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Covid Impacting Lives

Indian Performing Arts– An Insight from the Field



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The outbreak of pandemic has other than impacting the society in an adverse manner has also resulted a civilisational evolution and the same holds true for the field of Indian Performing Arts. While the technology has played a great role in this evolution of Indian Performing Arts wherein,

we are witnessing more and more of virtual events, a subconscious battle amongst many with reference to experiencing the performances live or in a virtual manner.

While, the virtual performances have enabled artistes and organisers to gain larger audience and hence potentially large fan base, many artistes and organisers still prefer the live performances over the virtual ones. This unwillingness cannot be termed as wrong, since virtual performances have its own drawbacks as well. The audience retention with respect to virtual performances for the entire real time streaming duration is very limited. Audiences have an option of VOD which would be mostly the case for ticketed performances as well as in case its livestreamed free of cost in platforms like YouTube, Facebook to name a few.

While the lack of any kind of interaction between the artistes and the spectators and amongst fellow spectators themselves is another important point for preferring live performance over the virtual ones. The pre-existing contractual obligation performers have, also been a reason for the proclivity. But whatever the reasons may be, the virtual performances have become a boon to many, since it has managed to provide some kind of financial support to performers amidst a situation wherein audience have two minds on attending performances virtually and physically. While it is true that a proclivity exists amongst the audience with respect to attending concerts physically, major chunk of them have also not made up their minds for larger congregations, however this trend is reducing and we are seeing full house performances in many places.

Though digitalisation of Indian performing arts is not a by-product of the pandemic, it has definitely been a great beneficiary of it, and virtual performances in its current stage or in a hybrid avatar is here to stay. Just like the way while fans do enjoy cricket matches at the comforts of their home, broadcasting it has no way resulted in lesser crowd at the stadium. Anyway, cricket cannot be directly compared to the viewership of performing arts, the basic intent of a need to have a social interaction with fellow audience shall drive them to the venue.

These developments have also resulted in revival of a much older question, i.e., Should performing arts be ticketed or not? While performing arts should be available for all the spectrum of the society to enjoy and cherish it and it is equally important that its value amongst people's desire to support

arts financially do not go down by offering it free each time. For the larger interest of promotion and sustainability of performing arts and artistes, supporting performers and organisations in a community-based approach is crucial and that could be through nominal tickets or donations.

Apart from the performer's perspective, there has been a great number of formal and informal organisations across the country recently established, hosting virtual performances along with the traditional forums. While it may be argued that a greater number of players in such a niche sector may ultimately bring about a shakeout stage, it can also be argued that having large players enhances the efficiency and vigour of the traditional bigwigs, which helps in providing platform and exposure to many budding performers. This expands the base of connoisseurs resulting in the sustainability and growth of Indian performing arts.

Another important take-away from the field, is the increase in number of children and elders having a desire to learn performing arts, recently and as a result, Institutes providing online coaching as well as offline ones have seen a rapid increase. Senior artistes have started their own master class sessions for fine tuning the students. All the students undergoing training may not end up becoming great artistes of tomorrow due to their own personal choice of profession, but for the survival of Indian performing arts it's important for them to develop a liking towards these arts and appreciate them. While all these developments look to be positive ones, the long-term sustainability of these initiatives is key for achievement of larger objective of enrichment and protection of Indian Performing Arts.

Disclaimer: The field insights and views of the author are his personal opinions and does not necessarily be the opinion of the Organisation he is involved with.