

An Inclusive Life



All my life I have kept an open, inclusive lifestyle. I feel that all should feel welcome and at home as this is how I was raised. I was raised by very open parenting and a household where even strangers who were met for the first time found a room with bed and food. My parents welcomed all with open arms without the slight feeling of them being strangers.

However this does not seem to be the case today. That inclusion I saw or many would have seen is changing in todays time. What is interesting here though is, many while choosing to be exclusive to people but inclusive to strangers on the social media. I am amused to see this change that we are willing to be open to a complete stranger to someone on social media who could misuse your generosity while we refuse to let the real into our lives.

We are getting so disconnected with the real person and also

not willing to welcome them into our hearts and heaths that we are creating a social cocoon around ourselves. How can we feel a human content in that I wonder? It will make us slowly into hermits with having friends with perhaps an synthetic generated text voice or an what we will paint as a perfect blend of a person with a hundred percent flawless face and body over the computer. We will spend hours on that since we will feel a strange sense of perfect fulfilment. Funny, we are only having conversations with our own voices of perfect words that the computer steals to generate a virtual reality which only entangles us.

I wish for the world to see the value in the closeness I hope to try to create with all. I hope that the myth of the perfect computer is destroyed within a body of an imperfect human. It is in that closeness I feel that we all can get to live within our truth. We will hence create a total willingness to be under no fallacy or mediated illusion of the other. Let us create only an life that creates a change of hope, connectedness and belongingness to all, with the help of the machine only and only to be help human kind.

So Far Yet So Near



When we speak to our loved ones on the phone, over whataspp, zoom or google meets we just don't realise the huge distance

or how far they are. We also do not realise that we have not met them over years and time just dissolves in the space of the internet.

However this was not the case about twenty years ago. I remember how much distance one had to carry in our hearts just to hear the voice of our loved ones or read their had written feelings in that blue heart pages of the inland letter. I would eagerly wait for that blue companion to reach my mail box. I would excitedly rush to get it and read and re read the contents pouring the love expressed inside.

My mother and I thought of many devices that would help us to send the affection to our close family who had chosen to stay far because of work or studies. We used to tape our voices over the recorder and laugh or sing songs so that it becomes easier for our beloved to carry on the tasks of the day. We also wrote diligently every week and it was an exercise that never failed us. That duty we created helped us in many ways and has helped us even today to keep in touch.

Those beautiful inland letters still are kept in boxes, the photographs sent, carefully placed in heavy albums. In todays world we can click and delete anything in nano seconds which many times has made us forget the value of being in the past. It should be said that to access is much easier which has its own advantage but it has made the sincerity towards our feelings a little hazy. In that haze we often times stand to forget as easily as we can remember.

Let us, I urge keep both in store, the virtual and the real both can amalgamate into a zigzag cross roads of several meeting points and quick departures. These goodbyes will only be met soon, which can then become realities. Our world is being far enough to be near, very near and let that closeness remain as the mementos we will treasure forever.

Bhediya the Play Creating a New Medley



When we first start watching the play Bhediya (written by Dinesh Agarwal and devised and directed by Binod Sharma and Hema Bhist) you feel that too many complex ideas are at interplay. What remains interesting at the core of the direction is that the farrago of complexities come together well in the end. One realizes soon interestingly that the script is in chapter formations, i.e. one chapter instead of leading to the next, had an end to itself while in the end all themes merge to highlight the main theme.

At the core this play talks about the restrictions that the society places on women, it ranges from a young girl (Prithi, played by Rajni) getting raped by her boyfriend whose hapless

parents show their true plight and loss ; the activist Malti Malini (Meenakshi Naithani) and the misogynistic reactions towards her, the ever presence of the television anchor and correspondent (played by Aditya Deshwal and Sheel Kalia) who only wants to increase their TRP despite the occurrence of wild allegations made by the other panelists the submissive Iyer and the pontiff of all society's bearing, the algebra baba (Vyom Gupta).

At the other end of the spectrum, we see a Bhediya (Mohit) or a wolf that is roaming in the village of drunk Maheswar Mahto (Dinesh Agarwal) who is unable to protect his grandchild Nanku (Tanuj), or even his own jobless son Mangarua (Nitesh Raghav) from the clutches of this preying animal. The heart wrenching scene of losing her child, husband and father-in-law is witnessed by Chameli (played by Richa Arora) which is only used again to as piece of news item by Bhatuknath (Sheel Kalia).

We see the play ending in a huge climatic wave of voices of strong female powers that emerge to create a huge medley. The grand opus thus is to destroy all the grave concerns of society against the females. What remains as a point of interest is the way the grave ideas are displayed and enacted, which the director, Binod Sharma cleverly used in a sequential order with small scenes and larger scenes and an opus of females in the end.

Instead of using a single point of reference in the script, Dinesh Agarwal has intertwined many ideas, the rape of Rajni and the devastation of her mother Madhvi (Nishta Sharma) and father Sadashay (Jitender Singh); the everlasting huge presence of the media; the attack of a real wolf on a small child of a rural village depicting the plight of the villagers and in the finality the waving rise of womanhood in itself.

What impressed me was the use of televised narrations and the interaction of multimedia projected screens in the play. A

special word must be given to Jitender Singh (Sadashay) and Nitesh Raghav (Mangarua) who pulled the act with great command of their acting skills as they had little dialogues. Little Nanku and Tanuj were a delight to watch, and Hema Bhist, Richa Arora and Nishta Sharma pulled me in their act.

Only one needs to look attentively at the technical of play as the lighting was choppy and so was the blocking too much centered. The stage could have been used in multiple formations despite the use of a projected screen. The songs could also have been used more appropriately with lights as well as the use of actors. Overall, the play Bhediya is indeed a good watch, and it brings a difference in style of scripting and direction. It marks a new way of looking at theatre and hence one should watch it as a mark of contemporary Indian Drama.

Being Content in a Day / Gouri Nilakantan



When one more year has finished in your life span and your birthday marks that celebratory day we realise many things. We come to see that life is neither too long nor it is too short, its just enough to be content in a day. The meaning of life should be seen within that day, the steps taken on that day should be enough to be carried forward. There is hence value in one, singular step.

When we live day to day we come to realise that we are not slighted in the least and words of today might echo the past

ones. The last breaths of yesterday has given only new meanings today. When you realise how to contain yourself within one day without looking too far ahead you are only and only able to see the rays of the rising sun of tomorrow.

I must say that I have learnt to live day to day without creating too many plans for the future. This has given me the wings that I need to fly higher as I do not fear the future nor feel sorry for the past. I simply give myself just one task to perform per day. I give vale in the singular without the wanting of the plural.

There is value in slow down to a simple one task. I make sure that I only do one only chore and I define that to my passion, hobby and profession. That one task is always related to theatre, it could be reading a book, watching a play, talking to a student, writing a blog or a paper, or finding a grant. I do not try and push myself beyond that singular task as it makes me content and happy to have finished it in time. This makes me look forward only to the next few days to come.

I know my singular voice of today will turn into a multitude of voices tomorrow. This will help me leap into the golden rainbow to bring back dusts of diamond, gold and silver that will adorn not only me but all. Lets all slow dance. Lets try and be content in one, only to sing and raise our voices to the future sun, to dream that one common dream and share the common glories that are thus sure to come.

the little fledgling will

leave its nest



We are just birds, we build nests for our eggs to hatch and keep them warm until our fledglings arrive. When its time a gentle push is given to the fledgling to leave the comfort of its coop, only to recreate its own. The birds show no signs of grief when their little ones leave, as they know its only a cycle, then why do humans lament? Is it because as humans we are much more clingy, much more emotionally attached, or simply we just don't know how to adjust to change.

Change is progress I would say, it is an indicator to not only growth of others but also self growth. However in our cases, unlike birds, we do not need to leave the past completely behind but only allow the past to become a beautiful reminder of tomorrow. Our days to come can hence be planned in such a way that we allow for the easy exit of our young ones and at the same time we also are able to normalise the different situation.

It will be time for me also to bid "cu soon take care" soon, very soon to my own fledgling. I will see the flight of my young one, only to welcome the change with cheer both for him

and me. While he carves his own journey, I know that new meanings of the situation can be given by me alone. This itself is giving me the eagerness to look forward for the new times to come. There is no fear in my heart and why should there be I wonder? No, I don't have any ready made answers nor ready plans. All I have is a happy, contented heart to see now the young ones leave and the new emerging times to come to be happy for his occasional returns and my own abode to be.

For me the fact that I can see my young one leave without any fear but with a sense of joy and the fact that I will find myself in a contented space calls for happiness. That happiness will allow me to explore and create new meanings for myself. Its going to be now a state of creating new dreams for me to draw and colour in myriad formations. The staircase to my new starlit world is within my steady and happy gait.

The value of a rest



Life can be best described as a story within many lines, with commas and with full stops. The punctuations of life has its own significance and sometimes a full stop leads to an exclamation mark of joy in the very next moment. I am now in the period of a full stop not really knowing where the next few lines of my own story will lead. I think that each line will be a an great exclamation but that in reality does not

happen. Some can be merely slow days with a semicolon or just three phased dots.

I must admit with all honesty, I wish for something exciting to happen soon. However I am getting used to this slow paratheses that my life is holding me in. I knew I was getting into a journey of long eased three stops which might lead to a lull so I have nothing much to complain. I have nothing to complain as this was done by me with great amount of thinking and fortitude.

What really scares me is that it is in this spaced out paragraph that maybe I will find my inner story is rejecting me. It maybe rejects that stand that I have taken in a full stop just for few more emerging lines to come. My soul is scared, " what if they never come at all?" Will I then need to lead my life in that rejected phase for ever? The phase of being denied in totality is what no one really wants. That lull if becomes permanent can be totally damaging to both the heart, soul and living.

I then realise that rejection is a part of the process of an actor and also a theatre director, scriptwriter or director. I stop and see that it is so much a part of many paragraphs of his/her life of a theatre person that a few exclamations of joy are enough to carry on further. That is why there is a value in a rest, as allows you to look only ahead. I hope that the next time I allow my inner journey to be written in a few lines I will be able to share lots of punctuations of ecstasy, of delight and of happiness. So stay still my lined life, the value of a rest will turn into a new page soon, very soon.

The sweet sounds of melody



I tried so hard to suppress the melody I always played that it only returned back in full swing and gusto. If you have ever played an instrument to the fullest dignity you need to give it, it graces you back with the same respect. Despite you trashing it out as "no longer useful" the instrument you pick up hugs you in waves of comfort and solace. It gives you an immense pride to belong once again.

I had given the instrument I used to play for hours a bidding goodbye almost 25 years ago but little did I realise that I would be more than motivated to give it a welcoming cheer. Once only has to pick up the melody, the chords and the rhythm of songs or even of simple broken chords. Each line of the melody or each note of the chord strikes a smile.

Even if you are many times still babbling like a baby, the music mother hugs your babble to hear your first word saying "mumma"! The moment the word melody comes clear the mother music picks you up, jumps up in much joy and refuses to let you go or let you live past her. Many times your being alone or perhaps being left alone only is understood by music who never fails to comfort you. I am only glad, or should I say ecstatic that I have found my home in the home coming into music. This is the place of original love, laughter and joy!

Teaching English Theatre to First Time Speakers



How many times I hear from first time learners of English that they want to learn English theatre. Why they want to do it goes beyond simply wanting to “fit in”. The need to do English drama is to get exposed to a global world view of writing. India never experienced the two world wars directly unlike Europe, Japan and America, hence our world view that is seen in dramatic literature is largely based on socialistic principles, mythology or themes that are pertinent to India set within in her cultural model context. The need for English theatre or global scripts translated in English is for a wider exposure.

I never say no to the first time speakers because I totally believe that language is a mode that helps one communicate through emotion in theatre. I see saying the dialogues in English like a film play backer singer in India who sings in multiple languages. I seem to enjoy teaching the first time learners more and more. One thing I make sure is that I don't force them to change or modify their accents as it makes the script odd. I don't need actors to speak like the kings or queens but rather understand the emotion behind the expression. The script and the story line is to be understood

within the emotions and the dialogues.

I cant say that I have been successful totally however I always tell first time learners if I can learn to speak in Hindi so can you learn to speak in English. There are some points I emphasize on:

1. I do multiple readings with the cast, so that they can sound perfect. I totally believe in practice makes perfect.

2. Actors are made to understand how to realise and I make sure that they are given visual cues to pick up the script. For example if the actor comes in and improvises the dialogue while entering the house. In this case say the actor enters the house and says, hello what a beautiful house and visually improvises and moves to a chair, the non English speaker can just say his line and say " hello sir."

3. I encourage the actors to check the pronunciation on google and take help from voice apps.

4. I also encourage the actors to read as per their fluency. The best way is to start reading newspapers or books with a voice clip. They can read along even if they don't understand to get used to the flow, enunciation and pronunciation.

So friends lets get the English theatre on the stage with even non speakers and lets make theatre about emoting the script rather than sounding like someone else or trying to sound like someone that no one can relate to, including themselves. Its really us directors who have to remove the coloured lens of our attitudes towards native speakers and encourage them. The more we encourage them, the more finer actors will be produced. So the buck starts and stops with us!

Pitch, Pitch, Pitch...GOT THE JOB!!!!



We all are always afraid to just pick up the phone, make a cold call and ask for work. This is more so for theatre people. Somehow its feeling of being rejected that one makes one, have a ego or one does not bother to pitch at all and simply ask their managers or want to outsource that to someone else. I highly recommend that theatre people simply do the pitching themselves. I am not qualified enough to talk about films as theatre is my primary genre and I consider myself a hard core theatre person. So this blog is only concentrating on theatre pitching. Many people ask me how do you get work, today I simply want to say, "I ask for work".

Ok, let me share some guru mantras (can I call myself a guru after 33 years in theatre?)

1. Keep in touch with your clients: one should always keep in touch with your clients, an occasion is the best way to keep in touch. A simple Diwali greeting or even a new greeting does the trick. We have festivals almost 200 days in a year in India, a great way to keep in touch.
2. Also give calls back to inquiries. Follow ups are extremely important if they do not answer back, relax and then get in touch with them after a few months.
3. Find a meaningful relationship with your team. For me personally I prefer if my team is based on a professional relationship rather than a warm cosy knit group. I would like

to see my actors get certificates and awards as my theatre is a company and not a group based experience.

4. Research on the internet. I use the computer at least thrice a week and make searches on topics that might get me work like " open calls" "proposals" " grants" etc and I make sure that I answer them. I must admit truthfully that for every ten proposals I write I might just get selected for one. That also I might never do but it makes me optimistic and gives me enough motivation to pitch for more work. I must add here that I also pitch for foreign courses and jobs even if I don't have the visa to the country. One should not look at those matters which can be tackled later.

5. One should make their presence felt in schools and educational institutions. Schools are an amazing place that will help you market your own brand. One can try and get visiting teaching jobs.

6. Write on blogs. I must admit here that I started writing for stagebuzz almost 26 years ago and it gives me immense motivation. I also make sure to share the blog with my friends, family and other theatre people and I get extremely excited to read their likes and comments. Find a blog to publish or simply publish in magazines.

7. Join associations and communities. Associations charge minimal and make a deep impact on networking and getting that job that you always wanted.

Do not give up my friends, make pitching a habit that you will develop. Once that habit gets developed, you will feel out of sorts if you miss out even one on your habits. Its a enjoyable task and please do it yourself, as who else knows you better, than you. Do keep sharing your ideas in the comments about how you pitched, and got your job as it will help us all including me!

An interim called slow downing

As I am embarked in theatre, I seemed to find so much joy in the lights, the sense of space of the auditorium, the high rush of euphoria listening to the claps I never wanted the pace to slow down. One year became five years in theatre which slowly even before I could realise it became a good 34 years. However as age progressed my legs weakened and so did the actors attitude towards their craft. The guru shishya parampara that I was used to had dissolved to quick theatre quick rewards and to become rusted into another group no sooner that they had rusted into mine.

I must admit that some theatre directors are used to this rusting but unfortunately I could not understand nor find how to cope with it. I found myself falling into a trap of not knowing how to deal with them into anger towards myself and others. I did not realise how badly the rush of 34 years had affected my mental space until I decided to take an interim of 8 months. My son's class twelve exams gave me good reason to go on this interim.

Imagine you are on a roller coaster ride and you have to slow down. There is great value in slowing down as it gives you perspective to look at everything carefully and deeply. You put your mind in each activity, do a digital detox, lessen on talking aimlessly and pick up skills and hobbies like playing the piano or simply basking in the sun. I wish to restart also not like a fast racing car but like an elegant ambassador of the past. There is simply no need to be the quick rabbit but being like the elegant elephant walking in deep contemplation seems much more to be my guide today. Yes this interim of slow

downing will surely help my next few years that will come ahead. I am only looking forward to that simple slow and steady life.