

# MUSINGS

## Art education -Potential and Problem

*Umashanker Periodi*

*Art education has a very high potential for providing space to children and teachers to learn in a non-threatening, non-competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere.*

Drama and me -The celebration



One thing that I remember from my primary school days is the school day celebrations and the performances in which I had participated. There was something magical for us children

in those celebrations. It was different from the usual school days. It was relaxed, we were all involved in something concrete to do, the gap between the senior students, the teachers and us was considerably reduced and above all, as a team, we were working towards something wonderful. The atmosphere was of exploring, finding out and creating. It is in those rehearsals that the bond between the team members was built and a strong feeling of unity took form. The appreciation that we would receive after the performance from our own friends and from others would give us immense joy and satisfaction. In those days of celebrations the school wore a changed look a school that we liked! I often wonder as to what was so special in that school day celebrations...

Drama and the community : The school day teacher

I remember that my village school was not considered a 'good school'. Students from our school were not accepted in neighbouring higher primary or high schools. Their complaint was that the children were 'dull' and did not know anything. All this changed when a new teacher joined our school. When the teacher set foot into our school, we boasted of having only one room and a single assistant teacher. On her retirement, 15 years later, the school had a different story to tell. With 15 teachers, 8 rooms and a full fledged stage for performances, we were the envy of many! The attitude towards children from our school changed dramatically in that time span. This teacher was the first to start the ritual of school day celebrations. Parents were invited to watch their children perform drama on stage and hold exhibitions in school, with equal ease. They were overjoyed to see their children performing. The old students slowly organized themselves into an association and started working with the head teacher

for the betterment of the school. The 'betterment committee' came together and it started managing things for the school. School upgradation, bolstering of existing infrastructure and obtaining schemes from the Government - it were all happening in our school. Initially the parents came only for the school day celebrations but gradually increased their involvement. The entire change was brought in a decade. My people say that all this was done through the school day celebrations. Till date the teacher is remembered as the school day teacher.

Drama- Assessment or appreciation

Recently during the KSQAO assessment I witnessed the challenging process of assessing schools in yoga, project work, sports, and other "art education" aspects. It was very difficult for the evaluators to evaluate these aspects of art education and do a good job of it. Everyone I spoke to in the field agreed that it was a very bold and necessary step in making educational assessment holistic and meaningful but would invariably lead to discussions on the limitations of such an assessment. The teachers equipped with some knowledge of art education remarked that to assess art education it was essential to develop authentic and specific assessment tools which were different from the tools devised to assess 'subjects'. The school teachers quipped that these evaluators could only evaluate the subject content and would be unable to do justice to art education. They opined that since arts education was subjective it was almost beyond assessment. The teachers also put forth the argument that something like a drama could not be evaluated as the process of evolving the production was far more critical than the product (drama) itself. The dynamics which build the child and the team has to be considered before, during and after the drama. I heard a teacher saying that presenting yoga for somebody to assess, goes against the very essence of yoga! But it is also true that if this is not assessed it will not be taught. It becomes extra curricular, outside syllabus, outside school and outside learning. Yet my personal experience says that art education has a very high potential for providing space to children and teachers to learn in a non-threatening, non-



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competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere. There are also teachers who argue that to make art education fruitful and fun it has to be kept outside the purview of the examination!

The challenge before us is two fold: First, that art education should not be considered cumbersome by the mainstream educators and hence should not get neglected. Second, creating space for art education would break existing social hierarchies which may be of interest to very few members of the upper class and caste.

The challenge : Art as an extra

This particular branch is so important in helping the child understand herself and the immediate surrounding- if one looks at the core aims of education. The sensitivity, the flexibility to human relations etc is easily possible through arts education. But in reality it is looked down upon by the teachers, parents and experts. Teachers are not encouraged to seriously engage themselves in this branch of education and those who do, are themselves not taken seriously. The children who participate in art are often discouraged and told to focus on 'subjects' and here that often means rote learning!



We need to figure out what needs to be done to bring art to mainstream education without losing its great capacity and flexibility to nurture imagination, freedom of thought and scope for

creativity. It is in art education that the Hand, Head and Heart are engaged in a meaningful construction. The limitation and lack of appropriate tools for the assessment of art education is the major hurdle in mainstreaming art education in to the curriculum and syllabus. If assessment tools are developed art education will be considered for examination and thus teaching inside the classroom will become full-fledged.

But for this to be fruitful we will have to avoid rote learning in art. How often do we see that children when asked to draw, sketch the mundane cup and saucer, bucket, the rising sun, and the hibiscus flower? The session on drama and acting would bring Gabbar Singh, Shivaji and Yecchama Naika on stage. It was Shri Gurbachan Singh of Rajya Shiksha Kendra, Bhopal who helped me understand that this was rote learning in art education. How do we avoid this? How do we mainstream the extra-curricular? How do we measure the immeasurable?

The challenge is three fold: i) developing teachers who are sensitive and resourceful; ii) developing assessment tools which take into consideration the multidimensional aspects of art; and iii) building an appreciation of and for art in the larger community. I feel that the KSQAO evaluation process and result will give us some clue to start working in this area. We will have to put together the evaluators, the evaluated and the teachers who observed the process closely to develop a tool to assess this component meaningfully.

The challenge : Me as an extra

The societal structure, its discrimination and hierarchy is recreated in schools with subtlety, but very successfully. This is very strong in the rural schools. The 'good' roles are given to children from higher caste - perhaps the Gods have to speak in a certain language with some sophistication and superiority! And inevitably the 'fringe' roles are left for the vast majority of others. This not only deprives these children of a great opportunity to learn and bloom but adds to their image of lower self esteem.

The art forms considered to be of value also generally pertains to the culture of the higher caste. Local dialect is looked down upon; folk forms are not considered as art forms and do not come anywhere closer to the classical forms. In schools one often sees just one or two star performing children being given most of the dances and the vast majority not looked at even for a small role or dance! . The teacher has to be very sensitive and imbibe the philosophy that we are not here to show case extraordinary heroes through some star performers.

This exclusion is so powerful that after three decades of my performance in Yakshagana, I could not graduate from Ravana to Rama. If these discriminations are reflections of the society, then we need to start working towards changing the society. Of course a tall order! But we will have to start some where. Can we think of a better place than primary schools? If we start seriously training sensitive and skilled teachers to work with children on art education providing space for freedom of thought, imagination, respect for others and creativity, in a non-threatening, non-competitive, non-violent and friendly atmosphere I feel that we will be contributing towards a more humane and democratic society.

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