



## **NINASAM CULTURE COURSE 2017**

### **A REPORT**

The Culture Course has been one of the most significant events of Ninasam's annual calendar for over twenty five years now. It aims at providing a forum where renowned thinkers, artists, and activists and culture enthusiasts and aspirants can come together to hold both formal and informal interactions. With its fusing of the artistic and the academic, poetics and politics, it has been widely recognized as a unique experiment which attempts to explore organic and alternative modes of sharing aesthetic and intellectual experiences. Held every October in Heggodu, Karnataka, it has been attracting a most heterogeneous group of resource persons and participants not only from different parts of the state but from outside as well. The diversity of the participants, in particular, who come from varied age-groups, educational and vocational backgrounds contributes to the creation of a rich, stimulating atmosphere at the course.

The 2017 edition of the Culture Course, held from 1st to 5th of October 2017, continued this tradition.

## **THE THEME**

The theme of the Course this year was *Inter-Generational Dialogue*.

While human survival and self-propagation depend upon continuity and adaptation, the evolution of human self takes place not only through the above two processes but often also through discontinuity, contestation, and conflict. Dialogue and dispute between generations seem to play equally important roles in the formation of collective knowledge, character, and consciousness of human beings. The disputes point out the generational gaps just as the dialogues facilitate building of bridges between generations. All history seems to swing between these two modes of critical and creative engagement between generations. Ninasam's attempt, through the Culture Course, was to understand and draw wisdom from some randomly chosen interactions of this nature.

## **SESSIONS AT THE COURSE**

There were four different types of sessions at the Course. There were lectures and panel discussions by eminent resource persons. There were lecture-demonstrations by accomplished artists and performers. There were open house discussions about the theatre shows presented at the cultural festival held in the evenings. These three types of sessions were scheduled in the 9.30 am – 6 pm time slot. The Course was accompanied by a cultural festival held 7-10 pm every evening. This festival featured theatre performances by several groups. Besides these formal sessions, the participants also had an opportunity to interact informally with the resource persons over their walk, breakfast, dinner or lunch.





## LECTURES AND PANEL DISCUSSIONS

The keynote address was by Samik Bandopadhyaya, eminent scholar from Kolkata. Outlining some of the major historical events of the world, especially the Western part, of the last century, Bandopadhyaya pointed out how the younger generation of this period had continually debated with the older generation, leading thereby to some profound changes in our modes of thinking and living. The generation of the 1920s, as exemplified by soldier-poets like Wilfred Owen, did take part in the First World War; at the same time, though, they also spoke out in anguish and rage against the inhumanity of war, the selfishness of the elders who sacrificed their younger fellow-beings at the altar of abstract, impersonal ideals, the devastation of humanism by vested interests, and the increasing depersonalization of human beings. The world, Bandopadhyaya noted, did not learn any lessons from this bitter experience as very soon, by the 1930s and 1940s, it brought upon itself another, still bigger and still more terrible war. Here again, it was the younger generations, represented by artists like Hemingway and Orwell, who responded to the call of conscience, by putting up a brave resistance against the fascist violence and the desensitization of the human mind. The generations of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s had to fight a different set of adversaries, Bandopadhyaya noted, as by this time there was a war being fought everyday in one or another part of the globe, as corporate forces began to gain cross-ownership of the media and to distort the realities of the world to suit their interests. Finally, the Student Uprisings of the 1960s in particular marked an important turning point in the long, on-going tussle between the generations by taking the fight from the political field to the intellectual and academic field, too. This Youth Revolution, remarked Bandopadhyaya, has had far-reaching consequences for the entire world, and it continues even today, in different forms and in

different parts. It is only through such critical engagements of the younger generations with their older ones that a creative balance can be maintained in human societies, Bandopadhyaya concluded. In another session, an interactive one, Bandopadhyaya dwelt at length upon his own experiences as a young man growing up in Bengal and India through the times of the freedom struggle, the attainment of independence, the partition of the country, and his association with, and assessment of the many art and political movements in his native state. This session testified to the intertwining of the personal and political in ample measure.



There were two sessions by the eminent historian Ramachandra Guha. In his lecture titled “Gandhi In Conversation with Generations Before and After Him”, Guha recollected the way in which he, a typical modern young Indian indifferent to Gandhi, came to discover Gandhi’s significance through a series of fortuitous, unrelated events in his personal as well as professional life. He then provided a framework of four major dialogues that Gandhi had, directly or indirectly, during his life (dialogues that continue to reverberate in our times, too) observing that this was one of the more fruitful ways of understanding Gandhi. The first dialogue was with the likes of Savarkar where Gandhi countered the typical Savarkar concepts like the justification of the use of violence, Hindu supremacy, a technocratic vision of development, and the idea of India as a modern nation-state with his concepts of non-violence, equality of all faiths, sarvodaya or the prospering of all together, and the idea of India as a nation of villages. The second dialogue Gandhi had was with figures like Bhagat Singh and the Marxists. Here Gandhi reiterated the virtues of non-violence both as a political and spiritual tool, pointed out that violence would not only be counter-productive in most cases, it would also result in the degradation of persons who use it. In his third dialogue, where he engaged with people like Nehru, Gandhi was again very assertive about his perception and vision of India, insisting upon the

superiority of the village economy, of human-scale models of development as against a Westernised, urbanized India seeking development through mega projects. The fourth dialogue of Gandhi was with Ambedkar and his followers, in which he advocated the eradication of untouchability through Hindu self-correction and heart-transformation as against Ambedkar's preference for religious conversion; civic, personal action against the latter's advocacy of state intervention and legislation; and a rural India of small-scale industries versus a modern industrial and technological India. In the concluding part of his lecture, Guha observed that when we look at these dialogues with the advantage of historical hindsight, reconciliation between Gandhi and Savarkar, Gandhi and the revolutionaries and the Marxists appears impossible, because of the fundamental divergences between them. As regards Gandhi and Nehru, and Gandhi and Ambedkar, however, reconciliation is not only possible but highly desirable, too, since it would bring about the kind of creative fusion that would benefit not only India but the world, too. In an interactive session that followed, Guha responded to questions from the participants and other resource persons elaborating, clarifying, and illustrating the arguments that he had presented.

There were seven panel discussions at the course:

In a panel on *Folklore Research*, scholars Krishnamurthy Hanooru, P K Rajashekhara, and Sunandamma spoke about the major trends in the field over the last three generations, the problems they had to face in bringing material which was essentially in the oral mode into the written/printed mode, the challenges in collecting, collating, and editing the numerous variants that folk texts exist in.

*Farming between Generations* was the topic of a panel where three young farmers from three different parts of Karnataka – Ajjappa Kulagod from the dry plains of the north, Anil Balanja from the hilly evergreen region, and Nayana Anand from the semi-dry plains of the south narrated the stories of their initial challenges and eventual successes. Their individual narratives, skillfully elicited and strung together by the moderator Shivananda Kalave, a journalist specializing in farming and environmental issues, fused to form a fascinating discourse which demonstrated how a modern generation taking to the age-old practice of agriculture could not only rediscover wise old ways but also develop on their own newer, ecologically sensitive and yet economically sustaining ways of doing agriculture.





In a panel discussion on *The Bhakti Tradition over the Generations*, scholars J Srinivasa Murthy, Basavaraja Kalgudi, and H N Muralidhara debated the different dimensions and perceptions of *bhakti*. One view was that *bhakti* was not just a passionate outpouring of personal faith and devotion but also a tool of social criticism and reform. As seen in all the *bhakti* movements of India, it was a form of protest against hierarchic power structures, oppressive systems, and empty rituals. *Bhakti* thus had an intellectual and political dimension, too, the great *bhaktas* often interrogating, doubting, even decrying their favourite deities. The contending view was that there was a lurking danger with *bhakti*, too, that it could degenerate into slavish dependence and servile surrender, a danger often foreseen by the same great proponents. Further, *bhakti*, which might have served as a potent weapon in the fight against inequality and inhumanity in olden times, now, in times of modern democracy, can easily transmogrify into unreason and fascism of various hues.

A panel on *Technology & Education Across Generations* with Srujana Kaikini and Varun Bhat as discussants and Sundar Sarukkai as moderator brought out fascinating aspects of the topic such as whether thinking about technology was not more important than merely judging it as good or bad; the allocation of responsibility between the old and the young generations as regards the proper use of technology; the various ways in which we fall for the seduction of technology, allow ourselves to be addicted to it or immerse ourselves in it; the many forms of resistance to technology; the idea of technological determinism where creation, ownership, control, and use of technology all play crucial roles; whether the idea of techno-literacy is leading to another kind of inequality, especially between generations; whether the fact that most ICT innovations were first done for military use has serious implications when the same are later released for mass-scale civilian use; the cost of technology as seen in the fields of environment and human relations; whether human beings are becoming more of

cyborgs, programmed mechanical beings; whether human beings face the threat of being rendered redundant, being increasingly replaced by machines and artificial intelligence.

The panel on *Reading Poetry from a Generational Spectrum* featured Tamil Selvi, Vikram Hathwar, and L C Sumithra, who read parts from works or entire pieces from different ages of Kannada literature, ranging from ancient times to the modern period. This session highlighted the rich diversity of the Kannada language and ethos as seen through some significant literary compositions. The session was moderated by Jayantha Kaikini, Kannada writer, who provided a perspective to the presentations.

A panel on *New Modes of Short Story Writing in Kannada*, comprising writers Vivek Shanbhag, Vasudhendra, Amaresha Nugadoni, and Tarini Shubhadayini discussed the new themes and trends found in contemporary Kannada short fiction. The discussion pointed to the continuities as well as the breaks between the different generations of Kannada writers of the past one hundred years. One main trend was an unprecedentedly large number of workers in the corporate and technology sectors taking up writing in the present generation. These writers preferred to produce literature which defies the conventional boundaries between forms and genres. They also wrote as ‘insiders’ of the modern technological world in contrast to the previous generations who wrote as ‘outsiders.’ With their professional careers carrying them all across the globe, as much to the non-Indian, non-Western parts as to the Western parts, they have a first-hand experience of life outside their native context in both developed and underdeveloped societies. This experience helps them gain a bigger and better perspective. Some of them even draw parallels between India’s own colonial experience and the neo-colonial experience of some less fortunate countries where they have worked as MNC employees. They also throw off the old inhibitions, writing boldly about topics and themes previously considered taboo. All along, however, these new generation writers are also earnestly engaged in the search of a new ethics that would embrace the entire world.





Political scholars Gopal Guru and Dickens Leonard participated in a panel on *Inter-Generation Conversations in Politics*, where they discussed questions such as whether in these post-modern times, where it is asserted that there are many truths and not just one truth, it was really possible to do meaningful politics; whether the ambiguity (or, even confusion) of the post-modern stance would not itself eventually lead to politics of the violent kind; whether the technology-driven, selfie-obsessed, self-centered generation of today is really capable of participating in any kind of dialogue, political or otherwise; whether the very fact that the arts manipulate time and thereby politics in an indirect manner does not hold out hope still in these times where speed is the most dominant force controlling, commoditizing, and diminishing everything.

In the ‘Concluding Remarks’ session, N S Gundur, literary scholar, Atul Tiwari, theatre and film writer and director, Vivek Shanbhag, writer and software professional, shared their experience and assessment of the course. They were of the common view that the flexible structure of the course, its blend of the formal and the informal, its non-judgmental orientation, its emphasis on cultivating human personality as opposed to taming it, all made it a uniquely transformative experience for them.

### **PERFORMANCES, RECITALS, & SCREENINGS**

The lecture and panel sessions were complemented by readings/performances/screenings which again related to the main theme of the course in their own ways. These were:

- *Music between Generations*, where Kalapini Komkali, Hindustani vocalist, shared her experiences of learning from her father, the renowned singer Kumar Gandharva. She also demonstrated how her father-mentor had not only imbibed influences from his own preceding generations but had also evolved independent ways of creatively transforming those influences in his own art. Using a number of video clips and her own live audio renditions, she enabled the participants get a sense of the rich and complex modes in which hoary old traditions like classical music live and thrive through generation after generation;
- *Mansha ki Shaadi*, a solo performance in Hindi by Arathi Tiwari, Mumbai, highlighting, through the hustle bustle and the trials and travails of a mother at her daughter's wedding, the tensions and the eventual reconciliation between two different generations;
- *Rip*, a one-woman performance by Savitha Rani, Puducherry, depicting a young woman's fight against orthodoxy and patriarchy and her attempt to find a distinct self-identity;
- *Mattobba Maayi*, a theatre performance, in intimate style, of a Kannada short story, enacted by Mahadeva Hadapad and co-actor, which portrayed the tragic plight of a young girl in a conservative social and family set-up, as seen by a teacher of hers.





## **EVENING CULTURAL FESTIVAL**

The Cultural Festival, held in the evenings during the Course, works in two different yet related ways. One, as an integral part of the Course it provides the registered participants who hail from diverse parts of the state an opportunity to watch some important cultural works. Two, open to the general local community, it helps them gain access to the world of culture from beyond their geographical confines. This year's festival featured the following programmes:

- *Madhyama Vyayoga*, a Ninasam Theatre Repertory performance in Kannada, based on the classical Sanskrit play by Bhasa, directed by Umesh Saliyana;
- *Su Bitre Banna, Ba Bitre Sunna*, a Ninasam Theatre Repertory production of a Kannada adaptation of the Italian play *A Servant of Two Masters* by Goldoni, adapted by *Jogi*, directed by Iqbal Ahmed;
- *Tataki Mardana*, a Ninasam production of a Kannada adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Manjunatha Badiger;
- *Sadarama*, a revival of the legendary company natak production, performed by the Spandana troupe, Bengaluru and directed by B. Jayashree;
- *Laya Laavanya*, a percussion ensemble performance by Vidwan Anooru Ananthakrishna Sharma and troupe;
- *Vaali Vadhe*, a play based on an episode from the Ramayana, performed by Gajanana Yuvaka Sangha, Sheshagiri, directed by Ganesh Mundadi.

## RESOURCE PERSONS

As every year, this year too, the resource persons were drawn from diverse fields. They included writers, artists, performers, thinkers, teachers, activists and the like.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants group at the Course every year presents a most impressive picture, particularly in terms of the diversity of their backgrounds. The group this year was no exception. The following statistical figures illustrate this point:

	Male	Female	Total
General (teachers, professionals, activists, self-employed, homemakers etc)	45	28	73
Students from outside	36	29	65
Ninasam Theatre Institute students	15	5	20
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>158</b>

## FEEDBACK

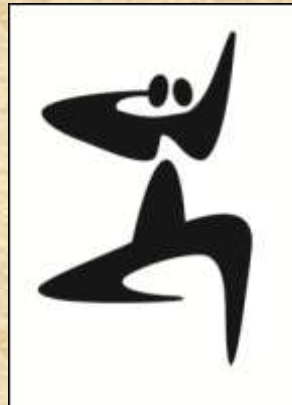
As every year, this year, too, Ninasam took special care to collect responses about the experience of the Course using a variety of ways. The Course has received highly encouraging responses from all categories of persons associated with it. Most of the participants, resource persons, special invitees, and observers found the Course's format, objective, organization, and atmosphere exceptional and invigorating.





## SUPPORT

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