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 downing 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 puck 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 dialouges.

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.

Why them why me…NO, YES THEM YES ME!!!!

Its the first day of the new year, 2025, the time is almost 9 30 in the night and one can say that the day is over. The second day to the year is to come but it somehow always never has the same anticipatory joy like the first day. For me the second day is always ” Why them why me”. I always seem to feel helpless and out of sorts and always (can I add here in the past) feel out of action, and energy. Having realised that I decided on the reverse to say ” YES THEM YES ME” for this whole year! Over the years I was getting increasingly negative and becoming almost a loner. I felt that the validation I give myself was more than enough than to even give a thank you to others. Forget a thank you I started avoiding family, friends, neighbours leading a life of a self created hermitage and be almost like a saint. I realised thankfully I am no saint neither are all others sinners. The feelings are just a dooming cycle which I go through within. I call myself a saint and others as sinners or simply call others as saints and myself as a sinner.

It requires a balanced mind, a quiet mind of contemplation, so do yoga, meditation, talk to a counsellor anything to break that cycle of saint and sinner created humanity. Look at being humane in humanity. Life is short, life holds more meanings that what we think or even imagine. If an person can go through these cycles of waxing and waning like the moon cant

he cut across the black hues of his mind. I want every second day of the new year of 2025 to be a canvas of calmness. A loners life is no joy, gives little peace and holds no triumphant winner. A hermit is an hermit who others might not understand. The loner will get no solace in me now for I am sure that all my second days are a big yes to them and me!

A HAMLET IN THEATRE

Prose



Its only a hamlet that we all wish to create. A sense of familiarity. a sense of being totally one and open with all, a place where no judgements will be announced and where all will be accepted with open arms. If that home can be integrated with art, music or theatre, an occupation that all are

artistically involved in it will give much more meaning to our lives. We have heard of co-living spaces and co offices why no cultural hamlets. I have seen and heard of many artists who have reached their senior years of 55 plus wanting to create that for themselves. They all not only wish to create a co habitual place but are already in the process of doing so where the entire team meets almost on a daily basis, eat talk laugh joke and create a sense of shared belonging.

I personally also toyed with the same idea however I realised that I was not capable of carrying the mantle of keeping the whole group together. Perhaps I did not have the band with or perhaps the interpersonal skills needed to keep everything and everyone tied to my core. My core I seem to have kept distant as mine and others as others. It is difficult for me then to function as I have no member universally available into my core and people came and left. So many came and left I have forgotten many and I kept on directing plays with teams of actors almost like teaching schools. Yes I miss the ideas of theatre groups with members and fun but I don’t know if I am even ready to take on that challenge. I lead an insular, hermit like life and my hamlet keeps to me alone.

I am here defending those who are keeping their hamlet in theatre for they are never alone nor truly lonely (though I despite not keeping a hamlet am not lonely). Those who keep homes within the discipline of theatre always seem to be there for each other and enjoy all moments of good or bad while I have my own hidden world within all the noise. I wish all the home creators only the best as they are providing safe zones to all who will to participate and be within them. The hamlet in theatre is a ready, comfortable, warm space that needs to be lauded and appreciated.

Theatre as an Academic Discipline



I have heard many times why should a theatre person continue in his academic life when he already has a degree in performance and why should we even read a book, is not acting enough? My answer is all that is you are wrong to discount academic pursuit’s in a performative genre. The value is exceedingly high. I have always maintained a life of both a performer and an academician as I know that this will give me inroads to both worlds. Whenever I decide to take a break from pure performance I immediately settle into the life of an academician, I read and write papers attend conferences and create a parallel world where discourse, debate and decisions are made in a different vein. I seem to enjoy attending the conferences many times online where I meet a totally different set of people with different set of ideas and placed in different set of circumstances. The best part is I am able to

make new friends and enjoy a new head space where I am able to read theoretical books on topics like feminism, globalisation, neoliberalism which are equally exciting.

Drama students hence must be encouraged to go beyond the script. If the engage with the material that makes a space in their heads they will truly be able to become a totally developed individual. The day the drama schools of India encourage academic papers also to be written and published by the students a new chapter will emerge in theatre and drama studies. We all will be able to talk in a new language and engage in strong academic discourses that will also put us in a category of other disciplines like history, political science or philosophy. Let us only unite in joining with our fellow academic brothers and sisters and make sure that theatre is a vivid discipline beyond its vibrant performances.