

Aalaap-Riyaaz

An experiment in learning without teaching

Riyaaz: The course

The pedagogical impetus for this summer course has arisen from the search to find modes of learning other than the ones offered by educational institutions and formal structures of knowledge (sometimes known as ‘disciplines’).

Modes of learning – individual and collective – which can enable oneself and one another to learn in non-competitive, non-judgmental ways and which open up new horizons. Learning that allows a theme, any theme to be explored by all – together – without fear or inhibition, lets our inquiry penetrate to levels which reveal the ways in which one recognizes and makes sense of ourselves and the world, thereby opening up new possibilities for living and acting in it.

In Hindustani classical music, *aalaap* refers to the preparatory prelude to a *Khayal* or a *Dhrupad* composition. It sets out in germinal essence the theme of the *raga* that follows. *Riyaaz* is the name given to the rigorous daily practice required of a dedicated student.

Our summer course takes its cue from this vocabulary. A blog called *Aalaap* will be soon set up. Its aim will be to collectively prepare for the *riyaaz* to follow in June. If all goes well, we will do this *riyaaz* at least once every year for three weeks.

Riyaaz will be spread across three summer weeks of reflection and practice at Sambhaavnaa, near Palampur in the Dhauladhar Himalayas of Himachal. The first week will be dedicated to *Ecologies of the Self*, the second to *Ecologies of Communities*, and the third to *Ecologies of the Species*. Needless to add, questions will cut and cross-cut across these three themes, in a sometimes frustrating way! At the back of our minds will be the precept that the condition of the natural environment around humanity is a more or less accurate reflection of our psychological, socio-economic and political lives. Ecological crisis is but the outer image of the many other crises in the [FINANCIAL](#), economic, political, technological, cultural and spiritual realms which rapidly besiege us now. The crisis, let us openly admit now, is in our consciousness itself. So we have to face it existentially and intellectually with resolute faith. Rather than the politics of blame (which is the staple of human societies) our goal will be to explore the uninhibited ethics of responsible living.

Our aim in *Riyaaz* will be individual and collective exploration – inner as much as outer. We will see if it is possible to evolve an ‘ecosophy’, a philosophy which will exclude nothing from its purview, addressing the myriad complex challenges facing us as individuals, communities and species, examining them in a living, dynamic, and interrelated way. We will suspend the apartheid which normally segregates the disciplines in academic institutions. No discipline is redundant to our needs. Nor is any sacrosanct. Only an underlying set of concerns, anchored in pivotal values (such as balance), is sacred.

The course will actively seek to draw upon the lived experience and reflections of the participants (about 20-25 in number) – drawn from a range of locations (gender, class, caste, region, language, ideology) – to work towards a transformative dialogue.

We will seek to understand our individual lives in relation to the macro-realities so overwhelming today.

What this course is

Exploratory, Investigative, Reflective, Contemplative, Participatory, Experimental, Disturbing, Ecological, Sustaining, Rigorous, Non-judgmental, Non-competitive, Sobering, Adventurous, Autobiographical, Ethical but, as such, amoral.

What this course is not

Pedantic, Preaching, Blaming, Easy, Predictable, Comforting, Competitive, Judgmental, Thrilling, Unbiased, Final.

A word on pedagogy

The primary mode of learning in *Riyaaz* will be conversation and dialogue which will aim to disclose hidden realities and meanings. Lectures will be kept to a minimum, may be an hour or two a day at most. Visiting speakers and interlocutors will be present in the course for a few days every week. We will also explore other modes of learning, such as memory-work, games involving listening and recall exercises, watching and reflecting on films, doing physical work and sharing stories in an informal way. A few hours of physical work and activity will be part of the daily routine.

Logistics

The course will be conducted at *Sambhavna* Institute near Palampur in Himachal Pradesh. One can reach there either by train via Chakki Bank near Pathankot, by an overnight bus from Delhi, or by air from Delhi. We will begin early on Monday, June 10, 2013 and finish the course on Saturday, June 29, 2013. Everyone will stay at *Sambhavna* for the entire duration, with the possibility of taking short trips in the neighbourhood. The cost per participant is Rs.150 per day, in addition to travel. (Only boarding/lodging is being charged.) We expect the total number of participants to be between 20 and 25, ranging in age from roughly 20 to 50.