

JAN - MAR 2017

THE ACROPOLITAN

A Magazine on Philosophy, Culture & Volunteering

FEATURE

SPIRITUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY MAINSTREAM CINEMA

A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC –
A BRIDGE TO THE DIVINE

TASNEEM ZAKARIA MEHTA ON
PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

The logo for New Acropolis, featuring a stylized 'NA' monogram with a classical architectural element (a column capital) integrated into the letter 'A'. Below the monogram, the words 'NEW ACROPOLIS' are written in a clean, sans-serif font.

NEW ACROPOLIS



THE ACROPOLITAN

In Ancient Greece, the Acropolis referred to the sacred centre, that lay higher than the rest of the city. It was a place of inspiration; a bridge that enabled citizens to connect to the divine, evoking the expression of the higher human virtues. Deriving inspiration from its purpose, The Acropolitan Magazine serves as a tribute to every citizen yearning for these higher principles in all aspects of Life: **Truth, Beauty, Justice, Goodness.**



NEW ACROPOLIS

PHILOSOPHY when practical, helps us to know and improve ourselves. It is a way of life, not an intellectual attitude, committed to the best aspirations of humanity.



NEW ACROPOLIS

CULTURE broadens our understanding of life, and fosters a spirit of mutual respect and solidarity, strengthening human dignity and facilitating harmonious coexistence.



NEW ACROPOLIS

VOLUNTEERING is the natural expression of a spirit of union with life and humanity, which manifests in the practice of values such as unselfishness, commitment and striving for the common good.



By Naloparicleon | Stockholm | CC BY PD

FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Dear Reader,

As we march forward towards the peak of human accomplishment, let us, even if for only a fleeting moment, assess the true drive that motivates our progress. Technology has brought comfort and efficiency to every aspect of our lives. Medicine is able to remarkably manage physical suffering. The internet has brought the unprecedented speed with which to make informed choices. And yet, as if scrambling in the dark, happiness and fulfillment continue to elude many of us.

An inner voice whisperingly insists, as if yearning, that there must be more; a larger purpose, a more meaningful role for which each of us has arrived to this world. Some look for answers at museums, where glimpses of past civilizations are preserved as part of the human heritage; others investigate the arts - classical music or cinema. And many look to revive education as the means to help our youth discover life's meaning.

Exploring these faculties through the lens of philosophy, a love for wisdom, kindles a spark of wonder and joy – so essential to persist on the path to Discover, Awaken, and Transform into what lies in our potential. We invite you to join us as we embark on this voyage of hope, at the start of the new year!

Hariato H Mehta, Editor

CONTENTS

www.acropolis.org.in



A New Philosophy of Life and Death 05
By Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga

Philosophy For Living
UNESCO World Philosophy Day 07
By Yaron Barzilay

Indian Classical Music –
A Bridge to The Divine 11
By Dipti Sanzgiri

COVER FEATURE
Spirituality and Contemporary
Mainstream Cinema 15
By Sukesh Motwani

The Crisis of Western Education
and The Role of Philosophy 21
By Sabine Leitner

Down the Rabbit Hole
Tasneem Zakaria Mehta on
Preservation of Heritage 27
By Manjula Nanavatii

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS 31



THE ACROPOLITAN
January - March 2017
Volume 4 - Issue 1

Cover Image: By Paul
Skorupskas | Unsplash | CCo

Images used on this page are
attributed in respective articles.

Editorial Department
Editor-in-Chief: Yaron Barzilay
Editor: Harianto H Mehta
Editorial Team: Manjula
Nanavati, Dilip Jain, Sukesh
Motwani, Shruti Sunderraman

Publication & Production
Harianto H Mehta

Graphic Design
Janki Shah, Neha Mehta
Printed by Vinay Arts

New Acropolis
Cultural Organization (India)
Yaron Barzilay
National Director
A-0 Connaught Mansions
Opp. Colaba Post Office
Colaba, Mumbai 400005
Tel: +91 22 2216 3712
Email: info@acropolis.org.in
Web: www.acropolis.org.in

The Acropolitan is published in
India, by New Acropolis Cultural
Organization. Reprints of
individual articles are obtainable
on application to the editor. All
rights reserved. No part of this
publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system
or transmitted in any form
or by any means without the
prior written permission of the
copyright owner.

SO ENDLESS

A JOG IS LIKE RUNNING A MARATHON

47 ACRES OF LUXURY LIVING IN CENTRAL BENGALURU

With such an expansive and sprawling space, even a simple jog would seem like a breath-taking adventure. Pre-launching ParkWest - Phase 2 by Shapoorji Pallonji. Offering a 4-acre Clubhouse, 1 lakh sq. ft. of Sky Zones, a 7-acre Biodiversity Park, a Skating Rink, an Orchard, a Reflexology Path... all nestling on 34 acres of lush landscaped greens. So inviting, we are sure you would want to run back home every day.

10668833

SPECIAL PRE-LAUNCH OFFER




2/3/4 BHKs
and Penthouses


Metro Station
5 mins


M.G. Road
10 mins


Railway Station
5 mins


International Airport
60 mins

PARKWEST™

Call: +91 80 67095485 | SMS PARKWEST to 575752 | www.parkwest.co.in
Site Address: ParkWest, Binnypet, Close to Sirsi Circle, Near Chamrajpet, Bengaluru - 560023.

* Disclaimer: The layout, amenities, specifications & features shown and/or mentioned, and the facts/brochings* image rendering used are purely indicative. The developer reserves the right to change the layout, amenities, specifications & features without prior notice.

A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE AND DEATH

BY PROF. JORGE ANGEL LIVRAGA



Philosophy means "love of wisdom or knowledge". It is a route illuminated by the sun of truth. Anything which does not respond to this essential characteristic is not philosophy, but mere speculation and alternative repetitions of what others have said, taking as much advantage of the old teachings as a spoon takes nourishment from and enjoys the soup in which it is dipped.

Life and death are the two sides of the One-Life. Someone who has not even realised this should not lightly call himself a "philosopher", for he will not even have begun to walk on the ascending path.

More than a cultural association, New Acropolis is a philosophical movement that was founded with this principal objective: to make the phrase "know thyself" a living reality. These are starting points; the bad thing is that the majority of people stay with them all their lives and the worst thing is that they even begin to forget about some of them as they grow old and become "bourgeois".

New Acropolis proposes a re-opening of the channels of classical philosophy; the only one which discovered truths a thousand times repeatedly and did not fall into

clichés or serve as an instrument for ignorance or the threat of brutes. Socrates is a witness. Our philosophy is not contemplative, pseudo-orientalist, but a fiery way of facing Life and the unknown. The human being must commit himself firmly to his historical destiny, his divine ancestors, his present moment, the future. He must be like a boat which with powerful oars scales the stream of life, and not like a clump of driftwood which is dragged without honour to the place where things go to rot. Our philosophy is a philosophy of action on all the planes to which the consciousness can have access, not for the results of that action but for the action-in-itself, since we fulfill ourselves and find pleasure in that action which keeps us eternally young, conscious of our immortality and our joy in living it from instant to instant.

He must be like a boat which with powerful oars scales the stream of life, and not like a clump of driftwood which is dragged without honour to the place where things go to rot.

So the world is illusion?... We know... But as this definition is also in the world, it too is illusory. What is called "illusion" by the "orientalists" is no more than reality in one of its many aspects or facets which colour the light. The hypothesis of "illusion" – a very poor and distorted version of the "maya" of the ancient Indians – makes fools of many who come to believe that there is somewhere where God is not, for example in illusion. If that were true, illusion would limit God or reality, an idea which is a piece of philosophical nonsense worthy of someone who is unable to handle even the most simple of syllogisms.



By observing the natural cycles and seeing the eternal return of things – from the water in the clouds to the sea and from the sea to the clouds, to the succession of days and nights and of the seasons of the year – we can clearly perceive a unity of destiny in nature and a constant and unfaltering progress according to a pre-established plan. Within that plan is the human being. He too is born and dies... and is reborn... and dies again. So simple, and so true.

All the ancient esoteric schools affirmed it and all the religions upheld it at the beginning, when their

founders shed the light of God over men. Some retained on the popular level more or less distorted imitations of that ancestral doctrine, and others buried it in their "forbidden books" and "apocryphal gospels"... which they made sure to preserve in their labyrinthine libraries for when the time would come to re-use those "accursed" arguments. The fact is that, in order to win adepts many creeds have used the path of promising a lot and demanding very little... And for that policy it was not convenient to maintain the popular knowledge of reincarnation, since that knowledge shows a long and tortuous road where the law of cause and effect rules and where absolution cannot be bought or given away to important personages. He who makes a mistake pays for his error, whether he be king or beggar. And the former will pay for it more dearly, since it is supposed that a king has more opportunities than a beggar... Every crown is a crown of thorns...

**He who makes a mistake
pays for his error, whether
he be king or beggar. And
the former will pay for it
more dearly, since it is
supposed that a king has
more opportunities than a
beggar... Every crown is a
crown of thorns...**

This new philosophy will liberate millions of people from the fear of death, as it already has done for thousands, whatever their beliefs or their line of work, and whoever they may be. It is the ancient sap of life which is rising again through the dried-up tree of humanity. And there will be flowers and there will be fruits. And there will be nests and new birds which will warble in the new dawns, for the burning sun of life is slowly but inexorably rising again. ★★★

Prof. Jorge Angel Livraga was the founder, and first International President, of International Organization New Acropolis.

PHILOSOPHY FOR LIVING UNESCO WORLD PHILOSOPHY DAY

BY YARON BARZILAY
COMPILED BY HARIANTO H MEHTA

Compiled from a talk presented by Yaron Barzilay (National Director, New Acropolis Cultural Organization) on 17th November 2016.

Today is a special day; it is the day that UNESCO marks as World Philosophy Day. It is great for us to be able to celebrate philosophy. Especially, since we shall also use the opportunity to launch a book written by Delia Steinberg Guzman (International President of New Acropolis), entitled *Philosophy for Living*. She has written quite a lot of books, published and translated in many languages. This is the first one that is translated to English, and I am very happy that we have this opportunity today, to launch it together.

As the title suggests, we call for celebrating philosophy every day, everywhere. Because philosophy is all about life - all about living. And if we don't *live* philosophy, maybe we should not call it philosophy.

I would like to share with you why philosophy is so essential. It is not just an interesting subject. It is said that the real power of philosophy lies in its ability to improve the human condition. That is to say - it not only has the power to cause change (because change could be for the worse) but it can improve. Moreover, it is noteworthy that Ms. Irina Bokova, (Director General, UNESCO) insists that by initiating

World Philosophy Day UNESCO does not hold exclusivity over the day or the subject; not UNESCO, nor any one nation. Philosophy is what makes us human, and if we lose that, we lose something essential about being human. She explains, "philosophy is more than an academic subject. It is a daily practice that helps people to live in a better, more human way." This is essential, especially for our world today, for the improvement of humanity. It is a way of life: Philosophy for Living.

Philosophy is what makes us human, and if we lose that, we lose something essential about being human.

As we explore the meaning of Philosophy, it is interesting to mention that just yesterday, Oxford Dictionary announced its annual Word of the Year: Post-truth - reflecting what they called "a highly charged political 12-months". First said to have been used in 1992, the announcement claimed that its usage had increased by 2000% in 2016, compared to last year. So what really does it mean? Post-truth - as if people no longer care for the Truth. It's like

a joke of history – that facts don't matter anymore. And it becomes casual, for example, for elected officials to openly make inaccurate or false claims. Alarming, Oxford's Casper Gratwool even says that 'post-truth' could become one of the defining words of our times. Has our world come to such a moment where the Truth no longer matters? Is it not relevant anymore? Have we forgotten the call of our ancestors: *Satyameva Jayate*, Truth Shall Always Prevail? Truth has the quality of being eternal. It is related to reality, it is always valid. Meaning, that what is not real cannot sustain; not in economics, not in politics, not in anything. We should not be surprised at the collapse of our economies. If we just backtrack to 2008, many remember it as an economic disaster. Yes; but I say it was a philosophical disaster. Because there was simple truth, simple facts, that were completely ignored. How can it be that Truth is not important anymore? That's just an indication that humanity has lost its direction.



Does truth exist at all? This is a great question with which to start the philosophical search because it has huge implications. If in reality there were no direction, no good, no bad, no meaning or purpose; it's one thing. But if there is a Truth, it

may be so vast and wonderful, that even the great philosopher Socrates, famously said to be the wisest man in Athens, realized, "All I know is that I know nothing". In recognizing the vastness of Truth, perhaps he discovered an opening of a path, not the end of the road. I would say that philosophy is a search; a search for the Truth that improves man, improves me!

In reality we are part of the spiritual world of archetypes; of Beauty, Fraternity, and Truth. And it is due to this that the soul yearns to re-unite with it.

Let's go back in time, 2600-2700 years, to the times of a wise and enigmatic man named Pythagoras. There are many stories about him all suggesting that he was a great teacher, a master. Tradition describes his disciples as so special that just by looking at them one knew that they were from Pythagoras' school. It is said that it was amongst them that the word 'philosophy' was first coined. That is not to say, that philosophy is a Greek invention. Because as we go forwards and backwards in time, universally, through ancient India, Egypt, and the Americas, we will always find the search for wisdom. But the word 'philosophy' comes from Greek origin; and combines *philo* and *sophia*, love and wisdom. The story goes that when his disciples came to Pythagoras in admiration they spoke to him as *sophos*, a wise man. But Pythagoras corrected them, saying, "I am no *sophos*...I am but a *philo-sophos*," a lover of wisdom, one searching for wisdom. It is like saying, "Don't call me a master, I am but a disciple." And so it is said, emerged the word 'philosophy' – the love of wisdom.

And love is all about living. It cannot be intellectual. You don't love your wife by telling her that after a lot of research and study, you have concluded that

you love her. Love is life; something that initiates movement, change, growth. Love is a force of attraction, a need. Not necessarily a bodily need. But a need of the soul.

What really is this need, and where does this need come from? Aristotle says that the need comes from wonder, from astonishment at encountering the way life manifests around us. If one lacks wonder, he lacks motivation to search, to learning. Wonder, makes sense, right? That's one idea.



But Plato, like Socrates and perhaps Pythagoras before him, says that this need comes from remembering – the soul comes to the world from an unlimited spiritual realm. However, it forgets its origins the moment that it is born in the physical realm. Hence, in reality we are part of the spiritual world of archetypes; of Beauty, Fraternity, and Truth. And it is due to this that the soul yearns to re-unite with it. The deep need of the soul exists because that is who we are. According to Plato, therefore, the entire process of learning is actually the process of remembering who we are, awakening our true identity.

Yet, it is easy to fall into the trap of intellectualism. The world is so big and so many seemingly wise

people have said so much, and have so many different opinions. It seems that each one has his own idea of truth. And Philosophy therefore, is relegated to the art of debate, exchanging ideas and opinions, meant to be contradicted for the sake of argument. But I think philosophy really is all about living. It is not about what people say; but how they live it.

"Everyone should be able to answer the question about what they are looking for in their own life? It's impossible to walk if we don't know where we want to go. What do I want to be do with my life? This is an essential question and if we don't have any clear idea about this, what victories can hope to achieve?"

What matters is not to reach a destination, but that there is a path, a process of change and growth, of becoming better and happier than what I was before.

As in the case of the universal symbol of a mountain as the abode of the divine, or of spiritual evolution, while the descriptions of this mountain may vary greatly, what is important is to climb. The more one climbs, the closer he comes to the peak, the centre, to unity - and the higher, more accurate, his perspective of life. You will see things differently. Obviously, each tradition might climb a specific trail on that mountain, and have different descriptions of the ascent. What is important is that it takes you upwards. So if it is just an exchange of ideas, gathering of information or knowledge - that is not interesting. Without a true search, I think knowledge can sometimes become too heavy, as depicted in Rodin's sculpture, The Thinker. Instead, the teaching must foster an upward process of change. It is a voyage, a practice, and although it requires knowledge and study, it is most important to practice because it is impossible to learn, without implementing what we learn, causing us to change, grow, improve.

"If Philosophy is the love of wisdom then that love must give rise to movement, love cannot stand still because it's always searching for what it needs, what it longs for. To be a philosopher requires movement because it is a love that always asks for more and urges us to go & get it. A constant refreshing of everything we know it is to re-read what we have read to listen again to what we think we already understood because every new search will lead us to new treasures."

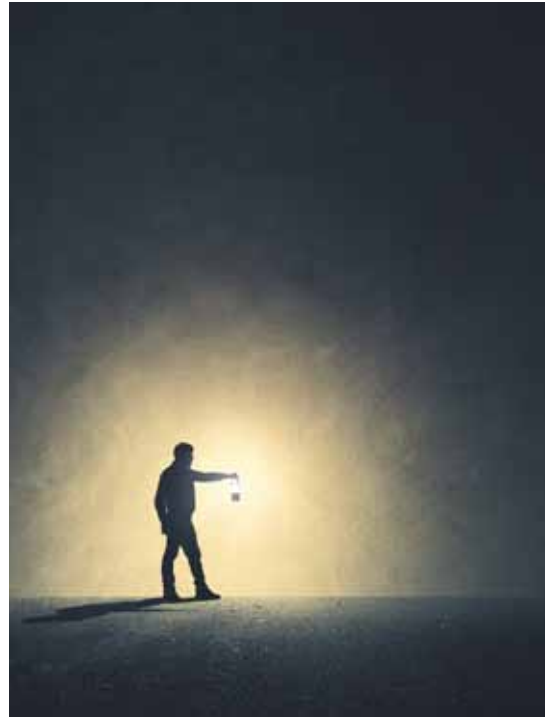
If I don't change, I stay at the same level...and I may fantasize that I have learned simply by gathering more and more knowledge. To implement is like climbing the mountain. When I climb, I do not remain in the same place. My ability to observe, the ability to learn, also changes. If you go in the wrong direction, it is ok – because you learned something – change your course. What matters is not to reach a destination, but that there is a path, a process of change and growth, of becoming better and happier than what I was before.

Path of philosophy is not the path of endless doubting, it's not just about questioning. It is also about finding answers without which we would be wasting time

In order to do this, it is necessary to have self confidence, as it relates to knowing oneself - self conviction. Because the path of philosophy is not the path of endless doubting, it's not just about questioning. It is also about finding answers without which we would be wasting time. Each answer changes us, and develops more confidence.

"Conviction is a high degree of psychological intellectual and moral commitment. It arises from becoming progressively more convinced on the basis of sound arguments, evidence, experience

and of supporting models and foundations... Convictions arise from the constant exercise of our inner powers. And the transformation of changeable opinions into stable and considered judgments."



Fear usually causes us to avoid embarking upon this adventure. Fear of making mistakes. But why are we so ashamed of mistakes? The biggest mistake is not to make mistakes because the ones who don't make mistakes doesn't do anything. Mistakes will only show us where to correct ourselves to become better.

This is philosophy; a voyage, a search, a yearning for the Truth, the mysteries of life. Every step forward is to face ever greater wonders, bigger questions, of the great mysteries of life of which we are each a part. For us the philosophy is the greatest adventure. It is to challenge yourself, to change, to grow. This is what our world really needs today, more than ever - Philosophy! ★★★

Yaron Bazilay is the National Director of New Acropolis Cultural Organization, India.

INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC – A BRIDGE TO THE DIVINE

BY DIPTI SANZGIRI



Om. The first sound of creation as per the Hindu tradition. That sound with which all ancient vedic prayers start and end, as if emulating the sacred process of creation through sound. The classical tradition of music in India therefore, has traditionally been treated as a sacred means to interact with the creative principle of Life; it has the potential to play the role of a bridge between the musician and the divine, the higher aspect of life. In that sense, the classical musician embarks upon a philosopher's journey, seeking that connection with the source and destiny of all Life.

Indian classical music has very ancient origins. It is said that it has evolved over the last 3000 years, beginning with the vedic shlokas, or hymns, sung in specific musical and rhythmic patterns. Together, the rhythm and intonation is said to create impactful sound influencing the person singing, as well as the environment. Over a period of time many a seeker and practitioner have developed and shaped this form of art and expanded its repertoire. There are myths abound that demonstrate this intimate relationship between music, the singer, and the environment. One such tale speaks of a highly celebrated singer from Mughal Emperor Akbar's court called Tansen, who by singing raga 'Deepak'

is said to have created fire and by singing 'Megh Malhar' could invoke rain!

How do we understand these phenomena? Can music really 'create'? How can an artist reach that stage? Indeed, the process of unraveling the mystery of classical music is akin to unraveling the enigma of life. Mastering of the technique and the discipline of a raga was of course the pursuit of the artist, but this was not enough for creating such connection with nature and divinity. For that the purity and higher level of consciousness of the artist was also essential.

The process of unraveling the mystery of classical music is akin to unraveling the enigma of life.

Every student of Indian classical music begins this journey with the practice of the first note *sa*, the *shadaj*, the very first note of the octave. When I first started learning to sing, for more than six months, my teacher would simply instruct me to sing the note *sa*, again, and again, and again. I would

hate it. "Why is he making me sing just one note repeatedly?" I would ask myself out of frustration, convinced that my first attempt was already masterful, no different from the last! I was unable to concentrate, and started losing interest. I had no ear for music then and I could not hear the wavering of my voice. Yet, I wanted novelty. I wanted to quickly start learning ragas. But no, I had to continue with that one note. It was supposed to sound piercingly straight and steady, catching the note right in the center; the perfect note - *sa*. Because it is never accidental or random. Nor is it easy. It's the outcome of persistent *sadhana*, daily rigorous practice. In search of precision, resulting in a deeper, almost meditative, connection that the artist achieves; fully present and concentrated on that one note. What follows is serenity and peace. Yes the journey was worth it. A victorious first battle.



Image Courtesy/ By Ramnath Bhaskar/ Flickr/ By 2.0

Caption: Begum Parveen Sultana, Classical Hindustani Vocalist

A philosopher, the truth seeker, goes through life like a musician, invoking virtues of love, generosity, compassion, justice from within, through practice in every aspect of life, daily, every moment, till he conquers the tendencies that take him away from that higher aspect of himself.

Ancient schools of Indian classical music were similar to ancient schools of philosophy also in the celebration of the Guru – Shishya tradition. The student had to seek acceptance by the teacher by proving his burning desire to learn and his dedication and devotion to music. Once admitted, the first few years went in just learning basic notes and ragas. Alongside, the student had to serve the teacher and do all the odd jobs, perhaps even living with the master. It was the same basic principle of philosophy; service. Learning to think beyond one's personality. The first principle for initiating any *sadhana*, practice; slowly and surely killing your ego. The more the student became humble, the more he was taught, the more he practiced and honed what the master taught, the more he was exposed to new explorations and paths. His learning process went beyond just music. He observed the way his guru lived; his devotion, his *sadhana*, for music, never using it for personal gain either materialistically or for admiration, but always as a bridge to reach divine, putting everything else on periphery. There are many examples of artists who had immense talent but whose growth was stunted because of their ego and just their masterful technique wasn't enough. They were not philosophers and hence their music never touched the soul.

A philosopher, the truth seeker, goes through life like a musician, invoking virtues of love, generosity, compassion, justice from within, through practice in every aspect of life, daily.

Classical music is about 'being', rather than 'doing'. It's a long drawn process of gradual transformation. Even for the listener there is no instant gratification in this form. No two-minute dishing out of emotions! Listener here goes on the journey of the raga with

the artist, It's a gradual process of becoming aware, inviting concentration on the subtle nuances and unique explorations that the artist takes you on.

Few basic aspects of Indian classical music: There are of course seven musical notes – Sa - Shadhaj, Re - Rishabh, Ga - Gandhar, Ma - Madhyam, Pa - Pancham, Dha - Dhaivat and Ni – Nishad and then back to Sa of the higher octave. It is said that each of these notes are inspired by the calls of different birds. Sa being that of Peacock and Pa being that of Nightingale!

Classical music is about 'being', rather than 'doing'. It's a long drawn process of gradual transformation. Even for the listener there is no instant gratification in this form.

A raga is the basic melodic pattern, simple or complex, consisting of several notes, in a fixed ascending and descending order. The progression of notes has a definite structure exhibiting a specific balance, harmony and proportion of the notes thus used. Some notes are more prominent in a raga while other notes support. This combination of the notes along with their order and structure has a purpose and intention of creating a certain kind of consciousness, sentiment of the raga. And this sentiment is designed to facilitate the musician's alignment with specific moments of nature. So, some ragas are sung in the morning, some in the evening and some at night. There are also some ragas that capture the essence of different season like Basant for Spring, Malhar for monsoon. Selection of the right raga to tune into the moment makes the experience magical! It is said that these ragas were designed so as to help people deal with the impact of the daily and seasonal cycles on

the body and mind. The *shastras* on Ayurveda, the ancient treatises on Indian medical science, capture this aspect!

One of the most known vocal styles called 'khyal', an urdu word for imagination, clearly illustrates the unique aspect of Indian classical music; rigid as a raga may be in the framework of ascending and descending notes, the artist has complete freedom to explore and imagine the form within its broad framework. There is no fixed composition that the artist has to follow. He can create his own composition with these notes, in the allowed order! A clear example of how form loses its relevance once you capture the essence. The initial need of form, the composition in this case, to express the essence gradually vanishes and the artist becomes free to explore the path in his own unique way. And this is truly a wonderful aspect of this art form. Disciplined yet free!



The artist immerses himself into each raga with a lot of love, respect and discipline. Each 'khyal' can last between one to three hours and always begins by introducing the basic melodic structure, followed by faster paced improvisations. There are legends

about artists who explored a single raga for the whole day without repeating a single phrase/idea. The artist does not perform to please the audience. His goal is to reach the essence of the raga with his full being, and sharing that higher experience with the audience.

The initial need of form, the composition in this case, to express the essence gradually vanishes and the artist becomes free to explore the path in his own unique way. And this is truly a wonderful aspect of this art form. Disciplined yet free!

Another significant aspect of Indian classical music is Taal, cyclical rhythmic patterns that serve as the foundation for each composition. Even during the free explorations in styles like '*khyal*', there is a cycle of say 10,12 or 16 beats and the artist has to come back to the first beat called '*sum*' again and again. This aspect brings discipline even in free explorations. Each return to the first beat makes his path of exploration clearer to the listener who starts swaying to that cycle, reaching the first beat, '*sum*' with exhilaration as they grasp and connect to the journey better.

So imagine yourself in an Indian classical music concert of morning ragas. The artist starts raga 'Bhairavi', a raga meant to evoke the sentiment of peace, love and devotion. The artist starts the slow '*khyal*' rendition of Bhairavi. After a while the tabla player, the percussion accompaniment, joins in. You close your eyes and begin to align to the sentiment of the raga. The softer notes tug at your heart. The artist explores the raga, often repeating



Images Courtesy: By Jasleen Kaur | Flickr | CC BY-SA 4.0

the same structure, inviting you to grasp the depth of the notes. After about an hour into the rendition of the raga, after the artist has explored the raga in many ways, he moves towards a higher octave, again beginning with sa. This transition feels like a home coming, as if the artist has reached his destination - that end for which the whole journey began. Tears may start rolling down your cheeks. You are in that early morning mood when the first rays of sun are just emerging from the horizon. Life seemingly awakens! As if remembering that it has a purpose to fulfill! And something inside you also awakens! Something inside you has connected with something higher, and you can't describe it. You have experienced that eternal beauty that exists, and whose expression you were just able to connect with. This has happened to me again and again, many times. And perhaps that's the reason I am here at New Acropolis, actively searching for my purpose, trying to fulfill it. ★★★

SPIRITUALITY AND CONTEMPORARY MAINSTREAM CINEMA

BY SUKESH MOTWANI

"Who were you that I lived with, walked with? The brother, the friend? Strife and love, darkness and light...are they workings of one mind, features of the same face? Oh my soul. Let me be in you now. Look out through my eyes. Look out at the things you made. All things shining."

"Maybe all men got one big soul where everybody's a part of it. All faces are the same man, one big self. Everyone looking for salvation by himself. Each like a coal drawn from the fire."
- *The Thin Red Line* (1998)

This is a humble attempt by a cinegoer, and a philosopher, to chronicle examples of how spirituality and popular cinema can merge beautifully. Story telling in the form of myths, folk tales, theatre, and even dance, has always been a means to impart values across generations. But in the last century, Cinema has captured our imagination; images, coupled with sound and music, used by filmmakers to investigate Life. The genre can truly embody archetypes of beauty and truth. It can remind us of the eternal nature of the Soul. And it can encourage us to manifest the magic of our potential as dreamers, lovers, and architects of a new reality; one in

which we truly find peace within our hearts and minds. Hence, it can serve audiences, far beyond entertainment and gratification of the senses for puerile joy.



Jake Sully and his Avatar

Spiritual cinema invites you to examine dogma...to draw your own conclusions rather than accept the experience of another. Above all, these films make you feel better about being a human being but don't shy away from confronting the darker elements of humanity or the cosmos. They deal with both the darkness and light. These films are life-affirming and hold human beings as sacred rather than expendable, and encourage the audience to ponder

existence more deeply than day to day routine. One hopes for a viewer demographic that is shifting its 'cinema viewing palate' from mindless to meaningful cinema; fine, inspiring and consciousness elevating. This particular time in cinema is ripe, as viewers crave for a deeper meaning in their films.

Humanity craves inspiring stories depicting the harrowing journey of life and the character traits necessary to triumph over hardship and attain the happiness, freedom and peaceful co-existence with one another.

Can cinema elevate our consciousness? Can cinema teach us to be kinder and loving? Popular mainstream cinema from different parts of the world in the last three decades has made the grade on this intention. What do films like *Star Wars*, *Shawshank Redemption*, *Forrest Gump*, *Avatar*, *Memento*, *Interstellar*, *Ground Hog Day*, *Eat Pray Love*, *The Pursuit of Happyness*, *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, *Amelie*, and *The Matrix* Trilogy have in common? Yes, they are extremely popular and huge money-spinners and they have big stars. But think back to when you first walked out of the cinema hall after watching these movies? Did it inspire a sense of hopeful introspection about life? These films were heart-opening and soul stirring gems; they nudged us, provoked us and inspired us to 'living absolutely and fully'...these films tell us great stories that ask the big questions about life, and the purpose of existence: Who are We? Where do we come from? Where are we going? What really is our potential?

Furthermore, all great cinema with spiritual messages remind the viewer of the beauty of the

human soul. Only by this recognition, are we driven to change ego serving behaviour - not by threats, guilt trips or slick persuasion but by the personal realization of the beauty within each one of us; a connection to something greater; a purpose in life far more satisfying than chasing money, lust or fame. The unfolding human drama on this planet provides ample fodder for countless cultural stories which shape new generations. Whether they are mythological tales, legends, fairy tales or simply modern-day heroism plucked from any town or village across the globe, humanity craves inspiring stories depicting the harrowing journey of life and the character traits necessary to triumph over hardship and attain the happiness, freedom and peaceful co-existence with one another.



One major reason for the emergence of such cinema is that we stand at a crossroad, both in society and in the movie industry. We live in dark times and life can feel disheartening; terrorism, civil wars, ideological and religious tension, refugees struggling for their place under the sun, famine, climate change, crime, natural disasters, etc. are hogging world headlines. It's easy for the human

mind to adopt a despondent attitude when bombarded by disastrous images. And yet, humanity can be inspired to emulate heroic deeds, and to show courage or uncommon compassion. In fact, perhaps we naturally yearn for it; some find it in their faith or in spiritual teachers, and some in travel. Yet others resort to recreational highs through usage of drugs, or thrill-seeking.

Gratification of our temporary selves, our physical bodies, is just a petty exercise, because we are all eternal beings integral to an all-encompassing Nature.

The extremely successful film by master James Cameron whose blockbuster *Avatar* was a fascinating ode to spiritual oneness, states that 'One of the film's philosophical underpinnings is that the Na'vi [race] represent that sort of aspirational part of ourselves that wants to be better, that wants to respect nature, while the humans in the film represent the more venal versions of ourselves, stuck in the banality of evil that comes with corporate decisions that are made out of remove of the consequences'. The film elucidates beautifully that all gratification of our temporary selves, our physical bodies, is just a petty exercise, because we are all eternal beings integral to an all-encompassing Nature. Destroying the ecosystem of a planet therefore, is akin to destroying humanity. *Avatar* grossed \$3 billion at the box office worldwide!

The cult blockbuster *Forrest Gump* made 3/4 of a billion dollars, *Pursuit of Happyness* made \$300 million. The spiritual masterpiece *Life of Pi* by auteur Ang Lee collected \$609 million.

Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* - one of the biggest box office hits of 2014 - suggests a 3000-year old Vedic notion of a universal super-consciousness that transcends time and space, within which all human life is connected. The film's astronaut hero Matthew McConaughey declares that the mysterious all-knowing "they", who created a wormhole near Saturn, are in fact "us". He saves mankind by travelling through this wormhole, thereby dissolving his sense of material reality. This echoes a central notion of the Upanishads, among India's oldest philosophical texts, that hold that the individual human mind is merely a reflection of the cosmic 'mental'. The multidimensional tesseraact - the infinite reflective prism that he finds himself in as he comes to this realisation, and in which he views life from every perspective - is the film's expression of Indra's net, a metaphor from the *Atharva Veda*, also referenced in early Buddhism. The metaphor is used to illustrate the concept of *shunyata* (emptiness), Dependent Origination, and interpenetration in Buddhist philosophy. It depicts the universe as an eternal web of existence spun by Indra, the king of Gods, each of its intersections adorned with an infinitely sided jewel, every one continually reflecting the others. Christopher Nolan's other breakthrough hit, *Memento* had its primary protagonist - as an amnesiac whose unreliable consciousness is the faulty lens through which we see the story of a murder, told both in chronological and reverse order. This notion of distrusting individual reality and looking beyond it for truth was extended in Nolan's cult hit *Inception* too, where the protagonist leads a team of 'psychonauts' on a heist deep within the recesses of a billionaire's mind - a spiralling adventure of dreams within dreams! The core inspiration being the most basic metaphysical idea from the *Vedas* of *maya* - 'Life is nothing but a dream, a projection of our mind'. The deeper invitation of *Inception* is to slip beneath our cognitive certainties, not back into pre-rational realms or sensory chaos, but into ever-surprising depths of who, and what, we truly



are. Beautifully through its narrative, it pushes us to deconstruct the 'I' within the dream. As one sufficiently penetrates the self-presentation of the apparent dreamer, a startlingly significant discovery is made: the dreamer is actually just another part of the dream, as mechanically constructed as the other elements of the dream. Decentralising our egoistic sense of self allows our true nature to more clearly emerge and the same is true of our dreams - decentralize the "I" who is starring in your dream, and a deeper sense of our true individuality emerges, one that is capable of recognizing itself in and (eventually as) every part of the dream.

But the true trendsetter movie when it comes to merging spirituality into mythical narrative is *Star Wars*. It was this film with its cosmic scale and theme of a transcendental force that confers superhuman powers on those who can align with it. This woke the entire movie-watching world to Indian esotericism more. Its creator, George Lucas was influenced by mythologist Joseph Campbell, whose work *A Hero with a Thousand Faces* traced the narrative arc common to all mythic heroes that Luke Skywalker would embark upon. Joseph Campbell's favorite mantra, "Follow your bliss" is derived from the *Upanishads*, *Sat-Chit-Ananda*. He claimed that he may not know the true nature of his being, but he knew where his true rapture lay, and that brought him his con-

sciousness and his being. Inspiration from this mantra became the paradigm for Skywalker's own realisation of the Force, the sense of peace, purpose and power gained once he allowed himself to accept and unify with it. As his mastery of the force neared its peak, Skywalker comes perilously close to taking Vader's evil path. With this, *Star Wars* established the principle of superheroes having to overcome an inner darkness while battling an external enemy, to find their evolution of consciousness in the process. Nolan's trilogy of *Batman* movies - in which a tortured protagonist struggles as much to avoid becoming his nemesis, as to defeat the external one, emphasizing the essential inward journey whilst facing the demons externally.

Apart from these mammoth blockbusters, another notable heartwarming film that deeply inspired and catalysed a debate on spirituality was the Harold Ramis directed *Groundhog Day* (1993). The protagonist Phil a repugnantly self-centred TV weatherman, finds himself trapped in a rerun of his most unfavorable day of the year. Over and over again, he wakes up at 6 am to the same radio sounds, to the same characters in a small town celebrating Groundhog Day, every day! Since there is no tomorrow and no consequences, Phil amuses himself with overeating, robbing an armored car, and seducing a local woman. He refines his line in

order to win the affections of Rita but she breaks free from him each time. Even his various suicide attempts come to nothing. The universe is presenting Phil with the same day over and over again, until he masters it. His challenge is to grow less ego-centric and learn to interact more positively with those around him, to be of service to the world. The day he completely evolves to become his kindest and wisest, he moves onto the next day. What's ultimately at play is a much deeper, incredibly profound spiritual message: that the universe continues to teach us lessons until we learn them, from one lifetime to the other, from one day to the next. In Phil, we see the evolution of an enlightened seeker. As he learns something new about himself each day, he uses it the next to help the world around him.

Amelie discovers and returns a tin of childhood treasures to a man, and then savours the tearful moment of his reunion with the past. Rejuvenated by the acts of kindness, Amelie vows to do more good works. Students of ethics behaviour have identified a phenomenon called the 'Helper's High' - a feeling of well-being and buoyancy experienced by those who are kind to others. Amelie experiences this bliss. It's not enough, though, when she wants to express her amorous feelings for Nino, her crush. She is helped eventually by Dufayel, a painter in her building, to connect with her soul mate.

Decentralising our egoistic sense of self allows our true nature to more clearly emerge and the same is true of our dreams - decentralize the "I" who is starring in your dream, and a deeper sense of our true individuality emerges.

What soul cannot fall deeply in love with Amelie's unfaltering and insanely sublime acts of kindness as she struggles with her own inner demons? The biggest French language blockbuster ever, *Amelie* (2001) had posters proclaiming, "She'll change your life!" An unforgettable ode to the kindest girl on Earth! This visual delight of a film, presents an unforgettable portrait of a woman who demonstrates a remarkable talent for the spiritual practice of kindness. To start with, Amelie Poulain is like many of us; she comes from a rather dysfunctional family and is introvert, shy and unsure how to connect with love. But in a magical moment,



At the other end, around the same time, the great Ang Lee masterpiece *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) presented a unique take on the traditional Chinese Wuxia martial arts narrative. International audiences all over were awestruck by the beauty, pain, passions and the dragons hidden inside Jen, the younger female protagonist as she struggles to pay the price of the freedom she wishes for. The young lovers in the film Jen (Jiao Long, 'Delicate Dragon') and Lo (Xiao Hu, 'Little Tiger') are stubborn and self-absorbed, but show great potential. Hence the tiger crouches and the dragon

is hidden. Ang Lee describes the phrase "crouching tiger, hidden dragon" as a common Chinese idiom which reminds us never to underestimate the mysteries, the potent characteristics that lie beneath the surface of society. Jen and Lo impulsively rebel against such society's attempts to restrict their desires while the older protagonist couple in the film - Li Mu Bai and Yu Shun Lien - are exemplary warriors who fail to embrace their love for one another due to blind adherence to ritual propriety. Tao Te Ching Verse 33 states, "To conquer others is Power. To conquer oneself is Strength". So the film essentially is Jen's struggle to conquer herself through a process of authentic self-cultivation that balances the traditions, moral principles, and social obligations of Confucian humanism combined with the spontaneity of Daoist naturalism. Jen rejects society by becoming a warrior, a criminal, and rejects the elder couple's attempts to mentor her. But she finds that this extreme type of freedom comes at a hefty price; the loss of the important relationships in life. So the film's beautiful ethical message: A good person must respect moral principles, propriety, filial piety, and integrity, but not at the expense of autonomy and creativity. It is only by balancing these values that we can conquer the self, and it is only by conquering the self that we can flourish.



There's a yearning for meaning and hope in the world, for stories that challenge us to be our best;

to lift up our hearts to the skies, and to encourage us to live fully to the potential of the people we were born to be, and to evolve with every challenge rather than succumb. For the last 100 years, modern society has placed its faith in science as the final arbiter of disputes. "Can you prove it?" has come to mean, "Can you take it into a laboratory and scientifically demonstrate it?" Before the Renaissance, the pendulum had been stuck in exactly the opposite direction - the Religious Institution - be it the church or the religious figurehead was the arbiter of what was Truth. Perhaps, part of the purpose of spiritual popular cinema is that it take this pendulum to settle somewhere near the middle; cinema that illuminates a path informed by Science but enriched by Spirituality!

The universe continues to teach us lessons until we learn them, from one lifetime to the other, from one day to the next.

Paying a tribute to the divine and truest undying essence within all of us, a befitting end to the piece would be the following lines from the film *Samsara* - an acclaimed spiritual love story. Apo (the mentor-Lama) writes in his last letter to Tashi, the protagonist: "I realize now that my task is not over, and so I will be returning to *samsara*. I know that we shall meet again. Perhaps when we do, you will be able to tell me what is more important: satisfying one thousand desires or conquering just one." ★★★

Bibliography

1. Montoya, Miguel. Illuminate Film Festival Blog <<http://illuminate-filmfestival.com/blog/have-we-entered-a-new-age-of-cinema/>>
2. Dhaliwal, Nirpal. How movies embraced Hinduism (without you even knowing)? The Guardian. (25/12/2014) <<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2014/dec/25/movies-embraced-hinduism>>
3. Masters, Robert Augustus PhD. Inception Review. <<http://robertmasters.com/writings/a-review-of-inception/>>
4. Simon, Stephen. Hendricks, Gay. Spiritual Cinema. Hay House, Inc. USA (2005).
5. Arp, Robert. Et al. The Philosophy of Ang Lee. The University Press of Kentucky. USA (2013).

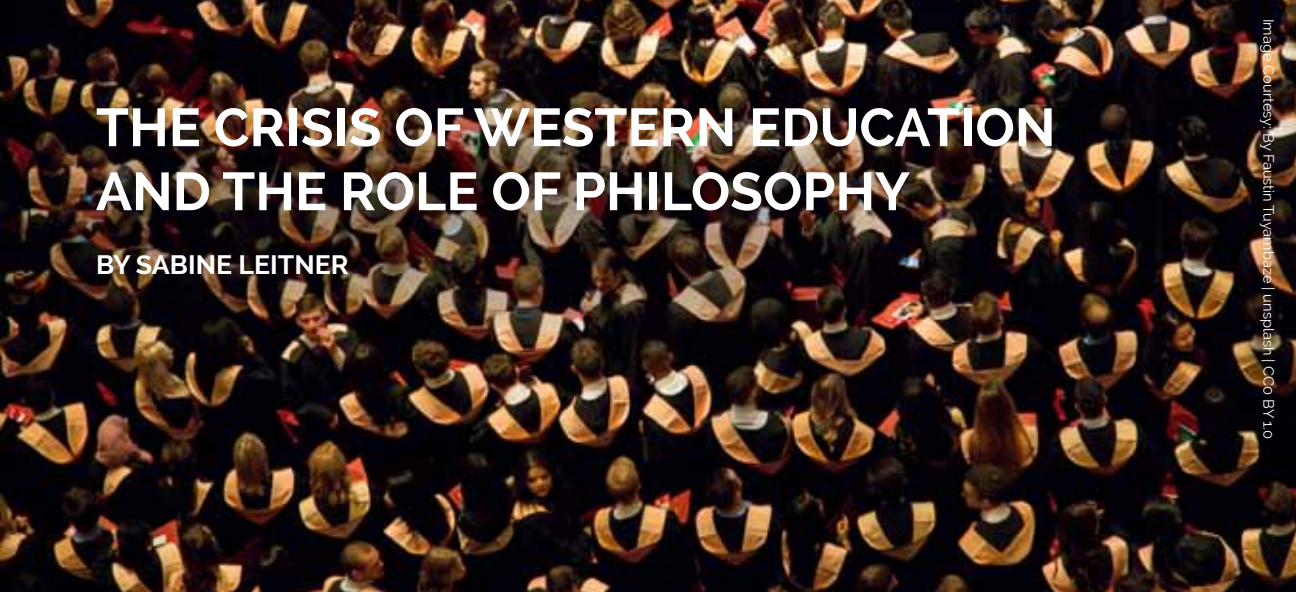


Image Courtesy: By Faustijn Tjebkempze | Unsplash | CC0 BY 1.0

THE CRISIS OF WESTERN EDUCATION AND THE ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY

BY SABINE LEITNER

Introduction

In the developed world, the standards of literacy, numeracy, general knowledge and behaviour are falling. Millions of young people have also become disaffected from school and, despite the fact that previous generations have fought hard to make what was once a privilege of the rich accessible to all, do not see much point in formal education. In the U.K. for example, the figures of truancy have been going up for years and the problem has become so bad that the government is paying the most disaffected students in order to keep them in school and away from the streets.

Governments are under intense public pressure to be seen to be tackling these problems and the last 10 years have seen more changes to the educational system in Europe than any other decade. But none of these remedial plans has so far reversed the trend and teachers are becoming tired of constantly having to apply new government directives that increase their workload but fail to produce the expected improvements.

The root of the problem is not a shortage of resources; government spending on education is in most cases consistently going up and modern schools display an astonishing array of high-tech equipment such

as computers, broadband, interactive whiteboards etc., designed to help learning and to give everyone access to a vast pool of information. There is also no shortage of educational theories, studies, statistics, and the progress in science has brought a better understanding of the development of the human brain. So why is it that, despite the best ever material means and contrary to our belief in linear and continuous progress, we have reached this state?

The problem is also not only limited to state-run education, but equally extends to parents who are increasingly confused as to how to bring up their children. They are torn between liberal and authoritarian theories, afraid of causing lasting traumas or 'imposing' their views on their offspring, powerless against the external influences of TV and Internet and more exhausted and short of time due to demanding jobs than any other generation before. Afraid of actively doing harm, they have resorted to a passive attitude of as little interference as possible in the 'natural' growing up of their children, and there is an indisputable link between this attitude and the sharp increase in juvenile crime and misbehaviour.

It is not that previous generations necessarily had better parenting skills, but what they had was a

common set of values and a general consensus as to how to bring up children. The underlying cause of today's crisis is the lack of a clear and coherent view of education and the widespread disagreement on almost every educational issue. This disagreement goes far beyond the healthy competition of ideas that is necessary to create a positive dynamic for continuous improvement. It reflects a much deeper lack of unity and coherence. It reflects the crisis of identity, purpose and meaning of modern man. We no longer know who we are, where we come from or where we are going. The crisis of Western education is therefore a reflection of the crisis of Western civilization.

The link between education and culture

The Encyclopedia Britannica defines education as "the transmission of the values and accumulated knowledge of a society". This process is equivalent to the anthropological term 'enculturation', and of all living creatures man is the only one who really has culture. Animals are generally not known for possessing culture and being able to pass on abilities to future generations other than in a genetic way. But man has the ability to transmit immaterial concepts in a non-genetic way. Thus we can pass on knowledge, values and ideas that not only help us to survive but also enable us to master our environment with increasing sophistication.

The English cultural historian Christopher Dawson (1889 - 1970) wrote already in 1961 an almost prophetically named book called 'The Crisis of Western Education'. In it he says: "Culture, as its name denotes, is an artificial product. It is like a city that has been built up laboriously by the work of successive generations, not a jungle which has grown up spontaneously by the blind pressure of natural forces. It is the essence of culture that is communicated and acquired, and although it is inherited by one generation from another, it is a social not a biological inheritance... Hence it is clear that culture is inseparable from education, since education in the widest sense of the word is what the

anthropologists term 'enculturation', i.e. the process by which culture is handed on by the society and acquired by the individual... And the most important of all the processes by which culture is transmitted - the acquisition of speech - takes place before formal education begins."

Culture is impossible without education and education without culture. How could we teach language without referring to our own language? How could we teach music without having recourse to the great works of music of our past? How could we teach science without knowing the great discoveries and achievements of our ancestors?

Some people think that culture is an imposition of a system of questionable beliefs on innocent children. It is true that every child is born without culture and that the process of enculturation will define to a great extent their way of thinking, their values, their behaviour and their beliefs. However, without enculturation man would remain in his primitive state and never develop reading and writing, art, science, music, etc. or a profound understanding and appreciation of the laws of the universe.



Image Courtesy/ By Jeff Peterson | Flickr | CC BY 2.0

Culture is not an end but a means

It is important to understand that from a higher point of view, culture is not an end in itself. Ultimately, the purpose of enculturation is not merely to transmit and perpetuate a particular culture. The purpose of culture is to accelerate human evolution.

Through enculturation we learn in a few years of our lives what it took humanity to learn in thousands of years. It is only through culture that human beings can unfold their humanness. It is often said that the purpose of education is to 'draw out' (Latin: educere) the inner potential. Without culture and education we could not develop this potential. Cavemen had the same potential for reading and writing, science and art as their modern descendants. But the lack of an adequate environment generally prevented them from developing these skills. An external impulse is always necessary in order to develop our inner potential. Like a seed that has the potential of growing into a tree, but cannot do so without the right environment and the external stimulus of water and light, so human beings need the right environment (culture) and external impulses (education) to develop their potential. We do not develop speech without an external model of speech to copy from, we cannot develop love without experiencing love and we would not even walk upright as we are designed to do if we grew up among animals.

Education is more than the sum of its parts

We have to accept that to educate will always be a subjective process. To a certain extent it unavoidably means to transmit to others our own point of view, our own way of thinking, our own values and our own beliefs. Since no individual and no civilization is perfect it also means to pass on our own limitations, our own defective ways of thinking, our own prejudices and our own wrong assumptions. The more unsure we become about our own values and the more we question our own role in history, the more insecure we become about transmitting our beliefs to our children. After all, we do not want to perpetuate defective norms and patterns.

However, although it is true that human beings will not only be immensely enriched but also limited by their 'inherited worldview', we need to understand another phenomenon: the human potential to go beyond inner and outer limitations, to adapt to

new circumstances and to create new and better forms of civilization. If human beings did not have this ability, there would never have been any progress. The rich tapestry of human history is full of examples that we are not simply satisfied with what we have received from our parents. On the contrary, we have the need to conquer new dimensions, discover new paradigms and continuously improve our circumstances.

We no longer know who we are, where we come from or where we are going. The crisis of Western education is therefore a reflection of the crisis of Western civilization.

We want to evolve; we are not simply robots that are fed with specific information. We are alive and want to grow. And thus, the most important matter is not so much what we teach and transmit. What matters far more is what we awaken in each individual. Cultural elements are not digital data, they are living elements with the power to awaken the dormant life-forces in the souls of human beings. Education does not mean to brainwash and programme children to continue along the lines of their parents but to awaken their own unique inner potential. Education is more than the sum of its parts because its effect will always be greater than its cause.

Understanding our Crisis

Every teacher knows that in order to give a good lesson he has to be clear about what he has to teach, what the purpose of the lesson is, what the outcome should be, what the best means are to reach these aims and what abilities and potential his students have. A lack of clarity about the objectives, a poor understanding of the subject and a half-hearted delivery would certainly lead to unsatisfactory

results. The same applies to education in general. In order to provide a good education we need to be clear about the purpose of education, we need to have a profound understanding of history and culture, and a clear vision of the future. We also need to understand on a very deep level the nature of the human being and what qualities he needs to develop in order to cope with the challenges of the future.

The root of our modern crisis is that we cannot see these issues clearly any more and that we are no longer convinced of the truthfulness and superiority of the values that were for centuries at the heart of our own civilization. After all, in its name we committed horrendous atrocities, ranging from inquisition to genocide, imperialist conquest to the exploitation of other peoples, the pollution of the planet to the squandering of the resources of future generations.

These nagging doubts about the rightfulness of our culturally inherited beliefs are in direct relation to the crisis in education. What shall we pass on to our children? Which values are safe, tried and tested to serve as the foundation for a better and more just world tomorrow?

There are times in history when the inherited beliefs and values are not questioned, when cultural elements are passed on with the full ring of conviction that these ideas are true and in some way superior to those of other cultures. These times constitute the golden ages of every civilization, in which a certain worldview has produced a peak in every field of human activity.

However, civilizations follow the same pattern as living beings, they rise and fall, they are born and they die. The breakup of a civilization is usually followed by a period of transition, a Dark Age or Middle Ages. This in turn is followed by a Renaissance, i.e. a rediscovery of cultural elements of former civilizations that provide the foundation

of a new civilization and lead to the 're-birth' (renaissance) of the spirit and the life force that will give shape to a new culture and civilization. After the fall of the Roman Empire, for example, Europe entered the so-called Dark Ages (Early Middle Ages). The rediscovery of many writings of Greek, Roman and Egyptian origin in the period we later called the Renaissance completely changed the medieval worldview and introduced the Modern Age with its unprecedented scientific discoveries and technological progress.

The rich tapestry of human history is full of examples that we are not simply satisfied with what we have received from our parents. On the contrary, we have the need to conquer new dimensions, discover new paradigms and continuously improve our circumstances.

There is a growing number of modern authors and academics (see bibliography) who believe that Western civilization is in decline and that we are about to enter a new Dark Age. The symptoms of decline of any organism are usually a general weakening, disintegration, the loss of flexibility and adaptability, and at the same time a weakened 'immune system' against foreign elements.

Our modern world displays many of these symptoms. By way of example: there is rampant and debilitating doubt about almost everything. Doubt regarding God (does He exist?), doubt regarding man (aren't we all selfish beasts that cannot be trusted?), doubt regarding governments and politicians (they are all corrupt) and doubt regarding our abilities (we are so weak and the problems are so great). Even the last resorts of safe convictions, science and technology,

have started to be shaken. Has science not failed to answer our innermost questions, has not the selfish application of technology caused many of our current problems, and has all the unprecedented progress of the last century not failed to make us happier and to make the world a better place?

Consequences

Since everything is in doubt and we are acutely aware that everything is relative, we are not sure what to teach to our children. The once commonly accepted purpose of 'character building' came to be seen as 'indoctrination'; therefore we react by confining education to intellectual training only. Political correctness forbids us to make value-judgments, therefore we hesitate to give any moral guidance. Since the only commonly accepted criterion left is the utilitarian value of every subject, formal education has started to concentrate more and more on vocational training and to see the main purpose of education as equipping people with the necessary skills for the job market. As a consequence, modern education has become increasingly sterile and devoid of those 'living elements' that are needed to stimulate the other aspects of human nature.

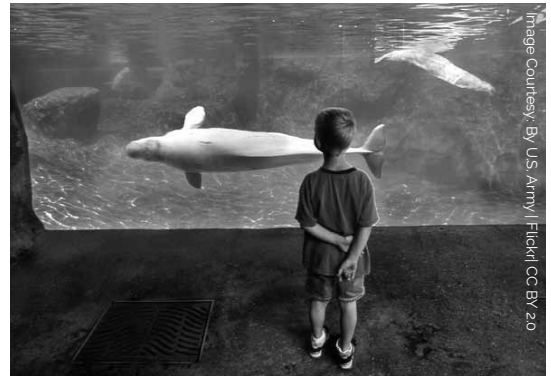
The negative results of this development are becoming more and more apparent. An education that mainly imparts information fails to meet the needs of the human personality and is a major cause of young people becoming disaffected with school. The utilitarian orientation of the syllabus causes children to become alienated from their own culture. The majority of young people in the West know so little about Christian symbolism, Greek mythology, classical music or the major works of their own literature (all subjects considered to be of little utilitarian value) that they have no access to the great works of art of their own culture. They are cut off from their roots because they lack the means to appreciate and interpret the cultural elements they have inherited. The emphasis on scientific and technical training does not develop in individuals the

inner resources to meet the challenges of life. The absence of clear moral guidance leaves students vulnerable to other forces that have the potential to influence their character and contributes to a deterioration of standards of behaviour.

The Role of Philosophy

Every crisis is a turning point and leads to a period of re-assessment. This re-assessment is essentially of a philosophical nature. It makes us question the most fundamental aspects of our existence. At its heart is the question of the nature of the human being and the purpose and meaning of our lives.

The modern way of thinking tends to look for quick solutions on the level of the problem, in other words to treat symptoms rather than causes. This ignores the fact that very often problems have deeper underlying causes. We are mostly unaware of how much almost every human issue is related to deeper philosophical questions.



In order to gain a clearer idea about the purpose, means and outcome of education, we inevitably need to answer questions about human nature, life and the values that underpin our civilization. Otherwise we will be forever lost in the currents of opinions, theories and treacherous statistics without any real point of reference. We will also be unable to bring about real change and improvement and only replace one quick-fix strategy with the next, groping in the dark as to where we are actually going. Without a clear vision for the future born

out of a clear understanding of the problems, governments will only be able to respond passively to the strongest currents of opinion instead of showing leadership.

It is understandable that a utilitarian society used to seeing everything from an economic point of view will naturally be unable to see the value of philosophy. It has reduced philosophy to the role of providing arguments and training the intellect to think critically. It has forgotten that philosophy is originally the 'love of wisdom' and that its purpose is not to question everything but to reach a clearer understanding.

Philosophy is an inherent human characteristic. It is the need to ask 'why', based on the intuition that there are answers to be found. This desire to understand has been the driving force of every human activity and given rise to all the achievements and discoveries of mankind. Philosophy is much more than intellectual activity alone, it is an active attitude towards life, the attempt to unite thinking and acting, and to express and live actively what we know.

Philosophy may not lead to the quick, verifiable and measurable products we are so accustomed to expect. But it can produce a profound transformation and therein lies its value.

The future will depend on the development of the human being.

Today we attach a lot of importance to economic and technological development. We think that with continued progress in science and increasing knowledge about our material world we will be able to solve all our problems. But most of our problems are not due to technological failures or a lack of knowledge; most of our problems are due to our human imperfections and what we need more than anything else is the development of the human factor – the unique potential that lies within each individual.

It is very important that we understand that highly trained people with excellent literacy and numeracy skills and a vast general knowledge are not necessarily better human beings. Nor are they necessarily happier and more fulfilled than others and there is no guarantee that they will use their greater power and influence in society wisely. After all, Hitler's engineers at Auschwitz were intelligent and highly trained individuals.

Rather than more knowledge, more money and more technology, we need more wisdom. Wisdom is not the same as knowledge; it lies in the use we make of knowledge. Modern man is in the position of causing more serious harm and destruction than any other previous generation. The more powerful our means become, the more potentially disastrous the combination of a developed intellect and selfish greed will be. We need human beings who will use their knowledge and their skills not only for their own benefit but also for the benefit of others who are less fortunate. This is no longer a question of the survival of a particular culture; this is about the survival of humanity.

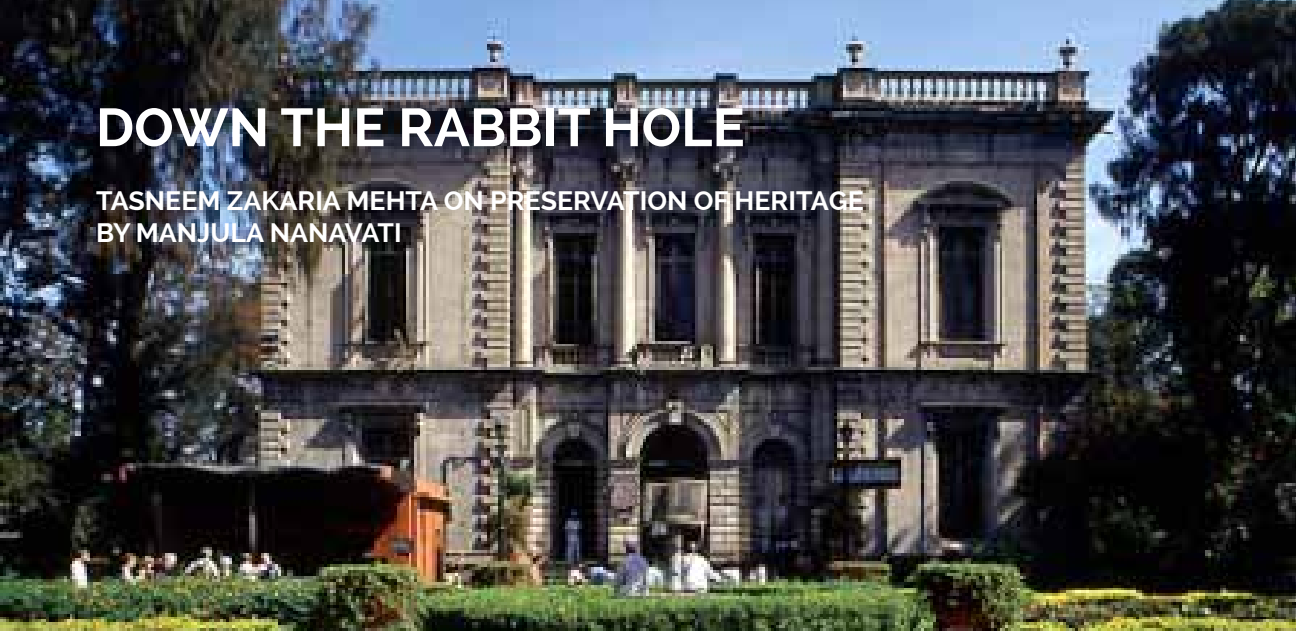
It becomes clear that we need an education that goes beyond the imparting of knowledge and the development of intellectual capacity. We need an education that can awaken and develop our other human faculties like love, compassion, imagination, intuition, will power, perseverance and any others that are capable of helping us to overcome our lower nature.

How can we awaken this potential? Through what has always been regarded as the most powerful means of education: clear ideas and living example.

"Education is... a journey in the infinite, a participation in the movement of the universe, a living in timelessness. Its purpose is not to enhance particular abilities; rather, it helps us to give meaning to our lives, to interpret the past, to be fearless and open toward the future." - Hermann Hesse ★★★

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

TASNEEM ZAKARIA MEHTA ON PRESERVATION OF HERITAGE
BY MANJULA NANAVATI



In five years Tasneem Zakaria Mehta revitalized a decayed and dying museum, transforming it into a vital and accessible cultural focal point for Mumbai. As vice-chairman of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and Honorary Director of the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad (BDL) Museum, Tasneem spearheaded the exhaustive research and the painstakingly detailed restoration of the museum's architecture, its interiors and its exhibits. In recognition of her work, she earned the 2005 Unesco Heritage Asia Pacific award of Excellence for Conservation. At her home surrounded by art, sculptures and books that are her life-blood, Tasneem spoke to The Acropolis about the importance of Art and the need to preserve our cultural heritage.

The Acropolis (TA): You are so passionate about disseminating art history. What is it that this knowledge or appreciation can do for our youth?

Tasneem: I think art opens up a window within. It sensitizes us to other people, to individual differences. It allows us to enlarge our minds so that we are able to see other perspectives.

For example, contemporary art can deal with difficult issues like politics and gender. It is a means of conversation about these things without becoming violent and aggressive, to develop tolerance; to agree to disagree. Art can be appreciated as a catalyst to conversation.

Art opens up a window within. It sensitizes us to other people, to individual differences. It allows us to enlarge our minds so that we are able to see other perspectives.

TA: Why is it so essential to preserve the past?

Tasneem: The past is incredibly important. In order to know who we are today, we must understand where we are coming from. Without this knowledge we cannot think of the way forward. A nation with an opaque past will find it hard to define itself. The heritage of a people, its national legacy, defines the national identity; it is an integral part of who we are as a nation.

Museums are platforms where you investigate different cultures: how they represented themselves, the importance that they gave to the different aspects of life. To me a museum is a time machine that takes you backwards and forwards in time. It is a memory bank for our descendants and a record of what we want remembered and sometimes of what we must not forget. It takes careful research and scrupulous honesty to present the facts.



TA: You're saying that museums could show history with more texture than history books.

Tasneem: A well written history book could do an adequate job, but I think what museums do is make history much more accessible. Museums are interactive and visual and so have an immediacy that a textual medium does not. You have to engage with text, decode it and understand it. You may be hampered by your facility with the language, or how educated you are. And there's no comparison between reading about something and looking at the craftsmanship and beauty of the object itself. Each object opens up a whole world. It tells a story... who made it, for what purpose and to where did it travel before it got here? That for me is a very interesting investigation. It's like a treasure hunt. You find a clue here, you decode something else there and then you connect the dots and put the picture together, using your knowledge and experience to bring something valuable to others.

TA: What role does INTACH play in nation building?

Tasneem: The Indian National Trust for Art & Culture Heritage was started by Mrs. Gandhi and Pupul Jayakar because we needed an organization that would preserve and protect our substantial national heritage which was constantly under threat.

The past is incredibly important. In order to know who we are today, we must understand where we are coming from. Without this knowledge we cannot think of the way forward.

Studying Indian heritage is especially interesting because it comprises so many different kinds of heritage. It comprises the intangible aspects such as oral history, customs, rituals and practices. But cooking is also part of the legacy, as is Ayurveda, and the way one might build a hut. Material heritage combines all craft traditions. Cultural heritage includes all the performance traditions, literature encompasses language traditions and environment heritage concerns itself with how the geography and environment impact cultural context.



And of course there is our considerable Architectural Heritage. Many institutions such as the army and the navy had many beautiful heritage buildings such as railways stations, post offices, court houses and entire cantonment towns that were slowly being destroyed because laws and regulations were not strict enough at the time. Accordingly, maharajas, collectors, commissioners, cabinet secretaries, along with artists and art aficionados were all part of the advisory board to the government.

At a national level we protect our natural resources, document and keep account of thousands of unprotected historic buildings, revive dying arts and crafts, run a conservation lab, a heritage academy, many education and community programs, and we maintain libraries and archives. We have aggressively begun to fight to protect precincts such as Mumbai's mill spaces, to repurpose them for public use. We must protect the industrial legacy of our city. In the process of our work we found hundreds of huge, old, hand-made solid cast-iron machines, so stunningly beautiful that they were works of art. And they were being given away to scrap!

Everything...even a stone, anything that is part of nature, is an expression of God; even the aberrations.

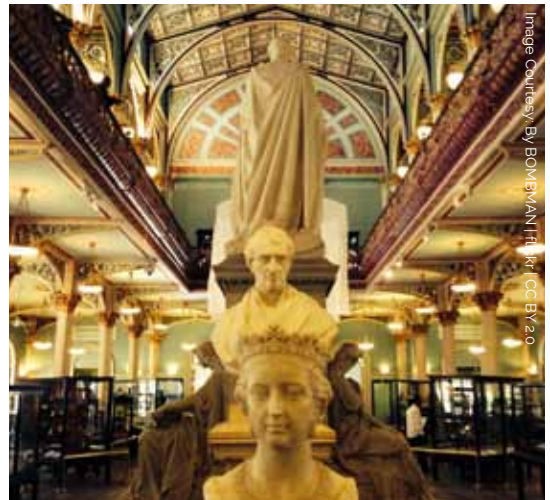
TA: Is there a conundrum here...machines as art?

Tasneem: Not at all. Art is all encompassing. When I see old typewriters, old printing machines, all the technology of a time when it was all handmade, I recognize an amazing quality. Yes they may be machines but they were conceptualized by people, made by people, wrought by people...they are truly works of art that we must preserve.

TA: My overwhelming reaction when I come out of the BDL museum is awe, a sense of reverence

for what a people achieved and how they thought.

Tasneem: You are right. It is like being in a temple. In fact museums as institutions in the very beginning were conceived of as secular temples. Many national museums are even modeled after classical Greek temples. There is a deliberate intention of creating a sense of identity and affiliation with the nation. They were a way for the state to communicate with its people, and to showcase its power.



TA: Every culture throws up its own unique art. There are cultures like in Tibet, which are austere and abstemious. Rome is an example of the complete opposite with opulent temples and massive monuments that reflected in the grandiloquence of Renaissance Art. What would you say about Indian Art?

Tasneem: Indian art, like all art when it first developed, was about expressing the majesty of God and interpreting the universe. Different cultures portrayed this differently. Even though India had a rich tradition of art long before the British Raj, Indian artists were not considered refined enough to commission. Indian miniature art, for example, was considered infantile because it was flat and two-dimensional. But it had its own logic,

completely different from the grand Renaissance style for example. It was intimate, about intricate, barely visible detail. There were painterly codes, but because they weren't understood, they were rejected as childish.

So for me personally, bringing the Indian artist back to centre stage was a political statement in a kind of riposte to that historical position.



TA: Is there a philosophical context that underpins your work.

Tasneem: Everything...even a stone, anything that is part of nature, is an expression of God; even the aberrations. We are not here to judge, and even though we may not understand them, we know that aberrations exist in nature, in the plant as well as animal kingdoms, and we should accept it all as part of divine expression. It is unfortunate that this very evolved, very inclusive, understanding has eroded today.

So for me, a museum is a forum to showcase inclusiveness and engender the understanding of human differences on a democratic stage. At the BLD you see poor and rich alike mingling, and there are very few places in Mumbai where this still happens; not in restaurants, hotels, malls, multiplexes, nowhere else but in a place like ours.

TA: How would you explain to a generation that has been extorted to live in the present moment, the relevance of our ancient cultural legacy, and the need to pass it on?

Tasneem: When you marvel at the incredible talent that created Elephanta, Ajanta and Ellora, you begin to understand how evolved they were. And yes they were living in a different age but time works in cycles. If you read Gupta history or Roman history, with urbanization, they too faced similar issues of sewage, roads, and traffic. Of course not as we face them today, in a completely different context. But nevertheless, the same kind of dialogue was needed.

When you engage with culture it allows you to investigate moral positions. When you appreciate the choices other cultures, or other generations have made, you begin to think about your own choices.

When you understand how humankind has developed it also helps you understand ethical issues. When you engage with culture it allows you to investigate moral positions. When you appreciate the choices other cultures, or other generations have made, you begin to think about your own choices.

I believe the human legacy is relevant not for philosophical or practical reasons alone, but because art in its broadest form invites us to go down the rabbit hole and discover a wonderland. And it is in the diversity of our conscious and our subconscious reactions that we begin to realize that even as we respond, we are uncovering things about ourselves. ★★★

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

www.acropolis.org.in



By MilitaryHealth | Flickr | CC BY 2.0

KALIYUGA – THE GIFT OF OPPORTUNITY!

Lecture @ **Khar**

Saturday, 7th January, 2017

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Kaliyuga, known as the Dark Age, seems to spell doom and disaster. But perhaps this is our very chance to shine, because even the dimmest light illuminates and dispels darkness. Join us as we explore the characteristics of our times and how we can take responsibility and seize the unsuspecting opportunities that lie before us.



EMPOWERING REAL CHANGE

Panel Discussion @ **Indian Express Gallery**

Thursday, 12th January 2017

7:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"Everyone thinks of changing the world but no one thinks of changing themselves" – Leo Tolstoy

Educationist and environmentalist **Sonam Wangchuk**, philosopher **Yaron Barzilay** and philanthropist **Zarina Screwvala** come together to discuss the tools necessary for us to be the change we wish to see in the world. Join us as the esteemed panelists explore the true role of education in society, the need to revive man's connection with nature, and how the only path to sustainable change is for each of us to take responsibility for our collective future.



By Viva | Flickr | CC BY-ND 2.0

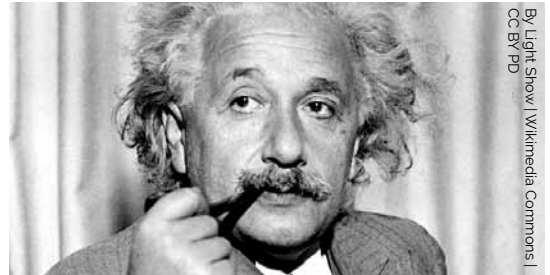
ART OF HUMOR

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**

Saturday, 21st January, 2017

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"A day without laughter is a day wasted." – Charlie Chaplin. The words 'spirituel' in French, and 'spiritoso' in Italian, have two meanings: spiritual, and witty or humorous. When we begin to understand some of the deeper Truths about Life, we come to realize that the big deal we make of issues driven by our personalities, deserve light hearted laughter, rather than stress or anger!



By Light Show | Wikimedia Commons | CC BY PD

EINSTEIN: A WORLD OF WONDER

Lecture @ **Khar**

Saturday, 21st January, 2017

6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead," said Einstein. What made it possible for Einstein to have so many breakthroughs in one lifetime? Join us for a special evening as we explore the driving force between Einstein's lifelong search for truth and his immense respect for the mysteries of life.

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

www.acropolis.org.in



By Padmavina Paranjape | Flickr | CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

A MUSICAL DIALOGUE

Performance & Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**
Sunday, 22nd January 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Learning Classical music requires devotion and practice, and is a dialogue between master and disciple. Every performance is a conversation between the performer and the listener. But the ongoing dialogue that pervades all is the conversation within, the eternal quest of the soul. Hindustani vocalist Jayanthi Nayak explores this dialogue in music.

LIMITED SEATS. PRE-REGISTRATION: +91 99301 98253



By Oriantini Ovi | Flickr | CC BY-NC-ND 2.0

ACCEPTING OUR DIFFERENCES. ACCEPTING OURSELVES.

Lecture @ **Khar**
Saturday, 4th February 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

In a world filled with increasingly diverse opinions, beliefs and cultures, how can we live in harmony, celebrating our differences? Join us as we explore the strength of unity that lies in coming together without the need to be the same.



By Richard Matthews | Flickr | CC BY 2.0

DEEPEN YOUR CONCENTRATION, IMPROVE YOUR LIFE!

Lecture @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**
Saturday, 4th February 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Are you ruled by 30-second commercials and stories told in 140 characters? Do you find half-baked ideas leave you jumping from one half-done project to another? Join us in a practical workshop to discover how we can learn to guide our own concentration and bring more focus and depth in our lives.



By Jacinta Iluch Valero | Flickr | CC BY-SA 2.0

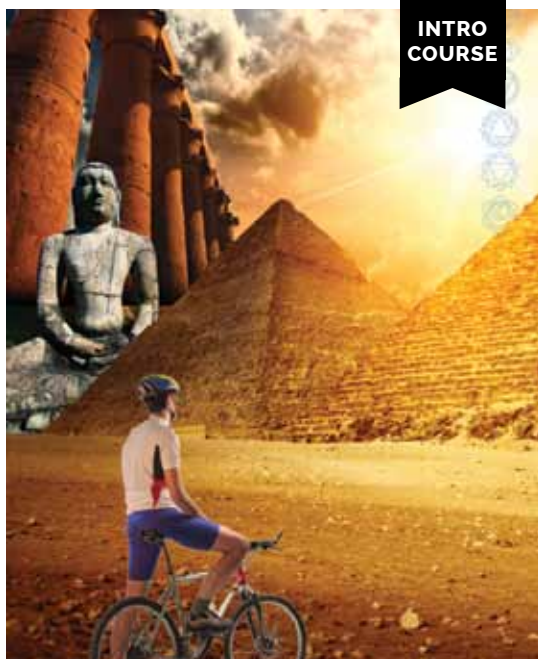
PHILOSOPHY OF ECOLOGY

Worshop @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**
Sunday, 5th February 2017
 10:00AM (6hrs), FREE ADMISSION

The gravity of the ecological crisis of our times is perhaps as much a crisis of self-identity for Man. By investigating ancient cultures this seminar will explore the necessary shift in perspective with which we think of ourselves and our world. Consider a role that obligates us as an integral part of Nature, rather than simply fulfilling the need of self-preservation.

COLABA (MAIN CENTER)
A-0 Ground Fl, Connaught Mansion,
Colaba (Opp. Colaba Post Office),
Mumbai
T: +91 22 2216 3712

KHAR
Ashray, 2nd Floor, 19th Rd,
Between 13th Road and Khar-Danda Road,
Khar (W), Mumbai
T: +91 98330 33239



INTRO
COURSE



By Masruri/Masruri/Malayli/Wikimedia Commons

AN EVENING WITH RUMI

Guided Discussion @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**
Saturday, 18th February 2017
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

"Love is the astrolabe of God's mysteries," said Rumi. What about the force of love brings us closer to unity? How can we learn to manifest love in our lives? Join us as we voyage through Rumi's poetry to gain insight into our potential.

LIVING PHILOSOPHY: DISCOVER, AWAKEN, TRANSFORM

PRE-REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Course @ **Colaba (Main Centre)**, 7:30PM (2hrs)
FREE INTRO: **Monday, 13th February 2017**
Course Starts: **Monday, 20th February 2017**

Course @ **Khar**, 7:30PM (2hrs)
FREE INTRO: **Tuesday, 14th February 2017**
Course Starts: **Tuesday, 21st February 2017**

This course establishes the foundation for every aspiring Philosopher by presenting a comparative study of Classical Philosophies, and helping students to develop a sensitivity towards the fundamental Laws that govern Nature and Humanity. In an attempt to preserve this universal heritage, the course serves as an introduction to ancient cultures and investigates the origins of humanity – a time of wonder and mysticism when the invisible world was respected. Course Duration – 16 Sessions. FEES APPLY.



By dhrmk | Flickr | CC BY 2.0

COLOUR PSYCHOLOGY

Lecture @ **Khar**
Saturday, 18th February 2017
6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Colours naturally affect human behaviour, and evoke instinctive feelings in the human psyche. Although colour preferences are subjective, Colour Psychology investigates the ability of each colour to trigger collective emotional, mental and physical responses from Man. Let's discover how different civilizations have experimented with colour.

SCHEDULE OF PUBLIC EVENTS

www.acropolis.org.in



HUMAN BEING OR HUMAN DOING?

Lecture @ Colaba (Main Centre)
Saturday, 11th March 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

We find it all too easy to get caught up in our day-to-day tasks and routines, that we often forget to live! But what does it mean to live as a human being? Join us as we explore how we can dare to live and bring more vibrancy and meaning into our lives.



By Mitchell Joyce | Flickr | CC BY-NC 2.0

MINDFUL LIVING

Lecture @ Colaba (Main Centre)
Saturday, 18th March 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Does our mind dictate our thoughts or do we allow our life to be dictated by our mind? Join us for a workshop to explore the importance of attention, working with habits and multi tasking in a fast world.



By Hartwig HKD | Flickr | CC BY-ND 2.0

JOURNEY BEYOND DEATH

Lecture @ Khar
Saturday, 11th March 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Is death the end of life? Or might it be the beginning of a more meaningful one? Join us as we explore the mysteries of life and death and how they might help us bring more meaning to our lives today.



AN EVENING WITH TAGORE

Guided Discussion @ Khar
Saturday, 18th March 2017
 6:00PM (2hrs), FREE ADMISSION

Rabindranath Tagore - the man with a thousand words who captured the essence of existence with such simplicity. Join us for a journey with Tagore as we explore his works and rethink our perceptions on challenges, love, war and happiness.

HANDMADE ART REPRODUCTIONS

Symbols are said to be the language of nature, through which ancient traditions unraveled the meaning and purpose of Life. The deeper the investigation, the more symbols reveal their essence.

Members of New Acropolis aspire to revive the value of symbols in many ways, including the creation of handmade reproductions available for sale. For a glimpse of our work, visit us at **Kala Ghoda Festival 2017**.

Inquiries: 9833564706 | krutika.mehta@acropolis.org



BEAUTIFYING OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

Be part of the silent transformation that is enlivening Colaba one wall at a time. Come Paint our city Clean! Join us for our next project!

18 Feb: 2pm to 6pm

19 Feb: 9am to 1pm

Wall across from Colaba Fire Station.

Register: 9920018204 | ubai.husein@acropolis.org



LIVING PHILOSOPHY

Discover. Awaken. Transform.

A 32-hour Introductory Philosophy Course (16 Sessions)



| | Free Into | Course Starts |
|------------------------|-----------|---------------|
| COLABA: Monday, 7:30pm | 13th Feb | 20th Feb |
| KHAR: Tuesday, 7:30pm | 14th Feb | 21st Feb |

Living an Ethical Life, Practicing Wisdom
Ancient Indian understanding of Man
Discovering Human Purpose
Hearing the Voice of the Silence (Tibet)
Harmony (Confucius), Justice (Egypt)
Nurturing the Soul through Right Education
Evolution of Consciousness
The Way of Happiness (Aristotle)
Types of Governance
Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato
Extracting Truth: Myth vs History
Opportunities of our Times