

**Brief Report on the Conference 'Art Education in India: Challenges and Possibilities'  
jointly organised by FIAE and the Goa University in Goa on 4th and 5th March 2019**

The Conference began with FIAE trustee and Visiting Research Professor at Goa University, Prof. R. Siva Kumar welcoming the dignitaries and the delegates to the conference. In his short speech he drew the attention to several issues facing educational planning as a whole and how they have to be addressed comprehensively rather than piecemeal to achieve the desired progress we have been looking for.

This was followed by an address by Sri Govind Gaude, chief guest and hon'ble minister for Art and Culture, Government of Goa. He welcomed the holding of a conference on Art Education in Goa and outlined the need for supporting art and culture and how the government of Goa has been playing an active role in this direction.

The Goa University Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Varun Sahni's speech touched upon many relevant issues. He spoke on art in education in the larger context of higher education. How 'late bloomers' and the misfits benefit from non-mainstream education. Prof. Sahni also appreciated the idea of a data driven seminar, "in a country where opinions are aplenty and hard data is given a go by it is remarkable that the seminar is data led. ..before we can deliberate on the possible future of art education, one has to first get a glimpse of where we are." He also touched upon how the issue of non-availability of distinguished educators for long durations at a time for the Mario Miranda chair was pragmatically solved by appointing more people for the short term for the same chair and how that proved to be a win-win solution for all concerned.

Sri. Bose Krishnamachari, the Director of the Kochi-Muzeris Biennale, highlighted the efforts made by the KMB and stressed the need to have more student exchange programmes within the country as well as outside it. One of the possible ways out of the rut is to facilitate mobility of students, particularly from the remote locales and allow them exposure to the best practices.

Smt. Vidya Sivadas from FICA and also a trustee member of the Shergil-Sundaram Foundation, expressed her interest in the findings of the survey and very briefly spoke about how it can be taken further by allowing researchers access to it. She also mentioned a survey undertaken by her team and wondered aloud if it is possible to combine the two.

After the tea break Eminent artist, writer, pedagogue and poet Padma-Bhushan awardee Gulam Mohammed Sheikh presented the keynote address. The need to give more attention to art. In his own words, "we are living in dark times chased by violence. Hatred is all around us. I would venture to say that if there is hope left at all, this can only be through the practice of art." While bemoaning the fact that art is always at the bottom of the list of priorities by the government, he cited the example of his friend Sudhir Patwardhan taking art to the small town audiences in Maharashtra and how he discovered that people were hungry for such kind of exposure. He also spoke at length about his own initiation to art in Baroda and its uniqueness.

The post-lunch session started with the presentation of the data of 80 colleges covering 14 states by Prof. Indrapramit Roy (artist, teacher and trustee of FIAE). The slide presentation highlighted the method of collecting data and the inherent difficulties and shortcomings before going into its key features and some of the findings. It gave state-wise break up of some data about colleges, their affiliations, number of courses, UG and PG levels, student numbers, student to teacher ratio, space, library facilities etc. The presentation was supported by visuals. It ended by posing certain questions to the audience and a questionnaire to elicit response on some key issues such as what we understand by 'Research', whether the medium based departments are still relevant, how best to introduce new practices was circulated amongst the audience.

This was followed by a question and answer session with the audience where Prof. Siva Kumar joined Prof. Indrapramit Roy on the stage. This session was followed by a brief presentation by

Prof. V. Ramesh on the absurdity of introducing text-based PhD as a mandatory criterion for the selection process and how it is bound to skew the in-take and load the dice against practitioners. This will prove to be a major policy disaster as far as the future of art education is concerned.

Post tea break was a very detailed presentation by artist, writer and educator Sri. Ravi Kashi, titled "Methods of Studio Pedagogy". He started by comparing art education with planting a seed. In his estimation art education is about the seed mode as opposed to the fruit mode of imparting education which is teacher centric and where the student can be passive. The seed mode demands active learning, but it takes longer to bear fruit hence it is ill-suited to the current fads of measurable outcomes or 'deliverables'. His slide presentation touched on structures of studio pedagogy in a systematic manner covering topics such as stray thoughts to conceptualisation, imagination and creativity, meaning making process, problem solving and collaborative skills, ability to question, articulation and communication etc.

Sri. Sadanand Menon's presentation questioned the romantic idea to look at art education in separation from other humanities-based subjects. He drew attention to the fact how contemporary education functions as an arm of capitalism and veers towards 'manufacturing consent'. Quoting Paul Goodman, he said that the present-day emphasis is not so much for compulsory education but "mis-education". All the problems discussed so far, in his view, were a by-product of this tendency. Art is failing to create the 'Affect'. He mentioned how the newspaper space given to art was suddenly withdrawn in 1996 and it became invisible from mainstream readers. Art, in his view, will have to move out of the classroom and the necessary politicisation of the consciousness (Art Education) must be used against forgetting.

The last session of the day was a panel discussion moderated by artist, pedagogue and FIAE trustee Prof. Vasudevan Akkitham (MSU, Baroda). The panellists were Prof. B.V Suresh (Artist and Professor- S.N. School, Hyderabad Central Univ.), Prof. Sanchayan Ghosh (artist and Associate Prof. At Santiniketan Visva Bharati) and Sri. Ravi Kashi. The mobility of both teachers and students across institutions, exchange programmes, interventions in studio teaching, possibilities of organising different kinds of camps and workshops were discussed.

The second proceedings began with a presentation titled 'Alternative Practices in Pedagogy' by Prof. Sanchayan Ghosh on the possibilities of a process-based pedagogy in the contemporary context. Drawing on his own experiments at Santiniketan he demonstrated how such an approach can be a collective adventure drawing resources from the experiences of the students themselves and generated in a local context. Such an alternate approach to pedagogy he argued can give rise to a democratic learning process that spreads laterally rather than a teaching process handed down from above.

This was followed with a presentation by Dr. Pradosh Mishra on the issues of teaching of art history in an India University. He focused on how entrenched discourses and administrative practices in universities, both within departments of art history and studio practice, prefer to maintain status quo, and in the process hinder the adaption of newer approaches and expansion of the field. And how this makes teaching art history and bring the best practices into it an uphill task even for the motivated teacher.

The second session had three speakers. Dr. Maisha Patil. Dr. Kirtana Thangavelu, and Dr. Rajkumar Mazinder. Drawing upon her long experience of teaching art history at the J.J. School of Art and elsewhere in Maharashtra Dr. Patil gave a richly illustrated historical overview of the history of teaching of art history in Maharashtra. Besides dwelling on certain general aspects, she highlighted the contributions of various artists and teachers to the growth of regional art historical discourse through publications in Marathi.

The next paper was of Dr. Kirtana Thangavelu who teaches art history at the Hyderabad Central University. Using the analysis of a single miniature painting she made a well-articulated and passionate plea for developing a critical and inclusive art history in which the past and the

margins can be used to interrogate what is considered the main stream and holds centre stage today. The morning session concluded with Dr. Rajkumar Mazinder of Assam University, Silchar. He presented a well-illustrated paper on the development of modern art practice in Assam through the efforts of three generations of artists trained mainly at Santiniketan and Baroda and how their practice has achieved a certain cohesiveness and grown into considerable discourse over the years.

The first post lunch session was devoted to art in the schools and art for children in general. In this session Smt.Ruchira Das presented a paper titled 'Creating Art Engagements for Young Audiences'. Drawing on her experience of working with children of various age groups in Kolkata she made an illustrated presentation on the possibilities of using art to engage with and educate children of various age groups, starting with toddlers and moving up to teenagers in stages. With examples of projects she has devised and run she demonstrated how besides awakening artistic interest in children, how children can also be encouraged to explore, learn and present other aspects of life such as history and identity using art as a medium.

This was followed by a panel discussion on art education chaired and moderated by Prof. Indrapramit Roy. The panellists were Smt. Ruchira Das, Smt. Sujata Noronha (who runs the Bookworm Trust in Goa), Sri Sridhar Kamat Bhambolkar (art teacher and artist of long standing in Goa), Sudesh Vaze (artist and art teacher) and Naguesh Sardessai (artist, teacher and FIAE trustee). Their discussions were wide ranging and touched upon diverse issues including the status of art teaching in schools; how art classes can be used, and is often used, by resourceful teachers as an instrument for crossing over to other arts and means of expression; the need for developing an integrated approach to the arts in schools; how books can be used to awaken literary and visual curiosity in children; and the importance of taking art and books to the children in places where they cannot be easily accessed.

Post tea, the academic deliberations of the conference concluded with a long open mike session. The art teachers from the schools in Goa (who had come in large numbers to attend the conference), art students, and private citizens and academics with interest in art actively participated in this session by presenting their experiences and opinions, and raising their apprehensions and questions regarding art teaching at all levels, the role and purpose of art in society, its accessibility and so on. The discussions and exchanges were lively and often passionate. From among the delegates Dr. Kirtana Thangavelu, Prof. Siva Kumar and Prof. Gulam Mohammed Sheikh responded succinctly to some of the queries.

In the last session Sri Nagaraj Honnikeri, Director Education Government of Goa, addressed the gathering. He appreciated the efforts of the organisers and the art teachers who attended the conference in large numbers. Recalling his own experience with music, he underlined how of participation and training in the arts can go a long way to making one an informed audience even if one doesn't become an artist. He also promised the support of his department for taking the goals set for art in schools by this conference to the next level.

The conference ended with a brief summing up by Prof. Siva Kumar, followed by a vote of thanks by Prof. Indrapramit Roy on behalf of FIAE and by Prof. Nandakumar Mekoth on behalf of the Goa University.

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Indrapramit Roy  
10<sup>th</sup> March 2019