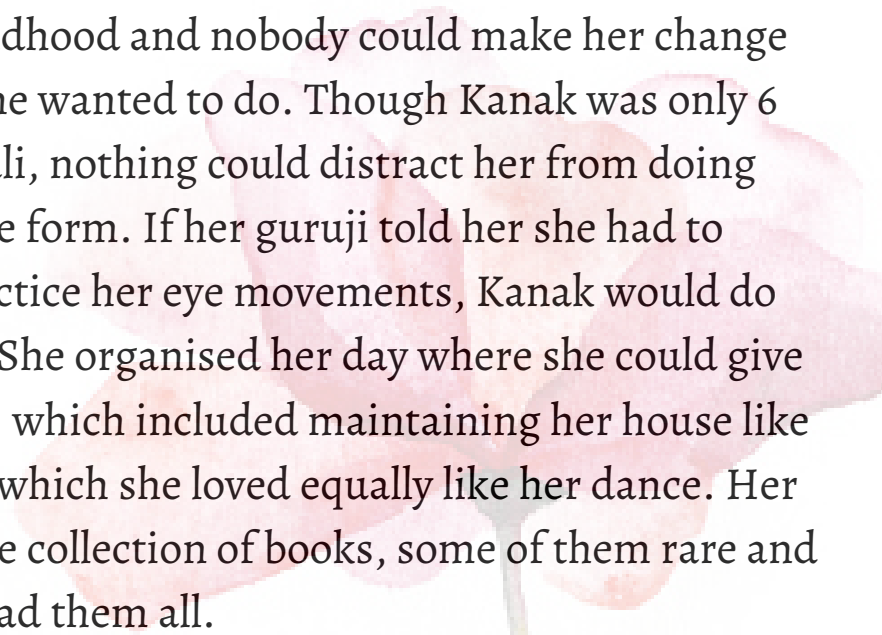




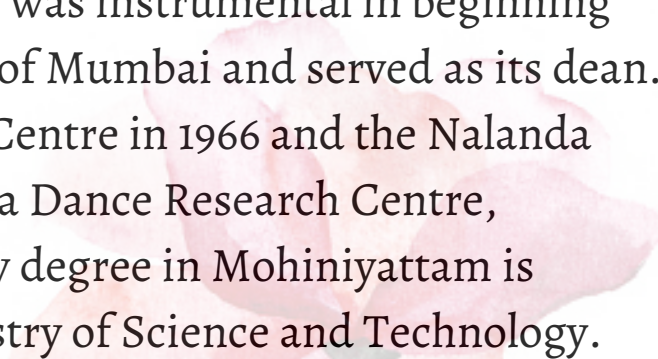
# SINDHU 2023

## Remembering Dr. Kanak Rele

Dr Kanak Rele managed many roles in her lifetime. A student, a wife, a mother, a grandmother, performer, researcher and an educationist. Her work in the field of dance is immense. Dr Rele could have become a lawyer or a doctor but her love for dance took precedence over every other profession. She had an independent streak right from childhood and nobody could make her change her mind once she decided what she wanted to do. Though Kanak was only 6 when she started learning Kathakali, nothing could distract her from doing what was needed to learn the dance form. If her guruji told her she had to wake up at 5 in the morning to practice her eye movements, Kanak would do it. Nothing could be a distraction. She organised her day where she could give time to everything she liked doing, which included maintaining her house like cleaning and cooking and reading which she loved equally like her dance. Her institute's library has an impressive collection of books, some of them rare and not available anywhere. She has read them all.

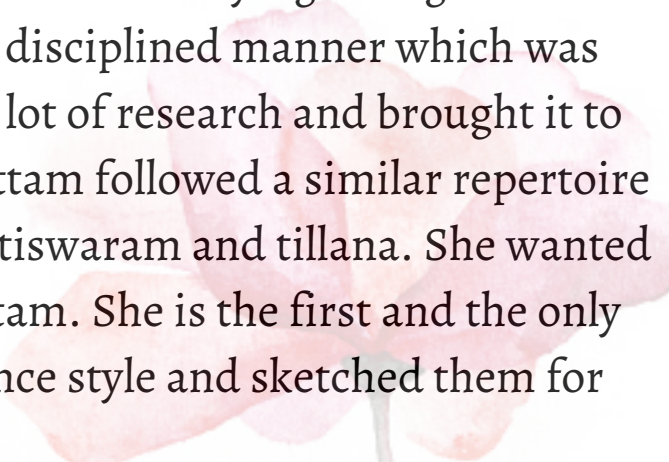


If I have to talk about Dr Kanak Rele it would be about the institute she started, to educate children about dance. It was not only dance that she wanted to teach. She wanted everyone to know the art in a holistic way both practically and theoretically. Her syllabus was an extensive study of the dance and she taught it with the same zeal and enthusiasm as she learnt it. The course that she has designed has opened up avenues in careers like choreographers, fitness trainers, dance school instructors, teachers, and performers. She has not only educated girls but generated a scope for income by teaching them a professional skill. The skill to teach or perform remains with you all your life much like any other professional skill. Dr Rele was instrumental in beginning the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Mumbai and served as its dean. She established the Nalanda Dance Research Centre in 1966 and the Nalanda Nritya Kala Mahavidyalay in 1972. The Nalanda Dance Research Centre, Mumbai which trains students for a university degree in Mohiniyattam is recognised as a research institute by the Ministry of Science and Technology.



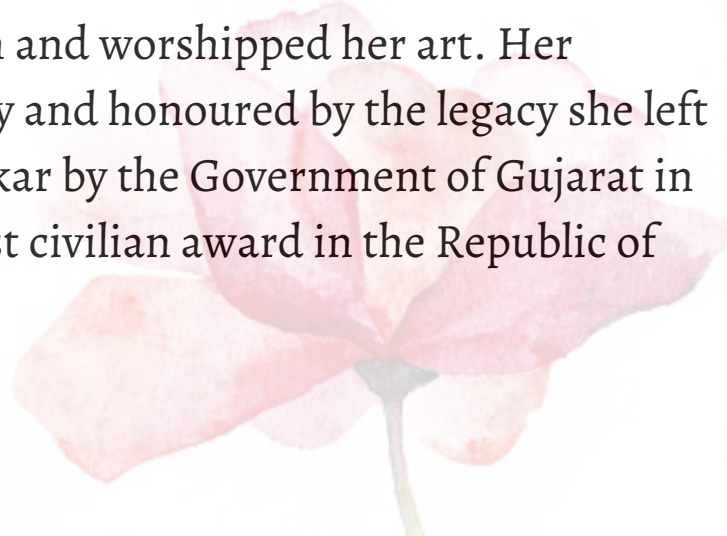
She also served as an expert and advisor on dance to the Department of Culture of the Government of India and the Planning Commission and was part of the University Grants Commissions curriculum development team and a consultant to Indian and foreign universities in developing academic dance courses.

Her reading along with her independent streak resulted in her choreographing women centric topics like Kubja, Gandhari, Draupadi, Urmila, Shikhandi, and Pootana Moksha. She liked to project a woman's stronger side. Her work in the field of choreography and research is immense. She has helped revive Mohiniattam, a dance form of Kerala which was almost dying. She gave a structure to the dance form and taught it in a disciplined manner which was not done before. Kanak evolved a style after a lot of research and brought it to the fore. She didn't like the fact that Mohiniattam followed a similar repertoire like Bharatanatyam and named their items jatiswaram and tillana. She wanted to imbibe the culture of Kerala into Mohiniattam. She is the first and the only one who has worked on the kinetics of the dance style and sketched them for her PhD thesis.



She was quite attached to her students. Her senior students would come back to her to learn new choreographies and she would be happy to teach them. She also encouraged them to go beyond dancing and concentrate on the theoretical aspect of dance too. While teaching them fine nuances of footwork, hand gestures and facial expressions she instilled in them a deep tradition which was not a part of her learning.

Dr Rele believed that she was an eternal student. She loved learning and when she got the opportunity, she took all that she could learn. She always respected the people she learnt from and worshipped her art. Her students were influenced with her positivity and honoured by the legacy she left them. She was conferred the Gaurav Puraskar by the Government of Gujarat in 1989 and the Padma Shri, the fourth-highest civilian award in the Republic of India, in 1990.



She was honoured with the title Kala Vipanchee by Vipanchee, a pioneering institution for Indian music and dance, in 2005. In 2006, the Government of Madhya Pradesh conferred the Kalidas Samman on her for her contributions to and excellence in the field of classical dance. She was also a recipient of the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award and the M. S. Subbulakshmi Award. In 2013, she was conferred the Padma Bhushan by the Government of India.

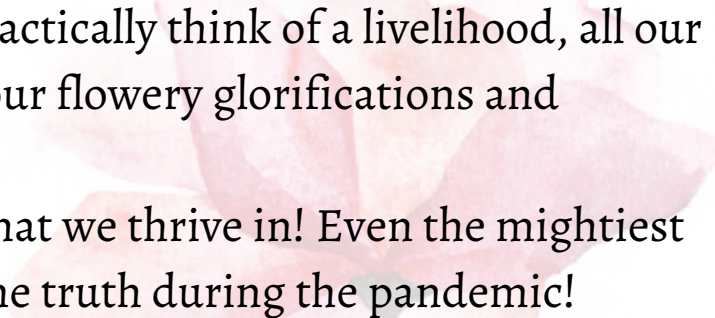
**Sharmila Taliculam**



# Artists and Cultural Echo Chambers

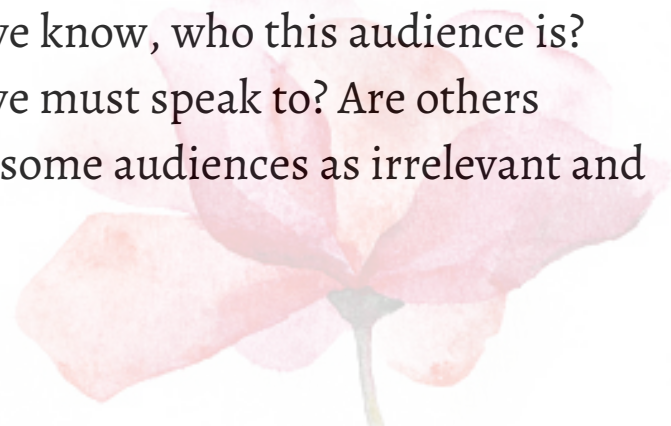
Why do we create art? This question has been thrown at every artist in every interview and whilst we answer with much enthusiasm and creativity, the truth is, that we ask ourselves these questions every day! As artists we don't think about such questions on our own until we come face to face with failure at our most daring and vulnerable venture. It is failure and even worse, indifference towards our work that forces us to look inwards. To put it simply, we are in the arts because we feel at home here and this is where we come alive.

When we remove this romantic lens and practically think of a livelihood, all our aspirations turn tipsy turvy! In spite of all our flowery glorifications and philosophies, we cannot deny that Money is so very essential in this capitalist world that we thrive in! Even the mightiest romantics who were in denial had to face the truth during the pandemic!



The Pandemic has destroyed our egos and has clearly shown us our place! We are as artists consumed by every one on the virtual space and yet we are not considered an “essential service!”

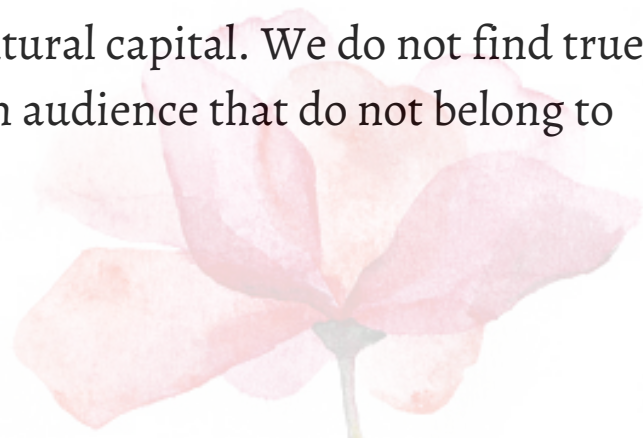
So, what are we really doing in this workspace? If we need to stay relevant, we must be consumed, critiqued and studied by an audience. There needs to be a bridge between our worlds and the audience. The bitter truth is, that most artists or artistic enterprises are struggling to find relevance and acceptance from an audience. If we have to be consumed by an Audience, is it not important to strike the balance between what we want to say and what the audience want from us? If we believe this to be true, how do we know, who this audience is? How are we sure that a specific group is who we must speak to? Are others irrelevant to us? How and why do we consider some audiences as irrelevant and overtly fuss about another kind of audience?





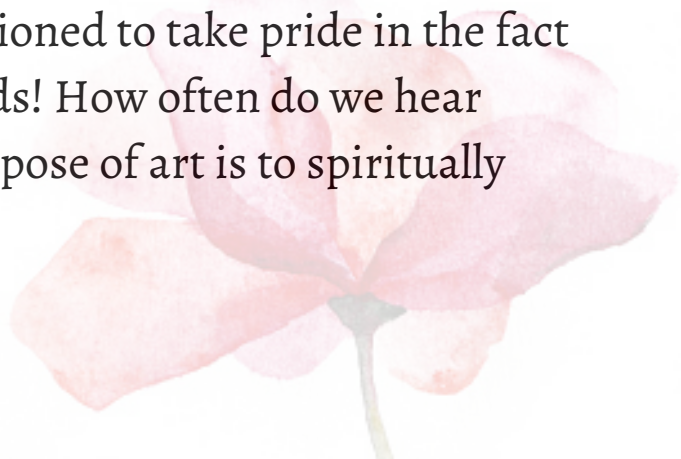
Are we looking at the reality or are we projecting our ideas onto this analysis? If we analyse deeply, it is very clear that we are in a narcissistic echo chamber. We want to say what we want to say to an audience who is exactly like ourselves and who we hope, will react to the art the way “we” react to art! It is a vicious cycle of echoes that eventually die out and cancel each other!

How many times have artists died waiting to be accepted by a certain set of audience and repeatedly knocked at the same doors that have time and again shut their doors? It is nothing but a narcissistic choice. Mostly, as artists, we seek validation for our low self- esteem from an audience we assume to be at a better place than us, in terms of social and cultural capital. We do not find true happiness or appreciate being embraced by an audience that do not belong to this niche audience.



It is ingrained in us to constantly seek validation from toxic, silent and authoritarian spaces which usually possess more power and capital than us. In this journey of finding relevance and acceptance, what happens to our art?

In most elitist and upper caste locations, Art is put on a pedestal. The more intangible and inaccessible the art, the better, we have come to believe! We enjoy the intoxication of being abstract, unattainable and overtly intelligent. This Brahminical aspiration of intellectual superiority is the guiding factor to most art creation processes in the classical arts arena in India! Whilst we are willing to cry of not having money, we still see the word “entertainment” as untouchable! We are brainwashed and conditioned to take pride in the fact that our Arts are directly connected to the Gods! How often do we hear spiritual jargons in classical spaces? If the purpose of art is to spiritually liberate us, why are we seeking



validation, money and fame through these arts? The hypocrisy of all this is sometimes too much to digest!

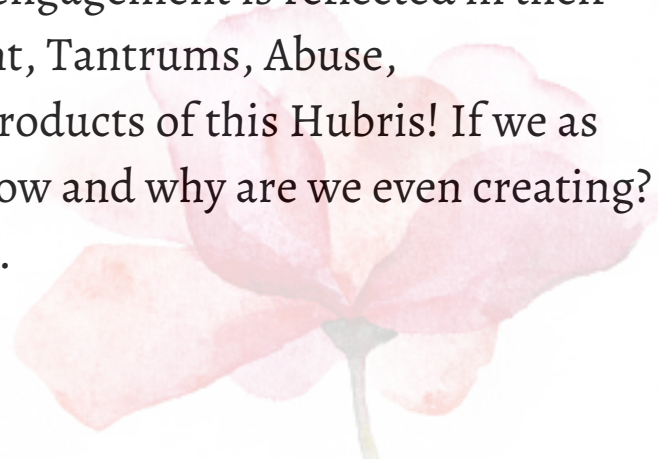
The purpose of Art is to ignite the humanity in us which is dying a slow death every day! To be in touch with our core human values, we need Empathy and it is this Empathy that can be the guiding light to creating art! An unadulterated, honest and deep engagement with empathy can open multiple avenues for an artist. We all can start really working on the values of inclusion. We may be in denial, but are not ticket collections and audience engagement, in direct relationship with inclusion? Why will people come to spaces and events that exclude them or dumb them down? Artists are also drenched in this notion that they are here to educate and elevate the audience! Are artists really capable of all that?



Who are we to elevate and educate someone? This notion comes from an instilled belief system that somehow as artists we are superior beings! When we believe this and engage with art with this notion, we are automatically belittling the audience and their wisdom!

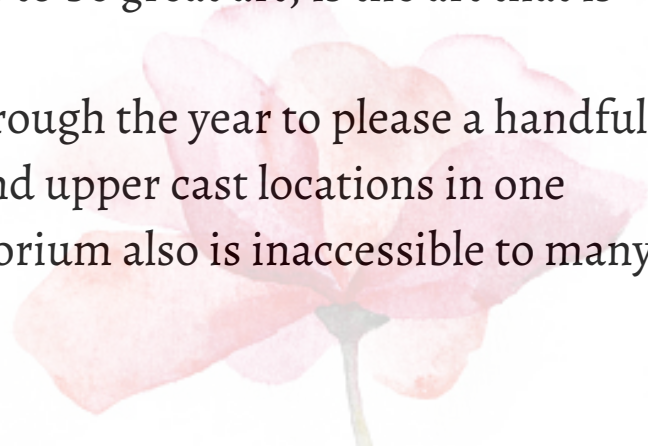
Artists must focus on a few things and be honest with themselves.

If the purpose of our art is to celebrate our own greatness and superiority, why must we create art at all? To create an echo chamber of narcissistic noises can do no good for the society! It is very reflective in how artists are beyond the spotlight! The lack of empathy and emotional engagement is reflected in their demeanours! Rudeness, Loudness, Entitlement, Tantrums, Abuse, Harassment and Oppressive attitudes are all products of this Hubris! If we as artists do not evolve into empathetic beings, how and why are we even creating? The world is already full of unnecessary things.



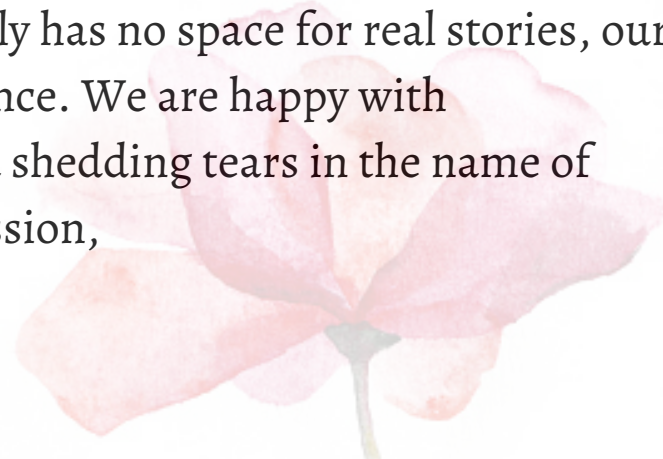
To take away from the preachy article that this might turn into, let me share from my personal experience! A very deep contemplation into my process opened up unbelievable realities before me! I could clearly see how deeply, the idea of superiority, intellectualism and Brahminical exclusivity was embedded in all my processes! I easily cancelled everything that was simple, uncomplicated and “popular” as being below standard. My process of creation too was steeped in research, immersive reading and nit picking tiny unnoticeable things. The more abstract and confusing the creation, the prouder I would feel. When I looked at the Classical Dance arena, it struck me a like lightning bolt that what we conceive to be great art, is the art that is intangible, difficult and exclusive.

The classical field breaks sweat and bleeds through the year to please a handful of audience clad in White dhoti, silk sarees and upper cast locations in one particular auditorium in Chennai! This auditorium also is inaccessible to many people!



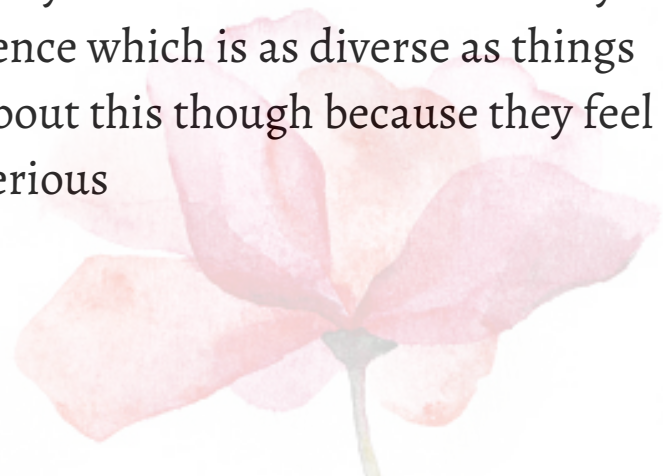
An auto driver who dropped me at this particular auditorium did not know what happened in this building! Most of my friends from Chennai had never visited this auditorium and these were a bunch of empathetic people who were extremely loving and supportive! I began to think what is the purpose of creating art that does not even reach these people?

My journey into theatre added a lot of perspective to my vision, but here too the exclusivity could not be ignored! The strong need to intellectualise everything and make theatre accessible to an audience from only a certain class, caste location could not be side-lined. It is with this observation that I delved into the subjects we talk about as artists. Our art usually has no space for real stories, our current affairs and human suffering or resilience. We are happy with mythology, stories of Gods and goddesses and shedding tears in the name of Bhakti. How often do the rising prices, oppression,



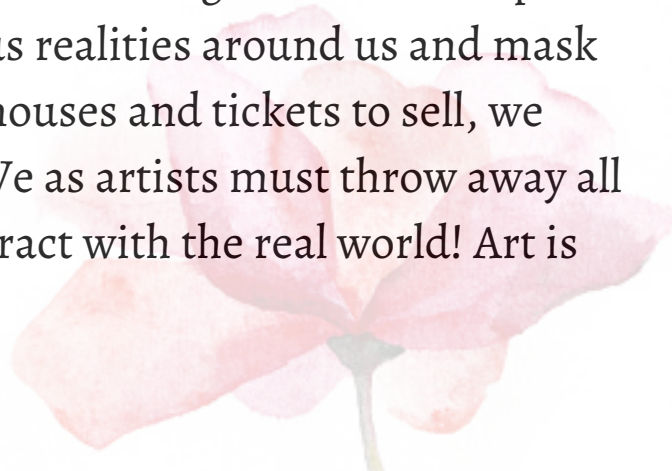
global catastrophes, division, immigration, health issues, psychological issues, racism, hate, minority struggle, disability or plight of daily wage workers find representation in our art? Even if it does find representation, why do we camouflage it with inaccessible technique and languages? When my driver once asked me to write plays that he too can watch and relate to, my heart broke! I realized how I was keeping him away from my art!

After journeying through extremely complicated scripting and technicalities I wrote a play that can allow access and yet raise pertinent questions. The darkest questions can only be expressed through comedy and hence I wrote a comedy. The play is receiving lots of love from an audience which is as diverse as things can get. The “artist” community is skeptical about this though because they feel the production is not intellectual enough or serious enough!



The same artists who marvel at a production that has an empty hall and is appreciated by a handful of audience just like them because it validates their superiority! It is important for me to not become a victim of this narrative and own up my decision and success without having to carry the guilt of feeling like a “dull mind!”

Art need not sell, need not flourish, need not achieve “mass”-ive success, but if art cannot bring us together in an already divided world, what’s its purpose actually? If we do not create art with the attention to represent and speak to the most downtrodden amongst us, why must we be creating art in the first place? How can we turn a blind eye to all the atrocious realities around us and mask ourselves in our privilege? If we need packed houses and tickets to sell, we need to engage with the humans around us! We as artists must throw away all the pedestals and stand in the streets and interact with the real world! Art is not an escape!





It is a mirror! It is about alternative possibilities to the grim truth that we dwell in! Art needs to embrace the word “inclusion” more than it has embodied exclusion all this while!

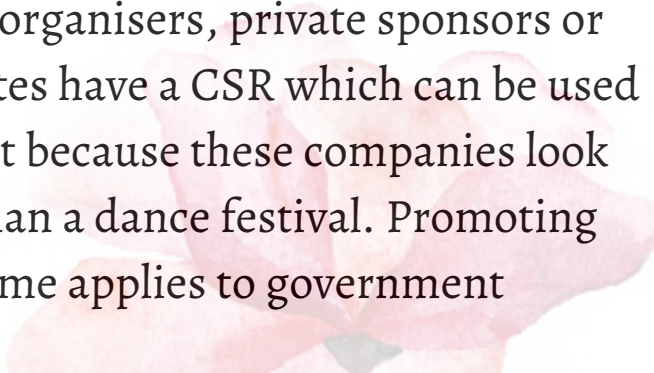
**Karthik Hebbar**



# **Funding and audience generating for dance festivals.**

There are two problems with organising dance festivals. One no one will fund it and the other generating an audience. An artiste needs both. In India, the criteria for an artiste is to look for a good platform to perform and get paid decently. Unfortunately most of the times the artiste do not get paid what they deserve. There is never enough funds.

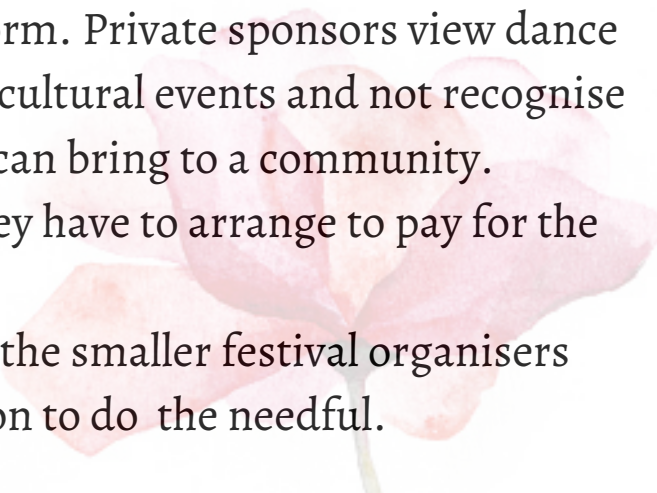
Most artistes look at corporates, banks, event organisers, private sponsors or the government, to fund the festival. Corporates have a CSR which can be used for these events but that becomes very difficult because these companies look at education, medicine etc as more relevant than a dance festival. Promoting art and culture always take a back seat. The same applies to government support.



This becomes a significant and crucial challenge for festival organisers because the government provide funds, grants and other resources that promote artistic expression and community engagement.

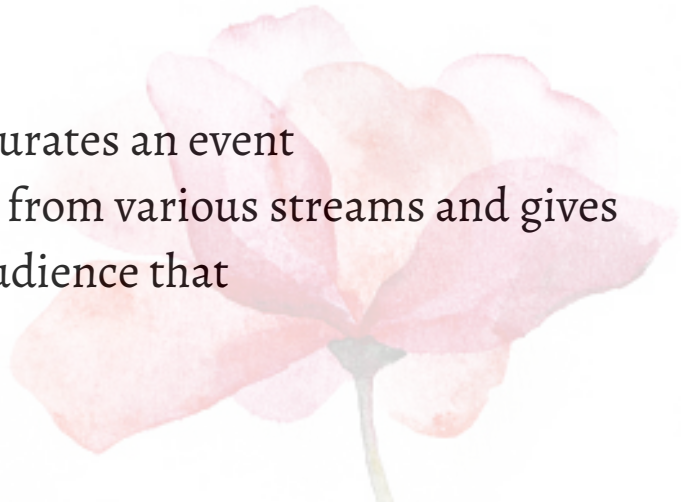
Also the allocation for government funding can be very competitive and dance festivals find difficult to secure the necessary support. The ministry of culture has the necessary funds but access to these funds is difficult. There is no way to know how much is allocated to a dance event and small, private festivals hardly ever gain from these funds. There is a definite lack of understanding or appreciation for the value of dance as an art form. Private sponsors view dance festivals as a lesser priority compared to other cultural events and not recognise the economic and social benefit a dance event can bring to a community. Dancers get paid a measly amount in which they have to arrange to pay for the music and their travel.

There is hardly anything left after that. Mostly the smaller festival organisers manage to fund it themselves or rely on a patron to do the needful.



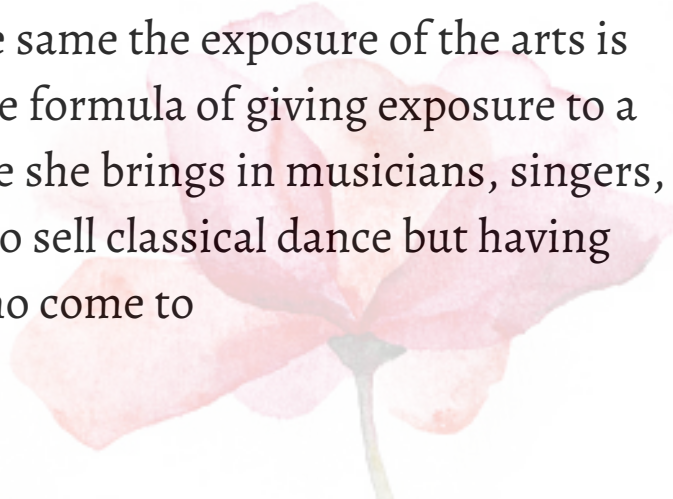
“I try and manage with whatever I have got at that time. Fortunately these musicians and performers are friends and they help out by not charging their usual fee. But I ensure that they get paid their deserved amount when I have enough funds”, says Keerthana Ravi who is a performer and organises two dance festivals in Mumbai. For getting the funds she has made a presentation and a proposal that she carries with her when she has to convince the corporates to fund her event. She believes that there are companies that sponsor these events but one needs to know people inside the company to make it successful. Keerthana crowd funded her first festival and since then has struggled to keep it going.

Prachi Sathi, a performer and an organiser, curates an event called “Art Baithak” where she invites artistes from various streams and gives them an opportunity to perform in front of audience that



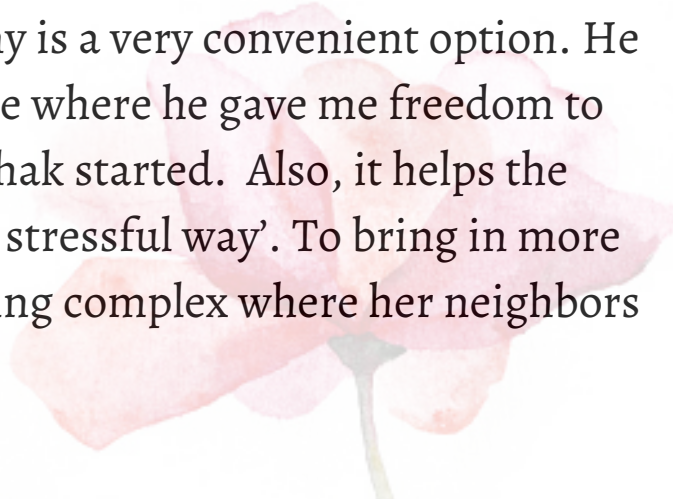
is not necessarily dancers. She feels that organising and performing require two different skill sets because it's not easy for a performer to organise a festival. It requires a lot of effort, thinking and planning to organise a dance event. Not to mention getting adequate funds to put up a show. "Many dancers take up teaching because they need to support their art and generate funds. Very few teachers are passionate about teaching. Nobody makes money organising a festival" ..

The problem is also magnified due to the limited reach of the classical arts. With the audience remaining more or less the same the exposure of the arts is not very wide. Prachi's Art Baithak follows the formula of giving exposure to a wider audience. She curates an evening where she brings in musicians, singers, contemporary and classical dancers. "I want to sell classical dance but having other art forms brings in a wider audience who come to



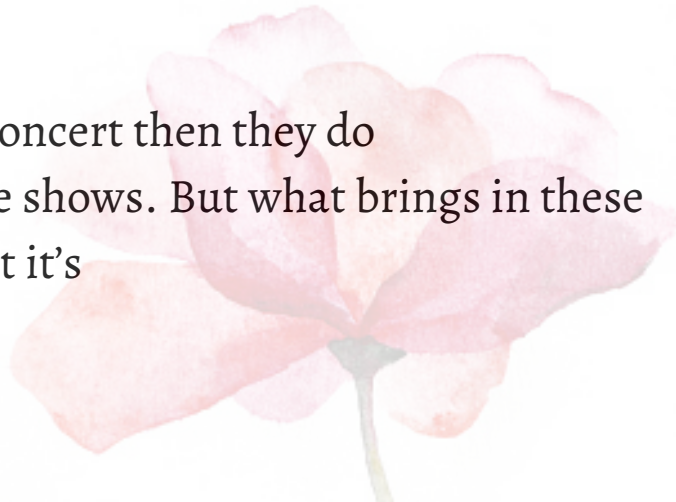
watch these artistes and gets a taste of the classical arts too. There is a cross pollination of arts where people of all generations and interests come together to experience the arts”. This way she believes she builds an audience who come for classical dance events too. When she danced in an event recently, her audience were mostly people who came regularly for Art Baithak and were not dancers or dance aficionados. Apart from this she realised that the venue was a big concern in a city that has massive traffic jams and people were averse to travelling long distances.

“My venue at Sumeet Nagdev’s Dance Academy is a very convenient option. He is a big supporter of the arts and had this space where he gave me freedom to use it the way I saw fit and that’s how Art Baithak started. Also, it helps the people from the city to experience art in a less stressful way’. To bring in more audience she plans to hold events in her building complex where her neighbors will come to experience art.



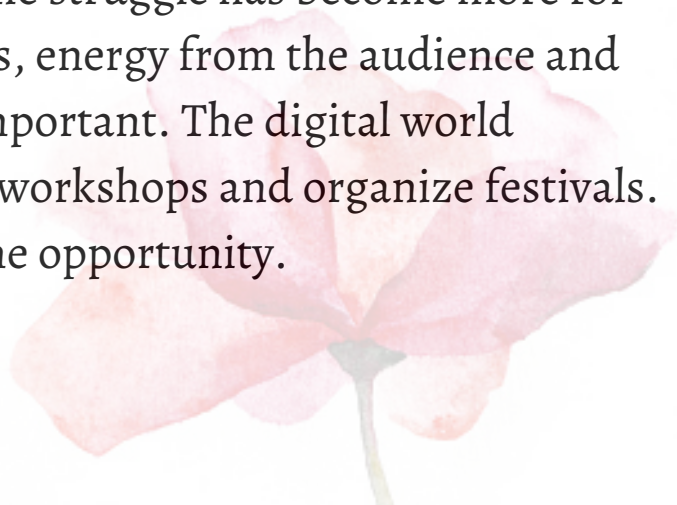
Collaboration with small businesses help to a certain extent and that only if their business benefits from it. The funds are not large, and the artiste might not make much but it would be enough to put up a show. Dance festivals will have saree brands, jewellery, books in connection with the theme of the event. The audience becomes a prospective customer during these times. Having a wider audience is necessary for the funds to come in. Generally, a dance festival will probably have only the families of the performer or dancers like themselves attending the event. Having a varied audience is difficult because people do not want long events or they don't understand the concept of the dance item.

If a corporate sponsors a musical event or a concert then they do it because of the audience that comes to these shows. But what brings in these people? Both Keertana and Prachi believe that it's



the content that brings in the audience. Prachi's event does just that. By getting musicians, singers, poets, writers and dancers she brings in the variety that the audience craves. "There is a school of thought that is steeped in tradition. But if you give the audience something that they cannot understand, then you lose them. By keeping the same vocabulary, context of your art form if you reimagine your content in such a way that you not only have your regular audience but you invite new ones too. You have to create a palatable work so that people enjoy it".

The pandemic has been hard on the art world. Money dried up further and now everything is rooted towards medicine. The struggle has become more for artistes for whom income from physical spaces, energy from the audience and connection from live performances are very important. The digital world afforded some artistes space to perform, hold workshops and organize festivals. But these were very few. Not all of them had the opportunity.





Ultimately, dance festivals need to be creative and strategic in their approach to securing funding and getting audience . By exploring various opportunities and thinking outside the box, dance festivals can continue to thrive and bring joy to audiences around the world..

**Sharmila Taliculam**



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