

Kapila ji, where sublime creativity surpasses words

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Padma Vibhushan Dr (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan, Founder Trustee, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts (IGNCA) and former Member of Parliament (Rajya Sabha) took her last breath on 16th September 2020 at the age of 91 years at her residence, New Delhi. Born on 25th December 1928, she is known for integrating India's rich cultural past with its present for future.

I recall my first visit to IGNCA in February 1995, when I was invited for an Interview for a post under UNDP project. On my turn, I was called in a big meeting hall where over a dozen interview board members were sitting. A lady was sitting at the center between the board members, grey hair, milky white colour, perhaps in her early sixties, wearing a very costly light colour silk saree, giving the resemblance of goddess Saraswati. I don't recall what was asked by the board members in the interview, which continued for over an hour, but I am sure that I was knowing nothing about arts or culture till that time, and the situation is not very different even today. Surprisingly, shine and depth of her eyes, indicating her will power and commitment, perhaps gazing the candidates with such yardstick, has left a permanent impression. Later, when I joined IGNCA, I was formally introduced to her (Dr Kapila Vatsyayan, Academic Director) by non-other than then Joint Secretary of the IGNCA and later Secretary to the Government of India, Ministry of Culture, Late Mrs. Neena Ranjan. Since then, Dr Vatsyayan was mentor, guide, philosopher and teacher to me for all my act, whether official or personal.

Her contribution in visualising the art as integral part of human development was incredible. Through her research she established the relationship between the arts with science, text with aural, classical with folk, traditional with modern and so on. Seamless assimilation of different art forms and establishing each as complimentary to the other, in understanding the subject in its totality was throughout practiced by her.

One of her important and unique contribution was establishment of the Cultural Informatics Laboratory (CIL), a Multimedia Research Centre at IGNCA, in 1994 with UNDP assistance. She envisaged IGNCA as a centre encompassing the study and experience of all the arts – in its inter and multidisciplinary dimensions. Through the multimedia projects, CIL demonstrates this vision by presenting the cultural heritage virtually, in the holistic and

integrated perception of culture. This enable the IGNCA to bring together scholarship and technology for facilitating communication in a modern world. The millennia-old (traditional) systems of knowledge of India's past and vigorous present, is captured in this lab in a computer-generated multimedia. To showcase the inter-relatedness of arts, she initiated five major projects titled 'Tanjavur Brihadishvara Temple' - an epitome of chola architecture, Jayadev's 'Gita Govinda' - the painting, the music, the dance; 'Devanarayan' - an oral epic of Rajasthan presented on Phad; 'Agnicayana' - a Vedic ritual and 'Vishvarupa' - a Cosmic Form of Lord Vishnu. Selection of these projects on Architecture, Literature, Folk Tradition, Ritual and Iconography is perhaps based on the categorization of arts reflected in Vishnudharamottara Purana, which she quote very often.

I am privileged to work under her direct supervision, for implementation of the "Tanjavur Brihadishvara Temple" and "Jayadev's Gita-Govinda" multimedia projects. Her quality of perception, observation and presentation was admirable. It took me sufficient time to understand her vision of Arts, where Science is a very small fragment of the Arts. During the discussions she reiterated the fact that the Computer Science fragments the subject (in fine details) before presentation, while Culture integrates them before presentation. Thus, combining these two disciplines together, in Cultural Informatics, can create enormous possibilities of presenting the subject. Also, this can help in making India's glorious past accessible to the younger generation, on their platform. Finally, her vision culminated in starting the PG Diploma in Cultural Informatics course at IGNCA with the approval of All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

Her vision of IGNCA reflects her foresightedness with academic, artistic and administrative acumen. With her demise, it ended a most glorious era in the cultural history of India, but for me it created a vacuum, forever.