

NINASAM CULTURE COURSE 2014

A REPORT

The 2014 edition of the Culture Course, one of Ninasam's annual flagship events and a programme widely acknowledged as a unique activity in Karnataka's cultural circles, was held from 2nd to 8th of October, 2014. A week-long event conducted at Heggodu, it attracted, as have all its previous editions, a wide range of participants and resource persons, chiefly because of its unmatched blend of the aesthetic and the intellectual, the formal and the informal, theoretical and practical aspects of the arts in particular and culture in general.

THEME AND SUB-THEMES

India, a land of great antiquity and unrivalled diversity, has long intrigued both natives and foreigners attempting to describe and define it in simple terms. It has always defied facile formulations and easy encapsulations, challenging every such attempt with its unfathomable depth and range. This essential, irreducible quality of the Indian civilization was reiterated for the umpteenth time in a celebrated essay by the great writer and thinker A K Ramanujan, "Is There an Indian Way of Thinking?" published more than two decades ago. Ninasam thought that the year 2014 was an appropriate point of time to revisit the essay and its theme since this year marked a quarter century since the publication of the essay. It chose the question that gave the essay its title as the theme of the Culture Course. It also chose as its sub-themes other questions that naturally sprang out of the main question, such as whether there was anything that could be pinpointed as "Indianness" in the various processes and activities taking place in India today, whether there was anything similar in the case of regional contexts within India, like "Kannadaness" for instance. The basic aim of the Course was to explore the complexities involved in such a search and to arrive at a richer and less rigid understanding of the many ideas of India

SESSIONS AT THE COURSE

The Course had three types of sessions. The main lecture and discussion sessions ran from 9.30 in the morning to 6 in the evening. These sessions consisted of lectures by eminent resource persons followed by open discussions. The second type of sessions consisted of lecture-demonstrations by reputed artists and performers, which too included a discussion component. The third type of sessions, held early in the morning each day, provided an opportunity to the participants to learn, in a hands-on mode, the rudiments of two different arts – theatre and photography – under the guidance of experts in the respective fields. Besides, each of the theatre productions presented at the evening cultural festival were discussed in an open house session the following mornings, while performances held as part of the Course were discussed in a similar manner immediately after.

LECTURES AND LECTURE-DEMONSTRATIONS

The key-note address was by Shiv Visvanathan, sociologist, who highlighted diversity and multiplicity in every walk of life as the distinguishing marks of the Indian civilization. These features, which had long served India in retaining its complexity and uniqueness, were, sadly, he noted, recently being ignored or sacrificed by a section of Indians bent upon modernising India, which was nothing but Westernising it. India, he observed, had to evolve its own synthesis of the native and the foreign, the

traditional and the modern, if it had to preserve its identity. In a second lecture titled “Indian Science and the Idea of Waste”, Visvanathan showed how the idea of waste and its recycling and reuse formed and still forms the basis of India’s understanding of and engagement with modern science, an import from the West. Manu Chakravarthy, teacher and scholar, offered a critical analysis of the aforementioned essay by A K Ramanujan. Krishnamurthy Hanooru, teacher and writer, spoke on “Indian Folklore”, bringing to the fore the vital ways in which the folk traditions of different parts of India have constantly been negotiating not only with one another but also the classical traditions. In his talk “Classical India”, Narahalli Balasubrahmanya, scholar and writer, outlined the continuous, mutually enriching interaction between pan-Indian classical traditions and regional classical traditions. He also traced the recent impoverishment of the classical Indian traditions through modern interventionist processes and forces like revivalism, reformism, purification, cultural nationalism. H S Venkatesha Murthy, Kannada writer and scholar, in his lecture on “Classical and Medieval Kannada” dwelt upon the diverse modes in which different ages and schools of literature in pre-modern Kannada attempted to explore and define the Kannada identity. Gopal Guru, political scientist, spoke on “Indianness in Indian Politics” wherein he tried to distinguish the Indian way of doing politics from those of other societies. Raghuramaraju and Sundar Sarukkai, both philosophers, shared their thoughts on “Being Indian” and “Thinking Indian”, respectively, both stressing on the impossibility of developing any clear-cut categorisations in the regard. In a panel on “Indian Philosophical Traditions”, classical scholars Prabhakara Joshi and Laxmisha Tolpady provided an overview of the fundamental debates between the various schools of Indian philosophy and metaphysics. T M Krishna, Carnatic vocalist and musicologist, brought out in his two lectures, the way in which concepts like “classical”, “Indian”, “south Indian”, “tradition”, “innovation” have been undergoing constant shifts, and posing challenges to practitioners as well as theoreticians in the history of Carnatic music. Ravi Kashi, painter and visual arts teacher, demonstrated through a series of chosen painting the features which could be understood as representing the “Indianness in Indian Painting”. M K Raghavendra, film scholar, in his presentation “Indianness in Indian Cinema”, showed how popular Indian cinema had incorporated classical Indian aesthetics in its plot and time structures even while using a medium which was essentially a modern Western one. Ashis Nandy, social psychologist, in his valedictory address, pointed out the basically indefinable nature of India and Indianness, arguing that the very attempt to define India went against the Indian ethos. Using various kinds of anecdotes and examples, he showed how since ages Indians had been living as Indians without bothering about self-descriptions or self-definitions, and how the entry of modernity which valued uniformity was in fact affecting the rich diversity of “Indianness/nesses”.

While virtually every session remembered directly or indirectly U R Ananathmurthy, writer and thinker, who was the director of the Culture Course for over two decades and who left us in August 2014, this Course had a special session dedicated to his memory. A panel of G Rajashekhar, Gopal Guru, and Manu Chakravarthy discussed the personality and the contributions of Ananathmurthy and their “Indianness”. There was also a screening of “Ananathamurthy – Not an Idea but a Hypothesis”, a recent documentary film made by Girish Kasaravalli.

PERFORMANCES HELD AS PART OF THE COURSE

Illiya Theerpu, an intimate style theatre performance by the Aadyantha troupe, directed by Mounesha Badigera; *Chitrakathee*, a traditional Marathi narrative performance by Ganapat Masage and group; *Krouncha Pakshigalu*, an intimate style theatre performance based on a Kannada story by

Vaidehi, presented by Susheela M P, Vidya Hegde, and Shailaja Prakash, and directed by K V Akshara; *NH 7*, a contemporary dance performance by the Dance Trio team, Bangalore; *Nirvaana*, a short film directed by Mounesh Badigera.

EVENING CULTURAL FESTIVAL

There was a week-long public cultural festival accompanying the Course, where a variety of programmes were held every evening. The festival was a part of the Course for the participants while it was open to the general public too. The programmes at the festival were:

Namma Samsara, a Ninasam Theatre Repertory performance, part-written and directed by S Raghunandana; *Uttara Ramacharitha*, a Ninasam Theatre Repertory performance, based on the Kannada translation of the Sanskrit play by Bhavabhuti, directed by Venkataramana Aithala; *Chirakumara Sabha*, a Ninasam production based on Rabindranath Tagore's play of the same name, directed by Manjunatha Badigera; *Taoos Chaman ki Maina*, a Hindi play presented by Gilo Theatre Repertory, Mumbai, and directed by Atul Tiwari; a Carnatic vocal recital by T M Krishna, Chennai; a Hindustani vocal concert by Rahul Deshpande, Pune; a Kathak dance performance by Nandini Mehta, K Muralimohan and Nadam Ensemble, Bangalore.

RESOURCE PERSONS

The resource persons came from a wide range of fields. They included writers, artists, performers, thinkers, teachers, sociologists and the like.

PARTICIPANTS VARIETY

As every year, this year too, the Course had the most heterogeneous group of participants imaginable. The very nature of the Course made this possible. Details in the regard can be found in the following section.

STATISTICS

Participants:Total -----

Male-----; Female -----

Teachers ---;Students ---; Professionals --- ; Art and Culture Activists --- ; Self-employed --- ;Homemakers --- etc

PROGRAMMES

The Course had ---- lectures, ---- lec-dems, --- open house discussions, --- theatre performances, --- music concerts, ---- dances, ---- film shows etc

FEEDBACK

As every year, a special feedback session was held on the last day of the Course. Resource persons, special invitees, observers, and especially participants were of the common view that the Course was a truly enriching and rewarding experience. They all urged Ninasam to keep unchanged the basic structure, nature, and objective of the Course, particularly its insistence upon creating a

platform where the experts and the laypersons, the professionals and the amateurs, could interact on an equal footing and in a highly informal, flexible manner.