

A Wholesome Multidimensional Experience

Nine Hills One Valley by Chorus Repertory Theater performed at the MetroPlus Theatre Fest was indeed a Multidimensional experience. Here are the highlights of three of interwoven threads that many would be able to easily relate. The play was an intense mix of wholesome entertainment, a crash course on management, and a deeply subtle yogic spiritual process.

Wholesome Entertainment

The performance blended several samples from the traditional and contemporary Manipuri culture to create an immersion into a culture at crossroads. The viewers were settled down during the buildup that showcased spread of the evil. The wailing and the treadmill effects – so familiar in everyday experience - was employed to draw the viewer into the play. The scene depicting the cutting of wrists of *Raas Leela* performers enabled total immersion. The magical composition of cast, color and cloths reinforced with myriad theatrical elements made the immersion total.

The encounter of the men of wisdom with men of the modern times brought out the satirical and the comic streak within Rathan Thiyam who indeed directed the play. United States invasion of Iraq and the consequent '*pissing off*' of the locals/Arabs was deftly portrayed within couple of seconds in the most funny manner. A muted mumbling English accent was effectively used to take a dig at the vagueness and chaos of modern times. Inundation by newsprints, with an obsession to report the death and destruction, served as a fitting ambiance to enhance the satire.

Soothing chants and music inter spread with graceful dance and movements amplified by color and costume made the performance a wholesome entertainment.

Crash Course on Enterprise Management

Nine Hills One Valley was not just a entertaining performance but also a demonstrative crash course on business management. For starters, it was 5S in action all the way throughout the play. The play brought out the essence of management buzzwords without uttering them explicitly. Here is a subset of elements covered in the crash course:

Organizational structure. In a typical business organization, the structures created for easy management invariably creates conflicts and inefficiency. In the play, the flexible partitioning effected through light demonstrated the harmony between the parts and the whole. The technique can be directly applied to harmonize the core teams and the support teams and manage the interplay between the visible and the latent.

Leadership In a scene one of the seven men of wisdom wore the blanket in contrast to the rest of the wise men highlighting his leadership. In many real life situations, the contrast between the leader and the rest of the team players is even more trivial. Yet, the contrast is a constant source of conflict and heartburns. The scene could help teams to put leadership in perspective.

Virtualization The pageant of modern men interestingly marked by out of tune zombie walk is a case of effecting *more with less*.

People and process The execution of the play itself is a celebration of people tuned to process. There were elements of people and process in the content of the play too. Like the traditional practice of use of *dhand* (serpent headed staff in the play) to externalize knowledge and wisdom. And using the staff to rewrite the wisdom in a form suitable for contemporary society.

Passion and Return on Investment. The play demonstrates the link between passion and high degree of attention to details. And the interlink between passion and exponential returns. The transformational touch of the play is the exponential return effected with sparse resources with good measure of passion thrown in.

Homework, Homework, Homework. Elaboration unnecessary. Enough Said.

On the whole, *Nine Hills One Valley* as a crash course in management is a compelling value proposition in terms of both value for money and value for time spent. It will beat buzzword peddling consultant mentors hands down any day! A key takeaway question from the course: When something as permanent as culture and tradition needs conscious renewal, how can businesses afford stagnation?

An Exposition of Spiritual Progress

Nine Hills One Valley is a Manipuri play. Yet, the language barrier proved to be an advantage to experience the exposition of spiritual progression expressed through yogic symbolisms shared across Indian cultures. The play is a vivid portrayal of the ill effects of disconnecting from the wisdom ingrained in culture and tradition. The portrayal explored the natural cycle of cultural reconnection and rejuvenation. The seven men of wisdom(symbolized by serpent headed staff) undertake a *sadhana* that wakes them from slumber and makes them transcend the ocean of life. The *sadhana* - inter spread with penance, chanting, fighting off the evils, invocation and reflection - not only leave them transformed, but also makes available the gift of wisdom and hope to the contemporary younger generation.

The play underscores the need for making traditional cultural wisdom relevant to contemporary society. The two way process in which the tradition and the modern meet half way across the bridge was outlined through juxtaposition of modern day angst with elements of grace and harmony quintessential of traditional wisdom.

The yogic symbolism of the palm - the instrument of *mudhra* that controls the flow of transformational subtle energy(*prana*) - was employed to illustrate the disconnect from wisdom. The cutting of wrists scene highlights the ill effects of disconnect from wisdom and the plight of traditional culture reduced to soulless ritual.

The performance climaxed with the modern mothers weeping and singing lullabies to their children expressing their modern day fear uncertainty and doubt. They invoked the men of wisdom who showed up in subtle form of light and hope in the valley thereby bringing the *sadhana* to closure.

For me, the climax was not during the performance but in the post-performance thanks giving ritual. The very graceful thanks giving was a revelation of and moment of connection with the *Adi Guru* – the energy that dispels darkness and *origin* of all art forms.