

“Many people hear voices when no one is there. Some of them are called mad and are shut up in rooms where they stare at the walls all day. Others are called writers and they do pretty much the same thing.”– Margaret Chittenden



After months of intense cold, getting up late, sleeping in late I was left without feeling a sense of yes, I have done

it, I finally today found my day restored. It was as simple as getting back to my physical space that had given me so much comfort before. I have a beautiful office, small compact and well done to suit my writing and reading habits and finally almost after eight months I went back to it. The space enveloped me with total warmth and love. I felt finally that this was I was lacking all this while. I needed to just get back to my most loved space that I had somehow neglected over the months.

All of us I am sure have beautiful spaces in our homes where we find peace, maybe just as simple as a sofa or a comfortable desk. However we often avoid going there feeling that space is redundant and no longer serves the purpose for which it was constructed. Maybe that room gives just so much grief, so we want run away from it, we refuse to enter to enter and try and create new spaces in nameless domains. However we are yet never able to own it and hence we are at a loss. I see this as a blind refusal, a blind negation to create a new routine to back to the old one. I also see this as being thankless and to be harsh enough to say callous to a space maybe created with great love, fostered with warmth and growth of thoughts and ideas.

I would only gently nudge people to get back to disorganised spaces not because I wish them to find the keys to face their grief and remain there to be disheartened but to find new comforts. This time the new joys could be with others who wish to create a magical garden with you, each step together confident and delightful. Dear Readers, I urge you to find your comfortable magic spot at home to claim it back with the same love and care as always done before. Give it that special hug that it needs maybe with a song, maybe with a painting hung or just flowers on the desk that will always smile back at you.

‘Seema resonates deeply with me’ – says Sandhya Hazarika

Sandhya Hazarika is a 28-year-old Assamese actress, dancer and presenter. With seven years of experience in the Assamese film and entertainment industry, she has made a significant impact, winning the 7th Assam State Award for Best Debut Actor for her role in “Nodi mathu boi.” Sandhya holds a Bachelor’s in Acting (B.VOC) from Guwahati University, showcasing her commitment to honing her craft. Her versatile career spans Assamese films, television series, short movies, stage plays, and music videos, demonstrating her range as a performer. She has worked on various channels, including DD Kisaan, Doordarshan, DD Arun Prabha, Jonak, and Rang, participating in numerous television serials and programs. Sandhya is expanding her horizons by working as a dance cover producer on the national platform SAREGAMAMUSIC. Looking ahead, Sandhya plans to leverage her diverse experience and continue pushing boundaries in the Assamese entertainment industry while exploring opportunities on national platforms.



How did you first discover your passion for dancing, and how has it influenced your acting career?

Discovering my passion for dancing was like stumbling upon a hidden treasure. It all began when my mother first took me to my Guru Doli Thakuria, where I learned the classical form of Assam. Also, during a school talent show, I reluctantly joined a dance group at my mother's insistence. To my surprise, the rush of performing, the rhythm of the music, and the freedom of expression captivated me instantly. In those moments on stage, I felt truly alive, discovering a form of self-expression that words couldn't capture.

As I delved deeper into dancing, I realised its transformative power. It taught me discipline, patience, and the importance of perseverance. Hours spent perfecting a routine translated into a stronger work ethic and a keener sense of dedication. These qualities became invaluable when I later pursued acting.

Dancing not only honed my physical coordination but also enhanced my emotional range. I learned to convey stories and emotions through movement, which seamlessly translated into my acting career. The ability to inhabit different characters authentically and grace stemmed directly from my dance background. Whether portraying joy or sorrow, the rhythmic

understanding and body awareness I gained from dancing added depth to my performances.

Moreover, dancing provided a unique perspective on stage presence and audience engagement. The confidence I gained from performing in front of diverse audiences strengthened my stage presence as an actor. It taught me to connect with viewers on a deeper level, to convey narratives through words and the subtleties of movement and expression.

My journey from discovering a passion for dancing to leveraging it in my acting career has been transformative. It's not just about mastering steps or routines; it's about embracing a form of art that enriches every aspect of my life. Dancing continues to be my muse, guiding me through challenges and fueling my passion for storytelling on and off the stage.

Can you tell us about your experience transitioning from dance to acting? What challenges did you face?

Transitioning from dance to acting presented unique challenges that tested my skills and perseverance. One of the initial hurdles was adapting from physical expression to verbal communication. Additionally, there was a learning curve in understanding the technical aspects of acting, such as camera angles, blocking, and working with directors and fellow actors. These elements were unfamiliar territory from a primarily performance-focused dance background, with different stage dynamics.

However, each challenge presented an opportunity for growth. Through dedicated training, workshops, and learning from mentors, I gradually honed my acting skills and expanded my understanding of storytelling. I was drawing on the discipline and passion for storytelling, tested my resilience, and fuelled my determination to pursue a career that allows me to connect with audiences and make a meaningful impact through acting.

Which film role from a film has been the most memorable for you, and why?

One of my favourite characters I have portrayed is Seema, from a movie named HERO, a young woman navigating the complexities of life in a journey while grappling with her identity and ambitions. Seema resonates deeply with me because her journey mirrors my experiences and aspirations. Seema's character is multifaceted and undergoes significant growth throughout the storyline. She starts as a somewhat naive and idealistic individual, eager to make her mark in the world but unsure how to navigate her challenges. As the story progresses, Seema confronts setbacks and disappointments, which force her to dig deep and discover her resilience. This evolution resonates with me because it reflects my personal growth in my life and career. What I particularly appreciate about Seema is her authenticity and vulnerability. She's not a perfect character; she makes mistakes and faces moments of doubt. Yet, through these moments, she learns valuable lessons about herself and the world around her. Playing this character allowed me to explore these layers of humanity and to connect with audiences on a deeper emotional level. Moreover, I thank my director and team for helping me introduce myself to the lovely character.

How do you balance your dance training with your acting commitments?

I establish a weekly schedule that allocates specific blocks of time for acting rehearsals, auditions, and dance training sessions. This structured approach helps me prioritise tasks effectively and ensures I dedicate sufficient time to both acting and dancing without neglecting either. I also identify and prioritise essential commitments in acting and dance. This involves understanding the importance of each rehearsal, class, or performance and planning accordingly. Effective communication is one key. I keep open lines of communication with my acting agents, directors, dance instructors, and coaches. They are informed about my availability, schedule

constraints, and upcoming commitments, allowing them to support and accommodate my dual pursuits.

Please have a look > <https://cutt.ly/TehtZiaJ>

The Urban tale of caste discrimination



The Kanada film 'Handineltu', a masterful creation by the talented Prithvi Konanur, unfolds with the closing situation of an elite higher school in the city. Students Hari and Deepa share an intimate moment in a classroom. During that time, Hari gives her a locket engraved with the words 'I love you'. The scene ends with Hari recording a video of their intimate moment on his cell phone. Throughout the film, sporadic title cards are displayed. After this scene, the last title card appears, marking the beginning of the main story.

There is a sports event happening on the school playground. Hari, a student from a privileged background, is among the spectators, showing a video on his mobile to some boys nearby. From their gestures, it seems the video is about the female body. The next scene occurs the following day, with school in session and boys and girls arriving. Hari enters college, and his friend informs him that the Principal has summoned him. Hari goes to the Principal's room, where he is scolded and asked to call his parents. This moment marks the beginning of the central dramatic tension of the film: the school begins discussing the possibility of expelling the boy and the girl. The boy comes from a wealthy family, so the school management body is lenient towards him. The girl, on the other hand, comes from a low-income family and belongs to a lower caste, so there is no one to show sympathy for her. The discussions start in this manner but gradually intensify, highlighting the personal struggles of the characters and the harsh realities they face.



Deepa, a member of the oppressed Dalit community from an

economically disadvantaged background, and Hari, from an upper-middle-class Brahmin family, are the central figures in this societal drama. The film's critique is explicit: the different social statuses and the discriminatory attitudes towards the accused, based on their caste and economic background, paint a grim picture of society.

Some deliberately try to destroy Deepa's bright prospects as a player. On the contrary, the upper-caste family plans to send Hari to study abroad. The biased attitude expressed by the school principal exposes another facade of caste discrimination. The composition of the committee formed to decide the punishment for the accused, with four upper-caste and only one lower-caste teacher, reveals the administration's casteist mindset in the educational institution.

The film is primarily school-centric. As the story unfolds, the families of the two accused also come into the picture. The entry of various characters at different stages has made the film's narrative pacy. The technique of unravelling the story is akin to that of a thriller genre film. The director, Prithvi Konanur, has skillfully created and sustained the curiosity of 'What next?' His portrayal of how caste and economic discrimination permeates different levels of society, getting expressed sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly when opportunities arise, is a testament to his skill in depicting societal issues. He does not advocate for any one side nor show excessive sympathy towards anyone. This self-restrained neutrality and epic detachment lends him the dignity of an unbiased, sensitive artist of society. Earlier, works propagating specific political ideologies under the garb of social awareness were termed progressive by certain quarters. Times have changed now. Artists like Prithvi Konanur prove that a sensitive filmmaker can make a socially aware film without propagating political ideologies. His earlier film 'Pinki Eeli' also depicted the life and struggles of marginalised people.

The film moves thrillingly but doesn't rely on surprising camera angles to create excitement, even though the story provides opportunities. The director's artistic ideology is to depict a picture of society impartially. Arjun Raja's cinematography also aligns with this ideology. Many outdoor school scenes show the verandah, with parallel and perpendicular lines of grills and railings against pale, clean backgrounds, adding complexity to the shots in line with the film's narrative. The cinematographer uses a handheld camera for some parts of the film, and the resulting slight jerkiness adds another dimension to conveying the mental unrest in the characters and the story. The physical intimacy video is the film's driving force, but the director did not show it to the audience. However, viewers can easily guess its contents. This restraint and decency have enhanced the film's and the director's dignity.

Editor Sivakumar Swamy skillfully weaved shots of different moods into a seamless flow, keeping pace with the story's progressively increasing momentum and adding to the film's appeal. Sherlyn Bhosle delivered a lively and authentic portrayal of Deepa's inner turmoil, remorse, and despair, while Rekha Kudligi convincingly portrayed the role of the school's Vice-principal. Through their authentic embodiment of their characters, all the actors have successfully elicited a strong emotional response from the audience. It is challenging to elicit consistent acting from various actors, and the director has succeeded admirably in this aspect.

The standout feature of 'Hadinelenthu' is its ability to provoke thought and discussion on the harsh reality of caste discrimination, touching upon various aspects of society through a contemporary issue. The film contains a lot of dialogue; reducing this and giving more prominence to visual images in some scenes could have made the aesthetic aspects more meaningful. The film's thought-provoking narrative and ability to spark discussions on such a sensitive issue testify

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Garbage Free Society

Today's Indian and Hindi cinema in particular seems the kind of garbage in and out- Irrelevant data producing irrelevant output. This general perception justifiably springs from the conspicuously lavish supply of extravagant violence and sex that's become an inseparable part of the films we see today. Nonetheless, if the makers of films are supposed to be held responsible for displaying such content, I feel, the audiences are equally responsible for paying undue attention to such frivolous foolery that is not worthy of even an iota of today's extremely busy minds that have much serious and deservedly important tasks to dwell upon. My question is "why do we even talk about such content?" The moment we see a sleazy or excessively violent film trailer, why do we not discard it from our vicinity instead of just investing our time writing critical articles, dislodging them or engaging in mass protests against them.

If banning a film could have saved our highly vulnerable youth

extremely anxious to watch age restricted videos, we could have successfully been able to divert their concentration towards participating in intellectual activities rather than getting hooked to violate all rules of censorship under the pretext of modernity. Indeed it is the gusto of radicalism that provokes the younger generation of today to watch violence and sex that spoils their mind and deviates them towards unwarranted actions.

If juvenile delinquency is a major concern today, it is not because of only films, it is because of our inability as responsible adults to rationally explain the youth the adequate reason beneath our denial to watch such explicit content on Television. Yes, somewhere down the line we have failed as parents and guardians to make our children understand the detrimental factors of becoming susceptible to the addiction of such films and hence we see the generation today watches all the provocative material.

Imposing the rule of not watching Netflix or OTT platform will not help. The rules are supposed to be broken is the anthem of many such youths that are unregulated on account of the fact that they are misguided. Many a times, the working parents and guardians are too engrossed in their own problems to fathom the necessity of counselling curious minds.

It is not by stringent principles but by a forthright and sensitized counselling that the youth of today can be made to understand the need to focus on the ethically correct and age appropriate matter. Three four days back, I found a very young 8th standard student reading a novel that wasn't compatible with his age. On asking, he told me that the book was given to him by a girl of his class and on further inquiry it was discerned that the girl had got it from one of her friends who happens to be outside of the academic organization. This means that the child is being persuaded to pursue something that isn't good for her. She's influenced and does not even realize

that someone has tried to intoxicate her with the wrong thoughts through a very indirect mode of approach.

Apparently, in today's times, it has become very easy to spoil young minds by implicit method of exposing them to inapt literary and entertainment media. The reason these hypnotise young minds is that these vouch as tempting modes providing access to all that is apparently denied to them. The prohibited content is like a forbidden fruit that appears more irresistible and therefore getting carried away by it is evidently easy. Argument, altercation and stipulating precepts against watching the sensitive content does not make any sense and does not work. It is only a healthy and candid discussion with them that enables them to cultivate the understanding that they are not mature enough to get exposed to mature content.

When we advocate sex education to the youths of today for their safety, it must be ensured that they learn the subject with decency by appropriately highlighting the health hazards involved in the same. Similarly, the jeopardy of inculcating violent traits in nature by watching exorbitant violence needs to be adequately explained. Most importantly, these notions enter into the minds of those that have been honourably initiated into culture and tradition which endorses decency and sobriety.

It is my personal observation as a teacher that unless young people have very strong ethical values taught to them by their parents and guardians, they do not comprehend the benefits of living a sober life. This is true in case of every child because it is a blatant reality that children that do not have a proper guidance in their youth are directed towards delinquent behaviour very frequently. Teaching the worthiness of abstaining from matter that does not complement the age is the indispensable responsibility of the parents and guardians. The centres of education like the schools and colleges may hold on value education classes but the primary teaching of

ethics and principles certainly comes from the family; this fact cannot be dispensed with.

We cannot expect a clean society without attempting to clean it. Merely sitting comfortably on our chairs and critiquing a certain realm of enterprise will not help. It is our moral duty to ensure we guide our youth in the right direction rationally without dictating the dos and don'ts to them in an old school fashion. Today's times I find the dearth of such matured adults that construe the need to focus all their energy and attention towards constructive ways of living life and becoming true mentors for the present day youth. What I find is a bunch of critics that raise a barrage of complaints against violent and sexually explicit content, burn effigies of celebrities or rant continually against them. The moment we mind our own business and not indulge in such foppery to avail media attention, we would make this world indubitably a better and safer place to live in. It is not by ruthlessly protesting and banning films but by educating our youth rightfully that we would ultimately gain immunity against such inappropriate content. It will not affect us anymore and therefore whether it is displayed or not displayed in front of us will make not a tinge of difference. We would not get susceptible to it in any way. **This is how we make a garbage free society, not by pouring out our anger against these content creators in a rancorous way.**

For comments (if any) please post in the box given below.

Is Ethical teaching to

students possible in the modern pragmatic times?

Teaching is not just a method. It is a principle forming ethical code of conduct that students and teachers are inevitably required to retain in order that education becomes something more than just a curriculum driven enterprise. Today, times have changed and so has the value system being reformed which makes it quite interesting and challenging to balance the rightful morals and the modern alternatives on the part of both students and teachers. To adequately select the kind of valuable precepts to be followed and those to be accurately negated for the higher good of futuristic learning which is far from being simply a matter of 'obeying the fixed norms set by authorities is indeed an intricate choice to make.

The present day has shown us the theory of relativism which operates on the notions that 'good' and 'bad' are mere perspectives and there isn't a hard and fast rule behind following or rejecting certain behavioural codes; the academic sector also not being excluded from the same. We know we have many who seem to be confused whether rules are meant to be followed or broken. That's the tragedy of the modern times that we aren't able to draw a visible and clear line between the dos and the don'ts in our lives. Consequently, we all try ways and means to adjust ourselves the way we can without being bothered about being essentially – 'ethically' correct. There isn't anyone who could be straightaway blamed for the circumstances that have resulted on account of the modern man's own lethargy of finding out the adequate distinctions between morally correct and incorrect. All we can do is simply state that the times have changed and so we need to accommodate ourselves with the altering times wherein teachers

and students may take certain deviations from the stringent norms of maintaining a conventional –Guru-Shishya, Teacher-disciple relationship. It can be based on camaraderie rather than a pedagogic alliance between the two and the one who teaches and the one who learns both can be on the same platform; each learning from the other. There isn't any harm of course in accepting this fact for this is the truth of today's era that encourages equitable learning which rests on the principle of non-discriminatory teaching enterprise wherein the teachers act as mentors and facilitators providing the best of their knowledge and at the same time remain receptive towards accepting the points of view of their mentees.

Apparently, this is healthy and seems oriented towards eradicating orthopraxy wherein the teachers dwell on the notions of stringent dominion and the students hardly get a chance to ask questions or engage in any healthy discussion that could enliven the concept of education as a holistic learning approach. In such an overtly adequate environment, it seems rather inconsequential to demarcate the teachers and the students as seniors and juniors or experienced and novice etc. These terms that are viewed as derogatory by those that regularly endorse teaching as the means of effacing teacher student difference and making the teacher an approachable entity rather than a formidable personality. Nonetheless, as the thin line of difference has been blurred, it now becomes very difficult to justifiably present the requisite of the need to treat teaching as a respectable profession and teacher as the one that deservedly ought to be revered for the contribution that one makes in the field of imparting education. The repercussions of this phenomenon are such that neither the teacher nor the student and not even the parents of the respective students are able to offer an appropriate wisdom on how teachers and students should be when they are in an academic setting. In addition to this there seems absentia of guidelines in the matter of interactions between teacher

and student in the external environment outside the school.

It is under the pretext of being 'modern' educationists that teachers today at times dismiss the mandate of being 'obeyed' irrespective of the child becoming assertive or demanding or even at times irreverent in one's demeanour. Ignoring under the guise of being receptive towards informal approach of the students in order to make them feel comfortable in one's presence seems simply an excuse. It is universally acknowledged that a teacher ought to let one's students understand that a certain code of conduct is supposed to be followed when one chooses to interact with an elderly and experienced mentor. A student often escapes the guilt of being impertinent with the teacher on account of one's tender age wherein immature language lapse and unregulated mannerisms are labelled as juvenile misdemeanours. A teacher on the other hand is responsible for the mistake a student makes while taking the self-respect of the mentor for granted.

Teaching is just not disseminating the information contained in the books. It is the onus on the teacher of 'shaping characters'. This process is not only serious but also challenging. Not all the students are open-minded towards the process of 'ethical guidance'. It therefore becomes inevitable for a teacher to identify the mental readiness of each student towards adopting what we term as 'good manners'. Moreover, the difficulty is also on account of the fact that the contemporary society is heavily oriented towards promulgating the notions of pragmatism which unfortunately dispense with the requirement of including ethical values and principles of life. It is erroneously proclaimed by many so called modernists that being sensitized towards cultivating humanitarian virtues founded on the principle of emotions is a sign of weakness. Those people that get influenced by such misconceptions become hard hearted and focus only on attaining material success. That pragmatism is the only need of the present day and emotional thinking is a waste of time and

energy is the most convenient theory adopted today. This is generally the belief of those that perhaps do not comprehend the rationality of being modest and courteous without which apparently there is no chance of establishing a healthy human society. Since the minds of the children are so impressionistic, they are the ones that get misguided by such wrong concepts and because they do not know the difference between being practical and being insensitive, these two concepts overlap and shape the deformed personality of many as we see them today.

Teachers have an integral role to play in this regard and even parents need to extend their support in the establishment of value education as a priority. Opted by many academic institutions these days, it is indeed beneficial to have a course on righteous conduct that may enable the children understand the worthiness of being ethical in their attitude. Together with the students, today's teachers also need to undergo a vigorous training on retention of ethical virtues. Ensuring equity in their approach towards students that effaces distinctions of any kind based on either their academic progress report or their social stature is fundamental. Practicing the principles endorsed to the students in one's own life is another mandate that the teachers indispensably need to follow in order that the students develop respect for them; respect cannot be demanded, it is to be commanded is a well-known adage. Thus, value education is not to be myopically understood as another subject to be taught to the students. It is something that is ought to become a regular habit inculcated in the lives of the teachers first and then through them in the lives of the students in order to have clarity that we all strive hard today to achieve about the goal of the teaching profession.

It is very easy to state that the child is beyond control or discipline is not possible to be imposed as a rule in today's high-tech secular environment wherein students are smarter and

more informed than the teachers as they are exposed to the techno-savvy world. The fact is that corrective measures are the right granted to every teacher and they need to be adopted as the means to bring about the change in the misinformed students that have been wrongly manipulated towards the ideas of liberty and secularism. The goal is achievable and is not something that is too far-fetched or larger than life to be experienced as a reality in our lives. Let us as teachers try our level best to strike a balance between ethical values and modern pragmatic concerns that demand constructive alternatives in the existing traditional systems of education. This balance is the adequate mode of making teaching something more than just a mundane exercise carried out as a professional endeavour offering lucrative benefits. The day when teacher learns to make learning a holistic experience for a student and selflessly impart education retaining ethical values, this world will certainly have better citizens committed towards living a virtuous life. The teacher student relationship will definitely be exemplary of an amicable affinity between a true mentor and a responsible mentee.

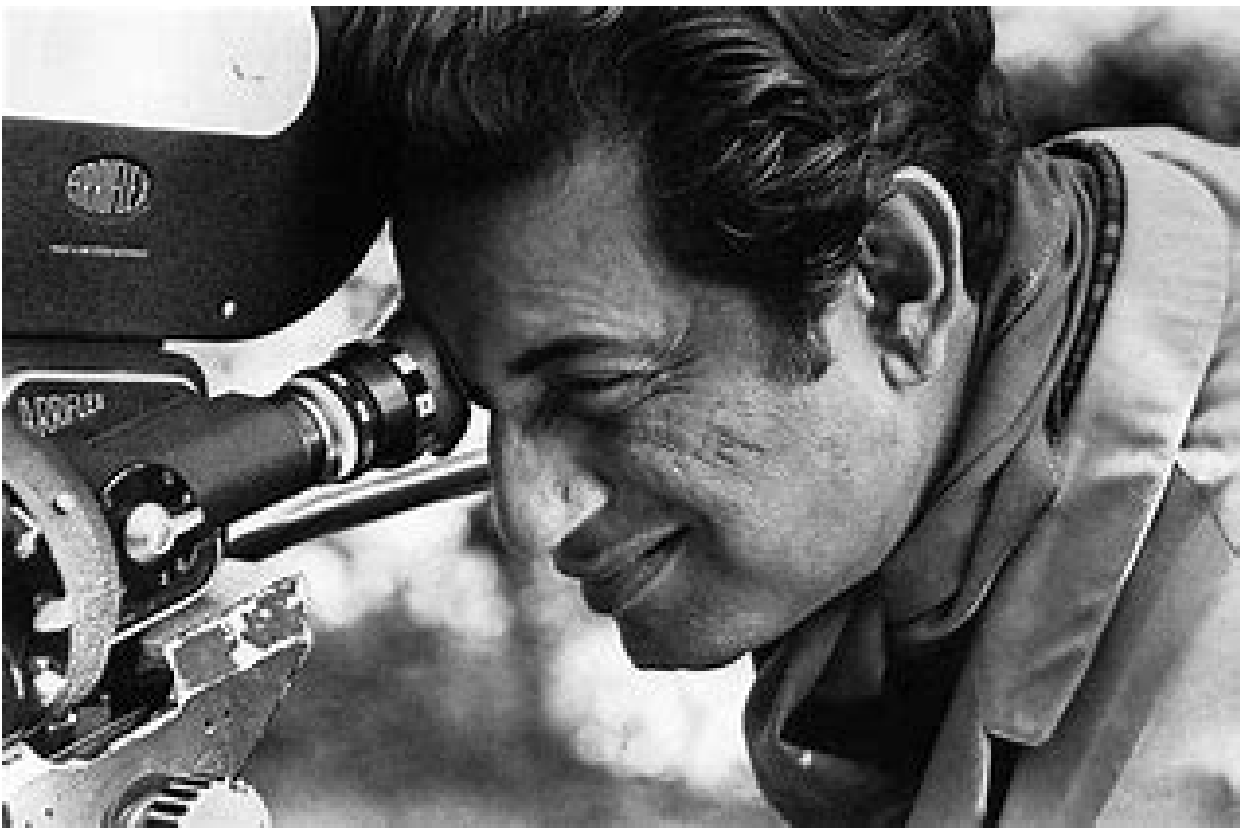
For comments if any please send in the box below.

Sherni: The latest Vidya Balan starrer on Amazon Prime / Sanjiva Sahai

This is Aastha Tiku's very first attempt at story and screenplay. Quite impressive. Dialogues by Yashaswi and Amit appear improvised, sound natural and sharp. Lovely. Benedict and Naren have come up with some extremely restrained musical

scores that elevate the sense of mystery in the jungle. And yes, Rakesh Haridas with his available-light shots provide some real-life experience for the viewers.

Remembering Ray | Kanika Aurora



Rabindranath Tagore wrote a poem in the autograph book of young Satyajit whom he met in idyllic Shantiniketan.

The poem, translated in English, reads: 'Too long I've wandered from place to place/Seen mountains and seas at vast expense/Why haven't I stepped two yards from my house/Opened my eyes and gazed very close/At a glistening drop of dew on a piece of paddy grain?'

Years later, Satyajit Ray the celebrated Renaissance Man,

captured this beauty, which is just two steps away from our homes but which we fail to appreciate on our own in many of his masterpieces stunning the audience with his gritty, neo realistic films in which he wore several hats- writing all his screenplays with finely detailed sketches of shot sequences and experimenting in lighting, music, editing and incorporating unusual camera angles. Several of his films were based on his own stories and his appreciation of classical music is fairly apparent in his music compositions resulting in some rather distinctive signature Ray tunes collaborating with renowned classical musicians such as Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar and Vilayat Khan.

No surprises there. Born a hundred years ago in 1921 in an extraordinarily talented Bengali Brahmo family, Satyajit Ray carried forward his illustrious legacy with astonishing ease and finesse.

Both his grandfather Upendra Kishore RayChaudhuri and his father Sukumar RayChaudhuri are extremely well known children's writers. It is said that there is hardly any Bengali child who has not grown up listening to or reading Upendra Kishore's stories about the feisty little bird Tuntuni or the musicians Goopy Gyne and Bagha Byne. He also launched Sandesh, perhaps the first children's magazine in India. Satyajit revived it in 1961 and it is currently available online as well.

He also established the Calcutta Film Society in 1947 with some like mind friends and film enthusiasts; the first film club of its kind in India, dedicated to watching and discussing the best of world cinema.

Pather Panchali (The Song of the Road), directed by Satyajit Ray is rightly considered as one of the greatest landmarks in Indian film history, placing our country firmly on the world's cinematic map inspiring several generations of film directors.

After watching Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves*, he recalled his emotions in a lecture in 1984. The film had "gored" him. "I came out of the theatre with my mind firmly made up. I would become a filmmaker. The prospect of giving up a job didn't daunt me any more. I would make my film exactly as De Sica had made his: working with non-professional actors, using modest resources, and shooting on actual locations."

"I was familiar with the camera, possessing a second-hand Leica. And paying homage to a photographer I considered to be the greatest of all—Henri Cartier-Bresson—I wanted my film to look as if it was shot with available light à la Cartier-Bresson... I had absolutely no doubt in my mind that I would become a filmmaker, starting my career with *Pather Panchali*. If it didn't work out, I would be back at my desk at Keymer's, tail between my legs. But if it did work, there would be no stopping me." (My Years with Apu.)

But there was no money to make the film. After failing to procure the bare minimum amount required to even contemplate filming, Ray decided to ask some of his friends to contribute a thousand rupees each. The budget of the film had been fixed at ₹ 70,000. He collected ₹ 17,000, and started filming in the October of 1952. The very first sequence that was shot is perhaps the most iconic of the film: Apu and his elder sister Durga running through a field of kaash flowers to see a train for the first time in their lives.

Pandit Ravi Shankar would provide the music and Subrata Mitra was the 21-year-old cinematographer who had never operated a motion picture camera before this. Today he is acknowledged in the cinema world as one of the finest ever to operate a movie camera.

The rest as they say is history.

Pather Panchali went to the Cannes Film Festival and there is a popular anecdote about how initially it was exhibited late

at night at a small theatre with less than a dozen people watching including Francois Truffaut, then a critic who would eventually go on to become a great film director, leaving the hall within 10 minutes, bored by the slow pace of the film. Truffaut later apologized several times and Ray and he became good friends.

Lotte Eisner, who would go on to become the chief curator of the Cinematheque Francaise, as Providence would have it decided that the film deserved a second screening. She lobbied and campaigned for it, resulting in a second show which was well attended and Pather Panchali won the special jury prize for the 'Best Human Document'.

Ray could now become a full-time film director. He started work on Pather Panchali's sequel Aparajito (The Unvanquished), which depicts Apu's teenage years is arguably the finest and most touching film of the Apu trilogy.

Although the first film he wanted to make was Ghare Baire, the one that got made was of course, Pather Panchali. An adaptation of Tagore's 1916 novel, Ghare Baire (The Home and the World) eventually did get made in 1984 and got nominated for the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival that year.

In 1982, delivering a lecture, Ray spoke about his work.

"There is a special problem that faces one who must talk about films. Lectures on art should ideally be illustrated. One who talks on paintings usually comes armed with slides and a projector. This solves the difficulty of having to describe in words, what must be seen with the eyes. The lecturer on music must bless the silicon revolution, which enables him to cram all his examples into a cassette no bigger than a small bar of chocolate. But the lecturer on cinema has no such advantage—at least not in the present state of technology in our country. If he wishes to cite an example, he can do no more than give a barely adequate description in words, of what is usually

perceived with all one's senses. A film is pictures, a film is words, a film is movement, a film is drama, a film is music, a film is a story, a film is a thousand expressive aural and visual details. These days one must also add that film is colour. Even a segment of film that lasts barely a minute can display all these aspects simultaneously. You will realize what a hopeless task it is to describe a scene from a film in words. They can't even begin to do justice to a language which is so complex."

Ray thought of cinema as a language. "Cinema is images and sound," he said.

"The problem," he wrote, "was over the word 'art'. If the word 'language' was used instead, I think the true nature of cinema will become clearer and there will be no need for debate." Cinema was a language defined by fade-ins, and fade-outs, camera angles, clever editing and quick cuts complemented by classical music.

Composing music for his films was essential to him too. "How interesting to know... that film and music had so much in common!" he wrote (Speaking of Films). "Both unfold over a period of time; both are concerned with pace and rhythm and contrast; both can be described in terms of mood—sad, cheerful, pensive, boisterous, tragic, jubilant."

Ray had mastered the art of conveying the message without actually making it explicitly obvious. In *Apur Sansar*, for instance, the audience gets a sense of the intimacy and comfort that Apu (the incredibly gifted Soumitra Chatterjee, who passed away recently and worked with Ray in fourteen films) and his wife Aparna (Sharmila Tagore in her first film role, who was apparently expelled from her convent school for appearing in a film) enjoy from the little sequences like Apu waking up in the morning, looking decidedly happy and satiated, opening his packet of cigarettes and finding a note by Aparna inside, asking him not to smoke too much.

Ray also ensures that women in his movies exhibit dignity and courage in the face of adversities.

Charulata, based on a Tagore novella called Nashtaneer, whose literal translation is The Ruined Nest (home in this instance) with the English title, The Lonely Wife is a masterpiece by any standards.

The opening sequence which establishes her soul destroying loneliness with no dialogues is fascinating and portrays her unique disposition in seven minutes of near silent shots.

In Ray's own words the seven minutes were about (from Speaking Of Films) attempting to use a language entirely free from literary and theatrical influences. Except for one line of dialogue in its seven minutes, the scene says what it has to say in terms that speak to the eye and the ear.

Madhabi Mukherjee, his rumoured muse and more accomplished the job with practiced ease in the scene which is still etched in his fans' collective memory; the embroidery, the chiming of the grandfather clock, casual lifting of the piano lid and striking a note; the monkey man, the palki, lorgnette and all.

Another personal favourite is her swinging gaily with fairly unusual camera angles and positioning perhaps influence by his mentor Renoir's A Day in the Country. So is the brilliant montage announcing the arrival of rains in Pather Panchali.

Everyone has a list of their cherished sequence, I daresay from scores of profound, layered and thematically rich Ray films, such as Jalsaghar, Devi or The Calcutta Trilogy: Pratidwandi, Seemabaddha & Jana Aranya.

One is spoilt for choice out of his 28 films which he directed in over four decades.

Most of these are based on classic Bengali literary works, and two; Shatranj Ke Khilari and the telefilm Sadgati on stories

written by Munshi Premchand. Others are based on contemporary novels and short stories, and some, like Kanchanjungha and Nayak are original scripts written by Ray himself. One of his last films, Ganashatru was inspired by Ibsen's play, An Enemy of The People.

A few of his films like Parash Pathar (The Philosopher's Stone), and the two Feluda detective novels of his which he made into film—Sonar Kella (The Golden Fortress) and Joi Baba Felunath (The Elephant God) are breezy and immensely entertaining. His two Goopy-Bagha films, Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne and Hirak Rajar Deshe (The Kingdom of Diamonds) delighted the children as musicals.

A little known fact about Ray is that without knowing it, he was indeed the first "graphic designer" in India. He even designed two English typefaces -Ray Roman and Ray Bizarre.

One of the most influential, multi-faceted and greatest filmmakers of all times, Satyajit Ray mastered the art of telling intimate human stories, the journey, the trials and tribulations of the ordinary men and women with extraordinary expertise embodying and showcasing the magic of cinema at its very best.

To recognize his enormous contributions to cinema, he was awarded the Academy Honorary Award days before his death. He was also awarded India's highest civilian honour Bharat Ratna by the Government of India

The legendary Japanese auteur Akira Kurosawa one famously remarked about Ray, "Not to have seen the cinema of Ray means existing in the world without seeing the sun or the moon."

Satyajit Ray shall forever continue to illuminate and inspire.



Dancing Away the Big Bad Wolf

Dancing Away the Big Bad Wolf:
Culture as a Site of Resistance to Big Capital

Joya John



I recently saw Madhuri Dixit's comeback film *Aaja Nachle*. However before you tell me that it is a little too late for a film review, I must clarify this not a film review. For those of you who have not seen the film a quick overview of the plot is necessary to see where my argument will lead.

Madhuri Dixit, or Diya as her character is called, returns from New York to the town of Shamli to revive a dance theatre called Ajanta, embodied in a performance space, that is to be mowed down to build a mall. Diya, strikes a deal with the rather flamboyant M.P. of the town played by Akshay Khanna, that in two months if she is able to stage a successful performance enacted by performers from Shamli itself, the M.P. will have to reconsider the proposal of building a mall. It is an uphill task, for Diya as she struggles with local goons and a motley crew of actors with no experience of performance or dance. The local businessman, played by Irfan Khan who has a vested interest in seeing the mall built tries to jeopardize the performance by buying off the local magnate, who was initially supporting the project, and also spreading vicious rumors about Diya's past (Diya had eloped with a American journalist leaving her parents to bear the social stigma). Needless to say the project is a success, the performance of *Laila Majnu* by the group is a roaring success and the destruction of Ajanta is temporarily halted.

Art and Culture is often the site where this conflict between public resources and private interest, or small enterprise versus big capital is fought out. There are equivalents of it in Hollywood. The film, *Sister Act*, starring Whoopi Goldberg, portrays a state school the only hope for black children from the ghettos, on the brink of closure. A 'successful' performance by the school choir helps to stall attempts to close down the school. What nobody notices in the bargain is the pressure on schools to show themselves as performing assets to continue getting funds from the government. The film *When Harry met Sally*, portrays a small community based bookstore threatened by the opening up of a multimillion chain of bookstores. The USP of the small bookstore owned, by Meg Ryan, is its personalized customer care as opposed to the impersonality of the big chain. It however cannot

compete with the magnitude of books and choices the big chain can provide at a less price. Here the romantic entanglement of Meg Ryan who runs the small bookstore and Tom Hanks the CEO of the chain provides a resolution to the conflict between small enterprise and big business capital. Big Capital (Tom Hanks) learns that it has to have a *heart* while doing business and it has much to learn from the expertise of the small bookstore. Meg Ryan's bookstore however does close down, while the values it epitomizes get transferred to that of that the big chain. So the big chain wins out in the end anyway.

While these attempts reflect a certain subliminal awareness of a conflict between the public and private interests the resolutions that these films suggest remain inadequate. Often enough the critique of private, commercial interest seems to spring from assumptions of its crassness. Ajantatheatre is art for art's sake, the *sanskriti* of Shamli, while the mall is only grimy commerce. Pitting a rarefied field of culture versus commerce is a risk. These oppositions are one that commerce and private interest would only be too comfortable with because this opposition de-links art from the processes of survival and livelihood. After all, an employee in a mall doesn't need to be an accomplished dancer and performer to make a living. What stakes does a potential, uncultured, employee of a mall have in the preservation of an Ajanta?

The problem with *Aaja Nachle* lies in the circumscribed role it gives to art. While Shamli risks losing a public space because of the vested interests of business and local politicians the troupe struggles to stage a performance of *Laila Majnu*. The distance of Ajanta, from the hub of the city, is replayed in the remoteness of its theme, deliberately shorn of any topicality. The alienation and decrepitude that Ajanta faces, and which becomes a rationale for its destruction, perhaps springs from its deliberate eschewing of a more politically sharpened content. While Laila and Majnu meet their tragic fates a teary eyed Shamli, is temporarily united by art. However romance cannot take away the fact that someday someone in Shamli will still want to use public land to build a plush mall.

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