

CHINTAN

Reflections on
SPIC  MACAY
and its core values



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(Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth)

and its Core Values

**This booklet is being published on the occasion of the
30th anniversary of SPIC MACAY's foundation**

CHINTAN, Reflections on SPIC MACAY and its Core Values
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CHINTAN, Reflections on SPIC MACAY and its Core Values is a collection of articles that have mostly been published as ‘Conceptual Corners’ in the movement’s national newsletter *Sandesh* over the last eight years. Many of these articles reinstate the philosophy and ideology that, like our rich cultural heritage, have been passed on through generations. Others reflect concepts, discussions and experimentations with ideas during various stages of the movement. The intention of this publication is to document all the above that have guided the direction and growth of SPIC MACAY over the past three decades.

Volunteers, who have worked together on this compilation, were spread out over three continents. For them it has been a unique experience challenging and elevating at the same time. While coordinating harmoniously between widely varied time zones through high-speed technology, the message of this work made them pause and introspect, imbibe and feel inspired. May the same experience touch every reader’s mind and spirit!

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Foreword

AS STUDENTS of the Indian Institute of Technology during the late sixties, many of us were into western music in fact, everything that was western. One staff member every year would organize a whole night of Indian classical music called the 'Green Amateurs Night' (I still have to figure out why this name!). It was held in a big pandal and we would go basically to look at the 'interesting' people who had come to listen to the concerts. Classical music was the last priority for.

Years passed. We graduated and many of us went abroad. While doing my PhD at Columbia University in New York in the early seventies, I came across a small advertisement in a weekly newspaper 'Village Voice'. It was about an upcoming dhrupad concert by Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar and Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York, under the aegis of the Asia society. A group of us said 'Chalo dekhen' (not 'sune'). None of us knew what dhrupad was or who the Dagars were.

I went into the concert walking on ground but came out walking an inch above it. A seed planted during my IIT days had emerged as a wondrous plant. The 'black box' concept in science could describe it quite appropriately. I knew the input to the box and the output, but not what took place inside.

I realized, what had happened to me could happen to others too. Under the aegis of the India Club of Columbia University, i started organizing concerts of great classical Indian artistes passing through New York. I also started learning Indian classical music. After completion of my PhD, I joined Bell Labs in New Jersey but kept in touch with the concerts and continued my own learning.

In 1976 when I returned to India to teach at IIT Delhi, I remember asking my students if anyone had ever heard the name of one of the greatest sitar players Pandit Nikhil Banerjee, who was alive at that time. Not a single student raised his hand. It rang an alarm bell and we decided to do something about it.

At that time I was teaching Operations Research to the final year ME students. With this batch we set up MEFORG (Mechanical Engineering

Final Year Operational Research Group) and decided to organize a concert. We publicized it widely and I was quite sure that we would be able to fill at least half of our Convocation Hall, which has a capacity of about 1500. Five minutes before the concert, there were about five people in hall. When it began, there might have been about ten and by the time the first raga got over, we were back to five.

A disastrous start. But we said, never say die. Next year the entire class got involved, making it a MEFYs (Mechanical Engineering Final Year) presentation. Having learnt from our past mistakes, this programme was marginally successful.

After this the movement spread organically. Students from other colleges agreed to organize similar programmes and a new catchy name SPIC MACAY (Society for the Promotion of Indian Classical Music And Culture Amongst Youth) was given to the movement. It soon spread to other cities. In 1981, schools joined in too.

Though we began with classical music, over years other facets of our heritage such as folk music, yoga and meditation, crafts, talks by inspired writers, painters, philosophers, social activists and environmentalists, walks to the monuments with historians, theatre, film classics and even holistic food were included in the gamut of its activities.

Initially, it was very difficult to get the best artists perform for a pittance. I remember going to meet Ustad Bismillah Khan at the Crown Hotel in Fatehpuri, Chandni Chowk.

Despite my elaborate discussion on how his help would change the face of the Indian youth, he refused to cooperate when I told him we had practically no money to offer. But I did not give up and something about the sincerity of my efforts might have struck him. He finally agreed to perform for SPIC MACAY.

Pandit Birju Maharaj, Vidushi Sonal Mansingh, Pandit Jasraj, The Dagar Brothers, Dr T.N. Krishnan, Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman, Pandit Hari Prasad Chaurasia, Pandit Shiv Kumar Sharma and Ustad Amjad Ali Khan were among the initial group of artistes who consented to support the movement. Most of our other great artistes pitched in later and helped it grow further.

Despite this great support from the artist community, funds had to be raised continuously and this has been a persisting problem. Captains of industry, even today, are committed to supporting projects which are tangible in nature such as primary education, woman and child issues, AIDS, drinking water, issue related to the physically challenged and others. Very few people like Shri Amit Judge, Shri Arun Bharat Ram, Shri Jauhari Lal, Smt Reita and Shri Vilas Gadkari are prepared to financially support even intangible efforts such as SPIC MACAY in a sustained manner.

Similarly in the government just a handful of people like Shri P. Sabanayagam, Shri Anil Bordia, Shri M.K. Kaw, Shri N. Gopaldaswamy, Shri Rajeev Ratan Shah, Shri Amitabh Pande, Dr Mano Ranjan and Smt Meenakshi Sharma have gone out of their way to extend support to the movement. Eminent painter Smt Anjolie Ela Menon has been regularly donating her paintings to SPIC MACAY that helped us raise lakhs of rupees during times of crucial need.

As the world started shrinking rapidly, a logical step for the movement was the induction of the best of other cultures into the activities of SPIC MACAY. It is today operating in 200 towns of India and about 20 cities abroad, conducting over 1500 events every year. The aim still remains to bring out all that is inspiring, subtle, abstract and most importantly mystical into the lives of young people all over India and abroad.

This year as we celebrate three decades of this movement, we realize that time has come to spread not only geographically, but also to take young people one step deeper. The focus is on transferring sanskaar helping them imbibe certain salient features of our tradition especially to the age group 5-10, a duty earlier fulfilled by parents but presently more by the television. A larger number of intensives and workshops in schools and prolonged Virasat sessions in colleges instead of sporadic lecture demonstrations and concerts will go a long way in consolidating the efforts of this movement.

Alongside, the scholarship scheme during summer holidays has been designed to send worthy students to great masters in various fields. The idea here is not so much to teach them as to inspire them. Through sangat (company) of such people who are custodians of our heritage, students can imbibe some of the best thought processes that have been transmitted over generations by our ancestors. This will help them to engage not only

in pursuits of the material world outside but also to focus some of their energies inwards and develop their inner domains, to make them balanced human beings.

We have sown seeds of inspiration in several hearts, now it is time to nurture the saplings that have emerged so that they grow into strong trees in future.

New Delhi
June 2007

Dr Kiran Seth
Founder Chairperson
SPIC MACAY



Essence of SPIC MACAY

Our Classical Performing Arts

Originating from the temples and moving into the royal courts, Indian classical music and dance were performed basically in the presence of rasiks people who were knowledgeable and could thus enjoy the performance at a different level. These people had a profound understanding of the heritage and its associated symbols and myths. The dancer could therefore quickly rise above the mere storyline, while the musician could use the structure of the raga and the words of the composition to move into the abstract, subtle, inspiring and mystical domains.

In the process they would take their audience along to larger and lesser extents, depending on the innate potential of both the performer and the rasiks. Children were taken to these performances so that with the passage of time, they would understand and be impacted by the depth of such presentations. Each art form was developed not to provide mere entertainment but to act as a medium to pass on the best of our heritage to newer generations.

After the independence of the country when the royal patronage for the arts stopped, the artistes moved on to the stage and had to rely on the popular mass for support. However, times were changing. The jointfamily system had crumbled and there was great ambition amongst the masses to be materially 'successful'. In the little free time that people got away from their worldly pursuits, they wanted to be entertained. Television, Hollywood and Bollywood, films and the internet largely took over.

This left the new generation Indians bereft of an understanding of our great heritage. Classical music and dance had to become much more literal and entertaining in order to be accepted. Greater emphasis was placed on attire and the manner of presentation. The look of the bottle started counting more than its contents.

The result is that programmes now have become more entertaining and less elevating. New experiments like fusion, mostly without a solid grounding in the basic form, have contributed to a lack of depth in the presentations. Technique in many cases has taken over, the casualty being the losing of rooh (the soul). The means have become ends in themselves.

SPIC MACAY has often been credited with introducing the lecdem

(lecturedemonstration) format to present Indian classical art forms in a comprehensive manner in front of today's youth, who have little or no understanding of it. The meanings of the basic mudras and bhavas and the structure of the ragas had to be explained. This change in presentation has been instrumental in popularizing our art forms amongst the youth.

However, in the process, depth in the performances has been lost. Many great artistes have believed in not talking while performing, leaving the more mundane part for others to execute. According to them, one could not go inward and outward at the same time. To give our artistes a chance to undertake this inward journey and thereby take us along too, organizations like SPIC MACAY have a very important role to play.

If we can transform the atmosphere of the concert hall to that of a place of worship, we could achieve this objective. A clean environment, audience seated in the baithak style with footwear neatly arranged outside, no cellular phones permitted inside the hall, no movement and conversation during performances, no flash photography and no clapping during a performance would go a long way in creating the ambience conducive for touching the highest heights, both by the artists and the rasiks.



Faith and Patience

Deep and abstract concepts often offer little scope for logical explanation. Their understanding comes through flashes of intuition developed over time.

There is the story of a young Chinese lad who went to a master to learn about Jade. He was told that he would be taught provided he was very patient, to which the boy agreed. Every morning a stone was placed in his hands and till sunset he was told stories of different aspects of life. Several years passed. One day when a different stone was placed in his hand, he beamed and told the Master, “This is not Jade!” For him to have arrived at this point of learning, it took tremendous faith and patience.

Another example is that of a shishya who went to a guru to learn classical music. The guru told him that for ten years he would have to practice only one note ‘Sa’ after which he would begin teaching him.

These little stories point out the importance of finding a right learning point, investing complete faith in it and developing the patience to stick on till the end. It is easy to start something, but to carry it on through its ups and downs till completion is tough. More so when the goals are not very tangible, this is the case with most things of depth.

To end, there is another small story. A little girl was explaining the difference between classical and popular music as she saw it. She said popular music is like a sparkler that burns brightly and beautifully but for only a few seconds; classical music on the other hand is like an incense that takes time to reach you, but fills up the whole room with its aroma lasting for many hours. Please do not leave the room before the fragrance reaches you. You will never know what you missed!



Passing Chits to Artists

“Please sing raga Hansadhvani”, cried out someone from the audience to an artiste in a concert. Increasingly, during concerts, people are making such requests to the artiste. What they do not understand is that classical music is not a requestbased system. Its basic difference lies in the fact that its character is elevating in nature. It does have an entertaining facet but when this takes on prominence, the difference between the classical and the popular becomes very thin.

A true classical musician must rise to the highest height within himself first the audience will be uplifted automatically. If he has to play to the audience’s taste, both can be entertained but neither can get the true taste of the classical domain. The late Ustad Nasir Aminudin Dagar once said that the tanpura tells a true artiste what to sing next. It is indeed jarring if this delicate communication is broken by someone from the audience through a written or a verbal request.

A great artiste will almost always give a great performance, but for him to rise above the level of a concert, a bit of help from the audience is also required. Keeping quiet, not moving, not passing chits to the artists would go a long way.



Nishkama Karma

Newton's third law of motion states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Conversely, there is the law of "nishkama karma" it says that for every action in which there is no embedded expectation, there is a reaction that is far greater than the action. This comes from a source other than that which is being acted upon.

Newton's third law can be experimentally proved while the law of "nishkama karma" can be proven experientially. Check out things through experience. It is a very powerful mechanism for validating the truth. Do put in ten percent of your time and money on something from which you don't expect anything and watch the beautiful result.



Voluntary Spirit

When we engage ourselves in voluntary work without expecting any tangible benefit, we benefit in an intangible manner. This is something we have forgotten today. Taking is in, giving is out. When we take, it affects those from whom we are taking, making them also wanting to take. On the other hand, when we give, others too are affected by the giving 'bug'.

Both giving and taking can be infectious. The difference lies in the fact that when we take, a certain tension builds up in the subconscious that does not allow us to fully enjoy what we have taken. Conversely, the giving person elevates himself immediately by sharing the joy experienced by the receiver. In addition, he gets back much more over a period of time from other sources. The principle followed is similar to Newton's Third Law of Motion, with a slight modification. Any giving action has a reaction that is more than the original action, but comes delayed from the source other than that which is acted upon.

True voluntary work is a fine example of this law of karma. People involved with such work have to face many difficulties but, over a period of time, they start emitting a glow that no money can buy. The Mahatma believed that whatever he possessed, including his body, mind and spirit, was held in trust for the benefit of society. He considered himself the trustee and never felt as the owner. If we can incorporate even a small part of this concept in our lives by contributing in a true voluntary spirit to any positive effort, we will experience a joy that words cannot adequately describe.



This Day This Age

Information Boom

Today truth lies in the www (World Wide Web). The faithful mouse, on the command of a click, takes you to shores unknown. The web can take you where you always wanted to go, but did not know how! Even Chief Ministers can bring the most powerful people in the world to their doorsteps thanks to the mouse. These divine incarnations have brought truth to our fingertips within a few seconds.

Indeed, this is a great advancement from our yogis who would only tell us to look for truth within a much larger space than the tip of the finger! The realization of this truth would take many an entire lifetime. However, the World Wide Web has such a great impact even on some of the yogis today that they have been forced to innovate. We can now reach nirvana faster and with increasingly less efforts a two or three week course should suffice. This shows us what competition can do! Everything and everybody has been dotcommed and we now know who can show us the way! Lead kindly.com amidst the encircling euphoria, lead thou me on!



Jumping the Gun

A young person today is much more aware than someone a few decades ago. This could be due to Darwin's Theory of Evolution and the technological revolution. However, time is required for information to become knowledge. A greater time lag is needed for it to transform into wisdom.

Once a direction becomes clear through knowledge, a lot of hard work is required to acquire wisdom. The process also needs patience, a certain degree of faith and an open mind, all of which are at a premium today. Consequently, a bright and hard-working young person is likely to fall into the trap of 'I know it all'. This forecloses possibility of progress.

Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar would say, "Hum bacche ko chaalis saal tak stage par nahin aane dete the, -kahin wo bhul na jaye wo kis liye gaa raha hai" ("We did not allow the disciple to go onstage till he was 40 years old, lest he forgot why he was singing").

The way to progress is not by rediscovering the wheel, but by improving upon the best wheel available with your ingenuity. To get that, one must have humility, patience and a desire to learn. No one says that questions should not be raised, but it is important to know how, when and where to raise them.

A teacher carries a treasure that cannot be parted with so easily. Only he who has the quali-ties mentioned above can access it. Once the depth of what he pos-sesses is fathomed, the teacher will tell a deserving pupil to move on and search for deeper truths but till that time one must try not to jump the gun.



Making It to the Top

We are all rushing to do big things in life, often forgetting that the biggest have their bases in the very small. A huge building is constructed brick by brick; how painstakingly this is done determines the ultimate strength of the edifice.

“I want to make it to the top quickly” is increasingly heard today. But the greater portion of success lies in the process. The path tampers you, making you strong. The pain of laying bricks one atop another, the joy of watching something grow in front of you, the setbacks, the frustrations all contribute to your standing tall once you are at the top.

If you go up too quickly, chances are that you will come down equally fast. This does not imply that one must reduce one’s efforts. Only the focus should be on the process. Each step must be worked at very hard and the litmus test is that a sense of satisfaction must be obtained all along.

A classical musician moves from lower notes to higher notes in a systemic fashion (badhath). Ustad Aminuddin Dagar would say that he kept on hovering around each note till he got its darshan. When he got each one, it gave him a high which reached a peak when he touched the upper Sa. He would describe it beautifully by saying that the transition from the Ni, which he said was nirakaar brahma, to the upper Sa, the saakaar brahma was ‘adhbhut’ (incredibly beautiful). This left both the singer and the listener wonderstruck. The process is similar for other roads leading to the top.



Superficiality

There is a lot of superficiality in the world today. Projecting oneself is much more important than one's development within. This often results in a disconnect between what a person is and what he or she has to live up to. This malaise has also hit our arts the difference between the performance and the performer is constantly increasing. Technical ability and showmanship have taken over the expression of soul. It is important for more people to recognize the difference between a diamond lying on the wayside and a piece of glass neatly packaged.

There is a story of the student who wanted to learn everything about jade. He went to a master who would put a jade stone in his hands and would tell stories about everything other than jade while he held it. A few years passed and one day when the master placed a different stone on his hand, he cried out that it was not jade!

We all must go to several concerts and not leave them midway. We will, in due course, not only make out the difference between the real and the unreal, but will also derive immense inner satisfaction from what the real can give us and thereby reduce this drift towards superficiality.



Chalta Hai! Attitude

The use of the term 'Chalta Hai!' is on the increase these days. Since the pace of life has become faster, it leaves us with no other option. However, there is a danger in not checking this tendency. Big things are hidden amidst very little ones. We want to achieve the moon, skipping small things on the way. This can not happen in a real sense.

How we keep our shoes when we take them off, how we put up a poster during a concert are some small but important details. We need to keep these in mind if we wish to develop the knack of being able to catch the subtle and the abstract, both of which are necessary ingredients to grasp anything of depth.

There is a story of a young Jew who wanted to study The Torah, the holy book of the Jews. But he did not want to study it under any of the many great Rabbis (Jewish priests in Jerusalem). When asked why he wanted to go to one special Rabbi in an obscure hamlet, his reply was that he wanted to observe how this great man tied his shoelaces!

It is not easy to pick up deep concepts. One has to struggle a great deal and the Chalta Hai attitude can be a big hurdle in achieving this goal. These days during classical music concerts, claps come in only when the tabla and the instrument being played fight it out. We do not know when to say 'Aah!' it comes only when a subtle shade of a note is applied at the right place. Not everyone can catch this.



The Learning Process

The education system today basically provides us with information. Ideally it should provide us with knowledge and wisdom but it falls short because the conditions required for their transfer are not sufficiently met. A great human being or a guru can pass down only a fraction of his wisdom in a typical classroom situation.

There are a number of factors that would increase the chances of an efficient transfer. A great desire to obtain the knowledge and wisdom of the guru must be there in the shishya. He must also have the capacity to receive it. In other words, he must be the paatra. It must be remembered that though the guru has a treasure box, the shishya holds the key to it. It also must be realized that the opening of the box, if it takes place, does so at random instants of time. The shishya must be ever vigilant to pick up the bits that come out from the guru's mouth whenever they do. The shishya must also completely suppress his ego if he wants to open the box.

Does this mean that he slowly becomes a clone of the guru? No. Once he has learnt all that the guru can teach him, in a few years (what the guru himself has taken a lifetime to achieve) he can launch off on his own to develop further in his own way. A true guru will tell his shishya when it is time to move on. This nature of the learning process is relevant to all subjects, provided one wants to go deep into them.



India Today

India's Core Competence

India's core competence lies in its knowledge of the inner domain. Science, technology, sports and other areas that are outward in nature are the forte, largely speaking, of the western world. While we must and are already making big attempts to catch up in these areas, neglecting what our ancestors have bequeathed to us as a result of centuries of experimentation would not be wise.

Today the government, media, industry, parents, teachers, students and people in general are giving a lot of importance to subjects such as engineering, medicine, business administration and mass communication. Conversely, very little importance is being given to our philosophy, our languages, our classical and folk arts, our crafts and theatre. Consequently, the ability of the society to recognize the subtle, the abstract, the inspiring and the mystical is going down with each passing day.

The best schools and colleges spend large sums of money and devote tremendous efforts on hosting various cultural programmes, many of which are ordinary. At the same time, they find it difficult to even partially support the not so popular programmes of classical and folk music and dance by our greatest masters. Elite schools give children the option of learning a number of foreign languages, but not, maybe, their own mother tongue. Terms such as 'cultural extravaganza' and 'mega event' are commonly used in connection with many performances, forcing events of a totally different inherent nature to follow the popular 'Bollywood' pattern.

Culture is increasingly being treated as a marketable commodity it is not thought of as a medium of upliftment of individuals for which it was mainly designed. Superior quality programmes connected with our heritage have to compete for media space and have a tough time even being announced in the 'daily engagements' columns of leading newspapers, while corporations spend crores of rupees publicising their achievements.

Great classical musicians and dancers have to either resort to diluting their presentations or remain satisfied being sidelined in this increasingly market driven world. Consequently, great discoveries of our inner selves made by our ancestors and reflected through varied forms such as dhrupad and kuttiyattam, with instruments such as the rudra veena, the sarangi, and the

gottuvadyam today stand on the verge of getting lost. We have many young people learning the classical arts and yet, very few true artists. We want full time businessmen but are satisfied with part time musicians and dancers.

Each year the Padma awards are announced with music, dance and art all being lumped together under one heading 'art'. For a person who is not aware of the fact that Pt Ram Narayan is one of the greatest sarangi players of our country, he could easily be mistaken for someone who paints. Barring exceptions, the choice of people for awards in areas connected with our heritage, in particular our classical music and dance, leaves much to be desired. Wrong signals are sent to young aspiring musicians and dancers when great masters like Ustad Fahimuddin Dagar, Guru Kalamandalam Gopi, Ustad Asad Ali Khan, Smt Malini Rajurkar, Pandit Yaswant Bua Joshi, Ustad Fariduddin Dagar and many others who have spent their entire lives keeping the best of our heritage alive are bypassed year after year. This shows how little attention is being paid to our core competence.

The Norwegian government spends approximately Rs. 80 crores to take its arts to schools all over the country. Its total population of 4.5 million is less than half that of the population of Delhi. Over 93 per cent of Norwegian children are exposed to this important part of their heritage before they graduate from school. In India, there is a struggle to get even a few lakhs from the central and state governments for a similar endeavour by a 30 year old nationwide movement like SPICMACAY.

Today, the Union Minister of Tourism and Culture looks after culture; promotion of cultural tourism takes far greater priority than supporting culture itself. Great care is taken in the choice of a finance minister and ministers in many other areas, but the same is missing in the case of culture. The share of the culture ministry in the budget of the country is meager; for example, it was approximately 0.13 per cent of the total budget for the year 2004-05.

Due to this negligence, there is a lack of inner growth in the society, resulting in an overall decrease in the sensitivity of human beings. It is astonishing that not just ordinary people but the highest quarters in the land were able to justify what happened in Gujarat in 2002 and in Delhi in 1984. This is a symptom of a grossness growing country wide. Petty politics and narrow religiosity has taken over true spirituality.

The understanding of the inner space, once our greatest strength, is increasingly becoming less as the brightest students opt for outward careers which make use of only a fraction of their potential. Brilliant minds required to understand the finest aspects of our heritage land up devising strategies for selling soaps or developing ordinary computer programs simply because rather average minds in economically stronger countries would demand a much higher salary. Working very hard on a job, to be able to afford amenities that would help us relax is much more attractive than working consistently on the inner domain to make the job a completely relaxing experience.

There can never be a large number of people who will fully understand anything that has great depth such as our philosophy, much like Einstein's theory of relativity. But just as we encourage physics education that gives birth to an Einstein, we must support our heritage to produce a few people with an indepth understanding of it. With both parents usually working in the present urban scenario, the family structure cannot provide this input meaningfully to a young person. The onus therefore falls on the education system schools in particular and colleges and universities to a lesser extent. If a sustained effort is made in this area by teachers, students and parents with the help of government, corporations, foundations, media and concerned members of society, slowly but surely people will realize how much our core competence can contribute towards enriching our own lives and the lives of others all over the world.



Awards

Almost everyone is running after them contacting all those who matter in the corridors of power, in order to be nominated for one award or another. It is a sad state of affairs to see the best people in their respective fields lobby; it is even sadder to observe that many great personalities who do not lobby are not considered worthy enough.

People have forgotten that it is not the award that honours a great person but it is the person who honours the award. The Nobel Prize has acquired the highest standing today because of the people it has tried to honour. Also, with the increasing self centeredness of human beings these days, is it wise to continually promote awards given to individuals? Whenever possible, is it not a good idea to award collective efforts like the recent cases of Lijjat Papad and Ram Krishna Mission?

Individualbased awards tend to massage the ego, which affects the greatest of the great. One of our best artist's manners of speaking and behaving completely changed after he got a Padma award. If this could happen to him, what would be the fate of lesser mortals?



Our Endangered Art Forms

All our art forms are basically methods of meditation. Hence there is a oneness among the goals of Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar (the great dhruwad exponent), late Smt Ganga Devi (the great madhubani painter) and Guru Ammannur Madhav Chakyar (the great kuttiyattam actor). Our ancestors have developed many meditative routes and each has taken many centuries to be perfected.

Kuttiyattam, one of the oldest dramatic forms of the world in Sanskrit from Kerala, is becoming extinct because of a lack of patronage. It implies that one route will be lost, which in turn means the country and the world becomes poorer due to a lost opportunity for a number of young people in the generations to come.

Many such routes are on the verge of extinction. It is time for us to sit up and think. In Japan, when the three great art forms, Noh, Kubuki and Bumraku were in a state of great neglect, three national theatres were set up, one for each form. But though reforestation has taken place, a large part of the beautiful undergrowth has been lost. May that not happen in India.



Imbalance

A report in the newspaper once stated that a sum of Rs 19 crores had been raised for Narain Karthikeyan, the Formula One car driver, in endorsement for him. On the other hand kuttiyattam, declared as one of the masterpieces of the oral traditions of humanity not by the Indian Government but by UNESCO, stands on very shaky grounds due to a lack of support. A large amount of media space is given to Sania Mirza when she goes past the first round of a tennis tournament but late Ustad Bismillah Khan got just a small mention when he performed.

This imbalance has resulted in a gross devaluation of what this country has to offer to the world. We are all aware of the fact that the globe has shrunk. This has resulted in a big melting pot of all cultures in which every country is contributing its own bit. An eminent philosopher has stated that Indians are going to this pot emptyhanded, not because they have nothing to offer, but because they do not know what they have. This is the direct result of the imbalance referred to.

When computers first came into existence, they were bulky and limited. Diodes and triodes gave way to transistors, which in turn developed into integrated circuits, bringing down the size and pushing up the computing power of these useful machines. It would be very unfortunate if the entire process of research and development that has brought us to this stage was suddenly lost.

Similarly our ancestors have conducted extensive research in the inner domain, using the body as a laboratory for several centuries. The results that they obtained in this intangible domain were and still are useful to mankind. It would be sad if even some of these were lost due to our negligence. While moving forward to catch up in different areas with the rest of the world, let us not forget what invaluable treasures our ancestors have bequeathed us, from which not only us but the entire world can benefit.



Politicians

For most of us, politicians and politics are to be kept at a distance. The direct consequence of this has been that corrupt, criminal, communal and casteconscious elements of today's society have increasingly taken over our political domain. The silent majority has not only stayed away from joining politics but has also distanced itself from the electoral process by not casting its vote.

The turnout in an election is large when over only 50 per cent of the electorate casts its vote. Isn't that strange? Several voters cast votes because they belong to some lobby or another and try to get direct or indirect benefits from the person whom they are voting. Thus, negative elements gain upper hand and true competence is relegated.

We must cast our votes in all elections. Not only that, those of us with a vision must also become candidates for elected offices. To avoid getting sucked into the negative system, one would in parallel have to strengthen oneself mentally, spiritually and physically. One would have to be very strong to fight the negative forces that are taking over the system. We always complain about the system but do little ourselves to try to set it right. We must act.

Let us not forget that there was a time when we had people like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and others leading the country and idealism was running high in the political arena. We must all join hands to make a change even a small one will do as a starter! Remember that if competent human beings enter the electoral process, everything else will take care of itself.



Intolerance

One human being killing another just because he belongs to a different faith is an indicator of the hollowness within the perpetrator of violence. We all know that no religion would justify such an action. Why then does it happen? When we are ourselves incomplete, we look for excuses outside. Anger directed at someone else, if examined closely, is actually anger at one's own inadequacies.

If we were equanimous, negative thoughts and actions would not even arise. How does one reach such a state? It is through the practice of meditation. Intrinsically, it results in the control of the mind and at the subtle level, peace and tranquility within. When the body is not exercised, it becomes weak and unhealthy. Similarly if the mind and spirit are not serviced regularly, they decay and a rot sets in, inside.

'Modern life,' with all its pressures, allows us time only to watch television and that too only of the purely entertainment variety. Consequently, great contributions of our ancestors in developing methods for nurturing our souls hardly reach us. So many different meditative techniques developed to suit varied individual temperaments have been or are in process of getting lost. Mostly we are not even aware of the value of what we are losing. It follows that grossness in the society is rising.

Increasing levels of insensitivity towards our fellowmen was reflected in the recent happenings in Gujarat when even well to do people looted stores in Ahmedabad while their brethren were being killed. Considering that these are troubled times and there is a need of peace, please do spend some time every morning meditating on any ideal of your choice and you will notice that gradually you yourself will start becoming like that ideal. If everyone did this, the chances of another tragedy occurring like the one in Gujarat would considerably diminish.



Vision 2020

It is being predicted that by 2020, India will become a force to reckon with. All efforts are on by the government and the public to make it to the top economically, technologically, scientifically and in every other way one can think of in the tangible domain. We might achieve this in the next 13 years, but the way things are progressing, India may not remain India any more. In our rush towards the top, the best of experimentation bequeathed to us by our ancestors could get lost or could mutate keeping its outward appearance but losing its soul.

Smt Kishori Amonkar has commented that once a handful of older musicians pass away, there will be no one singing Indian classical music in the manner in which it should be sung. Kuttiyattam, one of the world's oldest art forms, declared 'as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity' by UNESCO is on the verge of extinction with very few practitioners. Still fewer in number are those who have learnt all the highly sophisticated techniques developed in this form and have simultaneously understood its deep philosophical tenets. The rudra veena, which stands for an entire tradition of music, has only two major exponents today and the dhrupad style of singing is modifying itself to survive in this increasingly market driven world.

Even the manner in which our classical musicians, both Hindustani and Carnatic, are staging their concerts is catering to the changing circumstances: making their presentations more pleasing and entertaining rather than elevating. Attempts at retaining the spiritual element in the music or dance are usually brought down to such a direct plane that they resemble the sermonizing of many of our modern gurus whose discourses tend to reach out easily to the lowest denominator, thereby making them slaves, rather than giving them a liberating experience.

The greatest of our rishis, munis and sufi saints have shown the broad way for others to follow, always encouraging them to try and find their own individual path. Today, greatness is defined by the number of people who have been drawn into following exactly the same path as professed by the guru. Our ancestors have handed over to us a philosophy subtle, inspiring, abstract and mystical. There is no short cut to achieve the understanding and

experience of this. Many easy routes are being propounded today but their benefits, though immediate, are shortlived.

Just as India today is giving importance to information technology due to which we are emerging as the information technology hub of the world, we must give equal, if not greater importance to the propagation of the ancient wisdom passed on to us through centuries of experimentation. This way we can contribute to the world, dimensions of inner growth which are unsurpassed, but which are gradually either getting lost or are mutating to cater to the market forces and thereby losing their *raison d'être*. The highways, the metros, the worldclass airports, the malls and the multiplexes are all welcome but not at the cost of losing this great heritage.

Civilizations such as the Greek, the Roman and the Aztec now exist only in museums. Japan, after its mad rush towards industrialization, suddenly realized the loss of its three great art forms Noh, Kabuki and Bunraku and set up national academies for their revival. But a replanted forest is never the same. It takes centuries to build the biodiversity and undergrowth. Let us not make the same mistake.



Journey through Life

Desire

The more a person desires, the more is desire fuelled. If a worldly desire is fulfilled, few more immediately replace it and if it is not, it leads to unhappiness and a greater craving for its fulfillment. The escalating spiral continues with no end.

It is said that a measure of happiness is obtained by dividing the number of desires fulfilled, by their total number. As one can never be sure of getting what one wants, a sensible approach would be to control our desires. If this number could be brought down, our happiness index would go up. Swami Ramakrishna had only one desire and that was fulfilled; the result was the highest possible happiness.

In the spiritual realm, the number of desires is usually far less than those in the worldly domain and the former has a controlling influence on the latter. As one goes inward, the outward becomes increasingly less important and a stable happiness is experienced. We all cannot become great spiritual masters but we can all benefit from their experiences. Just as we are finding the use of computers advantageous, even though most of us were not involved in their development. Maybe, looking at the lives they led is a good enough reason for us to reduce our desires.



Our Ego

Our ego can act as a doubleedged sword. 'I can do it' pushes one to work harder, but the thought that 'I did it and hence must be rewarded for it' pulls the person down. This negative aspect of our ego can be restrained through a realisation that comes only if one practices some form of meditation regularly. The wanting of power, fame and money (PFM) is a natural outcome of the efforts which one puts into any venture but then, one also misses out on the beauty and depth of the forest for the immediate benefits of felling a few trees.

The nature of PFM is that it is insatiable. The more you get, the more you want. The dissatisfaction of not having enough or even deploying devious means to retain what one has keeps the person in a constant state of tension and unhappiness. On the other hand, if the entire effort is treated as an offering without expecting anything from it, the inner growth of the individual is enhanced; this leads one to a higher state of wellbeing.

All this is easier said than done. To sacrifice PFM from which the seeming benefits are so obvious, for something that is so abstract and intangible is far too much to ask for! But through the daily practice of meditation, one is able to realize the futility of chasing PFM. Our efforts must not stop but for the results, we must look within and if we are able to see, we will not want to look outside.



Opposition

Whenever any good work is being done, there will always be some opposition. There is no point complaining that someone or something is responsible for putting roadblocks to prevent a good effort from succeeding. If they are removed by some means, someone or some thing else will come into the picture, which would have a similar negative effect. Hence it is important for the individual who is doing the good work, to continue doing so selflessly and sincerely and not let the negative forces, which will spring up in many different forms, affect him. Perseverance and not criticism will bring beautiful results, both in the work being done and in the personal growth of the individual. Remember that opposition is created to test your staying power and your conviction in what you are doing. You pass the test if you don't let these negative forces affect you.



Bringing Out the Best

I had gone to hear some music at the Shankarlal Music Festival and there I met Smt Veena Shroff, a person who has studied traditional hairstyles and ornaments. When she told me that she was in her '70s, I asked her what was the secret of her looking at least 20 years younger! She replied that she never thought ill of anyone. Not that she did not know that people could be very bad and cruel but she would always try to bring out the best in them by thinking very positively about those whom she came in contact with. There is the good and the bad in us all. Our greatness lies in being able to elicit the best in human beings whom we meet in our journey through life.



Illusion

One often wonders why our ancestors called the world an illusion when in fact it seems so real! Watching a close relative with her newlyacquired daughter suddenly provided me with an answer.

The mind keeps on flitting when actually we want it to be fixed as expressed in a Beatles song “To keep my mind from wandering”... This is an extremely difficult task and even after many years of meditation, great people have failed in this endeavour.

Hence nature has worked out many little illusions that we can easily focus upon and thereby temporarily be in a state of bliss. When people get married, their immediate focus is on the physical pleasures; when the newness of that dies down, nature brings in a child who takes up the attention of the parents. As it grows up and requires less looking after, another one arrives and the process starts all over again.

When we cannot get our minds hooked onto the real, nature makes sure that we latch on to one thing after another, which is unreal in the sense that it cannot give us sustained happiness. As a Buddhist text says, “The only meaningful life is a life which strives for individual realization absolute and unconditional of its own particular law to the extent that a man is untrue to the law of his being”. A true state of bliss is only possible when the mind has been stilled through deep meditation. In such a state one can realize why our great saints called the world ‘maya’.



The Inner Domain

Anubhav

Swami Vivekananda once asked Swami Ramakrishna how he could also see God. Swami Ramakrishna replied that experience (anubhav) was one of the greatest aspects of life. It is through this that one can have a glimpse of the Almighty. He went on to say that Swami Vivekananda had read too much and that came in his way not allowing him to experience the truth.

This day and age is particularly designed for 'experience'. Faith has fallen to an alltime low and can only be revived in an individual by his or her own personal experience. And the experience has to be of the bad as much as it has to be of the good. The road to heaven lies through hell; hence one should not hesitate to experience the worst, keeping in mind at all times that one must not be caught midway. This is possible by having an anchor and one method of getting it is through any form of meditation. There are thousands of different forms of meditation developed in India over the ages.



Check It Out

There is a simple way of going through life following the rules, and there is a risky path that could give high returns or high losses. This is the day and age of the second route. It is difficult to work in a set framework like our forefathers. However, with direct experience, it becomes easier to sift truth from untruth.

The tantric tradition makes us experiment with all the negatives and subsequently rise above them. The only catch is that a guru must monitor the process so that one does not get trapped. Sri Ramakrishna himself practiced the disciplines of tantra under the guidance of a female guru named Brahmani. He told his foremost disciple Swami Vivekananda that he had read too much and experienced too little to find the truth. In other words, he was telling him to ‘check it out’!

Unfortunately, true gurus are hard to come across these days. Hence we have to delve within for direction. One has to develop the inner strength through yoga and meditation while checking out the pleasures of the series. This acts as an anchor and controls our ship when it is being buffeted in this path it is very easy to be swept away.

So, do try out new things but never forget that you have to rise above every experience. There is a saying that the path to heaven is through hell. Don’t be afraid. Only prepare yourself to navigate the hell part of it.



Yoga

Yoga today is thought of only as “hatha yoga”. It actually comprises a wide range of meditative practicesnaad yoga also being one of them. However this piece will focus only on ‘hatha yoga’.

Hatha yoga is a complete discipline perfected over centuries in the country. It works at the mind, the body and the spirit simultaneously. Starting with the disciplining of the gross body, it moves on to train the subtler mind and finally works on the spirit. All three aspects are touched – only the focus changes as the sadhaka progresses.

How can a child do well in his or her examination if he or she cannot sit still for a few minutes? The physical aspect of hatha yoga gets the body to behave. But the mind wanders. The mental aspect makes the mind ‘smart’ and brings it under control while the spiritual part uplifts the child and a total glow starts emanating. Anything that he or she takes up comes out beautifully, including the twelfth class marks, IIT entrance marks, CAT, UPSC, etc etc etc! Just try it out!



Why Meditate

We all seem to be working much harder than our ancestors, but are perhaps not happier. We work hard so that we may enter good educational institutions, which in turn, would help us get high paying jobs enabling us to buy what money and power can. This would make us feel good. Ultimately it is all about being happy, but how much time do we spend introspecting on how to achieve the goal? We are too busy climbing the steps and seldom think of where they are leading to. Whenever we desire something and we get it, we do feel happy, but for how long! Very quickly, we get used to the new car, the new house and to vacations abroad.

The sum total of times of such happiness forms a very small percentage of our lives. A couple with whom I stayed for some time, got excellent jobs after graduating from the Indian Institute of Management at Ahmedabad. They had a beautiful flat near the sea, a nice car and were earning so much that they could go on expensive vacations to different parts of the world. Every morning, sometimes even on Sundays, they would be up early, rush to office and come home late at night looking a little spaced out. The TV would be switched on for a little while and one or both would sit in front of it like zombies. After that they would go to sleep and the next day would be the same as the previous one. Yes, once a year, maybe, they would take a lovely one week vacation to the Bahamas or wherever! They had what most young people aspire for, but shouldn't one spend some time thinking: is this what one should really aspire for?

It is important for all of us to ponder a little about where we are heading. The pressure of the times, however, prevents us from doing so. It is in the interest of big companies to make persons reflect as little as possible about things other than that associated with their work. They therefore give big pay packets and buy off the thinking process of the individual. You make the person work from 9 to 9 and more, leaving him with little chance to figure out which way he is heading. This often leads to depression, because intuitively he knows he is stuck. To treat the depression, external support is sought in the form of psychiatrists, pills, etc. which further enslave him.

On the other hand, if he is ready to accept a job which provides less material benefits but gives him more time for himself, he could experiment with different ways of extending his periods of happiness and increasing

their frequency. He could also build up his internal defences to deal with depression that hits each one of us periodically. Our ancestors did just this and found out that a little meditation every day gives us much more than what money can buy.

So many wonderful methods of meditation have been developed to suit different temperaments. They help us attain equanimity by linking us with our inner selves. Peace and longerlasting happiness are the direct results. As one becomes adept at the practice, bouts of depression diminish in frequency and intensity. Also our ability to handle these periods improves.

Beginning with at least 15 minutes of meditation of the form most suited to you a day is recommended. It must be done daily. Missing one day puts you many days behind. One of the lesser benefits of meditation that is tangible is that it concentrates our thought processes, making our mind more focused. We are therefore able to see more clearly, which way we are heading and can hence take timely corrective action. Classical music and dance are excellent meditative techniques. SPIC MACAY is trying to bring a large number of youth from all over the country closer to these and other forms of meditation during its annual conventions every year.



Power of Meditation - I

Akira Kurosawa's film "The Seven Samurai" shows a sequence of shots where a group of peasants is trying to protect their village from the attacks of a gang of bandits with the help of seven samurai (Japanese warriors). The bandits have conventional weapons but have recently acquired a few muskets this is proving to be a big problem as the samurai have only swords. One samurai sits down in the night and meditates, after which he goes very calmly to the enemy camp, chops off a few heads and brings back some of the muskets.

Today we are sending children to the examination hall with blunt swords. They are tensed and are not mentally prepared to face the onslaught of the system. On the other hand, if we teach them how to sharpen their minds through yoga and meditation, they will then go calmly with ekagrata (single-pointedness) into the battle and return victorious.



Power of Meditation ~ ||

“You become what you think”. If therefore, you put an ideal into your head and keep on thinking about it, you should approach it slowly but surely and who knows, one day you might even reach it. Meditation in a nutshell is just that. But it is easier said than done. Realising this, our sages developed thousands of different methods of meditation.

There are many different ways of reaching the summit of a mountain and different routes suit different human beings. The greater the number of routes found, the more is the likelihood of larger number of people reaching the peak. All routes are difficult and each takes many years to be found. But each human being will find a route if the desire is there from the routes that are known or develop a new one which is suited to his or her temperament.

At a much lower level, meditation improves concentration or ‘ekagrata’. If one practices focusing of the mind every day, one’s concentration is bound to improve, just as the practising of weights improves the body. The person will excel in whatever he or she takes up. But the real benefit is much more and again has to be experienced to be believed.



Ashrams are Forever

As a child, my parents took me to many ashrams. I have fond memories of watching The Mother playing tennis at Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry, of the smell of freshly baked brown bread and of witnessing the table football game there. I remember the serenity of the Shahenshahi Ashram in Rajpur, the beautiful bhajans of the Swamiji and the gushing waterfall not very far away. The Shivananda Ashram in Rishikesh was very special. Swami Chidananda had an allpervading glow in his eyes. He would attract people without speaking a word.

As I grew up, I visited ashrams in different parts of the world all by myself. I went to the retreat of Swami Muktananda in the Catskill mountains in New York, stayed at a monastery in France where the monks meditated with Gregorian chants, practised dhrupad at the ashram of Ustad Nasir Aminuddin Dagar in Kolkata and Ustad Fariduddin Dagar at Panvel, visited the gurukuls of Guru Ammanur Madhava Chakyar in Irinjalakkuda and Pandit Kishan Maharaj in Varanasi, attended a two –week camp at the Bihar School of Yoga in Munger and visited many other ashrams. The atmosphere of total giving at the Shivananda Ashram, the humility of the Abbot at the monastery in France, the intensity in Ustad Aminuddin Dagar’s ashram and the rigorous riyaz at Ustad Fariduddin Dagar’s ashram have left indelible marks on my being.

These experiences helped me realize that our ashrams are scientific laboratories whose inmates experiment with their lives, following the results of research carried out by our ancestors and directed step by step by the gurus. All of us do not have to live in an ashram but as Swami Niranjanananda Saraswati of the Munger ashram says, we should visit a true ashram at least once a year.

What we call spirituality is at one level a scientific method of applying distilled wisdom and information on a large scale. Perceptive people at various places at different points of time have verified this truth. We know that Einstein was a great scientist and Otto Hahn a great technologist, who converted his theories into an actual fission reaction the atomic bomb that later engineers replicated for more useful purposes, namely atomic energy. Similarly, Jesus Christ was the originator of a number of great concepts that

his apostles propagated as methods of good living; the church copied this prototype and spread it in an organized manner.

We could be the engineers who could use the ideas developed in different ashrams to enhance our own lives. Different methods have been developed to connect with our inner selves and each human being would have a natural preference for one particular method. The more the number of routes, the greater the number of people likely to reach the goal. Each true ashram provides us with a route traversed initially by the original master. Taking ideas from the various ashrams, we can come up with a route that is most suited for each one of us.

Today, young people visit different cities in the world during their vacations, take up fancy jobs or simply spend their leisure time. Very few visit ashrams. The SPIC MACAY National School Intensives are attempts to bring the ashram to the student. As the saying goes, if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain. The School Intensives are designed to give the students an experience of staying in the proximity of great masters in various areas of human endeavour, learning from them and watching them perform. May this experience enrich the lives of many of my young friends.

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SPIC MACAY is an affirmation of

A PRICELESS CULTURAL HERITAGE rooted in what is essentially Indian. SPIC MACAY seeks to conserve and promote an awareness of the rich and heterogeneous cultural tapestry of this country and their deeper and subtler values amongst the youth.

THE NEED FOR A MORE INSPIRED PERSPECTIVE in a world bombarded by too much information. A unique feature of the heritage of India is its inbuilt characteristic of introspection and a philosophy that transcends mere intellectualism.

A VALUE-BASED EDUCATION, which involves the absorption of aesthetics and spirituality in an increasingly technical, mundane and competitive world.

THE PULSATING AND DYNAMIC VITALITY OF THE YOUTH. The movement incorporates this vitality to cajole them into being custodians of their birthright their heritage. their roots and their identity. It seeks to provoke thought and a genuine spirit of enquiry amongst the young.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF VOLUNTARY WORK in inculcating a spirit of service. Volunteers of SPIC MACAY come from all walks of life with varied aspirations and skills. The emphasis is on participation without hierarchy and excessive formalism.

ALL THAT IS BEAUTIFUL, LOFTY AND WHOLESOME, of the sensitive, kind and gentle human being who is inspired, and in turn, inspires.

JOIN YOUR MOVEMENT TODAY!!

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