan, was in Bangalore recently to speak at the Arts Education conference organised by IFA and Goethe-Institut.

In the following interview he tells us why he thinks of diversity as “the grammar of our imagination”, describes the roles Indian artists have historically played in relation to education, and urges us to think of arts education in the civilisational sense rather than just as a question of the best classroom practices.

You spoke about culture as something that is by definition plural and whose cornerstone is diversity. What might be the sources to express or think about culture in this way?

Agriculture, language and dance. To me these are the three great creative forces of diversity and if you look at each one, it is the logic of diversity that sustains these as civilisations, as cultures, as centres for innovation. And for me language is probably the most fundamental of these. The diversity of dialects is a challenge to power because no dialect can dominate, it is endemic to a locality, a neighbourhood. A theory of diversity has two things—a theory of power, which cannot be central, and a theory of culture, which is always plural. Whether it's medical systems, agricultural systems, the way we build houses... I think all these are startlingly, stunningly different.

Diversity is the grammar of our imagination, while for the West the emphasis was more on liberty and equality. I think what's really happening in Indian democracy is a new attempt to invent the democratic imagination between fraternity, plurality, diversity, and liberty and equality. Liberty and equality in the Western form tend to be homogenising—our context, even if it is sometimes hierarchical, has a tremendous plurality which can never be captured by one text, one organisation and is always a multiple narrative. I think to a certain extent that's the power of the oral tradition—which allows for the diversity of imagination.

But there is also diversity in the official sense, it's been recognised officially...

It has but I'm not bothered about the official diversity, it's only a theory of *differences*, it's not a theory of *difference*. The unconscious of India actually provides a more powerful idea of diversity than the official one. When the Indian National Movement said—unity in diversity—in a way it froze diversity because unity has to be of a different kind. They wanted a oneness—here the idea is difference.

So what they meant was unity *in spite of* diversity...

Yes, that's the unstated part. It was seen as a response to a constraint. While here it's about the explosion of the imagination.

So to come back to the question of how we express this diversity and in what forms, you also spoke about the artist. You said the artist should be the legislator and we don't hear the artist's voice enough. But with arts education the concern has also been to institutionalise, to create frameworks. Isn't the artist too frail to carry the burden of arts education?

Let's take the Indian National Movement. Two of the greatest figures in the Movement were Rabindranath Tagore and Ananda Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy wrote this fantastic article in 1915 in which he said the National Movement must fight a guerrilla war against the museum. There is a fantastic section in another of his articles where he says—if God were to come to the Western world and ask civilised man where the Aztecs, the Incas and the Aborigines were, would he take him to a museum? We preserve the folk song at the very moment that we destroy the folk singer.

Tagore was the other one. In fact Tagore was so confident he tried to write science textbooks. He, Patrick Geddes and JC Bose used to conduct summer schools in Darjeeling about the idea of science that we should have. Now that is a different notion of diversity from the one we have. Now you're acting as if you're marginal—but the tragedy for me is that the artist as marginal is not as eccentric as the margins should be.

The margins in India are huge, a few million strong. Just take Gujarat—the nomadic population is stunning, it's a few million strong. You take shifting cultivation in Orissa—1.2 million. When the margins are so big they don't act as peripheries, or rather let me put it this way—they act as peripheries but not as margins. The assumption in the conference, where I see the lack of confidence, is the assumption of marginality. Which is why I said the UNESCO charter has to be challenged first. They make a concession to the arts by first divorcing the arts from culture and two, a lot of art is reduced to heritage. I think the definitions present in UNESCO are regressive. To follow that—no matter how progressive it may sound in print—I think is a step back in time.

The second thing is that there is a greater sense of diversity in the Constituent Assembly debate. Partition broke that confidence. The one thing that broke the sense of diversity in India was Partition. After that we wanted to homogenise, we wanted to equalise, we wanted to nationalise—you wanted uniforms and you wanted uniformity. But if you look at the imagination of the National Movement it was all for diversity. Alternative sciences, alternative technologies, the variety of religions, and even the idea of the West was a part of India. The Indian National Movement was the only movement which felt it had to rescue the West from itself. So these are very, very powerful ideas of diversity.

So because of the confidence inspired by the National Movement, the artist was able to see a role for him or herself that s/he cannot today?

Yes, absolutely—and in two senses—the artist as painter and the artist as craftsman. You can still see it today if you go back to the old Baroda school, if you talk to a Bhupen Khakar or a J Swaminathan, it's clear. Or if you talk to Mahasweta Devi—she is one of the greatest chroniclers of the death of diversity in India which is the death of the tribe, the death of the nomad, the decline of pastoral groups, because borders create uniformities of the passport. If you had a theory of culture, you wouldn't have to just say 'arts'. Culture is much more embracing. By narrowing it down to arts and then narrowing it down to school education I think you lost the epistemic war though you might win the institutional one, I don't know.

But if you drop the politics out you lose the battle, how can you say 'art' without talking about it in a civilisational sense or a cultural sense? And the thing is we're accepting the Western definitions of art—Coomaraswamy provided a better definition. He said, any man divorced from his culture is a proletarian. An artist is not a special kind of vocation but every man in the pursuit of a vocation is a special kind of artist. If that happens, then the definition of the school changes.

What do you think is the best thing that IFA can do in the area of arts education? Relative to government we are small and have limited means, but we're trying to make a difference at a larger level?

It's an advantage that you're small. Allow for eccentricity.

The UNESCO report that we heard this morning spoke about scientific studies to prove that children who do art are better developed. That's rubbish! If you look at the debates in science many of them would challenge the totalitarianism of the textbook in science. When scientists are challenging this, why is the artist falling for it? In fact I think what we suffered from here was not a poor notion of art but a false notion of science. And as a philosopher of science that to me was the stunning disappointment of the conference.

You said that one of the advantages of our education system is that it has fragmented us and that's liberating because it's left us with a bricolage. Does that constitute a hope for you?

And hope for the IFA too. Because if you can go back to the idea of the bricolage—that is, you do a set of innovative experiments within the constraints of the system—I think in a period of transition that would be a very brave effort. And it would also have a sense of humour. The bricolage allows for humour because it allows you to use a thing for something else.

I think IFA also has to participate in certain international debates and one of them would be to rewrite the charter of the UNESCO. I don't know how game you are but I think it's happening in the sciences. The whole notion of science and technology is being reviewed through European Union debates. Why not the arts? Why can art not guarantee the availability of eccentricity as a prelude to diversity? So a child would know to dissent is not wrong, to be different is not wrong, to be diverse is an invitation to a different world.

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