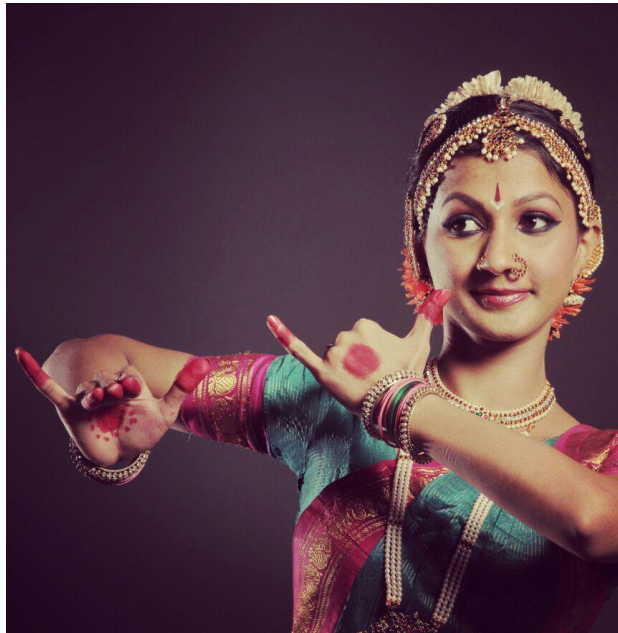


Scent of the Earth

A tête-à-tête with Apeksha Ghatkar



We met at an Artistes Residency in December, 2017, organized by Akshara and USEIF, in Mumbai. The venture by the organizers brought together artistes from different streams to work on a creative collage. Apeksha is a talented and promising dancer with many laurels, awards and accolades to crown her, and it was simply delightful and fascinating to watch her Bharatnatyam performance and when she collaborated with other artistes in our team for a particular theme. As a part-time visual artist (my passion and profession strung in off beats), I look forward to working with her in some of my “Image, Music, Performance, Text(s)” ventures. This artistic rendition of Kajri , with its local story of Kajli in Mirzapur, has been a delightful surprise from

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this artiste friend. So we are here today from *Caesurae*, for this tête-à-tête, to know more about her creative dreams, to learn how this captivating project was conceived and found expression.

Jayita: Dear Apeksha, what triggered this idea of giving expression to this Kajri number sung by Girija Devi and Pt. Ravi Kichlu?

Apeksha: Usually Bharathanatyam is performed with Carnatic Music and language is mainly Classical South Indian or Sanskrit. With the folk- semi classical song, we wanted to reach out to the ‘mass’ with the ‘class’. As Martha Graham says, ‘Dance is nothing but discovery’, one discovers new things every time one is dancing and these things trigger a thought and this is what led to this video production. Thumri in itself is a form of poetical expression. So, we tried to bring in those elements in photographing the movements in juxtaposition with the architecture. Kajri or the songs of longing are the outbursts of a woman overwhelmed by desire and Girija Devi’s voice here adds a rough and pining flavour to it.

Jayita: Please tell us about the settings. The exposition with you in the sugarcane fields and the temple architecture of the Ellora caves. What made you choose the temple architecture in the backdrop? What was Nachi’s idea as the concept you say is his?

Apeksha: The dancer evokes the image of the Temple with its myriad forms of sculptural embellishments and the sculptured images evoke the rhythm and movements of dance. Dance is said to be as Moving Sculpture. So without a second thought we chose the rich heritage of India - Ellora caves majorly to give the video a classical touch. We also wanted to bring in a contradictory dialectic of the caves as some caves were monks residences too, where a woman dancing and that too to suggest love’s yearning, would have been seen as a disgrace. We wanted to break that taboo. The intention of the Jain and Buddha statues in the backdrop was to convey the idea of sacrifice - of what Yasodhra must have gone through when Siddhart left his home.

But all this is not too much up front because we wanted the performative elements to dominate rather than metaphors. Say for example the movement where I am depicting a deer and how

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animals are watching me, with the statues of God around, and then how the camera tilts, is generally to catch the roughness and fluidity of the movements to suit the semi classical feel of thumri.

My adorning the red saree inside the caves is to give the feel of the primitive emotion; to suggest a strong emotion which is prevalent in Indian miniature paintings. The idea was to build up the emotion to a climax and then suddenly you see a cool downpour like a longed for relief.

Jayita: The cinematography is absolutely superb! Hats off to Nachi for that! Are you thinking of more such projects together?

Apeksha: Thanks a lot! It means a lot to hear from a calibre artist like you. Nachi is an experienced cinema director and we wish to do more such projects with more professional set up where either Nachi himself will shoot or some other professional cinematographer under Nachi's direction will, for my presentations in the future.

Jayita: Monsoon and love have a very close connection; so does the creative angst. I am reminded of the poem, "Meghbalika" by Joy Goswami, which I had musically transcreated for stage performance and a narrative performance for a Caesurae CD two years ago. It is about creativity or a poet's longing for his muse. And we used an ensemble of malhar moods for that. Kajri is a genre by itself, where the folk and classical blend so well. Tell us more about why you chose Kajri. Are you planning a sequel to this project?

Apeksha: As you rightly point out, monsoon has always been a favourite theme with the artistes. May it be a dancer or a painter or a singer. Here, in this Kajri song monsoon has arrived and separation becomes unbearable and this takes the form of a popular Kajri song. "Come monsoon... and it brings relief from the sizzling hot summer ... Come the black clouds... and separation from the beloved become unbearable ... Each bolt of lightning hits straight at the

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heart and makes it beat faster” as the lyrics go, we clearly understand the mind/heart of the artiste is being reflected in the climate and vice versa.

We would be surely be planning more of such classical dances in collaboration with other art forms and mediums of expression to reach out to more art lovers.

Jayita: Tell us about your Dance Academy, your dreams and visions about your school.

Apeksha: ADAA-Apeksha’s Dance Arts Academy is a dance organization with an *objective* to preserve, promote and propagate the rich cultural heritage of Indian Classical Art forms. ADAA is determined to bridge the gap between the audience and classical art forms and connect the audience to the wonderful world of Indian dance and music, which in turn, not only offers healthy entertainment but also connects to spirituality and happiness. This is a charitable trust to pass on the art heritage to coming generations. We have PADARPAN festival every year which aims to exclusively feature interaction of an exponent artist with the students of performing arts and others. It is to improve the rich heritage of our Indian culture and to reconstruct the ‘*Guru-Shishya Parampara*’ through workshops, lecture demonstrations, performances, photo exhibitions and much more. PADARPAN 2019 is coming up in March. Stay tuned!

Jayita: Thank you Apeksha! We wish you success and look forward to some joint ventures on a mutually conceived creative project in the future

Apeksha: Thank you very much. I am looking forward to work together. Lovely interacting!