

Adishakti LABORATORY FOR THEATRE ART RESEARCH
Edyanchavadi Road, Irumbai Village, Vanur Taluk, PO Auroville, Tamil Nadu,
Tel & Fax No: 0091 (0) 413 2622287
Email: adishakti@satyam.net.in
Website: www.adishaktitheatrearts.com

On behalf of the Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre Art Research and the Ford Foundation, I welcome you to this **Conference on Religious Pluralism**. The idea of such a meeting is that we share our thoughts, ideas, experiences and our doubts so as not to be alone in our work. And hopefully having established such a fellowship we will continue to keep company for years to come.

Let me also welcome you to Adishakti.

Through our engagement with the Ramayana and with previous dialogues with difference, certain key thoughts/insights, which might be of pertinence to this conference, have surfaced, which I would like to share with you.

1. First may I suggest that we examine the adequacy of the term 'religious', in the light of the fact that to many of us religion as a belief and a practice is passé. Might it not be better for us to employ the word sacred instead? While the religious can be formulaic and therefore emotionally remote, the sacred involves 'value' at a deep subjective level and is therefore potentially more sharp and violent when questioned. At the same time it covers a broader spectrum of 'difference'. Thus for example the guru of a traditional performance may hold the instruments of her performance as more sacred than the deity she worships.

2. Having said that, I would like to look at the other word in the theme: plurality. This implies the existence of 'difference'. As creative artists we value 'difference' as a means of creative stimulus. The shock of meeting the dissimilar is what stimulates us towards new thought new creativity. . Nothing grows by a pure self-development from within, in a virgin isolation. On the contrary, external impacts on a vigorous and healthy body stimulate its force for self-development. And as it grows, it adds, new-creates and gives back more than it receives. In fact our aesthetic practice concerns itself in bridging a range of diverse realms which are not normally, or visibly, in communication with each other. Thus for instance exploring the sacred epic text of the Ramayana in relation to its folk, tribal, regional, dalit, Muslim, political and other variants along with performers, historians, cultural psychologists, sociologists, poets, musicians, visual artists etc; and in an earlier experience with exploring bridges between traditional performers and contemporary performance; between theatre practitioners and urban architects; between the needs of the contemporary actor's body and the resources of traditional. Between physics and art; between maths and philosophyetc

It is this need for new thought which compels us to embrace plurality and difference and nurture it. In this regard I always look on Adishakti as a bridge, a 'mixed' space, a place of traffic and perpetual transition, one that it does not require either participants in a creative interchange to cross over to the other side.

3. As artists at Adishakti our work is to create metaphor and we therefore tend to view the world from the prism of metaphor/ the rule of the metaphor, which is the intuitive perception of similarities in dissimilars.

We are not talking about talking about resemblance, because resemblance implies visible similarity. The similarities we seek are at a non- visible level. At the visible level what we see are the boundary lines {national, cultural, religious, racial), which tend to reinforce either conflict or due to their natural hegemonic tendency to level out differences between individuals and knowledge systems. The invisible similarities on the other hand reinforce the interconnectedness between disparate peoples, localities, knowledges. Breath koodiyattam, noh and Shakespeare. So for example in our study of Koranic and Sama Vedic chanting, we have discovered that in both cases the aim is to release as many sounds that a vowel contains. Such a similarity is a rich source for our performance practice of course, but also interconnects two diverse traditions at their roots.

4. In a seeking for interconnectedness in a range of diverse realms we must value communication.

Communication between difference is of a special kind. It is futile to enter into it with a hegemonic attitude based on a presumption that a particular system of knowledge or way of knowing is superior to another. If there are different objects of knowledge there are equally different ways/processes of knowing. Each equally valid and fulfilling a function unique to it. The artist and mystic know through intuition, a knowing which reason unpacks much later in time. /Intuition is an apprehension of knowledge before reason can comprehend it AND analyze it.

And each way of knowing there are as well different pedagogical processes. Thus for example traditional gurus tend not to part with their secrets easily, as I well know, and we may be impatient about that. I do not believe that it is always to do with a politics of knowledge. I believe that this pedagogical process emerges from the premium that is put on self- realization. The guru provides a structure which the student has to fill with her experiential conclusions. The difference between Arjuna and Eklavya. This process is eventually more democratic as it privileges the student's self- discovery over received knowledge.

Outsiders need to spend time on the learning and allow our intuitive faculties to lead us in the direction that is most fruitful of knowledge. Tantric centres.eg
Difference. Stimulating and creative. Foundations of Indian Culture.
Metaphysical=Life Divine

Parallel texts across culture elicit similarity in the seeming similar.