Ram Gopal Bajaj, the founder of Bharangam to be felicitated on the Inaugural

National School of Drama's 20th Bharat Rang Mahotsav, the International Theatre Festival of India, is Back with a Bang; Gears Up to Dazzle India

The International theatre festival of India, Bharat Rang Mahotsav, BHARANGAM, will kick off in New Delhi on 1st February, 2019 and culminate on 21st February, 2019 and will cover 6 cities in India with 111 shows and various allied events.

A key feature of the inaugural ceremony of the festival is the felicitation of its founder *Ram Gopal Bajaj*, who was the Director of National School of Drama. It was his visualisation of the idea of bringing best of theatre from India and later all over the world, to help the students of NSD to see the possibilities of theatre and also an experience for the audience to absorb and be enriched.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM), the annual theatre festival is

organized by the National School of Drama (NSD), was established two decades ago, by Ramgopal Bajaj to stimulate the growth and development of theatre across India. Originally a national festival showcasing the work of the most creative theatre workers in India, BRM has evolved to international scope, hosting theatre groups from around the world, and is now the largest theatre festival of Asia. Till date, BRM was celebrated in New Delhi and has travelled to several cities in India, presenting an overwhelming 1787 plays, and riveted thousands of audiences who basked in the glory of heart-winning stories and superior performances.

The 20th edition of BRM will include various national and international performances, and associated events such as, 'Director's Meet', 'Living Legends', and 'Master Class'. This year, the festival pays a tribute to Mahatma Gandhi, the 'Father of the Nation', on his 150th birth anniversary and will stage plays depicting the Gandhian philosophy and the dilemmas Bapu had as a person. The 20th Bharat Rang Mahotsav also hold parallel festival in other cities including Dibrugarh (Assam), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh), Ranchi (Jharkhand), Mysore (Karnataka), and Rajkot (Gujarat).

The 21-day long festival will stage plays in Hindi, English, and other regional and international languages. International productions from Bangladesh, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, the Czech Republic, Italy, Nepal, Romania, and Singapore will also enthrall the audience during the festival.

Apart from plays, the festival will also host folk performances and other traditional performing art forms, street plays by around 50 dramatic societies of colleges in Delhi, and national and international seminars discussing the theatre scenario in India and abroad.BRM is organized by National School of Drama (NSD), an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India and one of the

foremost theatre training institutions in the world.

20th Bharat Rang Mahotsav (BRM), the largest theatre festival in Asia, organized by the National School of Drama (NSD), is all set to bring its bouquet of plays, interactive sessions, and other cultural events to cheer up the winter afternoons of theatre enthusiasts in the city.

The inaugural ceremony will be held at Kamani auditorium on 1st February, 2019 at 6:00 PM followed by the performance of 'Karanth ke Rang', directed by Amod Bhatt. The 50-minute long performance is a medley of songs composed by late Shri B V Karanth, a stalwart of Kannada and Hindi theatres. Shri Karanth was a prolific composer of songs and scripts for theatre and directed and acted in many productions.

The festival, which enters its 20th edition this year, is celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi – 4 of the plays to be staged on the life, philosophy, and principles of the 'Father of the Nation'. The festival will host 69 Indian and 15 foreign plays across India, selected after screening. Additionally, 9 folk productions, 5 plays by NSD diploma students, 1 production from the Sikkim center of NSD, 3 plays by the NSD Repertory as well as 5 invitee plays by eminent theatre practitioners will captivate the theatregoers across India.

The national capital will host 89 plays: 25 plays in Hindi, 16 in Bengali, 5 in Kannada, 2 in Marathi, 2 in Odia, 2 in Gujarati, 2 in Manipuri, 3 in English, 2 in Assamese, 2 in Malayalam and 1 each in Maithili, Telugu, Nepali, and Sanskrit, in addition to 15 foreign plays, the festival also brings 8 folk performances to theatre aficionados in the city.

The 21-day long festival this year will include plays in Hindi, English, and other regional languages. International productions from countries such as Bangladesh, Poland, Russia, Sri Lanka, the Czech Republic, Italy, Nepal, Romania, and

Singapore as well as non-verbal, folk, and multi-lingual performances will enthrall the audience during the theatrical spectacle.

The performances in New Delhi will be held at Bahumukh and Chahumukh (7:30 PM), Open Lawn (6:00 PM), and Abhimanch (8:30 PM) at the NSD's Bahawalpur House campus as well as nearby Sri Ram Centre (4:00 PM), LTG (5:30 PM), and Kamani (7:00 PM) auditoriums.

Apart from the spellbinding performances and interaction with thespians and eminent personalities from the world of theatre, the festival in Delhi will also have 2 international and 2 national seminars on theatre. The national seminars to be held in New Delhi will attend to the topic 'Is Modern Theatre Inclusive?' and will hold sessions dedicated to 'Notion of State and Representation', 'Unrepresented Form', and 'Non-Governmental Curating and Funding Policy'.

Besides, the NSD campus will be abuzz with street plays, ambience shows, and 'Theatre Bazar', a motley of stalls offering a range of products and culinary delights. The youth forum shows will comprise performances by dramatic societies of nearly 50 colleges in Delhi while ambience performances will bring folk dance and other traditional performing art forms.

In keeping with its concerted efforts to promote theatre among people and take select performances to other parts of the country, the NSD arranges parallel festivals in Dibrugarh (4th to 10th February, 2019), Varanasi (7th to 13th February, 2019), Ranchi (9th to 15th February, 2019), Mysore (11th to 17th February, 2019), and Rajkot (13th to 19th February, 2019).

"The art of theatre is the oldest and the strongest medium that conveys human emotions in a manner that defies temporal boundaries. We are delighted to usher in the Bharat Rang

Mahotsav to its 20th year and have made all efforts to bring a selection of quality plays, choosing the best out of 960 submissions. There are 9 folk performances being presented in Delhi as well as invitee plays and productions in regional languages. We have tried to accommodate as many young theatre enthusiasts as we can, since the institution aim to foster the growth of young talents through the platform of BRM," says **Shri Suresh Sharma, Director In-charge, National School of Drama (NSD).**

"Theatre is a celebrated art form across the world and I am happy that this festival gives us a chance to witness many of the plays which have received critical acclaim globally. BRM aims at bringing together people and hence, we have spread the festival across the country so that theatre reaches more and more people. BRM has been a very successful festival attracting a lot of audience, including first-timers and we hope a similar run this year too," says **Dr. Arjun Deo Charan, Acting Chairman, NSD Society**.

About National School of Drama (NSD)

The National School of Drama is one of the foremost theatre training institution in the world and the only one of its kind in India. It was set up by the Sangeet Natak Akademi as one of its constituent units in 1959. In 1975, it became an independent entity and was registered as an autonomous organization under the Societies Registration Act XXI of 1860, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. It offers 3-years training program in every aspect of theatre with a special focus on the practical implementation of theories. The NSD has two performing wings – the Repertory Company and Theatre-in-Education Company (TiE) that started in 1964 and 1989, respectively.

The Music and the Muse / Prateeksha Sharma

An Identity for Kumar Gandharva


Kumar Gandharva (L) In Full Bloom (R) Younger Day

This paper is an attempt to trace two aspects of creative artists: 'Bildungsroman' (novel of formation) and 'Künstlerroman' (novel of the artist). The subject of the former is the development of the protagonist's mind and character, in the passage from childhood through varied experiences- and often through spiritual crisis-into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world. The latter, the 'artist novel' represents the growth of an artist from childhood into the stage of maturity that signalizes the recognition of the protagonist's artistic destiny and mastery of an artistic craft.

Generations of Indians, for hundreds of years, have grown up singing Kabir, from oral traditions to classical traditions, from rustic village *mandalis* to sounds polished and honed through years of *riyaaz* and *sadhana*. Among the classical sounds one of the most prominent and far reaching voices is

that of Pandit Kumar Gandharva (KG) (1924-1992) a voice both rich in its classical understanding of ragas, a voice imbued with the meaning of the text it attempts to deliver, and a voice capable of creating mystery and a reverence about the depth and colossus of the literature it has set out to explore. This paper tries to trace the sojourn of Shivaputra Komkali to the iconic Kumar Gandharva: the crisis of identity and the development of the artist from the prosaic to the poetic, from the mundane to the spiritual.

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At the outset it may be noted that the present attempt is not an exercise in voice analysis as much as to understand why is it that KG's voice stands out on the firmament of Indian music in its rendition of Kabir, while numerous others sing the poet saint, equally well, if not better? Why is it that generations of people seem touched to their inner core by his singing more than that of any other musician of the tradition (of classical music) or training? What is it, that makes Kumar Gandharva a mystery and an enigma that reaches a peak during his Kabir bhajans?

The above concerns are explored on the basis of observation and logical reasoning. It relies on the observations of some people who had learnt with Kumarji himself, reading about him, working on Kabir in my own musical journey and interacting with a number of people who associated with Kabir's thought and philosophy and KG, people who had heard KG in person, people who learnt his music with his students, critics and admirers, his own students and followers. KG is an enigma that not only haunts but also continues to grow right in front of us. "*Time*", according to Van der Post (1975), "*has a knack of putting the truly great…well ahead of us, rather than in the past darkening so fast behind*." KG today looms larger on the scene of the human spirit than he did in his own lifetime.

Kumarji belongs to the class of artists whose echoes linger on in the aural memories of millions all over India, a formidable legacy for anyone to carry forward and a giant task to comprehend. Much like Kabir, he grew up in a manner never experienced before him; he was a man detached from his times, the institutions of his times and the sensibilities attached to those institutional structures. If Kabir was a weaver who simply and irreverently composed verses that shook the frame of all tradition and authority; KG equally powerfully shook the tradition of music and stepped aside from the main current of being 'certified' by any one *gharana(school of music).* Given his extraordinary ability to sing any and all of them with equal facility- the choice to not affiliate him to any one *gharana* was a great act of rebellion, an act unheard of in his time, a radical breakaway from the prevalent order and injecting a new level of thought into the entire gamut of Hindustani music's exploratory process.

"*Sunta hai guru gyani, gagan mein awaaj ho rahi jhini jhini…*" (meaning, the one anointed by the guru, hears…hears an inaudible, imperceptible cosmic sound) is a very popular bhajan of Kabir sung by KG. This song alone can be an initiation for one into the world of both Kabir and Kumarji and numerous listeners venture unsuspectingly near KG and Kabir, coming with the quest for enquiry aflame in their minds about the nature of everything and perhaps the most significant being WHO AM I? Those questions of philosophy, which have haunted the human mind eternally, assume a new light when put forth by Kabir and when KG spoke in that voice, says Raghava Menon (2001), "The Kabir Bhajans on the other hand are laden with the monochrome of timelessness."

How did KG become what he became is a question that one wishes to examine in this piece- the voice, the identity, the expression, the intensity, the depth and so on. Though Kumarji is a subject worthy of many studies that have been carried out and no doubt will be carried out in future too, I will

restrict this presentation to the psychological aspects alone and the process of 'individuation' within the theoretical framework developed by C.G. Jung.

The Child: A Crisis in Identity

It is very well known about Kumar ji that he was a child prodigy. A prodigy is always a challenge for society to understand, for s/he confuses everyone with his/her prowess and ability. It seems uncanny and is given various connotations depending upon the arena where the prodigy has appeared. In the field of music prodigies are not only found once every few years, their method also remains similar. Society down the ages has largely been based on conformity; and individuality is frowned upon for it is perceived as a threat to the prevailing institutions. In such a situation reports Menon(2001),

Kumar was born with a supernatural memory…He could…reproduce a three-minute record of any of the well-established musicians of the day with a fidelity that made his singing of them seem like musical photographs. Considering the number of years that these musicians had spent in mastering their art, this eerie facility of a seven-year-old lad seemed miraculous…People who had no interest nor understanding of music came in hordes to hear him and look upon him…(p.40)

Literature abounds about KG telling us about his genius and the fact that how while he was just a little boy he had become the cynosure of all eyes, a crowd puller and a musician par excellence. *"But what surprised Kumar …was not his ability to sing but the response he had on those who heard him. For that he was not prepared. All he thought he was doing was…he sang it (a song that he heard) the best way he could"*(Menon, 2001, p. 49).

When a small boy of seven comes under public gaze what could be the possible effect on the developing ego of the

child? What would he have thought about himself and about his admirers? How would he have dealt with all the adulation or to that extent not only him, how do all ‘celebrity’ children handle an invasion into their lives by effusive adults who they do not understand?

From the viewpoint of the child whose developing concept of self is subject to the kind of exposure that KG was receiving at that point in his life and he was being celebrated for his singing, his ‘voice’ was paradoxically was not his own- he was an accurate imitator, an excellent mimic and the world was adulating his ability to mimic; not necessarily his musicianship. Like a small boat that is tossed in the giant sea of careless waves Kumar’s ego had been laid bare for the world to examine, study, wonder about and comment upon. A child was in the ‘limelight’ without knowing why, or assimilating in the true sense the reason for being there. Psychologically, all children who are in the ‘public eye’ undergo this phenomenon of ‘premature exposure’ without having the ego strength to deal with the impact of it and someday face the possibility of a neurosis or hopelessness.

When the ego is sufficiently developed it can handle success and failure, criticism and appreciation with a fair degree of equanimity. But a child imitating an adult, and being adulated for that ability will sooner or later only come to feel confused about his/her own identity*.

*Another famous and celebrated artist currently on the world music scene is Michael Jackson, also considered a child prodigy. Much later as the whole world now witnesses a lot of his childhood pain surfaces in the form of abnormalities which showed up in adult life, to the confusion and surprise of the world. If we extend the analysis about the lack of ego strength in the child, whose concept of self is not well defined it appears to be true in this case too.

The Personality

Author, voice instructor, and singer Carolyn Sloan (1999), reflecting on the process of self-discovery through the voice says,

"*I have learned that singing is about self-examination and observation, though not self-criticism…. Along with courage and ability to question, experiment, and observe, a singer also must have an unfailing persistence and desire to solve what may seem to be unsolvable mysteries…. A singer must become become his or her own ally, searching for clues and solving these mysteries for him or herself. A singer needs to become a detective…. We must balance our need to control with a necessity to let go so our true voices can surface. We do not create the voice. The voice is and creates us. It teaches us that we must be open to being stimulated and to experiencing our lives without inhibition. As a singer, it is imperative to be a spiritual master (p.5).*"

A voice is like an identity. Every human being needs a 'voice'. In effect voice is the expression of the individuality of a person. It is not necessarily a speaking voice alone, it is an expression of the soul of the individual- it can be a 'voice' that expresses itself through speech, through writing, painting, gardening, cooking, cleaning, teaching, farming, or any other vocation. A 'voice' is not limited to the function of the larynx alone. It is a multifaceted, multi-hued, aesthetic expression of the inner life of a person. As many roles a person perform in life or society, at least that many are the visible expressions of his/her individuality or 'voices'.

Voice is the fundamental aspect of a singer. When a singer is appreciated for excellent rendition of another's singing, in a sensitive individual it may produce confusion about who actually is being celebrated- the original voice or the cover-version. In such a state, it becomes urgent and necessary for the child to search himself out, for it is evident that he is

not being celebrated for himself but because he can be somebody else. This search for identity, when it is felt becomes the struggle.

In discussing about primal therapy, Arthur Janov (1970) talks about development from the point of view of a child, "*Struggle is what keeps a child from feeling his hopelessness. It lies in being the performer…Instead of being himself he struggles to become another version of himself. Sooner or later the child comes to believe that this version is the real him…. It is that moment of icy, cosmic loneliness, the bitterest of all epiphanies. It is the time when he begins to discover that he is not loved for what he is and will not be (p. 29)."* [7]

KG was not known to be neurotic as a child or as an adult but one is wont to believe that precocity had its internal roots in a troubled spirit. Raghava Menon (2001) sheds light on this aspect too, *"He merely puzzled over these issues inwardly…merely suffered quietly…. The problem was what to do, (p.64)…"*

So, a search for his own inner expression would have begun long ago in the soul of the child. It would no longer be enough to merely ape another great artist, because the inward restlessness demanded an original release, an outlet- not merely a borrowed identity. Kumar Gandharva had set out on the path of *" 'individuation'- a process referred to by Swiss psychologist C.G.Jung as a search for self; an expression of that biological process by which every living thing becomes what it is destined to become from the beginning" (Gandhi, 2001, p. 20).*

At a later point in his life when he came in touch with Anjani Bai Malpekar, who took him into the realm of the science of sound, or Nada Yoga, did he for the first time have a real glimpse of what he had sought all along? Before that, he was seeking without knowing. The inability to ask anyone or ask the exact questions for want of a facilitating environment

(both then and now) produced suffering. These experiences of pain, the beginning of the individuation is in fact transformative experiences that may be viewed as "… the dark and bitter night of the soul…" shares Raghava Menon (2001, p64). And interestingly, this is the view of transpersonal psychology too.

Experience of change, transformation or transition is in fact a point of crisis in the life of an individual. How the human encounters and deals with the process, assimilates the change and transforms himself and his destiny is the essence of transpersonal experiences. Stanislav Grof and Cristina Grof (1990), the former being among the pioneering figures in the transpersonal psychology movement say, "*One can also encounter experiences of fear, loneliness, insanity, or death during transpersonal sequences originating from collective or universal domains. The transpersonal realms contain both light and dark elements, and both the 'positive' and the 'negative' can inspire fear…However, the fact that fear sometimes arises when an individual moves into the realms of light and beauty is somewhat perplexing*" (p. 48)

When the artist began to question the environment around him it became imperative for him to understand who he was himself, what was the singing that he needed to do and what was the way ahead of him? Kumar needed to find his own face and distinguish it from the numerous faces that were being mirrored within him in his day-to-day quest. His struggle became introverted and was not limited to a search for voice and identity alone; it became a quest for affiliating the soul. Even when he went to study music at the house of his guru Professor Deodhar, he remained aloof about affiliating himself to any gharana; chronicles Menon (2001) "…*while there was a flexibility with respect to Kumar on the characteristics of Gharana, he was inflexible in his vision of what music should be, boundless, beyond frontiers and paradigms* (p. 89)."

Kumar Gandharva was a musician first and he, had already

examined the structures of the gharanas while still a child, so now the need was to find his own voice, his own identity from within the musical tapestry he had seen, studied and examined all his young days. At this point perhaps, his Guru gave him a teaching assignment "*Kumar was designated to teach all those students who did not have too clear a picture of what style they wanted most to follow. In a certain sense this was a wise technique to adopt for Kumar himself was not still quite decided on what contour he himself was to give his art*" (Menon, 2001, p. 89)

As yet, he had not found a way out for himself. He was troubled and occasionally happy. Troubled, because of the restlessness that gnawed at his heartstrings constantly and making him unsure where his precocity and genius were headed after all. The hero who is on the path of inner transformation has to face all his demons and fears when they come face-to-face with him. Few are moments of passing joy for an individual who cannot share the pain of his quest with anyone. But fortunate are those who do not give up in spite of the uncertainty.

Janov (1970) further elaborates on the need for authenticity, "*Because we were unified human beings, the real self will constantly press to surface and make those mental connections. If there were no intrinsic need to be whole, then the real self could be put away for good; it would lie peacefully within us and never make any attempt to intrude into our behaviour. What drives neurosis is the need to be whole again, the need to be our natural selves. The unreal self is the barrier, the enemy which must finally be destroyed (p. 41)*."

The unconscious in us is always pressing to express itself, mostly through dreams and fantasies, sometimes through experiences of illness too. When a young man seeks himself from all the haze that surrounds him, in some voices he finds a resonance of his own inner calling. The search had started

finding results. While discussing about self-realization of the unconscious, Anthony Stevens (1982) notes that, "*everything in the unconscious seeks outward manifestation, and the personality too desires to evolve out of its unconscious conditions to experience itself as a whole…It is not I who create myself, rather I who happen to myself* (p. 140)."

A Break from Tradition

From the child who apes every audible sound in its environment to its nearest degree possible to becoming an artiste par excellence was a singular journey. Often in the musical tradition one is taught that the lyrics or the poetry of the work is subservient to the mood of the raga. That means every 'khayal' or 'bandish' of a raga should sound like the raga from which it is born and not have a distinct identity of its own. Kumarji was among one of the few people who dared to challenge this fixity. For him every lyrical form had its own life and needed to be honored for its own sake, and not alone the sake of the raga. "*This quality is one of the principal characteristics of the Kumar Gandharva Gayaki*," points out Menon (2001), further elaborating, "*Kumar sang out of the Bandish and not out of the Raga. He subordinated the Raga to the Bandish, never letting the Raga take priority over the Bandish. This was a unique turnaround in the culture of the Hindustani classical musical heritage. This was the cause of the passion and intensity with which Kumar invested his performance. His Raga Vistara took on the lineaments of the Bandish on account of which the Raga has come to exist. So he showed the possibilities the Raga in that particular embodiment of the Bandish he had chosen to sing. This was the consequence of a highly developed and delicate literary grasp of the nature of the words of a language and the way they are spoken while being sung (* P. 86-87).

There is one significant point in the biography of KG, which many ascribe as the reason for maturity of his musical thought. That was a six-year long, near fatal illness that he faced, in the course of which he was forbidden from singing. The only voices that he could hear were the folk singers of his neighbouring areas. This prolonged absence from active singing was a return to the inner environs for KG, and that is where he honed his art in a new way "*This is a well-understood practice and is often called Mauna Sadhana, which irrigates and fertilizes the unconscious mind of the Sadhak* (Menon, 2001, p. 84)"

Though Kumar had reached heights in his musicianship early enough, this period of forced withdrawl and a near brush with death, deepened his insights into the world of the 'swara'. Possibly this was also the time when he became more inclined towards the bhakti tradition in poetry.

Illness and Transformation

A life of seeking becomes a life of pain, questions and uncertainty. Since many do not tread this path the seeker is usually left alone to look for answers till the next person can come and point out a little of the way ahead. Illness is usually a time that leaves many a person alone with not much else except their inner reservoirs to fall back on- as it did Kumarji. It was an experience of silence, an experience of using the ear to a new end, an experience of growing from the soil of, Dewas, Malwa, "*Dewas was a singing country…. The folk do not sing in the strict sense. They are telling things to each other and this speech sounds like song…. A folk tune does not have Raga, what it has are the seeds of feeling…. Lying in bed he discovered this simple truth*" (Menon, 2001 P. 93).

In finding out this simple truth maybe Kumar Gandharva found himself out. And now it was a new journey that stared ahead of

him-the internal journey having borne fruition but the world outside much the same. This is not an unknown phenomenon for the Grofs' having experienced an entire gamut of transpersonal experiences share, for example, someone who returns to a familiar situation may find the culture and the individuals within it unreceptive to his or her new capacities.

The reborn hero must enter the long-forgotten atmosphere where men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete. He has to confront society with his ego-shattering, life-redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend. Because of the magnitude of their transformative experiences… they may also face the very real problem that the everyday world around them is often not very receptive to their newfound discoveries" (C. Grof & S. Grof, 1990, p. 214).

After having completed a long journey (though visibly in a short span of time) in classical music, inverting it within himself- moving away from the realm of ragas to the kingdom of the *swara*, becoming fully musically quiet, except for the aural input of the folk singers that went into him, Kumarji brought about a most extraordinary change in his life through a lateral technique of riyaaz- simply through his ear and silent practice. It was as if he fought the tuberculosis by dint of sheer willpower- a triumph of the spirit. In terms of therapy this is termed as psychoneuroimmunology- where the immune system gets an impetus from the mind to fight illness and combat the disease. Music therapy and a lot of holistic practices these days are increasingly orienting themselves towards this multimodal approach.

Poetic Underpinings of Kumar Gandharva's Gayaki

Though bhakti singing in the form of bhajan has been practiced long before KG appeared, he seems to have established a new

method in the tradition- not for him a bhajan where the facial expressions of the singers "…have to show any devotion or faith in the syrupy fashion of our inheritance"…(Menon, 2001, p. 100). Kumar Gandharva brought Kabir (and the *bhajan*) to life simply because of his fusion of the folk and classical forms of music with poetry. Placing the poetry into the rustic countryside ambience it had grown out of, his songs acquired a new root, never before seen in *bhajan* singing. One sometimes wonders what made him choose Kabir's Nirgun *bhakti* as his 'voice' over the sagun bhakti (Not that he limited his repertoire of bhajans to Nirgun bhakti alone) As in the Nirgun tradition, the deity is a formless, divine entity, Kumarji ascribed that same formlessness to the 'swara'. Kabir's poetry is an ocean of spiritual philosophy.

Concluding Comments

Kumar Gandharva brings to life his words with new meanings, because for the first time a singer explores the swara in the same objectivity as the poet who utters the syllables. In other words the soul of the artist becomes the voice of the man. So there is no separation between the two identities. When one man sees within him another completely reflected, automatically the former's poetry becomes the latter's expression. There is a merger. **"***Thus does the Self accord itself recognition through that organ of consciousness-the ego- which it has given rise to. In one place Jung defines ego as a 'relatively constant personificantion of the unconscious itself, or as the Schopenhauerian mirror in which the unconscious becomes aware of its own face*" (Anthony, 1982,P.140)

In triumphing over illness, Kumarji rewrote the script of his life. He used his own music to heal himself out of a near death situation and gave succour to innumerable others after that. The myth of the wounded healer came alive once again for

the world. Thus Kumarji, demonstrated in his own lifetime the power of healing that music offers, opened out new avenues. Possibly without realizing he became one of the most eminent case studies for music therapy in India, rendering both the lyrical content of Kabir to its full glory and his own musical improvisation to carve out a hitherto unknown, unforeseen, uncharted path for all those who dare to follow; in the process literally and figuratively becoming the 'voice' of Kabir for the times we live in.

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Discourses on Music / Prateeksha Sharma

Music- A Path to Wholeness

The author practicing on the *Veena*

Music is the essence of life, spirit and creation. To understand our musical selves is the beginging of our journey to becoming whole from the disjointed, often scattered selves we become as a result of socialisation and accularization. When we turn to music we unknowingly turn to mother nature who coded music into us even while we were being formed from the various elements, and in this turning we connect ourselves to our inner deeper selves- sometimes which does not reveal itself to us in our mechanisitic daily survival rigmarole. Wordsworth, in his autobiographical poem, The Prelude, in a reflective passage of Book 1 says,

Dust as we are,

the immortal spirit grows

Like harmony in music

-William Wordsworth

Though we come from the five elements and return back to them, the spirit creates newer vistas for itself and continues to scale heights that the body alone cannot scale. The spirit grows while the body withers. Such is nature's playground. And the more the spirit grows, greater is the harmony it produces-

within itself and with the world around. Such is music; such is life. Music is a reflection that mirrors every aspect of life, within its infinite folds, shades, hues and contours.

According to Yaksa, who codified the explanations for the word *sangīta*, around 500 B.C. the word *sangita* is explained by its symbolic substitute word *bharata*: *bha* from *bhava*(emotion), *ra* from *raga* (the modal-scalar framework for melody), and *ta* from *tala* (the rhythmic and metric structure). The specific Bharata invoked in the definition of *sangita* is the legendary sage who is said to be the author of the *Natyashastra*, the most important early treatise on music and theatre[i]. This explanation of music clearly portrays how from time immemorial the Indians have known about the inextricable link between emotions, melody and rhythm.

The word '*music*' etymylogically comes from the 'muses'- Greek goddesses who inspired poets, painters, musicians etc. The word traces its history via Old French *musique* and Latin *musica*, to Greek *mousike*, a noun use of *mousikos* 'of the muses', an adjective derived from *mousa* 'muse'- John Ayto[ii] aptly comments :

"the specialisation of the word's meaning began in Greek- first to 'poetry sung to music,'and subsequently to 'music' alone.

According to the Greeks, Apollo was the patron god of music, dance and poetry. He earned the epithet of 'musagetes' –the leader of the muses[iii]. Interestingly Apollo was also the patron god of the healing arts, medicine and archery (Recall the number of hospitals and clinics named after him) Thus, music became synonymous with healing from the dawn of time.

[i] Rowell, Lewis (1992) first Indian edition 1998. *Music and Musical Thought in Early India*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd.

[ii] Ayto, John (1997), *Bloomsbury Dictionary of Word Origins*, Delhi: GOYLSaaB

[iii] *Mythology: myths, legends and fantasies*, (2003) UK: Grange Books

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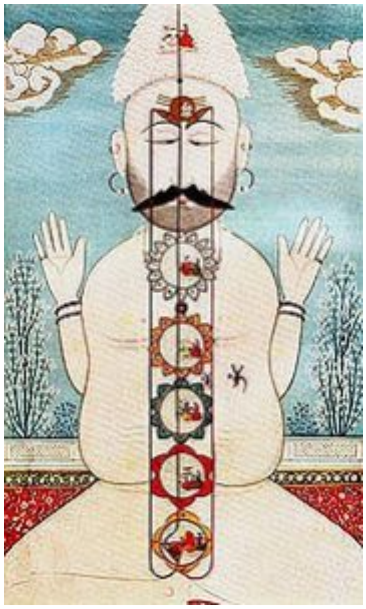
Chakras and Sound



Late 18th century A.D Kangra school Painting of Yogin with six chakras

In addition to our visible, gross body we also have the subtle body in the form of an energy field around it. The physical body contains the most dense and therefore visible energy. This energy continues forming layers of energy fields around the body which are not usually visible to the naked eye. This magnetic field energy that surrounds the body is called "aura". The aura is created by the energy of the *chakras*- the psychic, whirling energy processing centres of the body. According to yogic theory, there are approximately 72,000 *nadis*, astral nerve tubes, the most important of which is the *sushumna*, the astral body counterpart to the spinal cord. On either side of it are two *nadis* known

as *ida* and *pingala*, which correspond to the left and right sympathetic cords in the physical body[i]. There are six points in the body where these three *nadis* intersect and these points also correspond in location to the major nerve ganglia (cervical plexus, solar plexus, sacral plexus and so forth) located along the spine in the physical body. In healthy people, the *chakras* are vibrant and spin with vigour, while in those who are not well the chakra petals are dull and spin sluggishly, says the American Hindu priest Thomas Ashley-Farrand[ii]. Interestingly, these *chakras* respond to the sound of Sanskrit, a fact which was noticed by ancient Indian mystics with "second sight", the ability to see clearly in the subtle realm. These outcomes were carefully written down and can be found in the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads* and the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*. It took time before the sages arrived at the mechanism behind the impact of Sanskrit on the *chakras*. And they concluded that the total number of petals or spokes composing those six *chakras* is fifty. Similarly, the Sanskrit alphabet consists of fifty letters, with each one corresponding to a particular petal of a *chakra*. When a *mantra* built from the language is chanted, our *chakras* vibrate in tune with the Sanskrit sounds because Sanskrit is … "an energy-based language first and a meaning-based language second". Not all the words of the Sanskrit *mantras* have meanings. It is the energy coming from the subtle body that provides the key to the effectiveness of the *mantra* chanting. Each *chakra* has a corresponding *Bija mantra* or sound vibration. Irrespective of who chants the *mantra*, at the sound of the *Bija mantra*, the *chakras* spin with greater energy and vigour, giving corresponding strength to the body. It is also said that the *chakras* correspond to the musical scale with each *chakra* representing one *swara* of the octave.

Human society uses music in various ways. Some of it is used in education for those who become musicians or those who endeavour to develop a fine aesthetic appreciation of life, in

particular the arts, around them. It is utilized in religious ceremonies and rituals, as a means of entertainment and in imparting health to the body. Each of these applications of music is explained briefly.

[i] Vishnu Devananda, Swami (1995: third edition), *Meditation and Mantras* New York City: Om Lotus Publishing Company

[ii] Ashley-Farrand, Thomas (2003) *Shakti Mantras*: *Tapping the great goddess energy within*, New York: Ballantine Books.

Music Education

Republic Day Parade- A School Band

There are two aspects of music education- music in education and music as education. Training in music from an early age for the purpose of discipling the mind and making a career out of some aspect of music constitutes music education. When a child begins to train in music in a systematic manner a number of changes occur in the personality of the child- from discipling to becoming methodical, refinement of senses, time management (as the child also is involved with academic pursuits due to that age). It is a boost to the self-

confidence of the individual as his/her musical ability sets them apart from their peers and the artiste is a source of attaction for everyone around. Since music tends to be a performing art, the necessary exposure to the stage automatically makes the child confident and able to deal with issues related to shyness, introversion, and fear of public speaking. After the training phase, the next phase of the musician is to contribute to the social fabric in the same capacity- a role which maybe performed as a teacher, an entertainer, a healer, in the industry or attached to a spiritual organisation.

Music in education is a somewhat different application of music, in which music is utilised to improve the educational output of students. The main impact of music here is felt due to its ability to let students involve themselves in group musical experiences, which allow an expression of emotion in a medium other than speech. These experiences could be ranging from singing, playing musical instruments together, writing lyrics and setting them to music to making musical plays and productions and so forth. A competitive, performance oriented production with such activities has been seen to bring about both behavioural and academic improvements in healthy school going children as well as those suffering from mental handicaps, hearing handicaps and various other neurological and/or developmental disabilities. Such musical experiences not only foster socialisation, but also bring about group cohesiveness, enhancement of interpersonal skills, learning due to imitative behaviour and more adapted socially cooperative mannerisms.

Music in Healing

Music appeals to the emotional side of the human nature. Music stirs, births, expresses, fires, harnesses, channelizes and tempers emotions. Music precedes the development of language as a form of expression. That is because music is present in nature even before the human is born as an individual or a species. In his bid to emulate the sounds of nature man becomes musical. And yet in amputating himself from this connection with nature, in the process of socialization and civilization the human loses touch with the lyre within, coming to a point of dis-ease or an absence of ease.

Man has instinctively known forever about the healing aspects of music. Speaking about this knowledge in context of Indian music, Alain Daniélou the late Director of the International Institute for Comparative Music Studies and Documentation, Berlin, opines that "a general Sanskritic theory of music, termed *Gāndharva Veda*, was elaborated at a very early date." He continues saying that it seems that the *Gāndharva Veda* studied every use of musical sound, not only in different musical forms and systems but also in physics, medicine and magic. Music makes the human 'whole'- in harmony and in balance. Don Campbell says that bringing a body in to balance requires observing the orchestra in it's entirety, it's current condition and past experience, it's inherent strengths, it's potential for improvement. And the real genius of healing lies in teaching the body, mind, and heart to discover and play their own music-not something that has been dictated by social norms. If one is to examine healing in terms of emotion, then the process of healing involves the

transformation of one kind of emotion into another. The *Natyashastra* of Bharata mentions about nine primary emotions or *rasa-s.* Rasa is the Permanent Mood when it is revealed through enjoyment[i]. The nine[1]accepted Rasa-s are: the Erotic (*Sringara*), the Comic (*Hasya*), the Pathetic (*karuna*), the Furious (*Raudra*), the Heroic (*Vira*), the Fearful (*Bhayanaka*), the Odious (*Bibhatsa*), the Marvellous (*Adbhuta*) and the Tranquil (*Santa*). The catalytic process of music is aimed at transforming the dominant emotion into another emotion or reducing the severity of the emotional experience, incase the dominant emotion is a disease producing condition or itself an offshoot of the disease. For example sadness at one extreme becomes depression, which can in an extreme case also lead to a suicidal tendency. Music used appropriately with this emotion can aid in an expression that may not be spontaneously available to the individual due to disease related pathology.

It has been noticed that during conditions of illness, it is human tendency to revert to prayer, because of the impact faith has on the psyche, and the immune system. The greater is the patient's faith that they will get well and the more they silently pray, the lesser is their expectation from medical cures alone and also greater is the likelihood of them becoming well due to their own willpower. The reason is twofold: first, prayer takes the mind of the patient away from the disease and negative thoughts. Secondly, it gives a positive affirmation to the body's own immune system to fight the disease. Music unobstrusively becomes a catalyst in this process.

If one is to use music for therapeutic purposes, it is crucial to understand two principles: Entrainment and Isoprinciple. Entrainment is simply the principle from physics that tells us that our biorhythms tend to synchronize with the rhythm, tempo, or pulse of the music. We instinctively choose slow music when we want to calm down and faster music when we want

to energize ourselves. The isoprinciple states that in order to change a person's mood with music, one must first begin with music that reflects the state he/she is in to start with. If one is feeling depressed one cannot simply put on "happy" music to change the mood. It must be done slowly and carefully.

When we mention the term music therapy we need to remember that in therapy, music is specifically used to achieve non-musical goals. Music can both be used as an alternative, stand-alone therapy as well as a complementary therapy in addition to traditional medical procedures.

There are four levels of music therapy practice:

- Auxiliary level: All functional uses of music for non-therapeutic but related purposes;
- Augmented level: Music therapy used to enhance the efforts of other treatment modalities
- Intensive level: Induces significant changes in the client's current situation
- Primary level: Singular role in meeting the main therapeutic needs of the client.

Music therapy is an interpersonal process in which the therapist uses music and all its facets- physical, emotional, mental, social, aesthetic and spiritual- to help clients to improve or maintain help. The music used in therapy maybe specially created by the therapist or client or it maybe drawn from the existing literature in various styles and periods.[ii]

[1] Bharata admitted eight rasas, but later writers admitted nine rasa including *Śānta* or Śā*ma*

[i] Prajyananda, Swami (2002) *A Historical Study of Indian*

Music. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Pvt.Ltd.

[ii] Bruscia, Kenneth (1991) *Case Studies In Music Therapy*, (2nd ed.) Barcelona Publishers,

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Some Concerns in Designing Therapy

To utilise music in its therapeutic aspect we need to identify music that corresponds to our various emotions. If a particular melody attracts us, we could examine what is so special about it. Is it the lyrics, the voice, the intonation of the words, the interplay of instruments, the use of silence in the song or something else? However, when we use music as a complement to certain other procedures we have to study all the above aspects as well as the musical abilities of the individual who is the recipient of the treatment, and their preferences regarding the setting. There can be many a setting for a therapy exercise in music- from a community centre to a hospital ward, the studio of the therapist to the school-room, even a park or the home of the patient. In terms of participation it can be an individual who receives therapy, a couple, a family, a group or any other set of like-minded people.

Then one has to choose the kind of musical experience –between listening to music, recreating music, making new music and an

appropriate musical medium, whether it would be the voice of the participants or instrument, or a combination of them. Similarly, one needs to carefully choose what music to use- some existing music, which is known to both or known to one alone or a new music to be created jointly. Once these factors have been accounted for music therapy can be designed for any kind of disease or condition: from childbirth and immature babies to patients suffering from cancer, HIV/AIDS and those with burns and other trauma. It can also be used in treatment of psychiatric illnesses of schizophrenia, substance abuse, depressions, phobias and for rehabilitation to neurological conditions of multiple sclerosis, stroke, autism, developmental delays and handicaps, Alzheimer's and Parkinson's Diseases. Even in operation theatres the use of music can help in carrying out a safe surgery by reducing the stress levels of all involved, with a possible reduction of the dosage of anasthesia required by the patient and in post-surgical recovery. Further uses may be to promote self-actualization, to stimulate developmental growth, to manage pain and to treat musical problems.

The Belgian Embassy: A Masterpiece Revisited / Seema Bawa

This multi domed, arched, brick complex on Shanti Path is not only a landmark that defines the Delhi landscape but is perhaps also a watershed in Indian architecture. As such the Belgian Embassy has evoked heated debate amongst the practitioners of architecture over the period of two decades, since the time of its design in 1980.

Much of the controversy is focussed around the fact that Satish Gujral, its designer is not a professional architect. Going down memory lane, Gujral recalls that his interest in architecture was derived from his engrossment with the mural as a medium of public art. With this came the conviction that a mural, a painting or a sculpture to be successful in a building has to come form a single vision- “breathe from the single lung,” as he puts it. For this he had to design the building himself. In order to achieve this “I started to assist the architects of projects in which I was doing the murals, ” reminiscences Gujral. His early training in the Lahore art institution also came in handy where the curriculum had included draughtsmanship, carpentry, metalwork and the like.

With this came the conviction that instead of bringing art to the public place as through a mural, the need was to make the public place a work of art by itself. So after designing few residences, he submitted his design in a competition to build the Belgian Embassy in Chankyapuri in New Delhi.

The Embassy unlike most buildings is not oriented to the center of the plot. Instead the four major units are in all corners of the semi triangular shaped plot- the Ambassadors Residence, the Chancery, the Counsel’s’ residence and the servant quarters. “By placing them in this way I created a tension between the buildings,” explains Gujral. In the middle is a landscaped courtyard, what Dr.R S Sodhi, an eminent planner and expert on large complex designs, calls the *veda* , the *baramda*, or a cul de sac that epitomizes the north Indian village.

In fact, the complex has a rather late Mughal feel to it. Originally the jury that awarded the project had felt that this Indianness was a drawback and that the Embassy should reflect the character of Belgium. But the Premier intervened and said that for him this was a qualification. Commenting on the influence of globalization on architectural practice,

Gujral says “modern architecture is built for nowhere and speaks of nowhere. But building is like a human being – it has its own identity and provides an identity to its inhabitants.” According to Arjun Thapar, an architect who teaches at the School of Planning and Architecture ”The Embassy is not a pure building rather is architecture that reflects an artist’s thinking and personality.”

“When I sat down to design it, it was like I paint, without conscious thought that I want it to be like this or that- emotion finds its style. I introduced a sculptural element that was natural with my background. Where I used conscious thought was in the planning,” says Satish Gujral.

Sodhi concurs “the Belgian Embassy is a sculptural form, specially from the outside. Moving inside is like moving through sculptured space.” Herein lies the problem. “ Probably after having conceived of the form, Gujral didn’t want to compromise with it and was therefore not able to plan the openings, windows and doors, “ he clarifies adding “ we architects feel that form of the building should emerge form the foundations and function rather then vice versa.”

Gujral however feels that “professionals always abuse the non-professionals, and talk about techniques. It is only in the modern times that the divorce between architecture, sculpture and painting has taken place.”

“Visiting the Belgian Embassy is like visiting as museum. It is not like a regular office space.” Unlike other embassy structures in the Diplomatic Enclave, this is not cold and intimidating. “It is like an oasis amongst many other ugly and hostile structures. Open, friendly and non-intimidating,” says Thapar.

Placing it in context of history of design Thapar feels that it made architectural history, in the manner it broke norms of office buildings. Sodhi agrees and says that it was probably

the first time that exposed bricks were used for a formal building, bricks were usually considered and informal medium. The use of exposed bricks however was not new, considered that Le Corbusier had built almost the entire Chandigarh with this look. Bricks are also problem material because they allow for leakage unless until the roofing has been properly treated, especially in context of the Embassy the wall merges into the roof shaped like a dome, explains Sodhi.

The designer remarks that “in the 15 years of its existence its importance has grown around the world.” The best encomium for the Belgain Embassy is proabably provided by Gujral himself, “If Michaelanglo’s Sistine Chapel could survive for so many centuries, why the Belgian Embassy would not.”

The Owl and the Pussy Cat / Seema Bawa

Actors: Kavita Dang and Kumud Mishra
Director: Satyajit Sharma
“***The Owl and the pussy cat went to sea in a beautiful pea green boat…***”

Thrown together in a low-rent bachelor's flat instead of a 'pea-green boat', the odd couple in this highly amusing **Bill Manhoff comedy**, is certainly not at sea! 'The Owl', Felix played by **Kumud Misra**, a highly accomplished actor, is a self-styled intellectual author – while 'the Pussycat' played by **Kanika Dang**, is a wannabe actress and model – however, to pay the bills she entertains gentleman callers, a prostitute but not promiscuous.

Having noticed the stream of gentlemen caller at her apartment through his binoculars, the peeping owl does his 'civic' duty by informing the superintendent of the building. The pussycat with nowhere to spend the night seeks revenge by imposing on the owl for a bed. And then, through a battle of wits, words, and wisdoms they both start to 'educate' each other as well as the audience in ways they never knew they could.

The current production by Dotted Line Productions has wisely kept it simple and has not endeavored to create convoluted and over intellectualized caricatures of the protagonists. The director, **Satyajit Sharma**, an NSD Alumni with several outstanding acting and directorial performances to his credit, takes two great actors who handle some good old fashioned repartee rather well; coupled with adept handling of a witty script to put together an eminently watchable show.

The play focuses on two people who get to know each other, have sex, and eventually fall in love. As in most romantic comedies, one-liners abound and the protagonists are shown falling from their own self constructed identities. The fight in Felix's apartment after Doris barges in at the beginning is hilarious. She gets upset by his use of big words, but eventually buys her own guide to extending one's vocabulary. He is horrified by her "filthy" animal existence exemplified in his use of words like gutter slime and filth for her, but delights in the new experiences she has to offer. The two show each other new ways of looking at things and which is why Doris and Felix's chemistry works for the audience. It's is

akin to what *happens* in real life. Their romance is played for laughs, but it's also sweet and touching. Felix, like most men, has to have a near nervous breakdown before deciding Doris is the one for him through a bitter-sweet dream sequence that evokes meta-theatre. As each displays their softer selves, the audience realizes they have more in common than they think. The two are in transition; looking for that obscure goal of success; he in writing, she in acting. This shared ground draws them together and reflects to the audience a very real struggle that we all experience in relationships.

Odd couples, whether of the same or different sexes have been a comedy formula for decades. The play enthralls with its at times salty language. Most importantly, Kumud and Kanika have a very definite chemistry. Though Kanika's is better delineated and in intrinsically is the more outrageous and attractive character (being the underdog) in the script, it does not steal the focus. Kumud interprets the inherent wimpy-ness and prissyness of the character with a paradoxical male strength and libido. This makes for a powerful performance that converts the essentially mono-dimensionality of the character into a rather complex and conflicted one. The interlude when the wimpy Felix transforms briefly to a randy 'baby' is remarkably executed with Kumud performing from each pore of his being. Kanika has put in a lot of effort into building her character but while she is able to bring to fore the tartness of Doris, the vulnerability written into the character does not come out as well as it may have. Though this prostitute has a heart and it shows. While the play per se is not deep enough to allow for great acting, it does give scope to the two protagonists to demonstrate impressive technical finesse; the director who is apparently debuting for the group needs to be complemented for this.

In order to be memorable theater, the discovery by Felix and Doris that they are good for each other need not be revelatory in the vein of a metaphysical revelation, but

should be funny. The director and his cast achieve this with ease. The humor in “The Owl and The Pussycat,” depends largely on sarcasm, insult and the sort of logic that has Doris announce: “I may be a prostitute, but I’m not promiscuous.” A lot of the humor of the play depends on language and the “play” thereon. Much is made of the fact that Doris doesn’t understand words like despicable, aesthetic, assimilate and intrinsic while Felix who seeks to define himself through words or concepts finds them completely incapable of addressing his feelings for Doris. A comedy based largely on language and timing is always a difficult ask and the current production delivers in aces.

Directorial skill is amply demonstrated in terms of technique, stage craft and spatial usage. The fundamentals of good stagecraft such as blocking, body language and use of space have a refreshing rehearsed certainty and professionalism fast disappearing from current productions. Interludes of well chosen music pieces and the intermittent use of gaps during the play deserve to be commended. This despite the somewhat inadequate lighting arrangement around the proscenium of the LTG auditorium

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Jodha Akbar – The Film / Seema Bawa

Seema Bawa analyses this highly controversial film with a historical perspective

Actors: Aishwarya Rai and Hrithik Roshan

The historian in me could not resist having a *dekko* at a historical romance based on a character such as Akbar, who indeed is a larger than life figure of world history. A man of vision, statesmanship and great depth Akbar was the *Insaan-e-Kamaal* of his era. Hrithik Roshan as the young Akbar indeed does not disappoint even though in terms of physique he does not match the descriptions of the historical Akbar. The scenes depicting his valour, strength and prowess in battle, though competently performed are not exceptional. It is the sheer regalness of his bearing and the small details such as the fluid and effortless movements with which he sits on the throne, an act which requires immense theatrical perfection, that help him make the character his own. The scene showing Akbar getting into a trance while listening to mystical music of Sufi dervishes is authentic to the sources and enacted with great felicity. Aishwarya Rai as Jodhaa is right out of Mughal-Rajput miniatures paintings in her stance, apparel, ornaments and indeed her entire external persona.

The character of Akbar is better delineated because of the wealth of source material available, much of which is hagiographic in nature. That is not to say that the counterview was not available as is seen from the killing of Adham Khan Akbar’s foster brother. Other aspects of Akbar’s

prowess such as his exceptional skill as a bare-hand fighter, his dueling an elephant, his consulting philosophers of other faiths; all having basis in historical sources ring quite true in the film.

Jodhaa, on the other hand, being largely a figment of the writer-director's imagination, has been conceptualized with less depth. The single character trait that has been reiterated is her spirit, and her spirited resistance to patriarchal values which while anachronistic to the period depicted, is also quite tedious. Her depiction as a Rajput woman of honour and integrity is overstressed.

As for the characterization of secondary characters, unlike Lagaan, in Jodhaa Akbar this aspect has been largely ignored. Instead we have stereotypes paraded as Rajput Ranas, and good and faithful courtiers such as the *Khan-i-khanan* and Todar Mal versus fanatical *ulema* and scheming relatives. The entire structure of Mughal aristocracy, the *mansabdars*, so significant for the actual and visual construction of the Mughal era, is overlooked.

The film succeeds in reconstructing the sense of architectural spaces of the grand Mughal era, especially the *Diwan-i-Aam*. The battles and the epic scale are well done even though the armies rush towards each other rather than in formation.

The music of AR Rahman goes well with the film but does not stand out. The background score though is excellent.

The film is at one level an elaborate seduction of the spirited though mono-dimensional Jodhaa by a rather desirable Akbar. The plot is entirely based on coitus-interuptus, which is interrupted ad-nauseum where the consummation is heartily to be wished for so that one can finally go home. The sexual tension is very well structured and indeed works very well but for the length it has been stretched out. The political intrigues and the romance appear to be yoked together by

violence and are not linked organically. Indeed they should have been two separate films.

Perhaps the entire relationship of Jodhaa and Akbar should have been read within the context of sexual politics that underlay the harem of the Mughals, which could have served as an interesting back drop to the delineation of Emperor Akbar, arguably the greatest monarch and statesman this land has seen. We know that Akbar had at least two wives (besides many concubines) before he married the Rajput princess. The Rajput princess, whatever her real name may have been, would have been competing with them for her Emperor's favours and allusions to the same may have made interesting viewing. Instead the harem intrigues center around her conflict with Maham Anaga Akbar's foster mother whose importance had waned by the time Akbar attained adulthood.

The film is largely didactic in that it addresses issues of shared cultural heritage and communal harmony without appearing to preach. The historicity of Jodhaa/ Harka or Jia Bai is irrelevant to the film.

Religare Art Gallery: The Decorated Cow / Seema Bawa

Seema Bawa *curates a Solo Show of Paintings and Sculptures by* ***Sidharth***

It was an event to which the whole city was making a bee line. Art lovers, critics, artists, curators – they were all there. And why not. An artist and a Curator were resurfacing after a long time.

Sidharth, the mystic artist returns to the public gaze after a gap of some years with his much anticipated show, The Decorated Cow, curated by StageBuzz's art columnist Seema Bawa and presented by Religare arts.i from March 13th to April 13th at the Religare arts.i gallery.

For this show Sidharth has executed paintings, drawings and sculptures based on the continuum of the traditional and contemporary relationship of human beings with, India's sacred animal, the cow. On one hand the works view the cow in mythological, historical and socio-religious contexts where the Bull and the Cow are revered, adored and granted an intimate space within the household. On the other side, the post modern man has removed the cow from this space and created a disjuncture not only with the cow but the ecology and the world of nature she represents.

Kamadhenu, Surabhi, Nandi-symbols of prosperity and joy; the pastoral pleasures of Krishna's cow; the cow in nature; the cow lost in the urban jungle, wandering on heaps of rubbish; the cow as the source of dairy and meat products, pumped full of chemical enhancers and pumped out of milk- all wander in

the Sidharth’s canvases and consciousness.

The show thus, is a powerful commentary on the consumerist society and its greedy, all devouring need for material comforts. In the process the human is encroaching on the space of fellow inhabitants on earth, leading not only to an ecological disaster but to a dislocation of the human from traditional, philosophical and ethical moorings. The show interrogates this dislocation that has left the cow desacralised, abandoned and exploited.

This process has been highlighted by the comments of writers, such as Aman Nath, Vandana Shiva, Anirudh Chari, Kishore Singh, K Bikram Singh among others, on the cow in Sidharth’s art in the catalogue and the show. Thus, there are multiple voices dialoguing with the image created by one artist from varied vantage points, be these anthropological, ecological or cultural.

The colours in the paintings are fresh and luminescent. Sidharth has an intense and personal relationship with these colours, which is not surprising given that he makes his own colours using mineral and plant sources. The sculptures in the show provide a vital focal point given their three dimensionality and versatility in terms of size and materials used, ranging from marble, cowries to transparent fiber glass. The contemporary and mystical concerns centered on the cow have been amplified in a short film and music composed by the artist that will accompany the exhibition.

Sidharth’s art while deeply rooted in philosophic tradition contends with modernity in terms of tradition speaking to contemporary concerns.The artist, as an ecologue and cultural conservationist, dialogues with the contemporary world using the cow as a metaphor; cow is the projection of human thought, cow is a symbol of human psyche, cow is earth- the nature out there which man seeks to bend to his will.

Small is Beautiful / Keval Arora

When listening to people speak of how difficult it is today

for theatre groups to survive, and therefore of the feasibility of theatre itself, I find it difficult to share the general air of regret that envelops such discussions. Sure, it isn't easy to produce plays on a regular basis, especially for those who intend to make a living solely off performance. But it probably never has been – at any rate, far longer than many doomsayers would care to remember. Theatre today is pushed into a corner. The sooner we accept that fact as a given condition, and make our adjustments and interventions with such shrinkage in mind, the better we will be able to renew our appreciation of theatre's strengths and possibilities. Hankering for a return to glory days is a nice theme for lazy winter afternoons, but not for the evenings when rehearsal time is upon us.

Is this an unfounded optimism? I think not; in fact, it's not even an 'optimism' in the first place. If anything, it's impatience with the habitual passivity, the automatic funereal tone of the way we think about our work. If 'the death of the theatre' will ever come to pass (the way in which there has been talk for some time about 'the disappearance of the playwright'), I suspect it'll come from the failure of its aficionados to look forward from the present. By this, I do not mean that we accept the current scenario as a value in itself, for there is no need to infect our appreciation of theatre's function with the market-driven models of today. But, we do need to see where we can go from here, rather than talk as if our future lies in returning to the past. I sometimes hear the 70s being spoken of with some fondness. But I began watching theatre in the 70s, and I don't ever remember feeling free of the same anxieties then, the way retrospection today persuades us to believe. Unfortunately, for many people, the past has always been a better place, much in the way that the dead have only good things said about them.

There is always an audience available for plays. Correction: there *will* always be an audience available for plays. In the

several years that I have been attending performances, I have not come across too many instances of plays running to absolutely empty houses. It is another matter that some plays that deserved fuller houses did not get them, while others that ought to have been less popular had spectators arriving in droves. (Given the troubled state of theatre attendance and solvency, comments on such anomalies were rarely aired aloud, being more a matter for internal envy rather than for public pride.) The point is not whether there is or isn't an audience for theatre; rather, what is our expectation of an audience – what is the minimum number required for spectators to be regarded as an audience?

It is essentially a numbers game. An 'empty house', or a 'FULL House', is a relative term, relative to the capacity of the auditorium and varying in tone according to the amount paid out as rental. Take a 500-seater, sell 50 tickets and you have a cavernous hole that depresses producers, deadens actors and embarrasses spectators by its silence. Place the same 50 people in a space designed for 75, and there is no way you can remain immune to the palpable buzz of togetherness. Performances in smaller spaces get charged in a manner that is impossible to replicate in the bigger auditoria. Amidst all this talk of dwindling attendance, why then do we insist on opting for large auditoria as our venues?

Admittedly, 50 tickets (not a terribly inspiring number in itself) is still only 50 tickets, irrespective of whether the number left unsold is 450 or 25. In the 75-seater auditorium, it still adds up to the same absolute number of spectators, and generates roughly the same amount of income; so why is this supposed to be a rosier picture? Before I am accused of dipping into the bag of ingenious tricks perfected by finance ministries to manufacture their statistics of health, let me quickly say that it is the economics of play production that makes me see in smaller venues an answer to our woes in the theatre. That is, even if we disregard the value of such space

in terms of performance and spectating, there are still financial advantages to working in the 75-seater auditorium.

Smaller theatres cost much less to rent than the bigger ones. As hall rentals form a substantial and recurring portion of production expenditure, any reduction in this area will contribute substantially to financial health. What most theatre groups do when they book the 500-seat auditorium is express a hope for attractive returns; what they end up doing is investing in 450 empty seats.

Small auditoria cannot of course meet the needs of all plays. Some texts require the machinery of large stages, or the space required for big casts. Such productions will necessarily have to exclude the 75-seater auditorium from its range of options. But, the majority of plays are geared for, or amenable to, intimate stagings. Especially contemporary plays, for playwrights too have wised up to the need to cater to groups with few actors and limited means.

The other advantage to performing in small spaces is of course enough to make such venues attractive even if they were by some quirk more expensive to hire. In the small theatres, the proximity of the actor to the spectator confers an intensity and directness upon performance that is difficult to match in the anonymity of larger spaces. When I think of performances that got under my skin when I saw them and are still with me now, I am struck by how many of them were played at intimate venues: *Woyzeck* and *Adhe Adhure* at the NSD Repertory's Studio Theatre, *Nagamandala* at the Prithvi in Mumbai, *Mother Courage* at the Modern School Gym…. How much of their magic owed to the setting in which they were performed, whether that quality would have been preserved had they transferred to larger, more conventional spaces, are difficult speculations. Productions are conceptualised with physical spaces and visual relations in mind; the best actors play within the altered chemistry that proximity brings; and therefore it is naïve to think of theatre productions as manufactured items that

function with the same stability no matter the shop in which they are sold.

Such intensity may not always be comfortable or desired. First time actors quickly experience the disorientation of performing in close-up, and learn to tone down volume and gesture, cull emotion of its theatricality, and re-locate their focal centre within themselves; in other words, they learn to work pretty much as actors do for a camera. Spectators can sometimes be discomfited too, especially when actors fail to work within the reduced scale – as in the case of performances at the now unavailable for theatre IHC Basement, where actors sometimes project their voices and bodies as if they are addressing back rows 75 feet away, they effectively end up bombarding the audience rather than speaking to it. But, there is no denying that special feeling of being sucked into the fiction when spectators are virtually thrust into the performance space.

This sensation is heightened in those small theatres that are not designed as the poor cousin, mimicking the proscenium methods and apparatus of the Big Brother. The real strength of the small stage lies in the flexibility that reduction in size brings – in its potential to leave seating and lighting arrangements to the director and the set designer and to let them determine the physical and visual relation best for their production, as in the Bahumukh theatre at the NSD. However, even when the audience seating area is physically demarcated and fixed (as in the case of Bombay's Prithvi Theatre and the NSD Sammukh Theatre), the fact of being seated at an informal distance, at virtually the same level as the actors (the Bahumukh) or at scattered angles (the Prithvi) makes watching a performance here very different from the regular experience. The effect of a heightened intimacy, a direct (and sometimes even private) connection with fictional space, powerfully underscores theatre's function as a persuader.

That's why it's not the same thing to being seated in the

first row of a regular auditorium. If you've had the misfortune of being stuck up front, you'll know what I mean when I say that it's possibly the worst row in the house. Great for being looked at perhaps, especially if you make arriving late a habit; but lousy if you've come to look at the show. The angle at which you have to look upwards is all wrong (especially at the Kamani), and it's virtually impossible to take in the width of the stage without feeling that you've wandered into a tennis match. (Great exercising for the neck, of course, so let's not trash the hidden benefits of the theatre?) Watching a street performance in the round does not produce a similar effect of intimacy either, though there is little physical distance between the actors and spectators, and the performance area does not call for callisthenics of any sort. I'd imagine that it is the 'public' nature of such theatrical practice that overlays all such 'proximity' with a public air.

Where are such performance spaces in Delhi? The SRC Basement is the first name to crop up, but that apology of a performance space merits first mention only because it's been around a long while – no longer, though: it closed down some years ago – and a home to several theatre groups. There is no other comparable space. The Basement Theatre at the IHC had begun to witness a lot of activity, but that was mainly because of a dearth of venues at that price. For the IHC Basement to have fulfilled its potential, it had needed to alter the performance space to allow multiple-entry access to actors, to install a lighting grid that covered the entire space and to install more lights of much lower wattage. I speak of all this in the past tense because today the IHC Basement Theatre is unavailable to theatre performance courtesy the objections of some municipal committee. Other spaces such as the Sammukh and the Bahumukh theatres are performance-friendlier spaces but unfortunately available only to programmes run by the NSD.

That makes this discussion on the merits of small performance spaces a purely academic one. The small auditorium, like so much else in the theatre, sadly exists more as idea than as fact.

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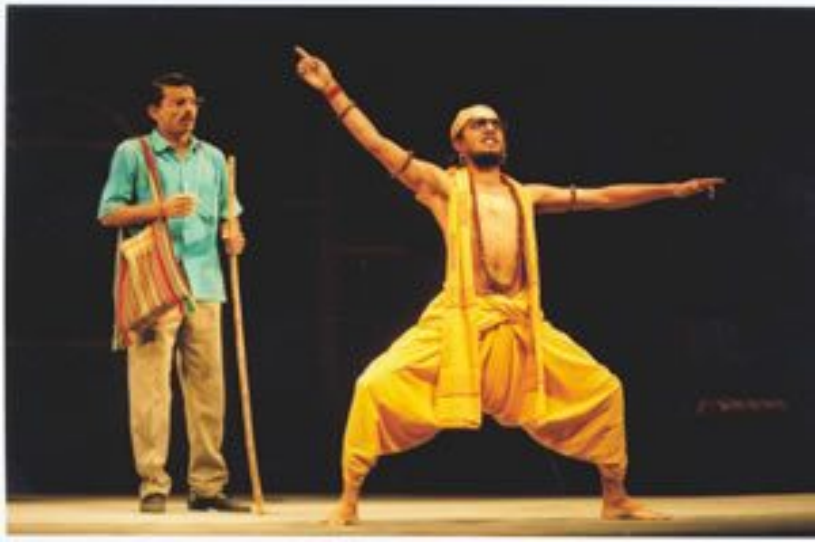
Keval Arora’s Kolumn



Come admission time in Delhi University, a strange ritual involving drama is enacted every June and July in several colleges. This ritual concerns admissions where the minimum marks required for entry into various courses are lowered for candidates with a demonstrable talent in theatre. Well, not just theatre: other Extra-Curricular Activities (generally described as ECA) such as music, debating, dance, the fine arts and photography also qualify. I’ll confine my comments to the situation concerning theatre, though much of what happens here is broadly true of the other activities as well.

The ritual is interesting for several reasons, not the least of which is the keen interest shown in it by those members of the University community who do not subscribe to either its aims or its methods. For those who do, it's a gratifying time because artistic activity is now granted however grudgingly some place in the sun. For the greater majority of those who don't, it's gratification time when non-academic achievement becomes the means by which academic under-achievement can be given the go-by. And, at a time when eligibility criteria and admission irregularities are being closely monitored by the media and sometimes even mediated by the courts, the little 'discretion' that ECA admissions allow seems to go a long way indeed!

As for the candidates, it goes without saying that this opportunity is embraced gladly by those who stand to benefit, without any grumbling of the kind that 'reservation quotas' inspire from those who don't. It must be remembered though that ECA admissions have always been used by candidates as an insurance against their not getting admission into the course/college of their choice rather than as a first-choice option. In fact, if one were to go by the quality of most of the applicants, being unable to secure an admission through the general channel appears to be the main eligibility criterion! Yet, listening to these applicants introduce themselves as being driven by a great thirst for theatre, one can see that the *natak* begins well before they have mounted the stage!

That's the questionable underside of such admissions; but there are other questions, more legitimate and no less problematic for all that.

For instance, these admissions bring to a head the difficulty of evaluation and ranking. A prickly procedure at the best of times, acts of ranking becomes decidedly iffy when it involves no more than a one-off stab at serialising creative achievement and potential. Moreover, with subjectivity being

both dominant practice and cognitive tool in art appreciation, how does this intermesh with a policy of ranking which necessarily invokes the application of some kind of objective or at least commonly acceptable criteria? Also, is it possible to set up a grid of checks and balances to shape and circumscribe such evaluation?

Of course, art activity is judged one way or another all the time, by way of reviews and commentaries in the media, or through selections for scholarships, grants and festivals. But rarely do such judgements, upsetting as these are sometimes, stamp actors or grade performances with the kind of hierarchical finality that is found in the admissions process. ECA committees are known to blithely wield axes that even the most rabid of reviewers would flinch from using.

After all, the one thing that loosens a reviewer’s tongue is the comforting lack of tangible consequence. The knowledge that reviews (often published after the event and therefore having a negligible impact on ticket sales, as in Delhi) are primarily cud for discussion enables reviewers to offer free and easy critical response. In contrast, the hardening of subjective opinion into summary judgements that slam the door shut on young hopefuls cannot but be a frightening responsibility. Sadly, it is rare to see this responsibility being judiciously exercised. All too often, ECA committees make their choices, unperturbed by the insufficient evidence on which these are based.

Another interesting aspect of this admission policy lies in what it reveals of attitudes towards and the space given to cultural activity within our educational institutions. (There is surprisingly little difference between schools and colleges in this regard.) At first glance, the fact that provision is made for such admissions appears an enlightened measure, for it implicitly acknowledges that artistic achievements can be factored into determining the worth of a candidate. The obsessive pursuit of better and better marks in the Board

examinations has made most schools downgrade non-academic creative activity as a secondary and even irrelevant practice. Students who spend time nurturing diverse interests and talents do, in all probability, end up with lesser marks than single-minded swotters, but they are not poorer students for that. In fact, the opposite is more likely to be true. So, what's the harm if extra-curricular talent is used, in a little reverse flow, to enhance the candidate's chances of admission, right?

No harm at all, especially as you can't remember the last time when you saw cultural practice command a premium in the marketplace. Yet, things aren't quite hunky-dory. A second glance reveals that this 'enlightened measure' is riddled with contradictions that float around unacknowledged as institutions blunder on with quaint notions of the education process. Why, I sometimes wonder, do colleges embark on these valuations of artistic worth if nothing changes down the line? It is the rare college that takes theatre activity seriously enough to offer realistic support in terms of scheduling, administrative support, budgetary grants and end-of-term honours. When institutional calendars designate cultural activity as mere recreation, it is understandable why admission processes too value and evaluate creativity in confusing terms.

The real problem, therefore, with this process is not, as is commonly argued, chicanery or the underhand attempts to buck the system – great Indian malady that: "have system, will buck!" – but that it lacks clarity of purpose. It is far easier to tackle the depredations of corruption or nepotism than it is to tackle the mess created by a muddle-headed approach to sports and cultural activity.

An instance of this mess is the divergence in the methods employed by different colleges to select candidates. The fact that there are no University guidelines for such admissions doesn't help because it leaves college administrations free to

flounder. In the absence of tested procedures, the time spent on evaluating an applicant's artistic ability varies enormously. At some colleges, theatre candidates are disposed of with brutal efficiency in a flat 10-15 minutes each: 5 minutes for a brief performance of a prepared piece and the balance for displaying their general knowledge ('name three Indian dramatists') and their certificates to an interview panel. On the other hand, at another college that I shall leave unnamed, some 40 candidates are processed through several elimination rounds (comprising prepared pieces, extempore performances, text-analyses, solo and group improvisations, and interviews) that add up close to 30 hours over 2 days.

Unlike a casting audition where the playscript provides some framework for selection, general testing for talent in drama is fraught because of the absence of clear-sighted goals, the procedures by which these can be sought, and a level playing field where applicants from different backgrounds and schools are played off against one another. For instance, does one or does one not distinguish between applicants who have studied in schools that possess a reasonable equipped auditorium, employ a drama teacher and place theatrical activity in the weekly timetable and those whose schools have no time or money for such things? This is probably why admission committees rely on applicants' certificates and brief presentations as a safe option. This procedure has the merit of appearing so objectively quantifiable that its inadequacy never ever comes to the fore.

Relying on certificates merely transfers the problem elsewhere, for then how does one assess the worth of such certification? In the absence of recognised inter-school drama festivals or training institutes, the drama certificates that most applicants produce relate to internal school activity, often indicating no more than the school's initiative in matters cultural. This is a far cry from the creditworthiness

of certificates produced by sportspersons to gain concessional admissions into colleges. With several tournaments organised for different age and proficiency levels in which students of different schools compete on relatively more level playing fields, sports certificates are fairly reliable indicators of achievement and potential – reliable enough, in fact, for forgery to have become a regular proposition!

It is equally risky to judge these young candidates by their prepared pieces alone, for it may be someone else's ability – an adult teacher/director through whose hands the candidates have passed – that gets judged. (Of course, this cuts both ways when you consider the quality of drama instruction available in even our best schools.) Another problem is that these presentations often drip with mechanically heightened emotion – in the mistaken but understandable conviction, given the all-pervasive television soaps in which whole generations are being rinsed, that powerful acting is always exhibitionistic in intent. Finally, the 'prepared piece and certificates' formula is inadequate because it merely ascertains, however dubiously, the candidate's past achievement without assessing her future potential. Admissions determined through these criteria end up looking like rewards for work already done, like certificates of merit that conclude rather than initiate a new activity. Surely the purpose of special admissions is the benefit that the college aims to derive from the student's stay at the institution. What is therefore needed is a selection process that offers a more accurate picture of the candidate's potential to work in the college – a process that tries, in a manner of speaking, to get beneath the skin, with the aim of observing individuals at work rather than superficially evaluating the packaged product that they make of themselves.

Such a process will still acknowledge past achievement, but only to the extent that it throws light upon the candidate's potential. It will focus on assessing individual creativity by

challenging it through the unpredictable structure of solo and group improvisation exercises. Apart from checking the candidate's ability to work within a group, to accept direction and to critically analyse his own creative choices, the fact that all this takes an enormous amount of time will also make this process a test of stamina. The pressure to be creative under conditions of tension and fatigue is arguably the best test of performance ability, though one has to be careful not to overdo such terms of endurance.

Finally, the efficacy of any selection procedure, even the most enabling one, depends upon its rationale being understood and its implications worked out. The selection process's emphasis on 'potential' and 'usefulness' rather than 'past achievement' means that in the case of over-qualified candidates, some hard decisions have to be taken. Some years ago, the son of a renowned violinist, a budding violinist himself, was granted an ECA admission at the college where I teach. But, between his classes and his tours with his father, he had no time left for playing in or for his college, and finally graduated from the institution having graced it with his instrument just a couple of times during that period. In drama too, many applicants today pop up with some experience of having acted for television. That sounds impressive alright, but this can be a real pain in the neck. For, not only are such candidates infected by the work ethic of the television studio, their commitments to the small screen leave them with little time for participating in college drama activity. Only colleges which bask in the reflected glory of their alumni welcome such stars. Others, with work goals defined in the present, continue their work with ordinary mortals and realisable potential.

Potential for what, is another question altogether. The academic year begins well with ECA admissions, but a couple of months down the line cultural activities get treated like the proverbial stepchild. For sports, there is a hectic University

calendar; culture gets left to college students and their fizz-drink sponsors for whom culture is confined within Ramp Displays (ubiquitously christened Fashion Shows') and Rock Shows. (The University does have a Culture Council in place but that is badly in need of some counsel and resuscitation.) Sports budgets are large and inviolate; ECA budgets are less than a tenth and constantly eaten into. Sports activities are run by faculty members appointed for the purpose; cultural activities are supervised, if at all, by regular teachers on a voluntary basis.

It is therefore not unusual to find that the categories under which the ECA admissions are made have precious little to show by the end of the year. Lack of accountability is in fact built into the system with teachers not being directly responsible for ensuring that the ECA students work, in the same manner in which they are accountable for taking classes or finishing their courses. In such a context, it is not out of place to wonder why colleges go through the trouble of having these admissions in the first place. The answer, I'm afraid, is not flattering at all.

If this is an unrelievedly depressing picture, let me point out that all cultural initiatives in the University have not collapsed. It is merely the system of the ECA admissions that has not delivered, not because it has been hijacked by vested interests but because the anxiety to *appear* just (more than the desire to *be* just) has led to the selections being carried out in thoroughly unimaginative fashions. Meanwhile, plays have been staged, instruments played, sketches made and photographs displayed, often on the strength of students who have not had to declare their artistic talents in order to gain admission.

Interestingly, the ECA admissions have worked when college administrations have not shied away from acknowledging the subjectivity of the selection process, and have insisted merely on it being an informed, committed and transparent

subjectivity. In that lies the only insurance against possible abuse of such ‘licence’. Testing has to be entrusted to those teachers and senior students (and alumni) who have formulated projects for the year and will be responsible for carrying them out. An audit of each year’s activities will also prove useful. Finally, as in so much else, the viability of the system boils down to the integrity and commitment of the persons involved. There is no getting beyond this basic fact. At any rate, are these not crucial ingredients in any form of cultural practice?

Who’s afraid of the documentary film / Keval Arora

Remember the cynical manoeuvring by which the Film Federation of India had, some years ago, denied entry to video documentaries in their festival? And how this had brought home

the threat that this medium can pose to vested interests? After initially denying space to video films in its international film festivals, ostensibly because these were ‘in a different format’, the Federation had inserted a censorship clause for all Indian entries to the festival. The row that ensued had been extensively reported in the media, so a bald re-iteration should do for now. Film-makers had come together to form an organisation named VIKALP with the aim pf safeguarding the rights of documentary film-makers. Launching a Campaign Against Censorship (CAC), they had run a widely attended ‘Films for Freedom’ programme of screenings and discussions at educational institutes.

This proactive initiative has had an interesting spin-off. It has placed the agenda of activism and its methods on the front-burner for a generation that is often written off as a self-absorbed ‘I’ rather than a ‘why’ generation. (By the way, what is this generation’s current alphabetic habitation? Is it still Generation Y, or is it now staging its last stand as Gen-Z?) The video documentary has, as a result, been so comfortably privileged as the conscience keeper of the nation that I’m tempted to play the devil’s advocate and ask if theatre isn’t a better mode of communication through which activist agendas can be carried out. However, before outlining crucial differences between the video documentary and theatre, let’s identify some strengths that both share.

The video documentary and theatre performance have, unfortunately, often been disparagingly prized as no more than a handmaiden to other activisms – as techniques by which grass-root actions extend or advertise their interventions. Such a view has treated video and theatre as little more than a courier service, as blandly variable vehicles of a relentless messaging. Put another way, the medium has been equated with its message; and has therefore been valued, from its aims to its achievements, for the literal directness of its effort. NGOs have been particularly susceptible to this

lure of social advertising, perhaps in the belief that generating the same message through a variety of formats extends its effectiveness, even though all it really does is relieve the tedium. If Doordarshan was obsessed years ago with televised puppet theatre as its favoured mode of disseminating advice to farmers and pregnant women, it's the NGOs' turn now to patronise street theatre with a similarly deprecatory optimism.

Why puppet theatre and street theatre is anybody's guess. I don't think the social sector's preference for these two forms is based on any insight into their potential. Rather, these forms are trivialised when used as a platter for pre-digested data and handed-down attitudes, as a dressing-up that goes hand in hand with a dumbing-down. Obviously, state television and the NGO sector rate the urban proscenium stage as the 'true' theatre, and puppet theatre or street theatre as cute country cousins suitable for rustic and other under-developed tastes. (Not that its performers have seemed to mind: in a shrinking market, even wrong attention is welcome as preferable to none.)

Yet, it must be pointed out that there is a faint glimmer of wisdom in the social sector's choice of theatre and documentary film for carrying out its activist agendas. This wisdom is hinged on two features common to all performance: greater accessibility, and the affective power of story-telling. Performative cultural modes are accessible to audiences in a special way because they circumvent the barriers of literacy and the drudgery of reading. Such accessibility is then magnified through the affective power of stories that theatre and film usually place at their centre. To the extent that the theatre and the documentary film tell stories, they can never be reduced to mere data transcription codes. It is immaterial whether their stories are real or fictional, or whether these are particular instances or typical cases, because performative modes that tell stories

irradiate even simple statements with a penumbra that deepens, authenticates and often problematises the business of a literal messaging. Clearly, the potential of theatre and film for activist causes remains unrealizable if these are used merely to sugar-coat mundane fare.

It is when we define accessibility in physical terms that differences crop up in the respective potential of film and theatre as activist space. Film is unrivalled in its ability to reach out to vast numbers of people. There is no gainsaying the seduction of spread: if maximising contact with people is vital to the activist impulse, the medium that reaches out more effortlessly will obviously be regarded as the more enabling one. In contrast, theatre performances exist in the singular and have to be re-constituted afresh for each act of viewing. Not only does this call for much more forward planning, it also implies that there can be no guarantee that later shows will work exactly like the earlier ones. Films, on the other hand, travel to venues more rapidly than do theatre troupes and offer an assurance of stable replication (every spectator gets to see exactly the same thing as created by its crew, give or take some transmission loss on account of projection equipment).

Of course, problems of technology and finance do cramp film-makers, sometimes so severely that I think ‘accessibility’ should be defined not just in terms of audience comprehension and taste, but also in terms of the artist’s access to the tools of her art. However, recent developments in video technology have ensured that these twin pressures are less burdensome to today’s film-maker – high-end digital cameras have become cheap enough for independent film makers to acquire their own hardware; sophisticated editing software, faster computer processors and capacious storage disks now enable footage to be processed at home. The result: a fresh impetus to the documentary film movement which is evident in the range and number of films being made today.

It is interesting to note that if this celebration of accessible technology and reduced expenditure were to be taken to a logical conclusion, it is theatre rather than the video film that would shine in an advantageous light. It’s cheaper to make plays than films, and it’s possible to make them without recourse to equipment of any kind other than the human body. Most theatre performances can be designed without technological fuss in a way that even the barest film cannot. Such a theatre gains a quality of outreach that far outstrips the reach of film. For, what technology can ever hope to compete with the affordability and the portability of the body and the voice? Sure, this isn’t true of all theatre productions. But I would argue that productions which depend on technological assists for their effects (take, for instance, the romance with projected images that most plays glory in nowadays) end up shackling themselves in ways that erase their fundamental nature. I say this fully aware that some of us believe that the facility which technology brings in some ways is well worth the price that has to be paid in others.

Take another difference between film and theatre. Films possess a huge advantage in terms of authenticity in reportage. They have no peer if the business of activism is to disseminate images and narratives of actuality, to show things as they actually are. But, if the primary purpose of activism is to persuade and engage with people, then the advantage that film enjoys over theatre is considerably neutralised. The very attractions of the film medium – stability, replication, transportability – become limitations from this point of view.

It is a truism worth repeating that the uniqueness of theatre performance is that it is a live event. People come together at a particular time, to a particular place, for a transaction where some people show things to others who watch. In film, there is no equivalent scope for interaction and therefore no lively relation between actor and spectator. The idea of a

collective spectatorship – where the audience becomes a prototypical community – is of course common to both film and theatre. But, in the latter, this 'community' includes the actor as well. It is not just the audience that watches the actor, but the actor too who 'reads' his audience and subtly alters his performance accordingly., Interaction, engagement and persuasion between the performers and audience is so central to theatre that it is often the richest source of dialogue in the performance event.

Where, pray, is any of this possible during a film screening? The film spectator remains more or less a passive recipient of a fixed structure. The film may well 'play' with the spectator's responses, but even such playing is welded to a grid that is frozen unalterably on videotape or celluloid. Interactions in the theatre between performer and spectator are, in contrast, dynamically dependent on the particulars of that performance. In other words, the fragile instability of theatrical performance becomes a powerful opportunity for an activist intervention, as is evident in the way Augusto Boal has actors interrupt the performance and address audiences directly in his Theatre of the Oppressed. Techniques used in Theatre-in-Education methodologies ('Hot-seating', for instance, where spectators talk back to 'characters' in the play and offer their comments) is another case in point.

As I said, where, pray, is any of this possible with film?

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