

CONFERENCE/SEMINAR REPORT

Published in Vihangama Vol. III No. 3 October - December 1995

Rta : Cosmic Order & Chaos

Monday, 18th December, 1995 was a special day in the IGNCA's history, as it marked the end of the beginning of the cycle of interdisciplinary seminars and exhibitions initiated by the Centre in 1986. This year's seminar on Rta, Cosmic Order & Chaos, being the fifth in the series of seminars on a universal theme was inaugurated by reciting invocations in Sanskrit, Chinese, Arabic, Greek, Tibetan and in Pali, followed by a religious song and sounding of the Manipuri Jahang. At 10.00 am the sprawling lawns of the IGNCA, were engulfed by the resonances of the sacred chants from different cultures of the world. Swami Jitatmananda of the Ramakrishan Mission, Rajkot, lit an Assamese sarani and carried it to the conference hall. The symbolic gesture marked the inauguration of the seminar.

The seminar provided a very rich and lively inter-disciplinary forum for profound intellectual discussion on the subject. Thirty one internationally acclaimed and reputed scholars, including four scientists from abroad and sixteen observers participated in this seminar.

The first session, chaired, by Dr. Vatsyayan on, 'Perspectives', on Rta : Order and Chaos, initiated a brief encounter between scientists and philosophers. Prof. John M. Malville from the University of Colorado, Dr. G.P. Talwar, Professor of Eminence, National Institute of Immunology, Professor Ravi Ravindra, Prof. of Comparative Religion, University of Halifax and Swami Jitatmananda gave their viewpoints.

Thereafter for five days (18-22 Dec., 95), the sessions explored the multidimensional aspects of the nature and articulations of Rta in different cultures. The first session explored the view of philosophy and the newly emergent sciences, namely, physics and micro-biology which have reversed the thread of reductionist analysis of systems and view the 'real' world as a self-contained matrix of order and disorder. Prof. G.P. Talwar's paper made the categorical comment that order is as central to Life Processes as bio-rhythms are to the process of procreation. Dr. Varun Sahani from IUCCA, Pune, gave a summary of the inherent order and rhythms in patterns of galaxies. Alongside these, several speculative philosophers brought us back to the philosophical speculations on the nature of Rta, as expounded in different traditions: Prof. V.N. Mishra introduced the meanings of Rta in the Veda, Swami Jitatmananda elaborated on the Modern Relevance of the twin concepts of Rta and Yajuna. What order meant to the ancient Science of Islamic Cultural Area was discussed by Prof. A. Rehman, and the elaboration of the Rigvedic Rta, in the Avesta and Iranian Society were also explained by Prof. Mukhopadhyay.

The second session on the 19th December, 1995 explored the search for order in the social, moral and the political spheres. Prof. Arindam Chakrabarti outlined the systems of hidden and manifest categories of order in the context of Vedic notion of food, its eater, and its social implications. Prof. Aditya Malik, from Heidelberg University gave a penetrating analysis on the construction of order in religious narratives of Devanarayana, in Rajasthan. Dr. Ramjee Singh commented on the Gandhian Vision of Rta; and the perennial theme of 'Dharma in the Mahabharata', was discussed at length by Shri Chaturvedi Badrinath. Rta in the 'Anthropology of Experience' formed the subject of Prof. S.C. Malik's paper; Prof. Tan Chung gave a comprehensive summary on the notions of social and political order' in Chinese society.

The third session on Art and Aesthetics on the 21st 22nd of December 1996, opened with a discussion on the composition and semantics of order in various art forms. Prof. Malville explored the natural 'Geometries of self-organising Systems' as it manifests in the tradition of pilgrimage. Ms. Devangana Desai discussed the iconic scheme of order in Khajuraho and Dr. Lokesh Chandra in the Stupa architecture of Borabudur. From architecture we moved to the relationship of Rta and Music. Prof. Sathyanarayana spoke on Rta in Sangeet; Dr. K.D. Tripathi gave a textual analysis on the notion of order

in the ancient texts on aesthetics, Dr. Chandra Rajan's beautiful descriptions on Kalidasa's Rtu Samhara, and Shri Keshav Malik's, experiences of order at different levels of consciousness brought us to appreciate the sense of order inherent in intuitive perception of reality.

Each of these sessions was followed by a stimulating discussion.

Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan, in her valedictory address, outlined the universal thread of ideas running through all our previous seminars and persuaded us to rethink our reductionist standpoint of looking at disciplines separately and stressed the importance of inter-disciplinary studies, however, diverse these disciplines may appear, she said, the viewpoints offered were complementary and not contradictory to one another.

Several cultural programmes were organised alongwith the seminar. A vocal recital of classical music on Ritu Sangeet by Ms. Shubha Mudgal, celebrated the various moods and emotions linked to the seasons. A slide-show by Mr. Ajit Khembhavi from IUUCA, Pune presented the natural cosmic forms of the galaxies as viewed by the astronomer-artist using modern cameras and computer technology. The seminar ended with a Poetry Reading session on the theme of seasons. Eminent poets read out their poems and enriched our appreciation of harmony and order in creative expression.

Madhu Khanna