

## **Vision Statement: School of Culture and Creative Expressions, Ambedkar University, Delhi**

“Ambedkar University, Delhi (AUD) is a unitary university that has been set up to focus on teaching and research in Social Sciences and the Humanities. Its establishment has been based on a view of public institutions as instruments for social transformation, with a focus on social action and the interface of civil society and the State. The idea is to focus on areas of knowledge and professional specializations which are relevant to our context, and at the same time, not being given enough emphasis by other universities in India.” (From the Concept Note prepared for setting up of AUD)

### **Rationale**

Within the above context, the proposed School for Culture and Creative Expression is visualized as a location that intends to implement a new vision of art pedagogy and practice in the country. It aims at being constituted by the principle of integration, creative overlap and interdisciplinary processes between varied creative practices and disciplines, including historical, theoretical and critical engagements. The proposed School is imagined as a breeding ground for the development of newer and different art making practices and theoretical insights.

The aim of the School would be in the direction of finding interdisciplinary paradigms, engaged scholarship, greater amalgamation between various arts; theory and practice on one hand, and between various arts on the other. It is proposed that the School will have equal focus on training in theory and practice of art.

While keeping in view the possible inclusion of a larger or the total range of artistic media and forms within the School’s curriculum, it had been envisaged that the School would primarily organize itself around four major streams of artistic practice. These are: (1) Visual Art (2) Literary Art (3) Performance Art and (4) Cinematic Art. The course structures of each of the streams and specializations would be designed keeping in view the composite and generic focus of the School, which would facilitate conceptual commonalities to interactively and creatively coexist between the various disciplines and streams of specialization.

While proposing the establishment of a new art teaching institution, a due consideration for the following critique of the available art pedagogy in the country needs to be kept in view. The focus of almost all the existing visual art, literature, performing art, and film educational institutions is understandably in the direction of imparting various kinds of technical knowledge and skills and/or in the nature of routine, if not uncritical learning of theory and history. The area of creative concept developing, newer presentation modes and experimentation in newer mediums, and an intention for effective viewer/reader participation are most often or at least relatively sidelined in the currently available institutions.

Considering that there are numerous undergraduate level art schools in the country that impart technical skills and training, and imparting historical and theoretical knowledge in specific mediums of art such as painting, sculpture, in theatre and in specific forms of music and dance, in literature and in the area of film, it is proposed that in the inaugural phase of the School at AUD, it will offer Postgraduate, M.Phil and PhD level Programmes in Visual Art, Literary Art, Performance Art and Cinematic Art. In this context it is considered logical that bachelor's level programme/s in any or all of the four streams of art would be possible to visualize and implement once the proposed Masters' programme is instituted and regularized. However, it is being proposed even at this initial stage that the Bachelors level programmes would be more basic, introductory, and the intention would be to expose students to diverse forms and practices. At the Bachelors level the stress would be on knowledge development through survey courses, historiography, introductory and broad based historical exposures and to a lesser degree geared towards introduction to critical practices and theories while inculcating critical thinking.

The programs the School will offer is being imagined to lend an intense learning experience through incorporating elements from various disciplines such as art making, history, philosophy, sociology, political science, anthropology, critical theory, literary studies, media studies, psychology, art history, art criticism and cultural studies.

Keeping the above context in perspective, the major differences that the proposed School intends to make while training the students will be in the direction of (1) developing ability in conceptual thinking, (2) promoting historical and critical thinking, (3) in inculcating research orientation, (4) in instilling creative concept development, (5) in enabling adventurous and active creative experimentation (7) in empowering for creative self-expression and (7) in sharpening the intention for effective viewer/reader participation.

While the School will seek a direction in creating an amalgamation of various disciplines of arts into a single curriculum, the attempt will also be directed towards retaining certain methodological characteristics specific to disciplines which will provide possibilities of specialization.

The focus of the School would be in the direction of exploring the possibilities of imparting training in the emergent modes of art making and forms in the four above mentioned streams that are not yet systematized and imparted as part of an integrated and holistic curriculum at the university level in the country.

**Visual Art:** The proposed courses in Visual Art take into view a certain crisis in the discipline and the courses offered in various Indian Universities and related institutions of Fine Arts and the problematic of currently available practices of art within the public sphere, and stresses the need for initiating a new model of pedagogy in imparting skills and knowledge in various areas of art education.

Within the historical overview of art education in India, given the three phases of its development; (1) colonial art pedagogy (Art & Craft schools at Madras, Calcutta etc), (2) nationalist/indigenous initiative of pre-independence period within Nationalist movement (Kalabhavana, Santiniketan), and (3) the modernist initiatives (Faculty of Fine Arts, MS University of Baroda and other subsequent similar attempts across the country), and the substantial overlaps of these three distinct approaches in the existing art teaching systems in the country, it is pertinent that a new model of pedagogy in imparting skills and knowledge in the various areas of art education be evolved.

The systemic crisis in the available practices of high/fine art within the existing mainstream of the gallery system, that allows a wide gap to exist between fine arts production, its circulation and the public sphere. This can be attributed to the mediumistic specificity of art; its object making orientation, its associated symbolic capital of prestige, status and power, and the entrenchment within the rather disproportionate monetary capital. The condition of the very nature of art, namely its presence as possessable fetishistic commodity and the resulting commoditization that has led to its relatively insufficient visibility in the public gaze, and the unavailability of it for larger public purposes; social instruction, empowerment or any other such significant social and political change, function or purpose, is a glaring fact to reckon with.

Having critically understood the above condition, increasingly, there are examples in the last fifteen years of Indian artists' search for alternative practices, where tenuous but significant individual and institutional initiatives and interventions have led to creating unconventional possibilities of producing and circulating art within the community. However, it is most significant to note that the art teaching institutions have by and large only either shown apathy or non-concern with such developments. Such apathy is also apparent towards non-objectifiable or non-commodifiable art, such as new media art; installation art, video art, new uses of photography, performance art, net art, digital art, happenings etc. The very nature of these new mediums either makes art more democratic or de-materializes art for possession or devolves art as concepts, rendering them as ideas that simply can not be owned for private purposes of possession and symbolic value. Significantly, such practices have also enabled artists to shift towards community oriented collaborations that challenge the conventional values enshrined in art. However, in the current situation these are rather inchoate or even disparate, yet possess the potential to be cutting-edge practices which have the latent power to break the existing deadlock and the stultified interface between art and larger society, that can open up possibilities of greater integration of art into the social fabric. Thus, in a broader sense, the attempt would be to democratize the field of cultural production.

The above inchoate developments that have emerged in the art world would be attempted to be gathered together to form a new pedagogical philosophy and structure in art education, with a view to promote issue based, socially interactive and purposive art making and circulation practice/s. It is suggested that the proposed School undertakes to organically integrate various inputs of interdisciplinary nature combined with artistic/technical skills, methodological framework, conceptual thinking ability, theoretical and historical knowledge, socio-political awareness, purposiveness and clarity

of address-points, moral and ethical integrity and commitment and problem solving abilities.

**Literary Art:** Although study of literature, including courses on Indian regional literature, is well developed in most of the universities in India, an integrated pedagogic programme to instruct aspiring students in creative writing as well as translation and editing is currently unavailable in any of the Indian universities. A few experiments with some variations have at a partial level been conducted elsewhere, yet they have not been completely successful. One such innovation was attempted at School of Letters, M.G University, Kottayam, Kerala. The Masters Programme had originally been conceived as a genuinely bilingual course with English and Malayalam and was designed to produce comparatists and bilingual scholars and critics, if not enable and facilitate creative writers in the real sense of the term. Moreover, translation and creative writing are deeply interconnected as translation is also transcreation and it is essential to connect the two. Further, areas such as creative writing or translation are generally subsumed within departments of language and literature and not explored and developed as artistic and creative expressions on their own or in interaction with other forms of artistic expression.

It is in the above context that the location of the Masters Programme in Literary Art is imagined within the School of Culture and Creative Expressions, where the students will not only be trained to be specialists in any one discipline of art but will be able to undertake courses that will help them to develop a perspective and a deeper understanding of literary art and its socio-political relevance in its varied dimensions.

**Performance Art:** This stream of creative expression takes into account serious gaps that exist within performance education and pedagogy in the country. First, in the area of performance art, there is no single university level institution in the country that undertakes teaching and practice of all the different aspects of performance such as music, dance, theatre, puppetry etc, least of all composite contemporary performance that involves multiples genres. For example, departments of music or dance which teach specific traditional genres in our context are often isolated and not interconnected with departments dealing with other aspects of performance. Institutions that specialize in specific areas such as the National School of Drama for theatre deal primarily with theatre, with lesser focus on other areas of performance such as music or dance, thereby delimiting the scope of performance to the confines of drama. Second, in specific areas of performance, there is a serious gap between the corpus of practices (available heritage, evolving practices, and multiple forms) and a methodology for analysis, evaluation and comparison that stems fundamentally from practice. In other words, often traditional grammar has dwindled and that which exists is inaccessible outside its specific contexts, while performance practices as such have advanced significantly.

Given the above situation, it is deemed necessary to develop a location where a grammar of performance and a methodology of analysis can be produced, with a view to evolve a new pedagogy by bringing academicians, performers and students together.

Thirdly, the practice of performance in contemporary times also reflects the transcending/crossing of borders of form, region, country and conventions, even while being rooted firmly in indigenous traditions, which have hardly been subject to critical academic discussion on a sustained basis. The relevance of the proposed new pedagogy of performance art within the School arises in the above context.

**Cinematic Art:** The existing film institutes in India largely cater to the needs of the commercial film industry. It is a well accepted fact that because of the excessive financial involvement in movie production, this form of cinematic art is limited to the experimentation and self-expression of a small section of people in the society. Whereas, video film making considering its relative financial viability has proved to be more accessible to creative and critical expression of creative people at large. However, from a historical perspective video film making still remains in the peripheries of academic disciplines. Although, in the recent past there are institutions that have mushroomed across the country which give training in commercial videography one of the primary objectives of academically structuring videography as a pedagogic discipline, as is being conceived by the School, is to enable this medium to explore its maximum creative and critical potential.

The proposed Masters programme in Cinematic Art will be an attempt to productively amalgamate the theoretical, practical and technical aspects while focusing on the medium of videography and film studies as two separate but interrelated specializations.

In the Film Studies programme, unlike in the pedagogy and research of many other centers that are available in the country, the programme at the School proposes to give a special emphasis on regional cinema in the Indian context. On the one hand, this emphasis will allow the programme to engage with the regional ethos and heterogeneity of language and culture and on the other hand, will enable a more comprehensive, non-hegemonic and inclusive history of Indian cinema. This would also allow the programme to explore the influence of cinema in everyday life and its political ramifications. The thrust within the research and pedagogy of world cinema would be on the traditions that have emerged at the marginal locations such as Latin American, African and Asian cinema. The newer developments both in cinematic practices and theorization across the globe would be introduced in order to equip students with changing paradigms of cinematic art practices.

The above integrated model inclusive of film studies and training in videography would provide more spaces for socio-politically committed and theoretically informed cinematic practices. This programme will also give an emphasis on community oriented video art practices in order to move away from conventional/canonical cultural production. In a broader sense, this would be an attempt to democratize the field of cultural production. This allows the practitioners/students to get in touch with ground level realities and also enable them to produce more experience and research oriented works.

## **Credo**

The aim of the School will be in the direction of practicing interdisciplinary pedagogic paradigms, promoting engaged scholarship, and enabling greater amalgamation between various arts. The focus of the school will be in spearheading new cultural practices with socio-political concerns and on the lines of engaged scholarship, and in the direction of breaking the reification of culture and in the direction of enabling critical thinking, intervention and praxis. As a whole the School will keep in its purview social needs, and needs of the art field in exploring the relationship of one stream to another, but would function apart from market needs.

The organizing principle of the School shall be that for inspiration it may look anywhere and everywhere, or in other words pedagogic practice will be based on liberty to experiment that give all involved a chance and applying themselves to the needs and dictates of our times. Contemporary relevance in terms of socio-political affect, social change and if needed transgression too should be possible through the programmes instituted by the School.

The attempt in the pedagogy of art in all the streams would be adequate disciplinary rooting which would at the same time allow and enable interdisciplinarity. The proposed pedagogy is imagined as a breeding ground for the development of newer and different art making practices and developing theoretical and historical insights which will be fulfilled by having equal focus on training in theory and in practice and their creative interaction.

A major focus of the art pedagogy will be to look at art and its relation to the community, in other words, will be to critically engage with art in terms of its contemporary relevance, interpretation, socio-political affect, social change and transgression. In this attempt to connect art with the people, there will be a focus such that art is not practiced in isolation but in connection with the concerns of the most marginalized communities. The aim will be that through all this, the students develop robust secular attitudes and egalitarian, democratic, emancipatory and ecological concerns. Engaged scholarship and subversion of conventional discourses will be a core part of the curriculum as well as teaching of radical schools of thought.

## **Programmes**

The School for Culture and Creative Expressions will offer Masters, M.Phil and PhD Programmes in Visual Art, Literary Art, Performance Art and Cinematic Art starting from the academic calendar of 2012. If a need or possibility is realized, a bachelor's course in any or all of the four streams will be designed after the Masters' programmes are instituted and regularized.

In each of the streams of specialization, there will be an equal focus on theory and practice, and two sets of courses; one with a specialization in practice and another in theory, history and criticism will be offered. For all the courses at the Masters level, the

students will undergo common foundation courses which will be theoretical and historical in content.

**Visual Art:** The practice oriented MVA in Artistic Research and Experimental Practices would include training in varied new trends of art making that fall under diverse nomenclatures and practices such as New-Media Art, Meta-Media Art, Installation Art, Performance Art, Photography, Video Art, Public Art, and Collaborative Art etc. Since the School is focusing on research orientation and experimental practices the focus of historical and theoretical studies/subjects for the students of MVA in Artistic Research and Experimental Practices would be on contemporary art history, which will include world art history, the history of national art scene with adequate inputs of regional/local art scene. The theory, history and criticism oriented MVA in Visual Studies would include imparting knowledge and skill in writing in the areas of critical art history/new art history, art criticism, art theory, and cultural studies/visual studies.

**Literary Art:** With regard to Masters degree in Literary Art, the School in its first phase will run programmes in Creative Writing and Translation at the Masters level with an elaborate module on language and conceptual editing, since editing is a very important aspect of both creative writing and translation.

Instead of running three Programmes in Creative Writing, Translation and Editing, the School will run one Programme which would be inclusive of Critical Reading, Creative Writing, Translation and Editing. Students opting for Masters in Literary Art would be required to do all the options and then could specialize in any one of them. Besides this, the students would be required to do modules in Literary Appreciation and Literary Journalism.

For the course in Critical reading, the students could take up papers from the Departments of Humanities, and especially from the Departments of Literatures/Comparative Literatures. Hence opting for two courses from Literature, for the students of literary Art could be made mandatory.

The course on Translation will include Translation Studies and Theory of Translation. This would entail imparting knowledge on social, psychological and cultural aspects of language, the history of translation, craft and art of translation, and literary sense of language. The students will study contemporary history and conventions of translation in some specific languages as well. The course will also aim at imparting skills in translating non-fiction and academic translation. Adaptations of Literary texts into performing and Cinematic texts would also come within the arena of translation. The programme on translation will have an interface with the programme on Cinematic Art, as it is possible to translate conceptually and develop screenplays and scripts from literary texts. Teaching the art of dubbing and subtitling will also be undertaken as these components also do come within the arena of translation. The course in Creative Writing would impart knowledge in the areas of style, genres, mechanics and theory of writing, experimentation in writing, oral narrative traditions, academic writing/literary criticism and literary journalism.

The Literary Studies course will impart knowledge and skill in the areas of literary history, literary theory, and literary criticism.

**Performance Art:** The Masters programme in Performance Art (MPA) will have two sets of courses, one with a specialisation in practice and the other in theory, history and criticism. The practice-oriented MPA will focus on emergent, unconventional and cutting edge performance practices which will be based on concept development, research orientation and experimental practice. Rather than purely skill oriented training, the course will be oriented towards enabling, enhancing and honing talents and training students in acting/abhinaya, dance choreography, music composing, play direction, costume and set design etc. The Performance Studies course will impart knowledge and skill in the areas of performance history, performance theory, and performance criticism.

**Cinematic Art:** The practice oriented Masters programme in Cinematic Art will offer courses in cinematic research and experimental practices through videography. There will be greater emphasis on the community aspect of cinematic art and this programme will promote attempts in this direction by implanting community oriented video art practices. The programme will also include training in various genres of cinematic art such as experimental films, documentary film, docu-fiction etc.

The theory and history oriented specialization of Masters programme of Cinematic Studies would deal with critical history and theory of cinema and of film making. This would include imparting knowledge and skill in writing in the areas of film criticism, film theory, history of cinema, film studies and visual/cultural studies. There would be a special emphasis on the regional cinema in the Indian context. This programme also would initiate an in-depth study of world cinema with a special focus on experimental cinema and documentary cinema from across the world. The programme would give a special emphasis on the regional cinema in the Indian context. To facilitate this, the school would undertake the collection and organization of regional resources. On the one hand, this emphasis allows the programme to engage with the regional ethos and heterogeneity of language and culture and on the other hand, would enable a more comprehensive, non-hegemonic and inclusive history of Indian cinema. This would also allow the students to explore the influence of cinema in everyday life and their political ramification.

In terms of the study of history of world cinema it is proposed that the programme would attempt to bring into focus newer currents from across global regions. The Hollywood centric approach of many of the film studies would be replaced by developments in cinema in other continents, cultures and regions. The newer developments in both practices and theorization across the globe regarding cinematic art would be introduced in order to equip students/practitioners with changing paradigm of cinematic art practices.

### **Pedagogic Structure**

In all the taught courses, apart from the lecture based classroom teaching and with regard to modalities of balancing theory and practice in order to initialize the implementation, the pedagogy will gather intellectual resources simultaneously through the system of studio model/ project model, workshop model, and visiting faculty/artists in residence programmes. While the studio model would entail the engagement of an artist in residence for a limited period of time to interact with the students on their ongoing work, the workshop model will involve an honorary engagement of an artist in producing a work of art in association/collaboration with the students and faculty members. Within the visiting faculty/artist in residence scheme, the invited faculty member will share the work experience with the students. The projects of the students are being envisaged as developing in a research and experimentation framework in a laboratory kind of situation.

The Masters programmes across specializations will comprise of 64 credits in all. All the taught courses will have common foundation courses of 16 credits which will be theoretical and historical in content. Apart from these, there will be core courses of 8 credits, which will be common and compulsory within each stream. 32 credits will be reserved for training in the chosen specialization. Apart from these, 8 credits will be assigned for optional/elective papers for all the streams of specialization.

The class room teaching and guidance in the practice oriented courses will involve five projects for the students to work with, namely (1) A project based on archival investigation (2) Production of an art work – left to the student to define (3) An art work to be produced in the public domain (4) Making of a collaborative art work (5) Production of a critical, analytical treatise concerning the works produced by the student. There would be an inbuilt scope for students to accrue skills from outside the School in the form of apprenticeship with artists/artisans/ technicians/or any other.

### **Infrastructure:**

Since the focus of the School is on concept development, research and experimentation, the teaching will be based on available expertise on technological devices and techniques, which will be supported by adequate number of technical staff, including high level computer technology.

The infrastructural facilities would include:

- Studio Spaces.
- Class Rooms.
- Computer Lab.
- Computer Softwares.
- Language Lab.
- Editing Lab.
- Sound Studio.
- Workshop (for fabrication in wood and metal).
- Project Spaces.
- Photography Lab.

- Exhibition Gallery.
- Theatre.
- Auditorium.
- Cameras (for still photography).
- Video Cameras.
- Library (common for all the four streams of the school).
- Documentation Archive

## **Faculty Structure**

There could be various kinds of Faculty

1. Faculty who can teach and guide courses specific to literary art, visual art, performance art and cinematic art.
2. Faculty who can teach theory across disciplines.
3. Faculty who can teach courses specific to literary history, art history, performance history and cinematic history.
4. Guest/visiting/artists-in-residence faculty who can conduct workshops and projects.

Some faculty may be employed on long term basis whereas some can teach as Visiting Faculty on short term basis, who can engage the students with creative/critical exercises, workshops, lectures etc. The School shall identify temporary faculty members from among creative artists who are also good teachers. The concerned faculty can be invited to residencies or appointed as Professors for specific periods of time. The School would also collaborate with other institutions like the FTII, Pune, the NDS, Delhi and Departments of Mass communication in other universities and develop exchanges of personnel.