

Interview of Sadanand Joshi

Ashok Da Ranade

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Sadanand Joshi

Bio-data

Name: Sadanand Dattatreya Joshi

Place & Date of Birth: Nashik, 16th July 1923

Residential Address: B4 Bhatia Bldg., Dilip Gupte Marg Mahim, Bombay 400 016

Profession: Theatre

Education: Matric

Languages known: Marathi, Hindi and English

Language of theatrical work: Marathi, Hindi and English

Period of theatre activity: 1948 onwards

Awards: Natya Darpan - Man of the Year Award, 1976 (for completion of 1,000 performances of *Mee Atre Boltoy*)

The focus of your work has been Acharya Atre, however you have not begun your work with him. Who was the inspiration for mimicry?

To tell you the truth, that I mimic I never knew. I am a 'worshipper'. In Nasik I heard Govindrao Deshpande, a member of the Parliament at that time. I was so impressed by this elocution that I came home and started telling other members of my family about the lecture, rather excitedly. Automatically I assumed his intonation and his gestures. People praised me for my good imitation. This is how I began my career, through my appreciation of a personality. For Atre too I have very high regards.

Maybe you began as an accident, but later you selected persons from different fields to imitate. What were your criteria?

With a greater demand and expectation for something new I was compelled to apply one criterion, that of the popularity of a person to be imitated. For example, if I imitate Charlie Chaplin, it will have a universal appeal because Charlie Chaplin is known to the

whole world. Hence I worked on Hitler, Stalin and later Nehru and Raj Kapoor. Hitler I presented through mime. Others through mimicry. Thus universal popularity is one criterion.

Having selected a person what method do you follow?

Firstly voice. Voice is known to many. For example, in a meeting of, say, three lakh people Atre could not be seen by everybody, but was heard by everybody.

In case of Atre, the voice was also 'larger than life'. But what about persons such as the educationist Acharya Donde or the late Prabhakar Padhye?

True such persons are not known very widely. Yet in special circles of writers etc. they are known. A mimic must be able to change his voice quickly... I attended a meeting of primary school teachers. Acharya Donde, who was their leader, had a special diction. With slight tremor etc. his voice used to give an impression of a deeply sympathetic person. I noted that and later added a comic touch to it. It was as if he had gone to a school prize distribution or inauguration of a function etc. and mischievous college boys heckle him! This is how I added a comic touch to the proceedings. The point is that there are conventions regarding the kind of voice and the nature of occasion involved. Breaking this convention is likely to create laughter.

It means that you do not imitate purely and simply. In fact you are working like a cartoonist. After noting your subject's voice and speech, what is the next step?

Next is to note the person's essence of personality, his life mission which guides him. For example, Acharya Donde wanted to 'teach'. Or Sane Guruji always talked of purity and love. He was soft and sentimental. All this is reflected in how a person walks or sits or moves or gestures. I used to show this to my audience. For example, while doing Sane Guruji, I would move to suggest how Sane Guruji took care not to crush even an ant under his foot! On the other hand Hitler moved as if he was crushing a scorpion under his step. I sort of give over my body and mind to the person I am imitating and everything else follows... tremor of hands, tears in the eyes...

To what extent you regard hand movements important?

Of course, they are very important (demonstrates Raj Kapoor and Prithviraj Kapoor in movements).

You admitted to an element of mockery. Is it necessary?

I think mimicry, imitation is a form of humour. Mischievousness, mockery are essential to it. I accept that mockery should not hurt. It is as if a child imitates his grandfather, with affection and mockery and everybody likes it... As I said I am an idolater... the intention is to entertain, no propaganda, no philosophy. I am equally intense while doing Nehru, Golwalkar or Savarkar... Temporarily I am their advocate.

As an advocate do you try to gloss over, conceal the defects of your subject?

No. It is like holding up a magnifying shaving mirror! You must see the cheek as it is... While imitating Antulay e.g., I will your attention to his hair style and also his ever-ready smile... Thus we select... Mimic is quick. Even without make-up he changes.

It appears that you have referred to all the qualities a stage actor is likely to have or is supposed to have. You also employ many of the techniques of an actor. How should you be described: as an actor or a mimic?

It is for the spectators to give their verdict. It is funny that those who put up a show with many others are called actors and a person like me, a lone mimic is looked down upon. Also please remember that we select our subjects, we study them and we write the scripts required for the shows all singlehandedly. It is for others to decide whether this is a superior or an inferior art!

Is it possible to say that a cartoonist and a portrait painter are different and so are the mimic and an actor?

I think music, dance, drama all have a long tradition of centuries behind them. They are, however, taken more seriously. In contrast mimicry is a new art. We do not have

gharana-s... When we are taken more seriously (I have not received a single award so far) we will be appreciated better.

A last question. If there is a play based on Acharya Atre's life, what would you prefer to act in the play or to continue with your one-man shows?

I may or may not like it. In a play the credit will be divided. In my shows on Atre, I have put up 2,500 performances on my own... maybe I am not living in a palace but I have built my own house!

Sadanand Joshi: List of Productions

Sr. No	Title	Subject	Language	First Performance	Number of Performances
1	Vyakti Darshanatmak Nakala	-	Hindi/Marathi	1948	1000
2	Mee Atre Boltoy	P. K. Atre	Marathi	1965	2750 +
3	Swami (dramatization of a novel)	-	Marathi	1969	50
4	Hasya Kallol - Atre Once More	P. K. Atre	Marathi	1980	800
5	Mime Demonstrations and Lectures	-	-	-	-
6	Mimicry Demonstrations and Lectures	-	-	-	-