

The Performance Space at Adishakti

At Adishakti the newly constructed performance space is an intimate space, which encourages interactive engagement between performer and spectator.

The entire structure is 56 feet by 42 feet. Central to the whole structure, and therefore emanating the highest level of creative energy according to the Natyashastra, is a performance cum spectator space of 30 feet by 40 feet, which is marked out by pillars and has a wooden floor.

This space is not further divided into a clearly marked space for the performer. It is truly a shared space.

The space is designed to accommodate not only the rehearsal work and performances but also the entire and varied gamut of our performer training, which includes highly physical aspects of the work.

Also in our attempt to expand the scope of theatre we have been exploring the use of space as a *signifier* in performance. And this demands a space, which is flexible and not severely pre defined.

The central space is surrounded by a 6 feet wide enclosed verandah. The enclosing walls are therefore unobtrusive and the performance space seems to float. **It gets its definition through the presence of the performer and her performance. And in turn also enhances her presence by this lack of an overpowering structural definition.**

The verandah also provides a space for observers who can sit to watch the proceedings unobtrusively. It allows performers to 'step off' the workplace and pursue their private practice/training. And during a performance, this acts as the offstage area for entries and exits and as a space, which could be used startlingly for an intimate though subversive interaction between performer and spectator. Apart from that it also acts as a buffer zone between the exterior wall and the interior workspace and keeps it cool.

The entire exterior wall is covered with jaalis / trellises to facilitate cross ventilation and permit the right amount of light during the daytime.

Behind the performance area are the green rooms, toilets and equipment storage areas.

The highest point of the roof is 30 feet and is over the performance cum spectator space. The slope of the roof here is at an incline of 35 degrees, which is the best for the carrying of sound. The material used in the construction of the structure also aids the acoustics of the space because it has an uneven perforated surface. We plan to surround the entire structure with trees so as to buffer it from extraneous sound.

Both the height of the roof and the laterite construction material, which is fossilized mud keep the structure cool. The aim has been to avoid a reliance on air conditioners and even fans.

The space was planned to envelop the performer with as much of a natural and aesthetically pleasing environment as possible. For the landscape and work environment have a huge impact on the consciousness of the performer and aid her in her creativity.

Choice of Material for the Theatre:

From the beginning I had decided on laterite as a material for the theatre, because it seemed aesthetically pleasing, strong, good for acoustics and cool.

Laterite is fossilized mud. It has the strength of stone and the cool effects of mud. It is attractive and comes in the colors red, yellow and dark brown. It has been used in the building of homes along the south-western coast of India { Goa and Kerala } and continues to be used widely in Kerala. In the north of Kerala this material is found in abundance and is still mined for domestic construction. The mining itself has led to the development of the eco-system as the pits, which the mining creates, effectively harvest rain-water and lead to the greening of the area as the material is rich in minerals.

Laterite is also seen in the old constructions in Karaikudi and the surrounding region. In fact it is clear that the region is rich in laterite. Unfortunately mining of this material has been banned in Karaikudi.

I was disappointed by this because naturally I wanted to construct with a material available near Pondicherry. But our architect said that even if we got the material from Calicut it would still be within our budget as a laterite block { which costs Rs.5 or so in Kerala } can be as big as eight bricks together { each brick today costs Rs. 3 }. And in the bonding of the stones less cement is used. Also laterite does not need plastering and can be used as it is. So certain costs would balance each other out.

But before we started the construction I went down to Karaikudi myself to check out the situation there. I discovered that the only stones available in Karaikudi were old ones from demolished boundary walls and buildings. No organized market existed for this material. I even thought of initiating a movement for reviving the mining of the material in the region as it seemed such a fine and cost effective option for construction. Masons and miners from Kerala could train local masons in Karaikudi and other parts of Tamil Nadu in the use of laterite, which could be used both in the cost effective environment friendly construction of domestic and institutional buildings.

I could however only focus my energy on the construction of the theatre.

The Roof:

In the construction of the roof we used the Filler Slab technique. It is highly cost effective. Also we were fortunate to be advised by Professor HV Sharama, Librarian at the NSD and an acoustics scholar who also drew his knowledge from the Natyashastra, and the Koothambalam. He advised us on the height of the roof and its correct slant.