

# Indian classical dance and music



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BUSTER**

“ It’s only for a section of society. The masses can’t really relate to it. “; “ It’s extinct. “; “ I don’t know anything about that. But I can talk to you about Jazz, if you want. ” Talk about Classical Music and Dance and these are the replies you get from the people of the country, supposedly so rich in heritage and culture. Boasting to have strong traditional and cultural roots, our country has always called itself the land of arts. Unfortunately, the very same country lives in an irony today as its classical arts face an abandonment from the masses. Who is to be blamed? ” is the big question. India claims to be the land of art and culture. Yet sadly, if we look at the present scenario, we find hardly anyone with genuine interest or genuine understanding of the Classical arts. Having lost the sheen they held, they have apparently also lost the audience and vice versa. “ It’s all about westernisation. We live in a society that apes Americans and Europeans. Classical Arts aren’t the only things that we have given up due to the Western influence,” says Kriti Malhotra, who has been learning music for the past 4 years.

And now we do what we do every time our culture is attacked. We complain and blame westernisation process. Contrastingly countries like Europe and America, which Indians continually criticise for their lack of ethnicity, provide much more cultural re-enforcement to their citizen. Most east European countries have 24 hour channel solely dedicated to their arts and culture. In our case, we have DD Bharti, which inspite of the list of talented A-grade performers and government funding have failed to attract viewer ship.

A few months back when DD Bharti’s transmission was made compulsory, most cable operators were not even aware of it. “ What could we do? There

is no demand for it, whatsoever,” says a Cable Operator. Doordarshan started out as thinking person’s channel with special and interesting shows based on various cultural arts. But since the entry of Private television, the approach followed by DD Bharti has been confused and random as the channel faces stiff and over bearing competition from it’s private counterparts. In the year 2007, out of an annual budget estimate of Rs. , 54, 041 crores, The Ministry of Culture was given a mere Rs. 5 crores initial grant for their cross-cultural projects. In spite of being one of the most populous countries in the world, The Planning Commission of our country has allocated a mere . 5 percent of the budget to culture and arts. Out of Prasar Bharati’s annual budget of Rs. 2, 000 crores, DD Bharati got a measly Rs. 14 crores in 2003. This goes on to highlight the hypocritical nature of those who brag about their cultural supremacy, while they do absolutely nothing to sustain it. The sad part is that the artists lack governmental support, as such. Only if you have contacts at the top notch places, can you think about a stable career ahead, ” says a dancer who wishes to not be named. Doordarshan Talk to any Official from Doordarshan and they harp on about being public service providers. “ We can’t show over-the-top shows which the people can’t relate to. Classical Dance and music are supposed to be very classy, we can’t show something that is against the mood of the program concerned,” says a senior official who doesn’t wish to be named.

But the quality and the packaging are of low. India is a society riding high on consumerism. Until and unless it is packaged well and presented well, they won’t be chosen over the likes of reality TV shows. Especially lately, the content of the programs has deteriorated terribly. Sneha Chakradhar, a

Professional Dancer and student of Geeta Chandran's Natya Vriksha, " It's a consumer market and you can't expect people to watch a show that is not packaged well. Their shows lack finesse. And thus, fail to attract a good audience. " We have a large amount of in-house programming and what we receive from the Doordarshan Kendras all over the country. We also commission programmes and get them from government agencies" says the official. The question is then why is all that never aired? " Every thing from programming to administration involves processes of great depth. " Media, of all kinds has given negligible importance to Classical arts. Thus, making them of remote interest among general masses. " On one hand, Media is highlighting the fact that Indian children are in extreme influence of Western culture and society.

While, on the other hand they are making no effort to bring them back to their roots," says Kathak veteran Shovana Narayan. " The classical arts and related issues have been virtually non existent in the media. Interestingly, the number of performances and that of the number of students joining in has been on a constant rise. This goes on to show that the arts haven't died in our country and among the people," she adds. Sponsors " It's not a very paying art. Finding sponsors is a problem. Some Gurus have affluent students. Size of the sponsorships is so small.

Mukesh Garg, the founder of Sangeet Sankalp Institute " The government is doing nothing. It's business Also, we seem to have the same names everywhere. " This is no different from Bollywood. Names sell. So, it's all the more difficult for a new comer to come in. " Genuine Audience And that brings us to another important question. Do we really even have an audience

in the country which is incapacitated to appreciate true art? And what kind of people actually view such shows. “ People don’t wish to know about it.

Members of IIC, IHC, Students, Older generation.

Given an option between a Bollywood concert and that of a Classical Indian performance,? The times have changed. And so have the demands of the people. They enjoy a Reshammiya Concert over a Classical Music Night. The basic thought that Indian classical arts are backward Indian Classical arts instil within you the kind of traditional values that “ We take great pride in talking about our great Indian culture. But who is keeping it alive? It’s the ignored artists who are keeping the literature,” “ The basic interest in classical traditional art was more. The number of performances have gone up

Western influence too much in lifestyle and art. Is the media, people or the audience? We are making the effort of going out. Institutions are going and trying to create awareness Even if you somehow find the opportunities, it is disheartening to see the response of the audience. Though, Shovana Narayan has a different story to tell. “ After performing in front of a jam packed crowd at Surajkund, I least expected to have a Haryanvi man coming up to me and telling how much he enjoyed the beauty of the performance. We judge the intellect of the common man too soon.

Given the platform to see quality arts, they will also learn to appreciate it. ” Professional Hazard “ Every profession has it’s own related hazards with it. It’s a non glamorous profession and it has and appeal to a select audience,” says Oddissi dancer, Rashi Khanna. “ There is so much art in our country.

And every art form has its own set of followers. Classical arts have always had less number of followers because of the intellectual complexity of the performances. So, just like engineers and doctors, it's difficult to understand and interpret our work by any common person.

Instead of cribbing about it, we should choose to focus more on enhancing the quality of the present art. " " Cultural arts have never been for masses to understand, So I fail to understand the big deal about it," Manipuri Artist Guru Singerjeet Singh believes. " Popular art doesn't reflect excellence. Rather be it any field, something that is popular is not necessarily the best. " " A person who is passionate enough to take up an art form as a profession doesn't really give money the kind of priority that people usually do. " I dance for myself. But there are sides to this story yet unexplored. Neha Malhotra BOX:

One can use research-oriented programming that explores various cultural aspects along with playful formats to form magazine shows While both are good ideas together, but if used individually like they have been, they are far from being compelling watching material. The only way to draw in audiences is to find inventive ways of presentation instead of mere talking heads. As media analyst Sevanti Ninan points out, it has to acquire some of MTV's energy and imagination without retreating from seriousness because it is, after all, public service broadcasting and can dare to tread where no private channel will go.

Obviously, a channel that relies on a meaningfully connected audience must do them the basic courtesy of proper scheduling. " I actually look out for

shows on DD Bharati like Gyan Seth's series on classical music. But these are so erratic and badly publicised that you just have to watch and hope you bump into some quality programmes," says Asha Rani Mathur, who was also involved with DD3. One of the ways to "grow" an audience and make meaningful arts content is to invest in experimentation. In order to make a difference, it must devote at least 10 per cent of its budget to lunatic fringe material, says Kak.

IN the glory days of public arts broadcasting in England, for example, several shows explored the sheer potential of the medium without being driven by the great ratings rat race. For example, John Berger's 'Ways of Seeing' was not only radical programming, but it also broke into new territory in thinking about women in art. Whether it was Susan Sontag holding forth on Pina Bausch, or Bryan Magee's series on philosophy, such shows were seen as important because they attracted a different quality of attention and involvement, which is more vital than the counting-eyeballs approach, in the long run.

Indeed, the idea that cultural programming cannot make market sense has proved a no-brainer, across the world. Today, much of the energy of arts television is devoted to finding novel formats that can compete with the accelerated ethos of global market-driven networks. Channel 4's 'Operatunity' found a way of appealing to both aficionados and beginners by modelling itself on a reality TV form, bringing over 1,600 first-timers to attend the final opera. "DD has access to fabulous wealth, we have early recordings of Indrani Rahman and Ravi Shankar.

But who has seen this stuff? If placed in context, it has the potential to intrigue and stimulate new audiences,” says Chandiram. In fact, there was a wide, rich audience for the regional films on Sunday afternoons on Doordarshan, says Chandiram, which testifies to the public’s hunger for some riveting fare. “ Instead of mere sound bites and fleeting appearances, if there was some space for Arundhati Roy or Jhumpa Lahiri to discuss books seriously, I am certain it would be very well-received,” she adds. Like DD’s new science channel is trying to pull its own weight financially, DD Bharati also has to create vibrant programming that can vie for attention with the other 70-odd channels on air,” says Kak. It boils down to the all-important difference – the BBC, being run by licence fees and a broad public service remit, is bound to be audience-driven. DD is still driven by regulation and precedent and chooses the path of least resistance, as it is still to some extent tied to the apron strings of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry.