

International Dance Day '10

The universal language



Julio Bocca

SHARMILA BANDYOPADHYAY

In 1982 the Dance Committee of the International Theatre Institute (ITI) founded International Dance Day to be celebrated every year on April 29. The date commemorates the birthday of Jean Georges Noverre, who was born in 1727 and was a great reformer of dance.

The intention of International Dance Day and the message is to bring all dancers together on this day, to celebrate this art form and revel in its universality, to cross all political, cultural and ethnic barriers and bring people together in peace and friendship with a common language -- dance.

In 1995 the International Dance Committee entered into a collaborative effort for the celebration of International Dance Day with World Dance Alliance.

The message circulated by the International Dance Committee on the occasion of the International Dance Day is one more attempt to build bridges through art. This year the message has been written by Julio Bocca, arguably one of the foremost ballet dancers of Argentina.

International Dance Day Message by Julio Bocca:

"Dance is discipline, work, teaching, communication. With it we save on words that perhaps others would not understand and, instead, we establish a universal language familiar to everyone. It gives us pleasure, it makes us free and it comforts us from the impossibility we humans have -- to fly like birds, bringing us closer to heaven, to the sacred, to the infinite. It is a sublime art, different each time, so much like making love that at the end of each performance it leaves our heart beating very hard and looking forward to the next time."

The dancers in Bangladesh have been celebrating International Dance Day since 1993 under the aegis of Bangladesh Chapter of International Dance Committee, ITI and International Dance Council. For the last couple of years the Bangladesh Dance Artistes' Association has been observing this day on a grand scale. This year the annual festival of the Association began on April 23 and will conclude today. Dancers in colourful costumes from all over the country will come to Dhaka, to join the grand rally today. Nrityanchal will also celebrate the day with daylong processions and programmes at various spots in Dhaka.

The overall scenario of this art form in Bangladesh has greatly improved. However, the commercial aspects and the attraction towards fame often dilute the true interest of striving hard to learn this art form to its core. Dance teachers are often confronted by various questions during admissions by the parents, such as, "How long will it take my daughter to become a dancer?" "Can my child become a dancer in two months?" "How soon can my child dance at a public function?" "Can you get my daughter ready for a competition next month?" "Can you make her ready to dance to song 'x y z' from the film 'q r s' at her cousin's wedding next week?" "Ma'am please teach me some contemporary dance..." etc.

Everyone who wishes to become a dancer one day has to keep in mind that there is no shortcut to achieving good skills in dancing, other than the utmost dedication and devotion towards the teacher, the institution and the art form itself. Hard work and only hard work is the only formulae of reaching one's goals and becoming successful in not only dance but also any other field.

The writer is renowned dancer, choreographer and dance teacher

Dancing Queen: On the line with Geeta Chandran

Iconic Bharatanatyam dancer Geeta Chandran lives and breathes her art. On the eve of World Dance Day, the New Delhi-based Geeta found the time for an e-mail interview with Kavita.

Excerpts from the interview:
What is the significance of earmarking one day a year to dance? Does it go far enough?

Since 1982, April 29 has been celebrated all over the world as World Dance Day.

India is the world's very special dance arena, a nation where even the gods dance! Be it Krishna, Shiva or Devi, they are all worshipped in their dancing avatars too. So it is deeply ironic that dance traditions are being rapidly devalued in India by un-enlightened planners, bureaucrats and culture administrators who have all brought dance to this sad state of affairs.

India's dance traditions are one of its strongest expressions of cultural diversity and of artistic creativity, yet dance has been marginalised in the current only-market-place-driven investments in art.

Hope that World Dance Day becomes a rallying point for dancers to get together and seek their legitimate due.

UNESCO's recommendations concerning the "Status of the Artist," which recognises the importance of the role played by the artist in society and urges governments to help create and sustain the material conditions facilitating the release of this creative talent needs to be better articulated in South Asia.

You are well known for your socially relevant choreographies, particularly those relating to gender issues and poverty. How far can dance go in conveying such crucial messages?

I firmly believe that Dance cannot be propaganda. The art has to truly reflect one's concerns and engagements. I have worked on different aspects of the gender issue for the past 25 years. Issues of violence, trafficking of women, dowry deaths, women and peace. All these have happened because I was convinced that having been lucky enough to be in a profession where women are showcased, I had to show others the path! For my work on trafficking, I visited centres in Kolkata where trafficked women were rehabilitated. I am associated with Sudinalaya in Delhi which does stellar work on rehabilitating women who have faced violence. For my project

on women and peace, I analysed the dilemmas of the character of Draupadi from the Mahabharata epic. So different issues have led me through different paths.

What are the changes you have seen among the new generation of dancers?

GenNexxt is smarter and more adept at information gleaning. But they need to be up on ways that information can yield them knowledge. Dance through its discipline and values, gives them knowledge, not mere information. That to me is the critical additionality that dance brings to GenNexxt. And that is what they are responding to. Dance is so different from all the other temporary gratifying objects they are perpetually surrounded with!

But GenNexxt is also in a hurry. Dance is not like 2-minute noodles. It requires a lifetime of learning!

What kind of response does classical dance attract from younger audiences?

I think that more and more young people are learning the dance. Whether they all become dancers is open to question. But at least that they will become enlightened audience members is my fond hope.



Geeta Chandran

Nrityanchal to hold a rally today

A CORRESPONDENT

Today on International Dance Day, the city will reverberate with special programmes. Dance organisation Nrityanchal is to celebrate the occasion with a colourful rally, which will encircle several places in the city. Starting from TSC at 11 am today, ITI Worldwide President Ramendu Majumder, is expected to inaugurate the event, informed the organisers.

"Three trucks -- decorated with motifs based on the nature and scenic beauty of Bangladesh, butterflies and flowers, a peacock and puppets -- the trucks will visit several points in the city," said dancer Shamim Ara Nipa, director of Nrityanchal.

The rally will stop for 30 minutes at Bangladesh Shilpakala Academy, National Museum, the Panthapath intersection and

Rabindra Sarobar. It will stop at Nrityanchal Dance School opposite the Parliament.

At each stoppage, students of Nrityanchal will entertain Dhakaiites with vibrant dance performances.

"The performance will include short demonstrations of dance forms of several countries -- Arabian and African dance, traditional dances of India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and our folk and indigenous forms," said Nipa, choreographer of the performance.

"Normally dance performances are stage-oriented, the rally aims at reaching a wider audience and give them an idea of the diverse dance forms of the world," said Nipa.

"Depending on the success of the rally, we have plans to hold the event throughout the country on International Dance Day from next year," concluded Nipa.

Brac Bank is the sponsor of the event.



Shibli Mohammad (centre) with dancers of Nrityanchal.

The Dragon's Gift: Sacred Art of Bhutan

RAANA HAIDER

There is political power. There is economic clout. And there is the gentle art of cultural exchange. Projection of rich, diverse and ancient culture to the international community is another form of reaching out. Internationally targeted exhibitions can promote people to people contact and offer windows to the unknown and more often -- the misunderstood underpinning of other cultures. The Kingdom of Bhutan has decided to follow the cultural pathway to showcase its magnificent repository of religious artwork in the 2009-2010 travelling exhibition "The Dragon's Gift: Sacred Art of Bhutan".

The country constitutes a natural amalgamation of fields and forests and plains and peaks. The Himalayan Buddhist kingdom's landlocked mountainous geographical terrain has contributed to its land being both blessed and beguiling. In this land of myths and legends the tiger flies and the dragon thunders. Taksang monastery (Tiger's Nest) in Paro clings on to a precipitous cliff-face. It was built in the 8th century by the saint Guru Rinpoche also known as 'Padmasambhava', who is said to have arrived from Tibet riding the back of a tiger, in order to chase away demons and bring Buddhism to the Paro valley. In the words of the Queen of Bhutan Ashi Dorji Wangmo Wangchuck in "A Portrait of Bhutan: Treasures of the Thunder Dragon" (2006), "The legend goes that when the great Tibetan saint Tsangpa Gyare Yeshe Dorji (AD 1161-1211) was consecrating a new monastery in Tibet, he heard thunder which he believed to be the voice of a dragon (druk), loudly proclaiming the great truths of the Buddha's teachings. He named the monastery 'Druk', and the religious sect he founded 'Drukpa

Kargyupa'. When this school of Mahayana Buddhism became Bhutan's state religion in the seventeenth century, the country was named 'Druk Yul', or the 'Land of the Thunder Dragon'.

Five years in the making, the landmark exhibition undertaken by the Honolulu Academy of Arts, Hawaii and the Department of Culture, Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs of the Royal Government of Bhutan focuses on

on his work. Art in Bhutan is not used for self-expression, nor is it taken up for art's sake...The Bhutanese believe that making or painting a deity is a pious act that leads to salvation...Bhutanese art concentrates on iconographical accuracy and verity of form. The depiction of divine figures is almost a part of meditation and devotion."

Painstaking in its preparatory phase, some three years of research and conservation were undertaken. A new



Monks practicing one of the many cham, or sacred dances.

Buddhist cosmology and the devotional arts of Bhutan. Culturally significant objects whose provenance ranges from 7th to 19th centuries include 117 rare treasures on display. Bhutan's 'Golden Age in Buddhism' is reckoned to be religious relics dating primarily from the 17th to 19th centuries. Ritual objects, gilt bronze sculptures, bronze urns, copper vessels, woven textiles, Buddhist manuscripts and scriptures and thangkas (sacred scrolls) feature in the collection. According to M.S. Kohli in "Bhutan: Kingdom in the Sky" (2004), "One distinct characteristic of the Bhutanese art is that it is anonymous. The artist almost never writes his name

principal monasteries in Bhutan but also from some remotely recessed mountain monasteries, some of these rare religious objects are on their first ever public display. These sacred items have never been seen outside Bhutan and by few of the public even within Bhutan. Included in the visual presentation is the exploration of the rich ritual dance traditions of Bhutan -- known as *cham*. Religious festivals *tshechus* are celebrated to honour Guru Rinpoche and are occasions for prayers and blessings, feasting and socialising. The most popular *tshechus* take place in Paro in spring and Thimphu in autumn.

"The Dragon's Gift: Sacred Arts of Bhutan" opened its doors to the public first at the Honolulu Academy of Arts in February 2009. It was opened by His Royal Highness Dasho Jigme Dorji Wangchuk. The exhibition next travelled to the Asian Arts Museum of San Francisco. Musee Guimet of Asian Arts in Paris hosted this unique collection. Museum of East Asian Art in Cologne, Germany and Museum Rietberg in Zurich, Switzerland were other European cities to offer a rare glimpse of Bhutan's rich repository of religious artefacts. Towards the end of 2010, the exhibition will return home. And then begins its journey in Bhutan. In essence, there is a translucent convergence of art, architecture, nature and religion in Bhutan. In a land where the Buddhist faith is deeply entrenched, its ethos, spirit, lifestyle and body of rituals are a reflection of the underlying Buddhist bedrock.

Bhutan is hosting the 16th SAARC Summit in Thimphu, Bhutan on 28th and 29th April, 2010; marking 25 years of the establishment of the South Asian regional body.

..... Raana Haider, a travel writer, visited Bhutan in March 2010.