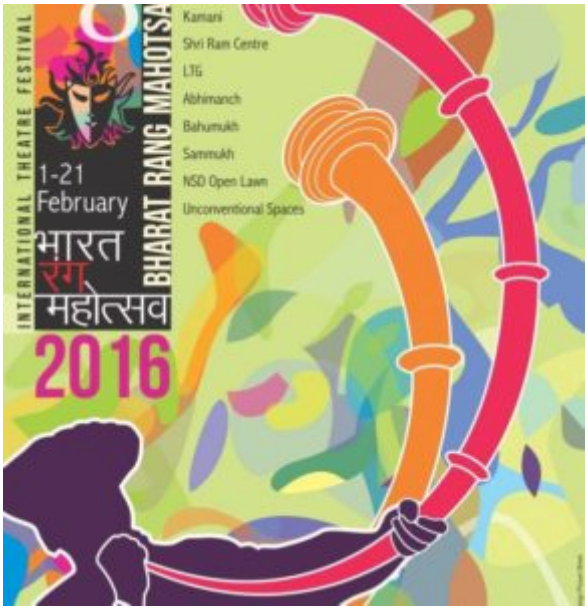
18TH BHARAT RANG MAHOTSAV

18TH BHARAT RANG MAHOTSAV KICKS OFF IN GRAND STYLE



National School of Drama's international theatre festival is underway

- NSD's 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav is being held in New Delhi from February 1 to February 21, 2016·
- More than 10 countries from around the world with almost all the states of India to come together to showcase their best theatre talent.
- 'World Theatre Forum' to be a part of BRM, where eminent theatre personalities from various countries will come together·
- Some of the finest names in the theatre world, including Nana Patekar, Mohan Agashe Pankaj Kapur, Anupam Kher, Paresh Rawal, Saurabh Shukla, among others to be a part of the festival
- BRM to also travel to Jammu, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar and Thiruvananthapuram this year

The 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav commenced today in the capital with great fanfare. National School of Drama's flagship festival, which is one of

the biggest theatre festivals in the world, is being held in New Delhi from 1st to 21stFebruary 2016.

The inaugural ceremony took place in the presence of Shri N K Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, while eminent stage and film personality Mr. Nana Patekar was the Guest of Honour. The evening was presided by Shri Ratan Thiyam, Chairperson, NSD Society and Prof. Waman Kendre, Director, National School of Drama was also present on the occasion.The inauguration was followed by the performance of MACBETH in Manipuri by Chorus Repertory Theatre, and directed by Shri Ratan Thiyam.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav this year promises to be bigger and better than ever with theatre groups from over 10 countries including **USA, Australia, Italy, Sri Lanka, Poland, Bangladesh, Spain, China, Pakistan, Austria**. Some of the finest names in the theatre world from India and abroad are set to be a part of the festival. The biggest theatre groups from almost all the states of India will also travel to showcase their talent at the festival. In a bid to promote theatre in other parts of the country as well, Bharat Rang Mahotsav will also be held at **Jammu** (Jammu and Kashmir), **Ahmedabad** (Gujarat), **Thiruvananthapuram** (Kerala), and **Bhubaneswar** (Odisha).

The performances will be held at Abhimanch and Open Air Theatre at the NSD Campus along with LTG Auditorium, Kamani Auditorium and Shri Ram Centre in New Delhi. Tickets will be available at NSD box office and at the websitehttp://eticket.nsd.gov.in/ in denominations of Rs. 50 and Rs. 100 at Open Air Theatre; and Rs. 50, Rs. 100, Rs. 200 and Rs. 300 at all other venues.

Staring in the Subway

A Chilling Short Story from London

Staring in the Subway
by
Manasvi Gautam

"Subway" (from *Ruckus Manhattan*), 1976– Red Grooms

A woman had been through a long and hard day at the office and was coming back home in the late evening. The day had seemed to drag on; she was exhausted and looking forward to getting back home where she would hit the hay. She went into a metro station where she got on a train and made herself comfortable on a seat. She noticed a woman sitting opposite her who was staring at her intently. She tried to ignore it but each time she looked over, the woman was there with her eyes wide open and the woman had not blinked or moved in any way at all. That strange woman carried on staring at her.

At one of the stops a passenger got onto the train and sat next to her. He quietly advised her to get off at the next stop; she decided to take the advice because she was apprehensive about what the woman wanted. The next stop was a busy one and she thought if that woman tried to follow her,

she would be able to lose herself in the crowd.

When the train came to the next stop, she hurried off the train and the man followed her. The man was relieved and said to her “I’m going to contact the police. That was really frightening. I didn’t want to alarm you on the train but the woman sitting opposite you was dead and there were two men sitting either side of her, keeping her upright.”

Film festival – to be or not to be

Culture Cocktail (from Mid-Day, Delhi every Wednesday)
Manohar Khushalani

Film festival – to be or not to be

As the 34th International Film Festival of India drew to a close it continued to be in a debacle, thanks to the continuous indecisiveness about its character. From a fairly prestigious beginning it has been brought down to shambles because of the lack of empowerment of the people running it, starving the festival of funds and changing its location every time. Why shift the national festival to Goa? Why mix tourism with serious cinema? Why spend millions of rupees to develop infrastructure and then invest all over again in another city. These are some important questions which will have to be answered before the venue is shifted again. As far as the films are concerned it was a mixed bag as always. There is

space enough only to discuss some of the films which I liked.

Pajn-e-Asr was an Iranian film based in post Taliban Afghanistan. It was about innocence and ambition in a country ravaged by its earlier rulers and how a young woman, Agheleh (Noqleh), tries to find a future for herself and maybe even become the President of her nation. No harm in dreaming. Her admirer, a poet and a fellow refugee, in the war torn land, puts up her portraits in an abandoned palace. The film ends in a desolate landscape where she and her father have to burn the horse-cart, which once transported them, just to keep warm at night. The conservatively religious father loses his son, his grandchild, and his horse in the land which according to him was becoming increasingly blasphemous. They meet another old man in the desert who was going to Kandahar to re-elect Moola Omar. "Too late," he is informed, "the Americans have already overthrown him." The film is directed by Samira Makhmalbus, who became the world's youngest director to participate in the official section at the 1998 Cannes Film Festival.

Undoubtedly the most talked about film in the festival, *Dogville,* directed by Lors Von Tries, is a highly stylised film, more theatre than film. The entire film is shot on a set representing a small town, Dogville, in which most of the set is drawn on the studio floor, which looks like an architectural drawing, complete with labels. Only the dimensions are missing. The central character is an exasperatingly self suffering and a stubbornly stoic woman, Grace, whose role has been played with a remarkable intensity by Nicole Kidman. Grace is on the run from Gangsters and the town shelters her at a price which goes on rising. The film is an interesting study about how seemingly respectable and apparently well meaning individuals become more and more savage. Just when the audience has had enough of the citizen's sadism, Grace gets her sweet revenge. The Head Gangster turns out to be her own father. In the entire film you never get to see the open sky, except once, when a window curtain is drawn

away. This adds to the claustrophobic nature of the story.

Yes Nurse, No Nurse, Directed by Peter Kramer, is a delirious, all-singing, all-dancing romantic comedy revolves around the eccentric denizens of an Amsterdam rest home and the killjoy neighbour who wants the whole lot of them evicted. Chock full of over-the-top*1960s* set design, tinted postcard tableaux and lush, split-screen visuals, the film's cheerfully rude musical numbers would have the audience tapping its feet. Based on a Dutch television show from the *1960s, Yes Nurse, No Nurse is* the musical tale of Nurse Klivia (Loes Luca), who runs a rest home populated by a gang of lovable nutcases next door to the cranky Mr. Boordevol, who is constantly looking for a way to get Nurse Klivia and her rowdy "patients" evicted, and may finally have found a way when a young, hunky burglar with a heart of gold (Waldernar Torenstra) moves in with them. The film ends endearingly with a change of heart of the nosy neighbour.

At the age of 84, Sri Lanka's leading director Lester James Peries returns to the international stage after an absence of almost 20 years with *Mansion by the Like.* With 18 features to date this classic veteran filmmaker has not only brought his country to the forefront of Asian cinema, but also inspired a whole generation of Sri-Lankan film makers. The film is inspired by Anton Chekhov's Cherry orchard, and although it has been adapted to the local milieu the characters drawn from the play are mostly true to the original. The film has been shot in visually pleasing locale- in a dak bungalow next to a reservoir. The direction is tight and conservatively classical. All the emotions are neither over stated nor under stated by the actors and actresses who have given taught and controlled performances.

HOLLYWOOD DIARY – Sydney Pollack

HOLLYWOOD DIARY

In Memoriam-Sydney Pollack

An Insight on his Life by Naveen Gupta

Sydney Irwin Pollack**(1934-2008)'**

Sydney Irwin Pollack was born to a family of Jewish immigrants from Russia, to an alcoholic mother and a professional boxer and pharmacist father. His parents separated when he was very young, in fact his mother died at the age of 37.

He began as an actor studying under Sanford Meisner at New York's Neighbourhood Playhouse and stayed back as acting coach on his mentor's request. He continued to appear on Broadway and TV. It was this experience gathered as an actor that made Sydney Pollack the director elicit powerhouse performances from Robert Redford, Jane Fonda, Dustin Hoffman, Barbara Streisand, Paul Newman and Burt

Lancaster. He directed more than 21 films and 10 TV serials, acted in over 30 films and produced over 44 films.

His first break came on TV, while working for John Frankenheimer; he met Burt Lancaster, who got him into directing TV shows. Pollack directed over 80 shows including the 15 episodes of highly popular TV show, 'Ben Casey,' His first feature, 'The Slender Thread',(1965) with Anne Bancroft and Sidney Poitier was taut black and white thriller, that opened with an aerial shot, something which was to become one of his trademarks, and in full flow in such films as 'Three days of the Condor'(1975) and 'Out of Africa'(1985). His next three ventures were all bummers: 'The Property is condemned' (1966), 'The Scalp hunters"(1968) and 'Castle Keep' all bombed at the box-office. He silenced his critics the very next year, when he pulled a coup of sorts by helming a deliberately toned down adaptation of Horace McCoy's novel, 'They shoot horses don't they', (1969). The film garnered 9 Oscar nominations, with Gig Young getting the sole statuette as best supporting actor for his portrayal of a sleazy emcee.

The public and critics both appreciated 'The way we were', (1973) for sizzling chemistry between Streisand and Redford, Out of 6 Oscar nominations, the film got for original dramatic score and best song. His next venture,' The Electric Horseman,'(1979) with his favourite Redford was a rip-off of the cult classic' Lonely are the brave' and was a dud at the box-office and with critics for being a sappy love story. Pollack bounced back to his form in 1982 with 'Tootsie', the biggest commercial and critical success of his career so far, with Hoffman and Jessica Lange. The film nominated for 10 Oscars was decimated at the ceremony by 'Gandhi', with Jessica Lange picking the sole Oscar for best supporting actress. Pollack acted as Hoffman's agent in the film as response to the gauntlet thrown to him by his lead actor, who was getting on his nerves, picking fights with the director on the sets. Hoffman could afford to mess with Nichols or a Levinson, but Pollack was an accomplished actor, who could hold his own even in front of camera.

His swansong was the biopic on Danish writer Isak Dinesen or Karen

Blixen, ‘Out of Africa’, (1985). The film bagged 7 Oscars out of 11 nominations, with Pollack getting his long due double whammy, as producer and director. In his later years, Pollack turned to an active role as a producer of films like ‘Major League’ (1989)’The Fabulous Baker Boys’ (1989), ‘Presumed innocent’ (1990), the compelling ’Searching for Bobby Fischer,’(1993). During this period he helmed only ‘Havana’ (1990) with his favourite Redford and ‘The Firm’ with Tom Cruise. He kept on acting till the very last with a quirkish charm that was on display in ‘The Interpreter’ (2005) ‘Eyes Wide Shut’ (1999), ‘Husbands and Wives’ (1992), ‘The Player’ (1992) and sitcoms like ‘Will & Grace’, ‘The Sopranos’ and ‘Entourage’.

In 2007, he appeared opposite George Clooney in ‘Michael Clayton’, a film that he also co-produced. His death of Cancer on May 26,2008 at the age of 73, at his home with his wife of 50 years, Claire Griswold, at his side was nine months after he had been diagnosed with the disease.

Mr. Sydney Pollack, they don’t make men like you with that rare ability to juggle various hats while producing and directing masterpieces. You shall be missed, dear sir.

1. **I have a way of wriggling out of my friend Manohar Khushalani’s deadlines for this piece! I’d also gone half way through my eulogy for John Wayne on his 101st birthday on 26th May, but the great Sydney Pollack chose to depart on the very day. Ed sent me a sms asking for a brief obituary for Sydney Pollack. I hope this fits the bill for a man who was an untiring, innovative and intuitive filmmaker**.

’Naveen K. Gupta

Some of the films and roles of Sydney Pollack.

As a Director:

“The Interpreter” (2005)

“Random Hearts” (1999)

“The Firm” (1993)

“Havana” (1990)

“Out of Africa” (1985, Oscar win)

“Tootsie” (1982, Oscar nomination)

“Absence of Malice” (1981)

“Three Days of the Condor” (1975)

“The Way We Were” (1973)

“Jeremiah Johnson” (1972)

“They Shoot Horses, Don’t They?” (1969, Oscar nomination

As an Actor:

“Made of Honor” (2008)

“Michael Clayton” (2007)

“Will & Grace” (TV, 2000-2006)

“The Interpreter” (2005)

“Changing Lanes” (2002)

“Random Hearts” (1999)

“Eyes Wide Shut” (1999)

“A Civil Action” (1998)

“Husbands and Wives” (1992)

“The Player” (1992)

“Tootsie” (1982)

PRODUCER:

“Recount” (TV, 2008)

“Leatherheads” (2008)

“Michael Clayton” (2007, Oscar nomination for best picture)

“The Interpreter” (2005)

“Cold Mountain” (2003)

“The Quiet American” (2002)

“The Talented Mr. Ripley” (1999)

“Random Hearts” (1999)

“Sliding Doors” (1998)

“Sense and Sensibility” (1995)

“Sabrina” (1995)

“Havana” (1990)

“Presumed Innocent” (1990)

“The Fabulous Baker Boys” (1989)

“Bright Lights, Big City” (1988)

“Out of Africa” (1985, best picture Oscar win)

“Tootsie” (1982, best picture Oscar nomination)

“Absence of Malice” (1981)

Source: The Associated Press

Form Grace Poise

Form Grace Poise

Preminder Singh
reviews a dancer’s performance

Bindu Juneja

There was a breath of fresh air in the dance world at The Habitat centre auditorium on 30th july. Bindu Juneja breezed in with a quality performance after an absence of more than12 years from any stage in Delhi. A student of Madhavi Mudgal for more than 10 years, she married and didn’t just settle down in Bhopal. She continued to dance and

teach at her own dance academy '*Parn*'. She studied the Kathakali style of movement from maestro Margi Vijay Kumar. This is the style par excellence of theatre, of facial expression, of *abhinaya*. Leila Samson in her book 'Rhythm in Joy' says 'the Kathakali dancer can, through facial expression alone, show the fall of a flower as it wanders downwards from the heavens. With his eyes alone he can measure its progress towards him. He smells its fragrance…his eyes, nose and senses are activated to reflect a myriad reactions.'

It is this that reflected in Bindu's performance and choice of pieces. Of 6 she did only one *Pallavi* (in *Raag Jait Kalyan*) and chose 3 abhinaya pieces to show the range and depth of her art.

The first '*Priye Charushile'* an *Ashtapadi* from the Geeta Govinda shows Krishna cajoling an angry Radha with a lot of flattery. Bindu did this with an easy grace and consummate skill and avoided the overacting that younger dancers are prone to in this *ashtapadi*.

This was followed by an *abhinaya 'Katana Bedana Mohi Desi Madana'* a composition of the 14th century Maithili poet, Vidyapati. The love lyrics describing the sensuous love story of Radha and Krishna and the poetry and prayers dedicated to Lord Shiva form a rich tradition of folk songs still sung in the region of Mithila in Bihar. They are also ideally suited to the Odissi style where the lyricism of the poetry is reflected in the sensuousness of the dance.

Bindu confirmed her mastery of expression of the Nayika separated from her beloved as well as her understated and confident exposition of the curvilinear movements of the dance.

The penultimate piece before the Moksha showed her dramatic skills in'Ramashtakam' depicting the various episodes from Lord Rama's life as a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a king and as both friend and foe. Bindu's skill in the theatrical aspect of the dance owes a lot to Dr. Kanak Rele the Mohiniattam veteran, but to combine in one seamless performance the quiet elegance of her guru Madhavi, the passionate*expressions of Margi Vijay and the abhinaya learnt from Dr. Rele we can safely say that we have another potentially great dancer*

in our midst who deserves much more than one performance in Delhi every twelve years..

Choreography was by Bindu and the excellent music was by Meera Rao.

Recovering the Republic

Recovering the Republic

Anisha Shekhar Mukherji

1.Plastic Salt Container, in Urban Kitchens 2. Traditional Salt Container 3. Traditional coconut scraper

(Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri)

I would like to begin with a question. A question asked by an external juror to the first year post-graduate students of Industrial Design in the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture, at the end of their

research presentations comparing a traditional craft with its modern counterpart. “Which is more important, the survival of the craft or the survival of the craftsman?”

Considering the abysmal conditions that most traditional crafts-people practice their art in, and the pittance they receive for hours of strenuous creative work, this question is entirely apt. It sums up the entire dilemma in reviving the manifest arts and crafts of India. Traditional craft is today unable to give either dignity or money to support its practitioners in our Republic. To ensure their own survival they abandon it, in favour of the most feasible employment alternative available—as road or building construction labourers, factory workers, domestic help. Such literally back-breaking unskilled work earns them some money. But it gives no surety of tenure, no provision of basic human dignity, no respect for their persons or their labour. We have all seen these labourers in our cities, their children lying unattended in a corner of the dusty road, their habitation consisting of a few plastic sheets. It appears that while soon there may be no traditional artists, having either starved or taken on other jobs marginally better than starvation, the relics of their art will survive as museum pieces in this country and in others, such as the beautiful traditional coconut scraper, from the private collection of Sankho Chaudhuri, Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri

What then should we do? We who praise and display the skilled products of such hands and minds, in safe and comfortable environments so different from theirs? We do not have to look too far back in space or time for the answer. It was given more than seventy years before, by none other than Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote in 1934,

‘In a nutshell, of the things we use, we should restrict our purchases to the articles which villages manufacture. In other words, we should evoke the artistic talent of the villager’. [1]

We have as a country disregarded this advice. The inaction or actions of our own government has resulted in the destruction of traditional habitats and the cultures that such habitats foster. Despite the manifest artistic talent of the villager, our way of life today

routinely favours ‘articles produced in big cities, even if they are obviously inferior in workmanship *and* design. We have segregated things of beauty from things of utility. They reflect our own segregation of lives where we separate work and pleasure into different compartments. Thus our homes and places of work, both from the outside and the inside, use materials that degrade the environment and consume huge amounts of energy in their design, manufacture and maintenance. Most products of daily use in even the homes of the relatively well-off and well-educated are *devoid* of aesthetic form or detail. What better example to demonstrate this, than to compare the domestic container for salt, the humble but vital ingredient of food that Gandhiji chose to use as his symbol for self-reliance from the British? The photograph above depicts a salt container collected from a rural home, by Sankho Choudhuri in the course of his travels over the length and breadth of the country and beyond. Contrast this with the usual salt container in a kitchen today.

We instill the same lack of feeling for art in our children, in the choices that we make for them. Though traditional hand-made toys, such as the wooden Benaras toy shown below, are practical objects to play with and are beautiful both as examples of craft and of design, it is the mass produced plastic toys of similar price available commercially, which most of us prefer to buy for our children today.

Traditional *Banarasi* handmade parrot

Plastic mass-produced toy dog

This is a reflection of the ‘colonization of our minds’. We have been conditioned into believing that the *only* way to progress is to imitate the cultures of the Western countries. This perception continues today, even when it is increasingly evident that the western mechanized model of development is neither congenial to individual creativity, nor sustainable for the earth’s resources. We all know that its factories occupy substantial land, and consume *quantities* of minerals, water and electricity *only* in order to mass-produce standardized objects devoid of individual characterization, and made of energy-intensive materials. When they are thrown after use they poison the earth and irremediably harm our habitats. Contrast this with the cycle of production, use and disposal of traditional crafts. Produced in a home environment which does not require any extra investment in separate land or buildings, the natural materials that they overwhelmingly use such as clay, wood, cocoanut shells, reeds, bamboos, do not degrade the environment, but add to its fertility after they are broken or have outlived their use. Thus, the input as well as the output of small-scale craft and design activity is far more humane and superior to the ‘environmental and human cost’ of large-scale mechanization.

Despite this evident fact, and despite a famed artistic tradition that still continues in some measure today, our institutions give credence only to book-knowledge or machine-skills. Most designers and artists graduating from reputed national universities cannot craft anything with their own hands to equal the skill of traditional designers. This

is why perhaps they produce banal work that is merely a copy of repackaged and repetitive Western ideas. Those that are in positions to do so, refuse to heed the economic potential of the vast human resource of traditional craftsmakers, which can not only support itself with practically no government investment, but can also earn the country much money through its craft and design skills. Some of our policy documents such as the revised Draft National Design Policy, do state that they would 'promote value added designs focusing on India's unique position as a country with a rich cultural heritage…'.[2]But in real terms many rare crafts-skills, far from being promoted, actually face extinction because they are even refused recognition as an economic industry. Student research shows that possibly the only remaining family in Paharganj in Delhi which practices the craft of hand-woven *chiks,* have been refused PAN numbers, since only pit-loom woven chiks are recognized by the government as a craft industry![3]

Historically, such craftsmen and artists of India have been famed over the world since centuries. So much so, that the eighteenth-century Persian invader Nadir Shah took care to carry hundreds of craftsmen along with all the wealth that he looted from India. The crafts have often reached their pinnacle in cities, and in or around the courts of kings and noblemen. How was it that we earlier managed to develop the potential talents of our people, while we are unable to do so today despite our democracy? In earlier times, as Dharampal, the noted Gandhian historian has recorded '…the sciences and technologies…in countries like India…[were] in tune with their more **decentralist** politics and there was no seeking to make their tools or work places **unnecessarily** gigantic and grandiose. Smallness and simplicity of construction, as of the iron and steel furnaces or of the drill ploughs, was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from understanding the principles and processes involved'. [4]

There was also no active discouragement to village organizations. And an important component of the economy of villages was local talent. The presence of such talent was nurtured, and the best amongst these

were given patronage in the cities. Thus in the mid-seventeenth century, the imperial urban palace of the great Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, in his new capital of Shahjahanabad, had areas reserved within it for artists and craftsmen from the city. These *karkhanas,* surrounded by gardens and courtyards, had some of the best such artists working within them. Imagine such a situation today. That some of the many rooms within the *Rastrapati Bhawan*, are given over for master-craftsmen to practice their craft, secure in the knowledge that they are under the patronage of the President! That they will not have to beg or run from pillar to post for raw-materials for their craft, or for buyers for their finished products. It would be a wholly suitable use for the hundreds of empty rooms in the Rashtrapati Bhawan maintained at public cost, but most of us would find it unacceptable, if not downright unthinkable.

The city of **Shahjahanabad**, a mid-19th century map of which you can see above, held to be an ideal example of town-planning in its design and functioning, followed the example set by the Emperor. **Despite being the capital of one of the largest and richest empires in the medieval world, areas of governance within the city were decentralized.** Houses of noblemen and princes were surrounded by that of their dependents, artists and craftsmen. **Workplaces and homes were integrated.** *Our*cities today forcibly separate places of work from residential areas, even in the case of professions which do not

pollute the environment in any way. Our law-enforcers separate poorer people into the fringes of the cities. The only end of work appears to be to make money, lots of it; that work can afford creative pleasure is a luxury most of us are afraid to even imagine.

The downfall of a local level of crafts and technology, that in turn fed a corpus at an urban level, began, really speaking with the advent of the European trading companies, three hundred years before Mahatma Gandhi campaigned for the revival of village industries. The sole purpose of these companies was to amass wealth for themselves in the name of fair trade, by deliberately undermining local craft and technical skills 'by hook or by crook'. The personal and state correspondence between British traders and British rulers and administrators, shows their active connivance to ruin this economic base while at the same time extracting economic and other benefits for themselves from indigenous Indian knowledge. They also show that the fountain head of this knowledge has been the villages. That it still remained in sufficient amount even a hundred odd years after the start of the British operations, shows the spread and tenacity of this knowledge base.[5] Thus in the mid-eighteenth century, in the time of the renowned ruler of Jaipur and Amber, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, the architect and town planner *Vidyadhar*, despite hailing originally from Bengal—a land many miles east of Amber—could practice his talent with dignity and freedom in Jai Singh's court. His remarkable design of the city ofJaipur, with its feel for local needs that most of our modern architects and town planners are bereft of, continues to function well till today. The city's unique identity, unlike its faceless or facile modern counterparts, stems from an integration of local building skills as well as a response to local climate and culture. Vidyadhar could visualize and construct the city in this way because though he came from a culture, whose details and landscape were different from that of Rajasthan, the process of thinking itself was not different. It depended on an elaboration of the local building theme, which was known as much to the local users as to the local builders. The formal basis for this theme was in the Sanskrit texts and building manuals.

For most of us bred to the superiority of city learning, it would be

no doubt amazing to realize that we owe the existence of the world-renowned Jantar Mantars as much to a village priest of humble origins as to the famous Maharaja of Jaipur. Jai Singh II met Pandit Jagannath, a Brahmin village priest in the Deccan, whose knowledge of astronomy and religion was so manifest that it catalysed the Maharaja to take the priest back with him to Amber. This also demonstrates that learning was not limited to cities or courts. Pandit Jagannath went on to become Jai Singh's chief aide in his astronomy researches and in the theory and practical construction of his unique masonry instruments of astronomy. It should also give us some food for thought that this is described as one of the darkest periods of Indian history, by many Western historians.

In what seems to be a perverse joke of history, the very nation that once led the race to wipe out indigenous Indian methods of living and crafts production, has now adopted a direction of economic growth that depends to a large extent on crafts and creative industries. The merely 32,000 crafts makers of Britain surpass the earnings of its organized industries of motorcycle or sports good manufactures.[6] Ironically, despite our estimated population of 'over a crore of handloom weavers, and an equal, if not larger, number of crafts people engaged in diverse crafts from pottery, to basket-making, stone-ware, glass-ware, hand made paper products and multifarious other utility items made out of local, available materials',[7] *our* policy makers assiduously continue to court a centralized large-scale, high-investment, and polluting model of western development.

The fact that there is a global market for Indian crafts is quite evident from the quantities that are bought by visiting foreign tourists, and by the fact that China is now mass-producing objects in factories that *imitate* Indian crafts, to tap into this demand. However, the export of crafts does not always imply the preservation of the artists. Thus, despite earning huge amounts of foreign exchange, the woodcraft of Saharanpur no longer succors the traditional craftsmen. Even local demand is by itself not enough. Despite a continuing demand for gold jewellery, traditional goldsmiths in Tamil Nadu from the *Vishwakarma* community, are starving. Customers

now go to showrooms owned by jewel magnates which stock machine-made jewelry instead of the custom-made designs of traditional goldsmiths. One imported jewel-making machine does a year's work of a*hundred* goldsmiths in about ten hours. From the late 1990s, this increasing mechanization in jewelry-making has led to the suicide of several goldsmiths, many with their entire families, by consuming cyanide, which every goldsmith uses to polish gold. Most of the remaining two lakh goldsmiths in the state, are in debt. About two thousand of them are now reduced to selling liquor in government run shops.[8]

Not content with wiping out indigenous craft and technology by patronizing large scale industrial investments, even the land of rural communities is being taken away. The recent Bill devised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, appears to be even more exploitative than the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894 that it seeks to replace. The new Bill according to Medha Patkar, the veteran activist who leads the National Alliance for People's Movements, (NAPM), removes the more public-spirited provisions in the colonial government's Act. It instead, includes a clause that may be invoked to assist private companies in acquiring public land for 'any project relating to the generation, transmission and supply of electricity' and even 'mining activities'.[9]

This is why, despite protests by village groups, Gautam Adani, ranked 91 on the Forbes' World Billionares list, has been able to buy land at rates between Rs 1 and Rs 8 per square metre[10, 11] from the Gujarat government for the SEZ coming up on the northern shore of the Gulf of Kutch in and around the Mundra port. This land, including government revenue and forest land, and more than 1400 acres of *gauchar* or grazing land under panchayats, has been leased to other companies by the Adani Group at *Rs 1000* per square meter.[12] The Adani group, the new 'company bahadur' has killed fragile ecosystems including more than a crore of mangrove trees, appropriated common property resources, and displaced 'local people who since centuries earned their livelihoods based on access to the land and the sea'. 570 hectares of mangrove forests have been cleared through industrial activity, the fish-

species they spawned have been destroyed, the local *Wagher* fishing community's and the traditional cattle/buffalo rearing *Rabari*community's livelihood has been permanently lost. Country-craft builders at the Old Mundra port which generates an annual income of a crore to the Maritime Board are also at risk. The smooth roads and infrastructure that the SEZ boasts as justification for all this destruction and displacement, are a stark contrast to the *kuchha* roads outside its boundaries without basic water and sanitation where its more than 10,000 migrant labourers are made to live. Despite such obvious exploitation, our obsession with foreign investments and stock markets have made us as a country blind to such usurpation of the lives and rights of village communities.[13]

How then, to return to the original question, do we ensure the survival of crafts people and their art, against the new colonists?

First, we must understand that it is only in the village, that these craftspeople can survive with dignity, in a familiar environment that promises them the security of some level of relationship with their land and with its society. **Second**, we need to ensure that their craft brings them and their families enough to live in the villages, without fear of starvation or eviction. Third, we must place the invaluable knowledge embodied in craftsmen, on an equal footing with that of the degreed faculty who teach in our institutions at enviable salaries.

To do all of these, craft has to come out of the ambit of merely 'decorative objects' After all, how many carved elephants or statues can one display in ones homes? They must regain their status as objects of utility that are also beautiful. If all objects of daily use are designed and crafted using the manifest skills of our traditional artists—plates, glasses, spoons, knives, lamp-holders, furniture pieces, photo frames, hair-grips, there will be a real demand for such objects and they will be part of a living tradition of use. This in turn, will ensure that there is a continuous demand for such objects, which will afford craftspeople sustained employment in

producing them. As Sankho Chaudhuri has said, 'The time has come to ask ourselves what we want to [do] with the potential talent of the artisans. We have to consider whether the village and tribal crafts should be used only as a means of earning foreign exchange and keeping alive otherwise meaningless, moribund forms and crafts (like gold sequins and brocade work on velvet or rose water jars) or whether we could apply their skills to evolve designs of utility, and develop simple cheap objects of daily use which every villager can afford, like clay toys, deities, oil lamps and so on, and try to create an economic base for these artisans to survive in the villages.'

It so happens that most of us are now used to certain conveniences, and if crafts objects are to replace mass-produced objects of daily use, they must have a certain convenience of use and ease of maintenance. Their appearance and detailing also needs to be in tune with more contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. Craftspeople additionally need help with access to raw-materials as well as packaging and marketing-skills. Therefore, we must decentralize the ***practice*** of craft and technology as well as the *decisions* that govern them; and foster interaction between those taught in the present design and technology schools and those trained in traditional arts and technologies, so that there is mutual transmission of learning. This is not in the realm of the impossible. It can be done. The collaboration between traditional Bidri artists whose fine metalware craft with inlays of silver, brass or copper is now almost exclusively centred in Bidar near Hyderabad, and Vikram Sardesai-a Bangalore based designer- has produced new designs which are distinctive, beautiful and useful, like Serving Plates designed with new motifs, manufactured and embellished according to the traditional techniques of *Bidri* ware &Keychains manufactured and embellished according to traditional techniques of*Bidri*ware.[11]

The range, quality and packaging of these products has, as Vikram Sardesai says, made the corporate world look '…at indigenous solutions, rather than constantly buying from the West and China…'[15]. However, well-detailed crafts-objects suitable for daily needs of modern living, need to be stocked at neighbourhood shops within the

ambit of *ordinary consumers* as well. For this, we have to generate a local demand for such products, within our own cities, towns and villages, so that there is a steady market that does not depend on huge production numbers. This will foster the necessity for local artistic talent. From this talent, those who do come to cities in the lure of fame and wealth, will like their historical counterparts be among the best practitioners, ensuring that they are not led to do downgraded jobs as today, but instead are elevated to positions of respect. And since most villagers and small-town dwellers aspire to be like the city-dwellers, this demand for village-crafts must come *from city-dwellers*. It is surely a small thing to ask, that we use objects that fill our daily life with beauty, which additionally help to keep alive in dignity those of us who have the talent to create such objects?

As Mahatma Gandhi said so many years ago:

'Each person can examine all the articles of food, clothing and other things that he uses from day to day and replace foreign makes or city makes, by those produced by the villagers in their homes or fields with the simple inexpensive tools they can easily handle and mend. This replacement will be itself an education of great value and a solid beginning.' [14]

Everyone present in this conference, can resolve to move beyond discussions, to use as much as possible articles produced by indigenous crafts-people in our offices, and in our homes. We need to convince as many people as we interact with daily, our families, our friends to do the same. Whichever of us are teaching in institutions, must initiate the inclusion of traditional knowledge-bearers on the staff- as visiting lecturers, as faculty, as part of special training measures. Those of us in the government can set an example to use indigenous alternatives for office décor and office stationary, such as bamboo chiks instead of plastic blinds. We also need to facilitate the making and transformation of the houses which often double as workplaces for craftspeople, into well-lit, ventilated and healthy spaces, whether through trained advice or through the promulgation of

rules which legalize such multi-use dwellings. At a policy level, the Government of India needs to ban the setting up of large mechanized efforts that compete with indigenous craft and technology, and enforce laws that forbid large-scale machine production of traditional skills such as of gold-jewelry and instead propagate and practice decentralized methods of production.

. Only then can we recover the basic tenets on which our Republic was founded. Otherwise, our very existence will be a mindless copy, like the idols we worship—now being produced by machines in factories in China. I would like to end with one such Chinese machine-made idol, displaying facial features reminiscent of the land that it was manufactured in, with the hope that true to the spirit of our tradition, our gods and goddesses shall prove an auspicious omen for the revival of Indian arts and crafts and their practitioners.

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Presence Perfect (Keval Arora)

Keval Arora's Kolumn

1. Barry john as Iago in 'Othello' 2. Naseeruddin Shah in 'Prophet'

Presence Perfect

Mulling over oddities that years of familiarity have lulled us into accepting as normal, one curious habit that comes to mind is the way we respond – or, to be specific, don't respond – to the physical presence of the actor in our estimation of plays and performances. It is strange that this dimension of playmaking rarely crops up in reviews and analyses. Even if it

does, the enormous contribution that the actor's physical presence makes to his role or to the play's meaning is often insufficiently acknowledged. We tend instead to focus on such qualities as are amenable to correction, training and control. (This is understandable. If skill is to be celebrated, surely skills for which we can claim authorship will come higher in our estimation than will those over which we have little control.)

Yet, our immediate experience and our lasting memories of the performances we see are mediated by and interwoven with the actor's physical presence – the actor in the flesh, so to speak. Think of Barry John's fleshy middle (he even punned on the Shakespearean word "pate" with the Hindi word for stomach) in Roysten Abel's *Othello: A Play in Black and White*, and you realise a leaner actor just couldn't have intimated that whiff of seedy corruption which Barry's Iago did. Or, remember the classic reviewer's comment about how a pimply actor in the role of Hamlet completely alters our understanding of the line that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Jokes apart, this last comment is suspect because it suggests the argument that the core meaning of plays needs to be freed from the tactless exigencies of their performance. To my mind, this is not simply a defensive position but also an odd one, for it leads directly to a contradiction in the practice of theatre criticism.

Theatre scores over cinema through the simple fact of corporeal presence. Its qualities of face-to-face contact and physical proximity give theatre a visceral power that the technologically disembodied cinematic image can never possess. (Does that explain the pressure on the cinema to push towards greater and greater realism?) Naseeruddin Shah often speaks of the high that actors experience when performing in front of a live audience. Audiences experience an equal if not a greater high when watching Naseeruddin Shah live on stage. This compact of physical immediacy is the true strength of the

theatre. Deny it, and you dilute the medium.

How then can we speak of the physical presence of the actor as a threat to the production of meaning? Worse, how can we not speak of it at all? Theatre criticism and play reviews in Delhi tend to tread a safe path by ignoring physical and stage presence altogether. Reviewers go into all kinds of intricate details, but commenting on the physical attributes of the performers, even when it is germane to the play-text, is apparently a “no-no”, and akin to an invasion of privacy. But, can one avoid commenting on the physical, in a performance art that is of the flesh? The actor’s medium is his body. No analysis of a product can ever be complete if the critic fights shy of talking about its tools.

Take Yatrik’s *Harvest*. Ginni, an American who contracts the body of a poverty-stricken Third World “donor”, is described in the stage directions by playwright Manjula Padmanabhan as “the blonde and white-skinned epitome of an American-style youth goddess. Her voice is sweet and sexy”. The actress cast in the role, Monsoon Bissel, did a competent job of emoting her role. But even with only a close-up to go by (we see only her face on television monitors), it was apparent to all that the director had taken liberties with the playwright’s vision of a cellophane-packaged desirability.

Surprisingly, not a peep about this was heard from the critics who otherwise tore up the production. Probably because any comment on the actress’s appearance would inevitably imply, no matter however politely hedged, that she isn’t the type to fuel a fantasy ride. Such comments, though valid as a response to the production, could appear as a personal and therefore an unwarranted attack on an individual. The fear of appearing tasteless makes cowards of us all.

Considerations of taste and tact prevent issues from being tackled head-on, even when facts stare you in the face and remaining silent becomes a sign of professional ineptitude. No

one, to the best of my knowledge, has yet pointed out that much of the popularity of the English-language 'Musical' theatre rests upon its flagrant display of nubile bodies dancing in gay abandon. That this is an unstated premise of the musical was unwittingly revealed by Delhi Music Theatre when it advertised its *Fiddler on the Roof*by plastering Bengali Market with posters which read in effect that 5 broad-minded girls were on the look-out for men!

Such blurring of the critical gaze becomes evident in those cases where comments on physical presence would in fact be appropriate. For instance, in the English language comedy that came to be known as the Sex Comedy in the shorthand of the print media. In a script where the male roles are envisaged as dogs on a leash, the female leash, sorry lead, usually went to an actress in whom acting talent was a bonus but the requirement of "oomph" was non-negotiable. The reviews, however, treated these productions like any other. When talking about body parts would have been far more attuned to the aesthetics of the show(ing), their focus on acting skills seemed perversely cruel to the audience, the director and the 'act'ress. Especially as (like in *Harvest*) the gap between intention and fact was often embarrassingly acute.

What is ironical about such silence is the fact that everybody on the other side of the curtain trades extensively on the physical in shaping textual meaning and audience response. After all, playwrights, directors and performers don't go through casting auditions with their eyes closed. But, when it comes to concluding the pact from this side of the curtain, the protocols of viewing shift from the aesthetic to the social. Decency and propriety suddenly stake a claim as aesthetic criteria. Comments on physical presence are derided as "nasty" reviewing, and banished to gossip boudoirs. What better proof does one need of Delhi's theatre community being a large club (of course there's much heartburn amongst its members, but which club is free of squabbling?) than the fact

that even its reviewers observe the social protocols?

I can understand analyses being circumspect if the actor's physical attributes are, as seen from a mainstream perspective, socially disadvantaged. Saying that an actor has too thin a voice to play the swaggering bully is a 'no-no'. But laudatory descriptions bring other problems. For example, there's no denying the fizz in Rahul Bose's stage presence. But, in *Seascapes with Sharks and Dancer*, this strength militated against his role as a reclusive writer. Bose thus seemed to play a man who was quiet by choice rather than situation, cool rather than conservative, and sexy rather than scared stiff. Much praise was heaped on Bose as if stage presence is a talent in its own right, regardless of the way it mangles the script.

The real complications in critical response occur when a production does not fit neatly into the black and white categories of convention. When normative perceptions of the physical are inverted, when what is conventionally regarded as 'inferior' is celebrated and the 'superior' is destabilised, the degree of difficulty gets too much for polite reviewers to handle.

Maya Rao, for instance, wouldn't win anybody's vote at a beauty contest (I say this with all the presumption of a friend), and it is this absence of the 'media'ted sense of the feminine that imparts a hypnotic quality to her stage presence. Whether it is Maya cupping her belly and speaking of the distinctive female muscles of the underbelly and the thigh in the course of her stage performance of Bertolt Brecht's short story *The Job*, or Ritu Talwar similarly challenging cultural codes of the feminine by physically emphasising the masculine aspect of her presence (in Anuradha Kapur's production of the same Brecht short story), the principle is the same. Both refuse to conform to picture-frame ideals of the feminine as endlessly replicated by the media and internalised by a whole generation of anorexic feel-gooders,

(This feminine icon is seen best in our younger film heroines. They are such clones – physically, mentally: who can tell – of each other that like quality assembly line products, it is difficult to tell them apart.) Maya and Ritu's refusal to conform marks the primary source of these actresses' challenging, transgressive power.

How can any discussion of such performances be complete if the critical discourse makes no accommodation for the body as a site of meaning? Obviously, the body is not just fair but necessary game in the business of reviewing. If sociality and its norms are allowed to thus infect the critical will, reviews may end up displaying the very symptoms that such productions seek to challenge.

Not that this solves the problem, for there is another side to the tale. Steven Berkoff explains why actors will forever be sensitive to criticism that accommodates discussions of the body: "The actor's working material is his own body. With painters, sculptors, etc, your work is separate and distinct from you. Criticism is therefore far more personally wounding to the actor that it is for other kinds of artists." In fact, in talking so carelessly of the actor's physical presence, I too may have presumed upon the insurance of friendship. It's another matter that Maya may cancel the insurance. Or, she may insist as a well-known director had declared at a workshop, that there can never ever be friendship between performer and critic.

Which simply begs the question: Why in that case should protocols of the public and the personal be so religiously observed? The actor's medium is the body. The critic must factor that into the analysis. Amen.

Keval Arora’s Kolumn- Admission Time Blues

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?

Habitat Film Club Discusses Hitchcock’s Dial M for Murder

Habitat Film Club Discusses Hitchcock’s *Dial M for Murder*

A Report by

Tarini Sridharan

Cummings, Kelly, and Milland

At a packed screening of Alfred Hitchcock’s 1954 classic *Dial M for Murder*, introduced and facilitated by Divya Raina, it was an eye-opener to how there is avid interest in the compelling cinema of the Master of Suspense. There was rapt attention throughout the viewing of the movie, as well as a very involved and intense discussion afterwards.

As Divya said in the introduction, “despite Hitchcock’s populist success, his work has always quite easily juxtaposed itself with that of Bergman, Renoir or Fellini.” She went on to add that Hitchcock had rightly been called “not only the creator of images”, but the “auteur of dreams; or the incubus of our deepest fears.”

This, she explained, was one of the key elements of *Dial M for*

Murder, for what was not always recognized under its murder mystery format, was how "it explored the realization of the worst subconscious fears that can surface *within marriage*." The film proves consistent to this with Hitchcock's black humour of a husband intent on murdering his wife and a wife having an affair with another man.

She particularly alerted one to the underlying symbolism used in the film, such as the Freudian metaphors of the *key-hole*, the *purse*, the*placement* of the *letter* and the *door*. Also highlighted was the intricately worked out colour scheme (Grace Kelly wears white in the first scene with her husband, red with her lover, and further on in the film when her life is in danger; somber grey).

The discussion that followed had several people bringing in the relevance of the 'murder' theme in the context of the current Aarushi – Hemraj case and there were comparisons to the superiority of Hitchcock's cinematic endings to various Hindi films. There was also a very engaged dialogue on the recurring preoccupations and themes in most of Hitchcock's films, as well as the voyeurism motif and Hitchcock's history with the heroines in his films.

There was, however, a sense of wanting more at the end of the event, a there was a clamouring for a Hitchcock festival in the same manner as conducted by Divya Raina, with many requests for various other Hitchcock movies, including his British period, and his relatively unexplored *Marnie*.

DIAL M FOR MURDER

Directed by	Alfred Hitchcock
Produced by	**Associate producer:** William Hill **Uncredited:** Alfred Hitchcock

Written by	Stage play & screenplay: Frederick Knott

Sarkar Raj – a product of our times where Business controls Politics

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A Review by Joya John

The movie ***Sarkar Raj*** belongs to a genre of Bollywood films that have repeatedly shown the nexus between the mafia and

governments. The audience is reminded time and time again that politics and governments are not in the hands of visionaries and incorruptible leaders. This is essentially a politics of the crooks with ideals and the crooks with no ideals. The central question that needs to be asked of the film Sarkar Raj is why should the audience/spectator identify with the father-son duo of the film played by Amitabh Bacchan(Sarkar) and Abhishek Bacchan(Shankar)?

The film works through certain tropes that are typical of the genre of mafia movies. An old guard, epitomized in Amitabh Bacchan or Sarkar, makes way for a new leadership—Abhishek Bacchan or Shankar. Shankar becomes involved in a multi-crore-power project-, which we are told, repeatedly, will benefit the people of Maharashtra. The words, "*badlav",*"development", and "public good" achieve an incantatory quality when reiterated by the tough talking glib Shankar. Not surprisingly this project encounters a contradiction that we are now only too familiar with, post nandigram- people versus development. The construction of the power project will displace 40,000 villagers. Shankar travels extensively to convince villagers of the necessity of this project. We never hear these arguments because of a deafening background score that reinforces the aura of the leader Shankar. All we are given are a series of homilies on "welfare", exchanged between Amitabh Bacchan and Aishwarya Rai.

However, opposition builds up to the proposed project and is spearheaded by Som, a peasant leader who convinces villagers that the project will benefit only the metropolis of Mumbai. The nature of this opposition is however suspect from the start and we learn later that Som's resistance is only part of a larger Machiavellian politics to overthrow the Sarkar backed government in Maharashtra. Shankar, the visionary, is killed and Amitabh Bacchan or Sarkar discovers that the project was never meant to take off and "power to the people" was never the purpose of the project. Through a series of vendetta

killings Sarkar, reestablishes the power of the “raj”.

The film Sarkar Raj ends with painting a rather grim picture of the world of politics. Interestingly its visonary-Shankar has strong links to the underworld and is not comparable to the student leader of *Yuva,* played by Ajay Devgan or a socially motivated protagonist like Sharukh Khan in*Swades.* Characteristically these would be the agents of social change for middle class audiences. So why does Ram Gopal Verma, decide to deify a hero who is after all from the mafia? Sarkar Raj is very much a product of its times when clearly the world of business controls politics. This has also meant that the self-proclaimed agent of social welfare is no longer the state, but big corporations. Sarkar Raj also depicts an old style mafia now diversifying into ‘clean’/aboveboard business. Ironically the film makes us believe that we are not watching a business venture take off but are in fact witnessing a welfare project to develop resources. The film is however a product of its own dilemmas. Can there be private profit with welfare? The film portrays power hungry politicians and money-grubbing businessmen who are not remotely concerned with welfare. In the grim world of Sarkar Raj, the public can only be pawns in the machinations of the powerful. Even when we see protest, the scenes of violence are strategic. Dissident peasants go on a rampage, destroying public property and attacking civilians and it becomes easy for an audience to distance itself from these concerns and see this protest as “incitement” of a misguided public. At the end of the day it’s the goonda with a conscience or the visionary businessman and their idea of public good that controls Ram Gopal’s plot. It is no small irony that Abhishek Bacchan has played the role of both the visionary entrepreneur in Guru as well as the visionary gangster in Sarkar Raj. Despite its rather patronizing subtext of public good being thwarted by corrupt politicians and unscrupulous businessmen and mafia the film Sarkar Raj deifies power not the people.