

# Looking Back...

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Of course, not in anger! On the contrary I feel grateful to the Theatre Development Centre for opportunities it continued to offer to observe, admire, analyze and appreciate the complex processes of 'making' theatre. Since March 1989, when the last review of our activities was taken, the T.D.C. has grown in stature. It has moved to take on fresh challenges in all kinds of relevant theatre-related work. The T. D. C. has succeeded in establishing noticeably high standards in archiving, documentation, dissemination, training and performing experimentation. The publication of the twenty-fifth issue is perhaps an appropriate occasion to note (and even restate) some of our important realizations in various activities pursued.

## Archiving and Documentation

Archiving and documentation seem to have caught attention of many individuals and institutions. A lamentable dearth of trained personnel is, however, repeatedly voiced. More importantly, the techniques and methods applied appear to be in need of rigorous thinking. It is known that for historical reasons, conventional archiving and documentation proved deficient in cultural matters. As a consequence, both operations are viewed by many as essentially stagnant and hence to be put away to the post retirement days! It is necessary to stress that cultural contexts transform archiving and documentation into enlivening processes conducive to continuous creativity within a tradition. To equate them with preservation and recording etc. is to mistake a tree for the wood! To archive does not mean relegating the archived to the past! Documentation too is not a disintegration of an experience into more or less unusable units! As has been repeatedly stressed, archiving and documentation aim at generating and systematizing material to provide larger contexts to creativity facilitating in the process its reception, comprehension as well as continuation. In spite of the post-factor analysis involved in them, the two functions are closer to artistes' work than to the tasks carried out by critics, aestheticians etc. To a great extent

archivists and documentarians miss the luxury of making their own value-judgements in relation to the experience they document etc. They, in fact, assume the value and concentrate on the question: What made the experience valuable and how? Incorrect stance in this respect is bound to adversely affect the entire effort. On the other hand, the legitimacy of all critical and aesthetic activity depends on the extent and depth of value-judgements made and put forward methodically.

## **Dissemination**

Dissemination has become a kind of catchword, the unavoidable fate of every new and potentially significant cultural development! The easily available and fascinatingly varied recording (and playback) facilities have brought about an explosion in demand for all types of documented material. In performing arts the legitimate desire for dissemination is, however, thwarted by anxieties caused by problems related to copyright, piracy and other misuses of the material.

Some guiding principles are (rather aphoristically) noted here:

1. In the final analysis all preservation is merely a slowed down decay and all dissemination is an encouraged distortion.
2. Documented material loses in value gradually unless it is recycled intelligently if not creatively.
3. Intentions of disseminators and users are more important than their particular and actual actions.
4. No misuse should be allowed to obstruct a use of any documented material.
5. Aesthetically 'bad' material can be efficiently documented but an efficiently documented material cannot add to the aesthetic value of the original. Dissemination of efficient but aesthetically indifferent material is culturally dangerous.
6. Dissemination is not wide distribution alone! Reuse and not re- hoarding should be the aim!

## **Training**

The glaring paradox of easily accessible training aids and a marked lack of well-reasoned methodology of using them continues! It is symptomatic that users of modern technological aids in theatre-training often refer to three free-floating terms:

time- saving, energy-saving and money-saving! The point is that tutors and trainees both seem eager to 'compress' training as a phenomenon! Unfortunately, the results are not encouraging! Weekend workshops, crash-training programmes, production-oriented teaching etc. seem to be face-saving formulae employed to conceal lack of competence in teachers and an absence of application by the taught!

Yet another problem faced in theatre-training (in particular) is the dearth of performer-teachers. Avoiding 'bookish' teachers i.e., those who parrot information available in books (especially English) is not enough! It is essential to identify performers who combine insights gained through actual performances with a scholastic ability to work on and towards ideas. Unfortunately, the dictum 'to teach from one's own experience' is mistaken to mean 'to talk about one's own self! Thus, we witness the spectacle of performers describing experiences without analyzing them, or narrating events without placing them in a perspective or listing achievements without giving credit to the impersonal tradition which made them possible. Training methods are expected to transform persons endowed with native talent into efficient performers. Very few performer-teachers are aware of this responsibility.

### **Experimentation in Performance**

An intriguing feature of the current situation is that a majority of established performers are ready to share their time, energy etc. for 'experimental' ventures. At least in Maharashtra they go out of their way to cooperate individually and institutionally to keep the 'experimental' flame alive. The amateur theatre-worker's eagerness to join the mainstream commercial theatre and the readiness of the commercial theatre-elements to help the experimental activity should fascinate any alert observer of the scene. Not that controversies about what is experimental have ceased! The truth that experimental is experimental in relation to the prevailing-is very often entirely forgotten. Added to that is the tussle between two strong orientations competing for the honour of defining the nature of experimentation in theatre. While actors and directors are keen on 'technical' experiments those following textual angles are inclined to focus on the content. It must be admitted that both parties seem unable to appreciate experimentation advocated by the other!

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The factual data tabulated in the present issue should suffice to assure theatre-workers that we at the Theatre Development Centre respect all activities related to theatre.

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