

A Report on **Connecting the Dots – Lessons from Arts Education**
Regional Conference, Kalaburagi, February 22 to 24, 2023

organised by **India Foundation for the Arts (IFA)**

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India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) under its **Arts Education programme (Kali Kalisu)** organised a regional conference titled **Connecting the Dots: Lessons from Arts Education** from **February 22-24, 2023** at MMK College of Visual Arts, Kalaburagi. Over the past decade, the Kali Kalisu programme has actively worked across Karnataka but has not been able to make enough inroads into the Kalyana Karnataka region. To connect with the desires, concerns and aspirations of the people and to join the thoughts, works and practices of artists, educators and art researchers, IFA organised a conference in this region for the first time.

Arundhati Ghosh, Executive Director, IFA, opened the conference with a welcome note. She reflected on the role of arts in her life which, as a child, helped her to connect with the stories of different peoples' experiences and today continues to shape her intellectual and emotional growth. At the organisational level, Arundhati said that the Kali Kalisu programme has provided a sense of community, taught us to listen to grassroot voices, helped us to recognise that change is a slow process, and showed us that meaningful engagements can be created through inexpensive but effective methods. The work of teachers, artists and educators has been a huge part of this journey. Her talk was followed by a small ceremony of watering the plants by the organisers which set the mood for the conference to commence.



From L to R: Krishna Murthy TN, Arundhati Ghosh, Professor VG Andani, Sumana Chandrashekar, and Vishweshwari Hiremath inaugurate the conference

Krishna Murthy TN, Senior Programme Officer for Arts Education, IFA, reflected on the reasons for children's education lagging in many parts of Kalyana Karnataka. One of the main reasons is the gap between spoken and written Kannada. Many dialects of spoken Kannada exist in this region. Instead of incorporating these dialects in education, a uniform Kannada language has been enforced by the so called 'learned people'. Conformity to one kind of Kannada in a student's educational activity alienates children from their environment and takes away choices in their learning. The pulse of this region is its rich literature, folk arts and the lived experiences of the people. He said that we should strive to connect these dots in children's learning.

There were three panels, a talk, evening performances and three practical activities spread over two days of the conference.

Panel I: 'Those Enduring Stories'

This panel looked at the failure of arts education in connecting children to their local language, the failure of the teacher in integrating different subjects to affect changes in learning, and the failure of the education system in constantly perpetuating gender stereotypes. The session was moderated by Vishweshwari Hiremath, theatre practitioner, Dharwad.

Situating Children's Play Songs in School Education

Gundurao Desai, Writer and Assistant Teacher, Government High School, Maski, Raichur

Gundurao Desai's presentation emphasised the need to research and incorporate children's songs in school textbooks. He mentioned that he has been researching and collecting children's play songs from the North Karnataka region for some time now. Children's play songs have been thought of as gibberish and nonsensical by adults. In his research, Gundurao discovered that the songs composed and sung by children deal with

many subjects and different languages like Urdu, Marathi and English are freely mixed with Kannada. A child's spoken Kannada and the textbook Kannada written by adults is very different. Gundurao believes that incorporating these songs might bridge the gap between the spoken Kannada and textbook Kannada. It might be especially helpful for students who do not fare very well in their studies and will also make the lessons enjoyable for all students. Gundurao ended his presentation by reciting some of the children's songs he had collected. Of the songs he recited, a few unfortunately reinforced gender stereotypes.



The Story of the Teacher who Sobbed under a Palm Tree

Ramesh Gabbur, Librarian and Singer, Government Pre-University College, Gangavati, Koppal



Ramesh, in his impromptu talk, shared experiences of beginning his teaching journey in a Government school at Palwaldoddi village, Raichur district, Karnataka. He described the joys and hurdles of what it meant to teach in a school which had no students to begin with and where people of the village only spoke Telugu (the village shares the border with present day Telangana). To add to the difficulty, the original school

building had been turned into a store room because of the belief that the school building was haunted. Overwhelmed by the enormity of these problems, Ramesh would sit under the palm tree for days on end and wonder whether to continue being a teacher. However, the conversations he had under the palm tree with friends and villagers revived his childhood dreams of becoming a teacher. In order to bring children back to school, he decided to incorporate arts in his teaching. He started to set tunes to the songs of various poets from Karnataka and slowly started teaching these to the few students who were coming to school which in turn attracted new students.

Besides the work in school, Ramesh would go from house to house in the village to gather students and look for allies in the village who would support this work. He also started making the use of Kannada compulsory for all in the village. Ramesh shared that even though some of his methods seemed imposing, people still accepted him as their own. In order to remove the superstition about the haunted school building, he shifted his house from Raichur to live in the school premises. The opening of the school library added a lot of joy to students. Due to all these efforts and more, the school gradually grew from five to 200 students over the years. Of all the experiences in his life, Ramesh shared that teaching in this school has been the most memorable experience for him.

Role of Art Educators in Primary and High School Education

Dr Satish P Wallepure, Coordinator, University College of Visual Arts, Davanagere

Satish reflected on the failure to make visual arts an exploratory, integrative and enriching subject for children in schools. Despite a clear mandate in New Education Policy (NEP), 2020, to integrate visual arts with other subjects in primary and high school education, visual art educators struggle to make this happen. The status of the visual arts teacher has been



reduced to making wall paintings, decorating the stage on special occasions or taking school children to competitions. Furthermore, it has been observed that a visual arts teacher is expected to forego their classes for other subject teachers to complete their syllabus. Lack of visual art teachers in government schools is also another concern.

On pedagogy, he put forth the following recommendations:

- Art teachers and subject teachers have no connection between their subjects. For NEP to work, we need art teachers to be the focal point in the school. Other subjects should use the skills of visual arts to create teaching tools.
- To look at communities, handicraft and folk arts around the school and expand the role of the arts educator to introduce students to local arts in the vicinity.
- School children should be taken to art galleries and museums to develop different perspectives and not just be made to participate in art competitions.
- In Gulbarga we are made aware of artists from literature but not much is written about visual artists in school textbooks. Regional role models in visual arts have to be introduced.
- To consider the pros and cons of global changes and its influence on visual arts and its pedagogy.
- To see how much digital technology can be introduced in visual arts.
- To rethink the role of visual arts to revive the relationship between school education and society.

Gender Discrimination in School Textbooks

Dr Sumalatha BM, Researcher, Hospet, Vijayanagara



Sumalatha's presentation showed the constant persistence of gender inequality in authorship and visual representation in standard contemporary Kannada school textbooks for grades I to X. She began her talk by reflecting on the patriarchal society we live in, which places the masculine point of view as central in all our communications. This gets reflected in our school textbooks too. The goal of education

is to develop an equitable and just society. As this is a lifelong goal, the education syllabus is updated every now and then to move towards critical thinking, building ethics besides imparting skills in students. In the last 10 years one can see that primary and high school textbooks have gone through many revisions to reflect the changing realities of our times but have still failed to be gender sensitive. The slides presented by Sumalatha with images from Kannada school textbooks showed women in domestic and cultural roles whilst men were seen occupying public spheres in occupations as policemen, scientists, farmers, etc. Women in public spheres were depicted in caregiving roles or as assistants to male workers.

All of these concerns were, however, brushed off casually by some male members in the audience even as Sumalatha was presenting. One could sense that conversations around gender and gender sensitisation amidst teachers need to take place alongside this change being reflected in school textbooks.

Panel II: 'Bazar' - Stories of Our Immediate World

This panel looked at the local concerns of this region. Connecting local ecology to school education through street plays, questions on the application of folk art in education, the disappearing murals of Kalyana Karnataka and learning through children's newspapers were the areas of discussion in this panel. It was moderated by Dr Ningu Solagi, Headmaster and Arts Educator, Mundaragi

Contested Stories of Folk Arts

Dr Arun Jolada Kudligi, Assistant Professor, Department of Kannada, Dr BR Ambedkar College of Arts and Commerce, Kalaburagi

Arun spoke about the dilemmas concerning the current folk discourse, the urgent need to debunk the myths that surround this discourse and the need for an organisation like IFA to look at these dilemmas, as teachers may carry forward ideas that may be detrimental to arts education.



Folk is a medium created by people to assert their agency against the ruling class, record their ancestors' stories and speak about their communities' aspirations through songs, dance, drama etc. However, time and again this medium gets appropriated by the dominant ruling class. It is hence important to note that what we call 'folk' has been created by the people or used by the ruling class to rule over the people. If we don't see this distinction, then we will be carrying forward values that cause more harm than good. Another concern is the belief that there is no authorship for community songs. However, that is a myth because even though these songs are sung collectively, there is always an author who creates the songs. Folk songs and stories are about people from lower castes. In order to ensure that their identities are erased from the songs they have created, such a category was created long back and folk researchers for years have not questioned this category. From the 17th century onwards, lower caste people started to add their names into their songs. The freedom revolution perhaps contributed to this movement. In Lavani, there are many poets who have signed their names but we do not study them even today. They have remained outside of Sahitya Akademi and the Government's recognition. Furthermore, there is a myth that everything from tradition gets carried forward. However, only those which preserve the status quo, gender system and caste hierarchy get carried forward from generation to generation. Folk researchers and people who apply folk material must pay very close attention to this filtration system. What should be applied and what should be discarded is the question that needs answering.

The Meaning and Role of Street Theatre in School Education

Dr Sahana P, Guest Lecturer, Department of Performing Arts and Drama, Vijayanagara Sri Krishnadevaraya University, Ballari

Sahana began her presentation with a question to educators on the role of education in the present times. Today's school education values only progress and fame. These changing values in school can also be seen in the practice of street theatre in schools today. Street theatre started as a way to resist the powers that be. However, today without understanding the meaning of the words like dissent, agitate and struggle, students associate these words only with India's freedom movement. The fault lies with the school education because it has not introduced children to the struggles of their own community. The plays that are staged in schools only provide entertainment and are yet to bring in stories from science and social sciences subjects into its realm. Even social science textbooks do not cover the incidents happening in a child's environment. For instance, students learn about air pollution caused by vehicles but are not introduced to air pollution through coal mining which is rampant in their region. If the communities' struggles are introduced in plays then the students become aware of the local environmental and community problems. The format of street plays allows for questioning and different ways of seeing which makes it ideally suited for adapting local issues into street plays.



However, street play artists face many difficulties from teachers in school. The imagination of stage plays in school is still limited to costumes, lights, stage performance and winning competitions. The teachers push artists to present a stage performance instead of creating a street play. Furthermore, to gather a group to make a street play has also been challenging because of frequent dropouts.

Development of Socio-Cultural Murals of Kalyana Karnataka

Dr Mallikarjuna C Bagodi, Professor, Department of Visual Arts, Gulbarga University, Kalaburagi

Mallikarjuna in his presentation took us through the history of Bhatti chitra or wall paintings, and their present conditions in the region of Kalyana Karnataka. This region has a rich history of this form which can be traced back to prehistoric times. Though this form flourished during the Vijayanagara Empire, the eventual decline of patronage from the kings led to many transitions between 1750 and 1900 in the way this art was practised.



A new order of patrons arose in the form of merchants and the moneyed class, head of mathas and people from powerful administrative posts who started to patronise the artists. These artists now had to adapt their form to meet the needs of this new class. The paintings depicted the point of view and the desires of the new patrons and were not bound by the classical framework of the

past. Mallikarjuna showed slides of the Bhatti chitras in Raichur Khaajana Gowdara mane, Sedam Shivashankara swamy matha, Lingeri Konappanavara mane in Yadagiri, Kaakalavaara graama Raja Darbar and Kheniyavara Godown in Halli Kheda grama. Though many of these Bhatti chitras have eroded and the buildings flattened due to road widening and other reasons, Mallikarjuna said that he has documented them since it is not possible to save the structures that house these paintings.

Contribution of Children's Newspapers in their Learning

Somu Kudarihal, Assistant Teacher, Government Primary School Kuntoji Camp, Gangavati, Koppal

Somu took us through a brief history of children's newspapers in Kalyana Karnataka and the opportunities and encouragement these provide to students. In national dailies, weekly and monthly newspapers, there are very few spaces for stories written by or for children. When it comes to regional papers, especially in Kalyana Karnataka, this space shrinks further. Regional newspapers give opportunities to children to write only on special occasions like Ugadi and Deepavali. Hence there is a need for a dedicated space for the children's world to be represented and the children's newspapers have made this possible. These newspapers are edited by children or jointly by teachers and children - the illustrations, poems and stories are written by children or by adults for children. The children are the ultimate readers of these newspapers.



Raghuram Sahib, Kotresh B, Gundurao Desai, Shankar Heeriyaravuru are some names from this region who started and have also popularised children's papers beyond their own schools and regions. To make learning accessible, Ventakatesh Chagi from Raichur brought out 'Chinnada Chilapige Patrike' during the pandemic using his own money to publish and distribute it to his school students. The newspaper slowly gained popularity and schools nearby started sharing the newspaper. This newspaper is still in circulation today despite the schools reverting to physical classes. The biggest challenge during the pandemic was the distribution of newspapers to students. Another challenge that these newspapers face is continuity. Contribution of articles

stop coming in after the initial period and continuity then becomes a hurdle. It has been observed that not all writings and illustrations come from school students but also from the children of the teachers who edit these papers. Despite these hurdles, children's newspapers bring a great deal of joy to students; they feel validated when their work gets published and it encourages them to write, paint, share and read each other's stories.

Panel III: Learning Ecosystems beyond Classroom Walls

Can learning be experiential, integrated, discovery-oriented and enjoyable? This panel attempted to introduce the possibilities visualised beyond the brackets of mainstream education. The session was moderated by Dr Mallikarjuna Kadakola, Arts Researcher, Kalaburagi

Museums and Sites as Spaces for Exploration

Sanjana Rangan, Museum Consultant, Department of Archaeology, Hampi Circle



Sanjana Rangan's talk presented the insights she obtained from the discussions with teachers at 'Kali Kalisu' training workshops organised by IFA at Yadgir and Haliyal last year. Sanjana worked in the capacity of a museum resource person at these workshops and the interactions with teachers gave her an understanding into teachers' perspective on museums and sites. Since the teachers were meeting a

museum professional for the first time at these workshops, it meant that teachers had to be introduced to Museology as a field of study and as a profession. In these workshops, Sanjana spoke to teachers about how museums could be brought into classroom spaces by making its digital resources available to students and ways in which these resources could be adapted for classroom learning. Her present work includes turning museums and excavation sites into learning spaces for school students. The interactions with teachers informed Sanjana about the ways in which a site needs to be developed and be made accessible for children. In Kalyana Karnataka, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has presently identified four sites that can develop as learning sites for school students. Sanjana's work currently is to map children's lessons from their school textbooks and to curate a parallel learning method at museums and sites. Alongside this, she also hopes to build the support system needed to develop the site for school learning.

Name the Colour; Blind the Eye - Failure of Visual Design in School Textbooks

Mallikarjuna Shetty, Visual Artist and Art Teacher, Government High School, Kalagi, Kalaburagi

Mallikarjuna made a presentation on the visuals in school textbooks which appear in the form of calligraphy, illustrations and graphics, and observed the failure of these visuals to entice students to fall in love with their textbooks. The font size and calligraphy used in school textbooks are uniform for all lessons and are kept the same from first to tenth standard textbooks. No imagination is used to correlate the style of writing with the theme being expounded. One also finds fewer visuals used in high school textbooks compared to pre-primary and primary textbooks. Visual images strengthen children's understanding of the text. Therefore the reason to reduce the visual content in higher learning needs to be addressed. In chapters where famous personalities are discussed, we see that photographs of only their faces are used. Bringing the entire ecology of these personalities through a series of photographs will bring immediacy and recognition. Instead, these passport visuals are followed by lengthy texts making the subject matter very descriptive for students. School textbooks also carry forward gender stereotypes through their visual representations. In the visuals, there is also a disconnection from students' lived realities. The way houses and schools are illustrated in textbooks do not match with the students' way of living. The visuals in a textbook should engage the child in such a way that they should get lost in it for hours. However, when visuals are disembodied and disconnected from the lives of the readers and fail to make the above expression true.



'Whose Art is it?' A Brief History of the Practice of Kinnala Art

Kishan Rao A Kulkarni, Author and Assistant Teacher, Government High School, Hanumasagar, Koppal



Kishan Rao's presentation introduced the history of the Kinnala art form and its practitioners who hail from a small village called Kinhal in the Koppal district of Karnataka. This artwork was first displayed in the parade at the Republic Day event in 2013 and most recently in January 2022. This brought national and international recognition to the art but today the hereditary practitioners are struggling to retain their identities. The tableau

for the Republic Day parade was not made by the hereditary practitioners in 2013 or in 2022. An NGO got the tender to do this work. More recently, Kinnala art practitioners from Koppal were invited to do small art works in Terminal 2 of the recently inaugurated Bangalore International

airport. The tender for this was obtained by Geetanjali Maini foundation which employed the hereditary artists to do minor works on Kinnala art wherein the main work was done by contractors.

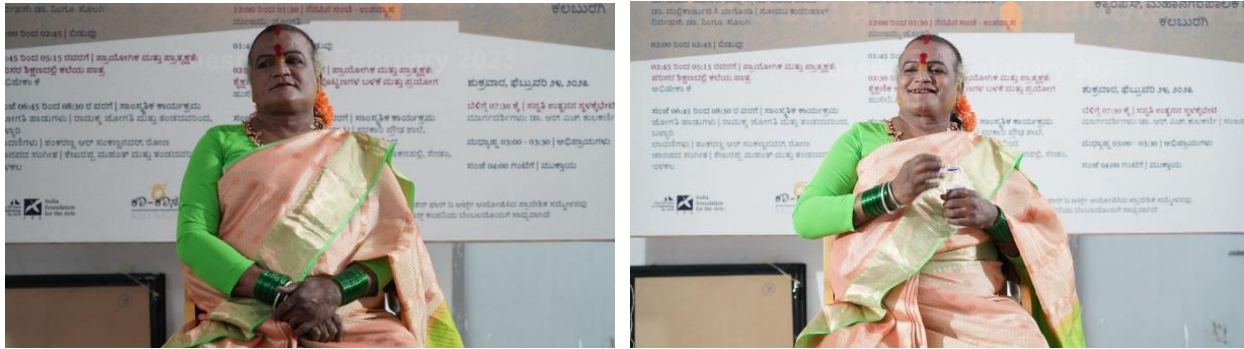
There is ongoing commercialisation and appropriation of this art form by NGOs, engineers and website designers. These artists also face the Government's apathy. The artists use a local variety of wood called Polki Mara (tree) which grows in and around Koppal. In the last 2 years, the forest officers have banned the cutting of trees due to illegal and rampant felling of trees. Kinnala artists are allowed to cut trees for their work provided they produce the right identification documents. The Government is yet to give them the identification documents resulting in the stoppage of Kinnala work as of now. The physical, mental, and economic condition of these artists is in dire situations and requires immediate attention. The art has become a symbol of the richness of Karnataka but the artists are losing their art and their identities.

Hindustani Music's Loss of Patronage in Kalyana Karnataka **Insaf Pinjara, Classical singer, Hospet, Vijayanagara**

In his short presentation, Insaf listed out a possible set of reasons for the loss of patronage of Hindustani music in Kalyana Karnataka. The development of Hindustani music in this region can be credited to Ustad Abdul Karim Khan. He was responsible for developing the Kirana Gayiki music and his students advanced it and disseminated this style. However, the Hindustani music field has not developed as much in Kalyana Karnataka as compared to other cultural centres like Mysuru, Dharwad and Bengaluru. Earlier, the theatre groups here would use Hindustani music in their plays. We don't have musicians working in plays today. Migration of Hindustani singers from here to other cities to either strengthen their livelihood or to get performance opportunities or to deepen their practice could be some of the reasons. However, the main reason is that we don't have a wider audience base for this form here. Efforts will have to be made to develop audiences and build a community here. Teaching Hindustani music is also shifting towards it being 'taala baddha' (bound to taala) than being emotionally charged. Insaf concluded his presentation by singing some Bandish in the Kirana Gharana style.



A Talk by Manjamma Jogati



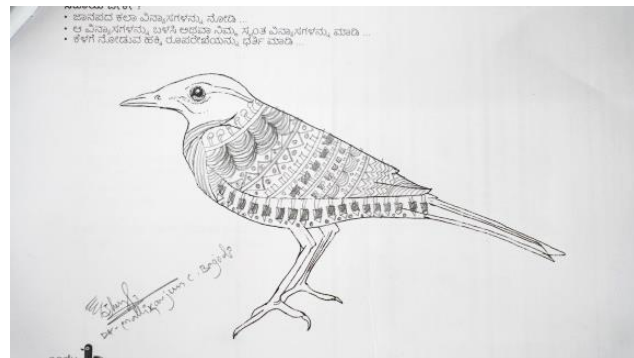
Manjamma Jogati, a well-known folk and theatre artist from Mariyammanahalli (near Hospet) was invited to talk about her life, work and experiences surrounding the arts. In an intense and vulnerable sharing, Manjamma spoke about her experiences as a child belonging to a large family which hailed from a difficult socio-economic background, the deep pain and suffering in coming out as a transgender woman, her life after being thrown out on streets and the sexual abuse she faced, finding a family in her chosen Yellama community and receiving strength and support through the practice of Jogati nriya. Her work today in schools is about educating children to develop resilience by talking about her own lived experiences around suicide, a sense of belonging, and hope. Connecting to her lived experiences, she reiterated that family and school environments must pay close attention to what children are saying and build strong bonds of community care and well-being for each other. By not only including herself but other performers from her community in this regional conference, she felt that the work by IFA reflected a genuine desire to open up the arts education space for all.

Practical Activities

The Role of Art in Environmental Education



Abhisheka K (right) interacts with participants



An artwork made by a participant during the session

This session was conducted by Arts Educator and Environmentalist Abhisheka K. She took a session on birds for the workshop participants and showed them ways through which they

could use arts to entice children to connect with birds and the ecology they inhabit. By introducing a few tools like poetry, drawing and storytelling, she tapped into a sense of wonder and creativity in the participants. At the end of the session, the participants were eager to find more ways like the ones they experienced to connect ecology to students in their classrooms.

Matchboxes – A Pedagogical Tool in School Education



Charts made by participants

Huseni SF, a visual artist and international matchbox collector, conducted a practical session on using discarded materials to create learning tools in classrooms. Huseni connected his passion for collecting and making use of waste/discarded materials to his own experiences as a student who always felt left behind in studies. This experience fueled in him a need to make use of what is thought of as waste, as a resource which can enrich learning. The participants were given matchboxes and were asked to come up with charts on maths, science, vehicles etc. The activity was hands-on and engaging for the participants.

Visit to Sannati Excavation Site

This visit was facilitated by Dr RH Kulkarni and Sanjana Rangan. The participants got an opportunity to visit the Sannati excavation site located on the banks of Bhima River in Kalaburagi district. The first part was a talk by Dr Kulkarni on the history of the site. The second part was an activity facilitated by Sanjana to explore the objects in the site. The objective of this activity was to introduce teachers to new ways of connecting with the site and to make learning exploratory and discovery oriented for children. Discussions around history, politics and power, ways of seeing the objects and connecting with the site in a sensorial way were brought up in this visit.

Evening Performances

On both the evenings, the cultural programmes were organised in an open space on campus which provided an intimate setting for the performances to unfold. On the first evening, we witnessed a beautiful rendition of Jogati songs by Ramakka Jogati & team and they were joined by Sankaranna R Sankannavar from Rona who performed a few folk songs. The second evening was marked by performances by students. There was a string puppetry by the alumni of

Government High School, Chibbalgeri and Dodddata performance by the alumni of Government High School, Jakanapally Sedam. The performances added to the discussions that participants had during the conference.



Top L to R: Ramakka Jogati and team perform Jogati songs, Sankarappa performs the Lavani
Bottom: Dodddata performers (L) and string puppetry team (R) receive certificates after their performance

Reflections

Arts education programmes have always been tightly packed and sometimes there is a feeling of not having enough time to process the many things that unfold in such programmes. However, this conference gave us an insight into the range and depth of works that IFA is engaged in through their arts education programme. From discussions with the participants, one can see that these conferences and teacher training sessions energise the participants and are rich material sources for educators. A sense of a growing community linked to ecology and its concerns is palpable whenever these sessions are organised.

Below is the feedback by some of the participants:

- The panel covered a vast array of topics and had a lot of speakers. Fewer topics but in-depth discussions around them would be more useful.
- The panel had a school-like format where the panelists (like teachers) were the only ones talking and we were the passive listeners. There was no time for debate, discussions and questions. Can the panel be reimaged to allow for more conversations rather than lectures?

- One of the participants suggested having a students' panel within the conference. The work of obtaining permission and the difficulty of organising such a panel was pointed out by Programme Officer, Krishnamurthy TN.
- The panel needed to have more women. In every panel there was one female panelist and three male panelists. Concerted effort for equal representation in the panel should be made.
- Since the mandate of arts education is to connect children to their local ecology and its concerns, it would be good to think through ways to make the conference too in line with the ecological concerns of the place. For instance, in this conference, the single use plastic bottles could have been replaced with other ways in order to reduce waste.
- Ways to make the conference more inclusive for people with disabilities must be developed.

Report by Mridula Rao