

## **REPORT OF SAMBHAV 2008**

Sambhav 2008 was an international event organised by A.L.P.A.N.A. (Association for Learning Performing Arts and Normative Action) on November 9, 2008 at the Main Auditorium, India International Centre, Delhi. It was an event on and by mentally and physically challenged persons from South Asian Countries.

A.L.P.A.N.A. has been working in Delhi for over five years with physically and mentally impaired people, whom they consider 'specially gifted'. A.L.P.A.N.A. regularly holds events to display the skills and abilities of these people. This time, A.L.P.A.N.A. decided to expand its platform and invite other South Asian Countries to share their knowledge and experience in working in the same field. It was able to bring together organisations and individuals from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Sri Lanka to the event.

The event consisted of two parts. There was an international seminar in the morning, and performances by the different organisations in the evening. The seminar consisted of two technical sessions: the first one had "Dance, Movement and Theatre as Therapies" as its theme, and the second one was based on "Challenges and Possibilities: Our Experiences".

The organisations which participated in the event were - A.L.P.A.N.A. (Delhi, India), Jeevan Jyoti Home of the Missionaries of Charity (Delhi, India), Educatum Foundation (East Delhi, India), Sunera Foundation (Colombo, Sri Lanka), National Federation for the Disabled (Kathmandu, Nepal), Sahaya Red Cross Centre (Orissa, India), Drak-Tsho Vocational Training Centre for Persons with Disabilities (Thimpu, Bhutan), and National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled (Dhaka, Bangladesh).

The people who made presentations at the seminar were - Ms. Sunethra Bandarnaike (Sri Lanka), Dr. Ambika Kameshwar (Chennai, India), Mr. S.K. Jha (Gujarat, India), Ms. Shila Thapa (Nepal), Guru Syed Salalludin Pasha (Delhi, India), Mr. Chorten Dorji (Bhutan) and Mr. Shamsul Arefin (Bangladesh).

The inaugural ceremony commenced a little after 10:00 a.m. Ms. Sadia Rehman welcomed the audience to the first part of Sambhav 2008. Dr. Anupama Singh also gave the welcome in English. Ms. Sadia Rehman introduced the guests for the session: the Chief Guest Ms. Indira Jaising, eminent jurist, lawyer and human rights activist; Dr. Arvind Gupta, IFS, Lal Bahadur Shastri Chair, IDSA, Delhi who was to preside over the session, and Mr. Bhagaban Shankar, IAS, Director, North Central Zone Cultural Centre, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, the distinguished guest of the evening.

Ms. Alpana Nayak, president of A.L.P.A.N.A. Society, accompanied the three guests to the dais. Ms. Priyadarshini, Secretary of A.L.P.A.N.A. Society, brought in bouquets, which were presented to the guests by Ms. Alpana Nayak. After receiving the bouquets, the guests proceeded to start the ceremonial lighting of the lamp, to mark the beginning of the event.

Ms. Sadia Rehman gave a brief background to A.L.P.A.N.A. and introduced the participants of the event. She went on to thank the sponsors of the programme for their support: Indian Council for Cultural Relations, India-Sri Lanka Foundation, B.P. Koirala India-Nepal Foundation, Powergrid Corporation of India Ltd., ONGC Ltd., NTPC Ltd., REC Ltd., Oriental Insurance, State Bank of India, NHPC Ltd., Bharat Dynamics Ltd., SPMC Ltd., VISA Steel and Bureau of Energy Efficiency.

Dr. Anupama Singh proceeded to give short biographical sketches of the guests on the dais. She then invited Mr. Bhagaban Shankar to speak.

Mr. Bhagaban Shankar showered praises on A.L.P.A.N.A.'s work. He mentioned that as Director of the Human Cultural Centre in Allahabad, he himself had organised many programmes for mentally and physically challenged people, and had observed at first hand the benefit art and culture can provide in their empowerment.

Dr. Arvind Gupta was the next person to speak. He congratulated A.L.P.A.N.A. on its sustained work and listed out the messages that Sambhav 2008 had for its audience: that persons with disability are equally or more talented than others; the rest of society needs to be sensitive to them, and not condescending; the performing arts are a powerful tool to help the mentally and physically challenged, and the entire society stands to benefit from it; and people-to-people contact is a powerful tool in promoting regional peace and friendship. He exhorted the ICCR (Indian Council for Cultural Relations) to support A.L.P.A.N.A..

After this, Ms. Indira Jaising was introduced by Sadia Rehman. Ms. Jaising has been awarded the Padmashree, and is an eminent jurist and lawyer, and also a human rights advocate. She is the first woman lawyer to be declared a senior advocate by the Bombay High Court. She is also a member of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

In her speech, Ms. Jaising enumerated the legal provisions under the Indian Constitution which are meant to protect the rights of the disabled. She also mentioned some of the international legislation concerning these rights. She said that the problems were not with the disabled, but with the rest of society which attached a stigma to the differently abled. Mere legal provisions are not enough, unless society changes its attitude.

After this speech, Mr. B.K. Dash, vice-president of A.L.P.A.N.A., gave a vote of thanks and announced the tea break.

After tea, the technical sessions commenced. Dr. Anupama Singh announced the theme of the first session - "Dance, movement and theatre as therapies". Ms. Meera Baghi accompanied the speakers and moderator to the dais. Ms. Alpana Nayak presented bouquets to them. Dr. Anupama Singh introduced Dr. Manjula Krippendorf, who would be chairing the first session.

Dr. Manjula invited Ms. Sunethra Bandarnaike, of the Sunera Foundation, Colombo, Sri Lanka to make her presentation. Ms. Sunethra spoke about the conditions in Sri Lanka - mentioning that since Sri Lanka has been affected for decades by the ethnic conflict, people are not able to give enough attention to the conditions of the disabled in the country. She said that Sunera Foundation was set up to address that particular lack. Sunera Foundation has endeavoured to change society's attitudes and perceptions towards the disabled, with a view to bringing about their social integration, using the performing arts as the medium for change. She went on to detail the challenges facing them in their work, especially the lack of qualified and interested trainers to help with their work. In spite of this, Sunera Foundation has managed to do consistent and regular work with the disabled in Sri Lanka.

Dr. Manjula thanked Ms. Sunethra for her presentation, and invited Ms. Ambika Kameshwar to speak. Introducing Ms. Ambika, she mentioned that she was a well-known dancer, teacher, educationist and founder of the RASA Centre, which is a pioneer of the methodology of using theatre for holistic development. Ms. Ambika Kameshwar gave a brief history of herself and spoke about RASA. She gave a short demonstration, and showed video clips of RASA activities. RASA conducts a one-year Post Graduate Diploma Course training people to work on disability using theatre.

Dr. Manjula thanked Ms. Ambika Kameshwar and then invited Mr. S.K. Jha to speak. Mr. Jha spoke about 'The Therapeutic Potential of Indian Classical Music'. He used a Power Point presentation to support his talk. He said that he was a physicist by education, but had always been interested in art. His speech was rich with Hindi and Urdu quotations from different poets - using them to illustrate his points. He mentioned that he had not conducted a scientific study on the effects of Indian classical music, but shared some anecdotes about the curative effect it had on certain people.

Dr. Manjula then introduced Ms. Shila Thapa, chairperson of the Down's Syndrome Association of Nepal. Ms. Thapa's own son is affected by the syndrome. The Down's Syndrome Association runs the Satyam Day Care Centre for children with Down's syndrome. Ms. Shila Thapa gave a power point presentation titled 'Rights of Persons with Disability in Recreational and Cultural Activities: Perspective from Nepal'. She mentioned that the political unrest in Nepal had affected the work being attempted to address the needs of the disabled. She said that there wasn't even agreement on something as basic as the number of the disabled in the country - there was an urgent need to conduct a proper survey on this. She said that numerous measures needed to be taken to incorporate sports as an activity for the disabled. There is also a need to create an environment in the other sports events so that the disabled can participate in them in their own right.

With the end of Ms. Thapa's presentation, the first technical session came to a conclusion. Dr. Manjula thanked all the speakers of the session, and announced the lunch break.

After lunch, the audience assembled for the second technical session. Dr. Anupama Singh welcomed the audience and declared the theme to be "Challenges and Possibilities: Our Experiences". She invited the moderator, Dr. Manjula Krippendorf, and the speakers - Mr. Chorten Dorji, Mr. Shamsul Arefin and Guru Syed Salaluddin Pasha - onto the dais.

Dr. Manjula introduced Mr. Chorten Dorji from Bhutan as a teacher at the Drak-Tsho Vocational Training Centre for Persons with Disabilities. Mr. Dorji has been trained both in special education and the traditional arts. Mr. Dorji supported his talk with a Power Point presentation. He talked about the Drak-Tsho centre, which intends to help people with disability to lead a contented life. 3.5% of the population of Bhutan is disabled, but disability rehabilitation was still a new concept in Bhutan. Drak-Tsho has the only parent-initiated programme in Bhutan that works on disabilities. He detailed the benefits of performing arts and said that it affected the disabled children, teachers, parents and community positively.

Mr. Mohammed Shamsul Arefin from Bangladesh was the next speaker. Mr. Arefin spoke about how the disabled face many challenges in Bangladesh, and how the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled was attempting to face some of them. He detailed how dance movements help in making people more confident and lead to an improvement in their social life. Participating in such activities had a positive effect on both the physical and mental well-being of the disabled.

Dr. Manjula introduced Guru Syed Salaluddin Pasha as a person who had been in the field for over twenty-five years, having learnt both kathak and Bharatnatyam. Mr. Pasha enumerated the basis for his organisation Ability Unlimited using performing arts with the disabled. Ability Unlimited has in-house productions which are composed entirely of differently abled people. He showed several video clips of various performances, including the Ramayana on Wheels, which won international awards.

After this presentation, there was a short question and answer session with the audience. Next, Ms. Alpana Nayak presented mementoes to the guests and group photographs were taken. A tea break was announced.

After the tea-break, the programme for the evening commenced.

Ms. Sadia Rehman welcomed Mr. Oscar Fernandes (Minister of Labour, Govt. of India), the Chief Guest, and Mr. Wajahat Habibullah (Chief Information Commissioner, India) and Mrs. Leela Ponappa (Deputy National Security Adviser, India and Secretary, National Security Council Secretariat). She greeted the distinguished guests of the evening- Sister Sherin (Missionaries of Charity, Northern Community, India), Mr. C.R. Jayasinghe (the High Commissioner of Sri Lanka to India), Mr. Durgesh Man Singh (the Ambassador of Nepal to India) and Mr. Liaquat Ali Choudhury (the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India).

The Vice President of A.L.P.A.N.A., Mr. B.K. Dash felicitated the guests with bouquets and they lighted the ceremonial lamp. The Souvenir of Sambhav 2008 was released. After the sponsors of the event were thanked, the performances began.

The first performance was "Srjan" by nine students of A.L.P.A.N.A.. The dance was about the celebration and joy which follows a new creation. The dance was supported by colourful animation in the background.

The second performance was a solo dance "Vasant Pallavi" by A.L.P.A.N.A. student Tanmay Aggarwal. It was a traditional Odissi dance and based on Raag Vasant.

The third dance was a group performance by twelve students from A.L.P.A.N.A.. It was based on the song "Sagar se Uthta Badal" and described the much-loved rainy season.

The next dance was by eight performers of the Sunera Foundation from Colombo, Sri Lanka. It was titled "Aspects - a dance of diversity and unity". It was a procession led by an ancient king and consisted of dances typical of various parts of the country. The elaborate costumes used in the dance impressed the audience.

The fifth performance was by Rashmi Khare from the National Federation for the Disabled, Kathmandu, Nepal. It was a patriotic dance by the one-legged artist who danced to the song "Laali Gunraas Ajambari Champa Chameli".

The next performance was also by an artist from Nepal, Arjun Podyal. He is a visually impaired flutist and played the "Mangal Dhun".

The next dance was a solo by one-legged dancer Roma Neupane from Nepal. She danced to a marriage song "Yo Ho Mero Pran Bhandha Pyaaro Bharati Ghar".

The next performance was by Kumar Podyal, again from Nepal. He sang a solo song, getting the audience to

clap along with him.

The organisation which presented its performance next was SAHAYA, Red Cross Centre, Orissa, India. It was a dance drama "Shri Ganesha" which narrated the mythological story of how Lord Ganesha came to have the head of an elephant.

Drak-Tsho Vocational Training Centre for Persons with Disabilities from Thimpu, Bhutan presented a group dance on the song "Thrung Thrung Karmo" about the rich culture of Bhutan.

The last few performances of the evening were by the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Emran Roshid presented "Dhinta Nader Dhina"- a contemporary dance item. Then there was a folk dance item "Kanak Chapa Gran" performed during the harvesting season. The participants were Emran Roshid and Nayeem Hossain. The next dance was performed by the same two people and called "Aki Bahalo Korla". It was a marriage song.

After the performances were over, the participants came on to the stage to receive a standing ovation. Group photographs were taken, and congratulations were offered to all the performers, bringing the proceedings of a rich day to a happy conclusion.