



**Celebrating
Human Values
Through Culture**

Compiled by the Editorial Team



Human Values are the noble, guiding principles that must shape our behaviour, attitude and interactions with others. Cultivating these values therefore, is crucial for fostering a harmonious and inclusive society. Culture, the rich tapestry of all the fine arts, as well as the philosophy that underlies customs and traditions, plays a significant role in nurturing and developing human values. To this end New Acropolis, in Mumbai, hosted a carefully curated selection of philosophy, film, music and dance on 10th June 2023, at the Chemould Prescott Road art gallery, to celebrate culture in its myriad forms.

The eminent panel of guests included film producer and Oscar winner for “The Elephant Whisperers” Guneet Monga Kapur; Kathak exponent Prachi Wagh; and Sufi singer Radhika Sood, accompanied by acclaimed guitarist Neil Mukerjee. National director of New Acropolis, India (North), Yaron Barzilay was the cohesive force, pointing out at the end of the evening, how the underlying yarn with which the rich fabric of all these diverse traditions has been spun, is the same philosophical truth: What is Beautiful, True and Just are all aspects of the same Divine Reality.

Art Is Wisdom Made Into Beauty - Jorge Angel Livraga

Explained Yaron, “The etymology of the word ‘culture’ shares the same Latin root as ‘Cultivate’. The Roman orator Cicero used the term ‘Cultura Animi’, an interesting agricultural metaphor for the ‘cultivation of a philosophical soul’. This suggests a beautiful allegory: just as a seed requires the right kind of nourishment, we too require the right soil to grow to our potential, and culture is that soil.

Culture can separate us, but on the other hand it has the ability to bring us closer, to bring harmony and unity, because the more we climb towards beauty, the more we awaken virtues within ourselves. Coming closer to unity is one of the gifts that culture offers.”

Just as the evening began, suddenly there was an electrical outage in that part of the city, and the lights and air conditioning switched off. The volunteers of New Acropolis demonstrated commendable grace under pressure by moving the refreshment interval forward. In a quick turnaround, snacks and beverages were circulated freely among the audience, while regular updates about when we could expect to resume were being relayed.

Then, in what may well have been the highlight of the evening, Kathak dancer Prachi Wagh, who along with 3 young students, was due to present a specially choreographed dance, rehearsed to selected music, displayed the courage and determination of a true artist; though her presentation was slotted in for the latter part of the evening, she offered to put on an impromptu presentation, in the fading light coming through the open windows, to the accompaniment of her own vocalization. She prefaced her offering with these inspiring words: “My guru always said that a really excellent performance is never the result of the hours put into the rehearsal for the show, but based on regular and intense practice: true *riyaz* (hard work) as a *sadhana* (a disciplined and dedicated daily spiritual practice). We do not depend on the circumstances. We are here to do what we need to do. So, we give you a presentation today without any accompaniment, based only on the strength of our practice.”





The confident performance and intricate footwork displayed by the 3 young students, followed by the eloquent and graceful dance by Prachi evoked the admiration of all in the audience that evening, but what stole their hearts was the courage, grace and generosity of the dancers stepping forward to fill the need of the hour.

In pointing out the difference between entertainment and culture, Yaron said “We can make culture entertaining, but not everything that entertains is culture. The most important aspect of culture is that it elevates us”

Resonating with this, filmmaker Guneet speaking about the making of the documentary said, “I saw the selfless love of Bomman and Bellie for the baby elephant Raghu. When Bomman said ‘I get everything from the forest, and it is enough’, that was eye-opening for me. Working on a documentary seldom pays the bills, but it feeds the soul. We need to show up in our best form. We need to show up with our integrity. Then no obstacle is insurmountable. For every 10 No’s you will get one Yes. So, I have learnt to celebrate my No’s by saying to myself as I face a prospective sponsor, ‘fine, quickly say no to me so I can move on, so that the Yes is just around the corner’. This example of determination and focus resonated with what Yaron referred to as “acting with our will, driven not by the external, but by our inner Acropolis, the higher city within ourselves. This is what allows us to connect with virtues and values and even awaken our intuition, to remember who we are”, he said.

Sufi singer Radhika Sood expanded on this with a beautiful song from Bulleh Shah who explored the concept of self, by stating explicitly what I am not. The words are a quest for enlightenment, about how habituated we are to labels, to segregating everything into boxes, and about realizing the meaninglessness of compartmentalizing life; and Radhika's clear voice, articulating this and other deeply philosophical verses from Kabir and Tagore began to do what music innately has the power to do; to go deep within you and awaken something lying dormant in the innermost recesses of your soul.

Truth Reveals Itself In Beauty - Tagore

In his succinct closing Yaron said "in a nutshell, culture is essential to awaken the human quality in ourselves. The sensitivity to beauty and divinity is uniquely human and that is the role of culture, not only for the performers, but equally for those in the audience. We don't all have to express beauty in a specific art form, because at the end of the day, our life is our art. Culture helps us become better at the art of Living. That is why it is so important for us to preserve and celebrate culture". 

