

India Foundation for the Arts Quarterly Newsletter

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Editor's Note

IFA has a new public face in the form of the recently-launched arts magazine, ArtsConnect. We hope the magazine will reflect and celebrate the multi-disciplinary, eclectic and process-oriented nature of the work we have supported over the years. Our two hundredth grant has just gone out - before us now is a huge fund of ideas, objects and materials to draw upon and invite reflection on through the magazine. At the centre, of course, will be voices -not dry, impersonal ones but those speaking from the midst of the field or from the messy centre of art-making. We also continue, in a modest way, to give space to voices in the arts through this newsletter's Slant, Stance section. In this edition, Vivek Shanbag speaks about the little magazine scene in Karnataka, an interview that contrasts with and provides a perspective on publisher S Ramakrishnan's hard-hitting critique of little magazines in Tamil Nadu, which we carried last time

Anjum Hasan

Recent grants

Four recent research and documentation grants support investigations into folk cultural traditions - how these reflect the identities of their creators, how the market influences their practice and, importantly, how such traditions are represented in relation to categories such as caste. The Deshkal Society in New Delhi begins work on the Reshma-Chuharmal Nautanki of Bihar, partly to understand how different versions of the story reflect a changing sense of identity among Dalits. Manu Devadevan from Bangalore looks at the oral narrative tradition of Manteswamy, a sixteenth century saint of Karnataka, and its performance by the Neelagaras, the traditional singers of the Manteswamy epic. Sindhi oral narratives from Western Gujarat and Kutch - and the multiple forms they take in performance - are the subject of Shalini Punjabi's project. And sociologist Roma Chatterjee is undertaking a comparative study of the pata chitra scroll painting of Bengal and Gond art from Madhya Pradesh.

The folk theme continues into the area of performance. A 30-day theatre workshop being conducted by theatre person M K Raina for a group of Kashmir's Bhand Pather artists is currently underway. Head of Programmes, Tripti Vyas, who was recently on a visit to Akingam village in Kashmir says, "Bhand Pather performers have traditionally been members of the same family, so the learning process has been organic.... But over the decades there has been a rupture in this practice. The formalised structure of the workshop combined contemporary pedagogical methods of teaching drama and discussion sessions where the ustads shared their knowledge and experiences. The workshop also saw performances by various Bhand Pather groups from across the valley that gave the participants a sense of the different ways in which the Bhand is performed." Continuing with our initiative to fund archiving, research and writing projects in Bengali, grants have gone out to Subhendu Dasgupta to research the history of cartoons in West Bengal and Bangladesh, Indira Biswas to study the linked histories of the radio, the gramophone and Bengali music in the early twentieth century, and Smita Khator to study post-Partition Bengali newspapers for their role in shaping Bengali cultural identity.

Work on earlier grants under this initiative continues apace. By way of an example, Prabhat Kumar Das, putting together a book on the history of Jatra in Bengal, is beginning to index and digitise his vast collection of play-scripts, photographs, interviews and publicity materials. The image on the right - a poster for a Jatra performance - offers a glimpse of the visual materials in his collection.

Public Eye

New Arts Magazine

July saw the launch of *ArtsConnect*, a biannual IFA magazine. Grantees reflecting on their work will be the highlight of this publication, complemented by writing on the Indian arts in general. The first issue includes an essay on the many public implications of censorship in the light of recent events at the MS University, Baroda; an in-depth discussion on 'activist' theatre in India; and a 'collage' of image and text inspired by an extensive series of workshops that filmmaker Kamal Swaroop conducted with arts students on the life and work of Dadasaheb Phalke.

To read *ArtsConnect* go to:

<http://www.indiaifa.org/images/ArtsConnectJuly-Dec2007.pdf>

Recent book on photo-performance

Documentation of an IFA-funded project that brought together visual artist Pushpamala N and photographer Clare Arni to create and photograph tableaux depicting stereotypes of South India women has recently appeared in the form of the book *Native Women of South India - Manners and Customs* - a photo-performance project by Pushpamala N & Clare Arni. Hardbound and lavishly produced, with more than 300 full colour illustrations over 150 pages, the book contains essays by Susie Tharu and Ashish Rajadhyaksha. For enquires about purchasing copies write to info@naturemorte.com or mail@bosepacia.com

Kissa Punjab

Filmmaker Gurvinder Singh has received IFA grants to document the Sufi and Bhakti music of Punjab, which resulted in the eponymous *Pala* on this magnificent singer of kissas, as well as an audio compilation titled *Kissa Punjab*, produced and marketed by Underscore Records.

Gurvinder recently organised the first public screening of the film in Punjab. He writes, "Hardly anybody in Chandigarh was aware of him [Pala]... The audience listened to him rapt as he spoke about his childhood and his days as a disciple to his ustad. There were many questions asked about the source of the oral literature which he sings. Most had never heard those texts, which are not available anywhere as written literature."

Meanwhile, almost 500 CDs of Kissa Punjab have been sold. Gurvinder plans to put together a second compilation as well as reissue the first one. Also, Pala will soon be available as a DVD+CD set on the Underscore Records website. The DVD will feature the film, and the CD will have about eight tracks sung by Pala and Sher Khan.

Art meets Science

IFA grantee Abhishek Hazra, making artwork inspired by the social history of early science research in India, was part of the recently-concluded Arts & Science Residency at KHOJ, New Delhi. His project at KHOJ focussed on the early history of the Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science (IACS) in Calcutta - one of the first science research institutes in the country, set up in 1867 by the physician and science enthusiast Dr. Mahendra Lal Sircar. Says Abhishek, "Through an ironic citation of C V Raman's research on spectroscopy, I have attempted to revisit some of the controversies around 'pure' and 'applied' science that marked the establishment of AICS. Raman's Nobel winning work on spectroscopy was done at the AICS in the 1920s."

Abhishek will take work on his IFA project further during two upcoming arts residencies - one funded by the Swiss Arts Council in Switzerland between October '07 and January '08, and the other funded by a Charles Wallace Trust Award at Gasworks in London.

Award for Grantee

IFA grantee, Ashok Sukumaran, working on a series of public electronic installations, is among the winners of the 2007 Ars Electronica Award - International Competition for CyberArts. His entry - Park View Hotel - developed while he was at a residency at Sun Microsystems Labs in San Jose - emerges from his interest in the pervasively 'wired' nature of our environment. Ashok tends to play with these technologies in a way that disturbs our habitual awareness of them. He writes, "Park View Hotel stretches between the Cesar Chavez plaza in downtown San Jose and the neighbouring Fairmont Hotel. Using specially-built pointing devices, audiences in the park can access interior hotel spaces, by "pinging" them optically... In this way, the park enjoys a certain neighbourly access to the hotel, inverting the usual character of the relationship."

Sculpture Workshops

Vishakhapatnam-based sculptor S D Hariprasad, who received a grant to experiment in media like glass, plastic, acrylic and stainless steel, has recently made a series of new works in latex, fibreglass and wood. He believes that the sculptural properties of glass have not been properly explored in India. Accordingly, he has announced a running series of glass casting/slumping workshops at his studio. These are free (apart from basic material costs) for art students and open to everyone else for a fee. Registration is open till the 15th of every month. For details mail apply.glass@gmail.com

Announcements

Support the Run for IFA

We are proud to announce that Manish Bhatnagar and Anisha Chugh will be running the Vodafone Delhi Half Marathon on October 28, 2007 in our support.

Manish Bhatnagar is Director, Commercial Operations at Underwriter's Laboratory, and an alumnus of Indian Institute of Management, Kolkata and London School of Economics.

Anisha Chugh has an MA in history from Delhi University. She is Fundraiser at the Dalit Foundation in New Delhi.

For details visit:

<http://www.indiaifa.org/article.asp?id=575&viewtype=online>

Slant, Stance

Writer and editor of the literary journal Desha Kaala, Vivek Shanbag talks about how little magazines have contributed to Kannada literature and how his own journal is attempting to carve a unique space for itself.

Could you please provide our readers with a broad overview of the Kannada cultural/literary magazine scene?

There is a long tradition of literary journals in Kannada. Many of our important writers - Masti, Shivaram Karanth, Gopalakrishna Adiga, U.R. Ananthamurthy and many others - have edited and published literary

journals. Though many have had a short lifespan, they have served their purpose of inspiring new writing in Kannada. Most of our literary movements were nurtured in this space.

There are many literary journals active in Kannada today, e.g. Sanchaya, Sankalana, Abhinava, Sankramana, Samvaada, Desha Kaala, Gandhi Bazaar and many others. This is the only space available for any serious discussion on literature. For example, popular commercial magazines and Sunday editions of newspapers give only a few inches of space for book reviews. Also, the quality of reviews here is very ordinary. Hence literary criticism and full length book reviews can appear only in literary journals. So is the case with long interviews and poems.

I must also say here that there are a large number of weekly and monthly commercial magazines in Kannada. These generate a lot of demand for fiction writing of all kinds. Hence there is little difference between fiction published in commercial magazines and literary journals. But the serious readership that literary journals provide cannot be matched by commercial magazines. I believe that Kannada writers and readers understand the difference between what gets published in a literary journal and a popular magazine. This awareness is very important for any literary environment because this is what supports the distinct space marked out for a literary journal. For its experiments and open discussions.

In the case of Tamil Nadu, publisher S Ramakrishnan has recently drawn attention to how the institution of the 'little magazine' - in the sense of a publication that nurtures independent opinion and new writing, and which is not run for purely commercial considerations - has now all but disappeared. What is the case like in Karnataka?

Sankramana, a little magazine in Kannada, has been published for the past forty years. Similarly Samvaada, Gandhi Bazaar and Sanchaya are active for more than two decades. And none of these magazines are driven by commercial considerations. And there are many new ones as well. I see no reason to believe that the institution of 'little magazines' has all but disappeared in Kannada. The success of a literary magazine is measured by its sphere of influence and not by its circulation numbers. Hence commercial considerations were never important for such publications.

What is your vision for Desha Kaala and in what way is the journal different from other cultural magazines?

Desha Kaala is centred around literature. This is what drives the journal. Whether we like it or not, today's Kannada sensibility is being shaped by many aspects that are beyond the influence of the Kannada world. We must

recognise this and respond to it. Whether it is literature available in English, Globalisation or Post Modern perspectives - we have no choice but to deal with these. And there are new experiments in the world of art and cinema. All this will certainly generate new ideas and new writing in Kannada.

In every issue of Desha Kaala we have introduced a writer from another Indian language through direct translations. Such interactions are very important to understand how writers in other languages think and respond to contemporary situations. Now, more than any time in the past, writers of different Indian languages share common concerns and issues. This could be due to globalisation or the internet.

Desha Kaala does not carry translation of any essay that is already published in English. The only exception was made for Ziauddin Sardar's essay on Post Modernism. This does not mean we have no translations.

Unlike other Kannada journals we have writers like Shiv Vishvanathan, Jeremy Seabrook, Daniel Amit, Sundar Sarukkai, Roddam Narasimha, Fritz Stall, John Perry and others writing for us exclusively and their articles were first published in Desha Kaala, in Kannada translation.

We have a symposium in every issue that focuses on certain themes. For example, in the last issue we carried an in-depth discussion on book publishing policy in Karnataka.

Desha Kaala is designed by Channakeshava, a professional designer. And till now, every issue is published on time. I am emphasizing this point because little magazines have a reputation of not following any periodicity.

Have little magazines in Karnataka built up networks to aid each other in areas like marketing and distribution? Are there ways in which outside support - financial or otherwise - would benefit such magazines?

There is no network of little magazines in Karnataka. But they work with the knowledge that they must complement and not compete with each other. A co-operative network for book marketing and distribution will not only help little magazines but also the Kannada book publishing industry.

Since most of the little magazines are sold through annual subscriptions, any help in creating a viable infrastructure for collection of subscriptions will help immensely. For example, a website shared by all little magazines where one can renew subscription. I believe that, even with a limited circulation, it is possible to run a little magazine in Kannada without incurring financial losses. However, running a magazine needs high commitment which

means a lot of personal time to be spent by the editor and the team. This is difficult to sustain over a period of time.

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