There's a Room at the Top

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Come November, and the tenure of the present director of New Delhi's prestigious National School of Drama will expire. Who will fill the coveted post, asks **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

WHO will be the next director of the National School of Drama when the tenure of the present director Kirti Jain expires in November? This is a matter of much conjecture and discussion among the theatre buffs.

Unlike popular belief the NSD is not purely a government department, but an autonomous, registered society funded by the government. The appointment of its director falls under the jurisdiction of the society, but, due to financial dependence, gradually the society has got into the habit of referring everything to the government.

The most important decision that the society has to take, in concurrence with the government, is the one relating to the appointment of a new director every few years. The list of ex-directors of the NSD reads like a who's who of theatre giants; B. V. Karanth, Rattan Thaiyyam, B. M. Shah, Mohan Maharishi and, of course, the inimitable Ebrahim Alkazi, who has had the longest tenure of 13 years. Most often directors stayed barely for two years and departed post haste, either due to student politics or their own professional preoccupation.

Surprisingly, Kirti Jain has had the second longest tenure of seven years. This, of course, happened due to a change of rules. The teaching faculty at the NSD voted for a minimum tenure of five years, instead of two years, because they felt that two years are not enough to implement any programme. Thus, when Kirti was renominated after two years she had a long stretch of seven years to implement her ideas about what the students at school should do. While the NSD has had a chequered history of strikes and student unrest, there haven't been any signs of student restlessness during her tenure.

Obviously, having spent many years in the faculty, Jain's approach appears to be: 'Hard work and no politics makes students a disciplined lot'. Certainly the approach is working because the students are doing what they should be doing, ie, learning.

Although Jain has not been as prolific as her predecessors, she appears to have a better record of administration and because she does not have a theatre group of her own, she is spending more time in school and responding to the student's problems. For example, during Rattan Thaiyyam's tenure there was a major student strike — their grouse: Thaiyyam was spending less time in school.

Usually the society has been selecting a single director and putting up his or her name for approval. However, this time, a search committee comprising of Rajendra Nath, Vijay Tendulkar, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Sai Paranjape was appointed to create a panel of three people. While opinion has been divided between continuity and change, the committee also approved the names of Satish Alekar and Satyadev Dube. It was learnt from reliable sources that by a majority of five to two Kirti's name was kept on top of the panel. If Kirti Jain is re-appointed then her tenure will be nearly equal to Alkazi's.

There are a number of problems that the new director (whoever he or she is) will have to address. The faculty members have for long been demanding better scales of pay. The P. N. Haksar Committee suggested that their scales should be better than the UGC scales, but so far their scales are not even equal to that of UGC.

The NSD repertory committee needs to be strengthened as it has been over a decade since Manohar Singh, their chief, resigned. Since then the company continues to have an acting chief. Although, we all know that the repertory has to deal with actors, but always adding the prefix "acting" to the post of the chief is a little too much, isn't it? But then the all mighty bureaucrats who deal with the NSD have their own qualms. The Haksar Committee also suggested making the repertory chief's job a contractual one.

There have been other suggestions about upgrading this position to that of a full-fledged professor in place of the present assistant professor, so that the tough task is given its due weightage.

The NSD has contributed some of the best stage, cinema and television talent in the country. While teaching standards and the quality of student productions have gone up in the last few years, the impoverished school has an uphill task in consolidating these achievements. The incumbent to the top post thus has a challenging task to fulfil.



BETTER ADMINISTRATOR: *Kirti Jain, director of the National School of Drama*