



COURAGEOUS CREATIVITY

JANUARY 2012



“WERE THESE TWO AMAZING QUEENS, RATIONALLY INCONCEIVABLE IN THEIR SPOTS IN HISTORY, SEEKING TO CONSTRUCT SINGULAR IDENTITIES? OR DID THEIR EXISTENCE AND ‘BEING-NESS’ TRANSCEND IDENTITY, WHICH IS WHY THEIR COURAGE, DEVOTION, WISDOM AND ENDURING POWER CONTINUE TO INSPIRE WOMEN OF CURRENT TIME?”

SPECIAL EDITORIAL: TWO UNREASONABLE QUEENS

SHAHANA DATTA GUPTA

Astiva: A Tale of Two Queens premieres on January 14, 2012 at the Kirkland Performance Center, featuring the stories of Meerabai, poetess and saint, and Rani Lakshmibai, warrior Queen of Jhansi, through classical music and dance, presented by Srivani Jade and Dr. Ratna Roy, respectively.

Astiva

A tale of two Queens *



TWO (UNREASONABLE) QUEENS

Personally having transcended constructs of identity, whether professional, vocational, social, cultural, or personal, and living in 'creative being-ness,' it is poignant that an opportunity presented itself, to reflect on the *astitva* of two extraordinary queens of history from the Indian subcontinent – poetess and saint Meerabai, and warrior queen Laxmibai – and their relevance to modern day existence. In its most rudimentary form, *astitva* is often taken to mean 'identity.' But, in truth the word has complex meanings from its Sanskrit lineage, also connoting 'existence,' 'is-ness,' 'being-ness,' and so on.

Meerabai, the queen-turned-poet-saint who lived as long ago as the 16th century, broke social mores of both wifely and stately conduct to devote herself to the lifelong love and adoration of another man – Lord Krishna, and she continues to be upheld as the epitome of sainthood, wisdom, and divine love. Rani Laxmibai, who according to lore, died fighting the British on horseback in full armored splendor in 1858 at the mere age of twenty-two, made it to Time Magazine's list of Top Ten Bad-ass Wives in July 2011, alongside the likes of Michelle Obama, Sarah Palin and Melinda Gates! Were these two amazing queens, rationally inconceivable in their spots in history, seeking to construct singular identities? Or did their existence and 'being-ness' transcend identity, which is why their courage, devotion, wisdom and enduring power continue to inspire women of current time? What was behind their drive, and the practically unreasonable paths they chose for their day and age? And what resonance do they have with you and me today? Or to the women who will portray them through their music and dance – Srivani Jade and Dr. Ratna Roy?

On the surface it would appear that both Meerabai and Laxmibai broke through and transformed the extant definitions and expectations of womanhood – or feminine identity. And this idea has undoubtedly been central to the evolution of the feminist (and generally, human) ethos over modern times, in which we have fought to close the gaping chasm between men and women in terms of social status, role, identity, rights, power, and so on.

“LOOK A BIT DEEPER AND YOU REALIZE THAT REALLY...IT WAS NOT THAT [MEERABAI AND LAXMIBAI] WERE BREAKING THE MOLD; THEY SIMPLY DIDN'T SEE THE MOLD IN THE FIRST PLACE!”

TWO (UNREASONABLE) QUEENS

But look a bit deeper and you realize that really, Meerabai's and Laxmibai's feminine bodily existence did not limit them from embodying both feminine and masculine principles of creative stillness and creative action. It was not that they were breaking the mold; they simply didn't see the mold in the first place! Their love, devotion, courage and conviction made them blind to such boxes, restrictions, boundaries and definitions, and they existed and acted purely out of the is-ness, the being-ness of their inner light. This, I believe is the universal and timeless appeal of women like Meerabai and Laxmibai, not just to womanhood but to humanity.

For me, thriving as a creative, vibrant and spiritually alive being has included balancing within, both the feminine and masculine principles. This begins with first owning and celebrating my femininity, which means transcending both the identity of the oppressed, victimized woman of time-immemorial, as well as the relatively recent identity of the progressive, "equal-to-man" feminist, valiantly fighting for fair rights and status. Further, balancing the feminine and masculine principles within is achieved by harnessing the creative power of both aspects (most literally seen in our *procreative* abilities).

Leveraging the feminine principle involves cultivating a creative stillness – the art of recognizing and receiving the Muse – and then, channeling it to pass through me into an act of creation. Leveraging the masculine principle, on the other hand, involves executing through creative action, that which has been revealed through creative stillness.

In my feminine aspect, I must act as a magnetic stillness, innately knowing visionary, a spark of inspiration, a catalyst for change, the sensor of subtlety, and the guardian of flow, order and life force for humankind's highest potential. In my masculine aspect, I must act as the passionate seeker, the discoverer, the leader by example, the creator of something greater than myself for the manifest expression of humankind's highest potential.

“FOR ME, THRIVING AS A CREATIVE, VIBRANT AND SPIRITUALLY ALIVE BEING HAS INCLUDED...TRANSCENDING BOTH THE IDENTITY OF THE OPPRESSED, VICTIMIZED WOMAN OF TIME-IMMEMORIAL, AS WELL AS THE RELATIVELY RECENT...PROGRESSIVE, “EQUAL-TO-MAN” FEMINIST, VALIANTLY FIGHTING FOR FAIR RIGHTS...”



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With Lord Krishna as her Muse, Meerabai allowed herself to be transformed by divine love into a channel for creative expression with timeless resonance. This epitomized the feminine aspect of human existence, or astitva. At the same time, she set out as the seeker and discoverer, traversing long distances on foot to meet seers and philosophers, in search of Krishna and Truth. This was her masculine aspect in action. Rani Laxmibai, in the absence of both male companion and male heir (both her husband and son had died unexpectedly), summoned her leadership and passion to fight the British, in a valorous expression of the masculine principle. Yet, evident in her path was also the feminine stillness of surrender – knowing well that she would perish, she executed on an inner knowing and vision that she must allow the call of duty to flow through her.

Abstract as they may be, to me, these are the enduring inspirations to draw from the unusual paths of queens Meerabai and Laxmibai. As women and men of an evolved consciousness, it is time to look beyond the definitions of gender, status, role and identity, and to return home to our innate one-ness, our true astitva, as balanced, creative be-ings. In this, there is true love, courage, creativity and change.

“AS WOMEN AND MEN OF AN EVOLVED CONSCIOUSNESS, IT IS TIME TO LOOK BEYOND THE DEFINITIONS OF GENDER, STATUS, ROLE AND IDENTITY, AND TO RETURN HOME TO OUR INNATE ONE-NESS, OUR TRUE ASTITVA, AS BALANCED, CREATIVE BE-INGS.”

Astitva

A tale of two Queens

Odissi Choreographer Dr. Ratna Roy
and Hindustani vocalist Srivani Jade
tell the true stories of two powerful
and inspiring queens of India.



January 14 ~ 8:00 pm

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Curators and Executive Editors: Shirin Subhani and Shahana Dattagupta
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Flying Chickadee

PO Box 30021, Seattle, 98113-0021

www.flyingchickadee.com

info@flyingchickadee.com

