



Kattale Daari Dura P28

Directed by TN Narasimhan, this Kannada play is set in a small town, where the inmates of a mental hospital face a greater chance of recovery than the establishment.

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It was a foot injury that became the catalyst for Rohini Sen's solo show, *The Efficacy of Exquisite Pain*. Sen's focus was on teaching art to children with attention deficit disorder and on running. She had a fitness coach who encouraged her to run in marathons, 10 Ks and so on. But in 2011, she injured her foot while running on Brigade Road as part of an organised run. There was a pause button on her fitness regime. Four MRIs, three bone scans, two Cortisone shots and several prescriptions later, a hapless Sen decided to look at the situation differently. The injury became a gift of time and the drawings began.

Was the forced rest cathartic? On the contrary. The marathoner stresses that the drawings are by no means "a therapeutic exercise". Instead, they reflect her observations of life passing by. The drawings themselves are unusual for the use of animal motifs and refreshing for the rich details within.

Rats, turtles, emus and parrots — all these members from the animal kingdom have made their way onto the big sheets of paper. Animals were chosen as they allowed her to say more about pain in a manner that isn't a literal representation.

LEARNINGS

It's been a journey in more ways than one. She has had moments of self-doubt in the past upon seeing a big sheet of plain paper. The fear of not being able to express what's in the inner reaches of the mind can be paralyzing for any student of art, she says. Many tackle that fear by sticking to A4 size sheets that are more manageable to fill up. She counts herself lucky to have had a teacher who kept giving her big sheets of paper. "My professor at the Rhode Island School of Design, Nancy Friese, would say the sheets of paper were mine whether or not I filled them up. That alone motivated me to draw what I wanted, to let go of the fear to not be able to recreate what is in my mind."

But what about the fear of one's injury? She sought out alternative medicines and with a "quarter of a doubting mind and a three-fourth of a hopeful one" entered an Ayurvedic hospital. She had a latent feeling that the Ayurveda method of pain management was far from scientific and

A study of pain

A chronic foot injury led this artist to create works that are visual metaphors for situations faced during a period of immobility



probably not the most helpful thing for a runner. The doubts are likened to little creatures or "ghouls" that her injury gave birth to along the way. From the point where her parents wondered if she could walk properly again, to the present where she plans to get back to running, the journey has made her eloquent about pain.

Sen hopes the works in the series serve as "teachings" to sports persons

and injury survivors. "They need a space to introspect upon their injuries and are entangled in the pressure to conquer their injuries."

DETAILED NARRATIVES

Talk veers to the fundamentals of drawing. Having trained as a sculptor at the Chitrakala Parishad, Sen acknowledges the importance of drawing in that medium. But she detests

the dictat that an artist has to be strong in drawing. "I am not a great draughts person," she points out, "but this kind of insistence would have made me stop drawing completely. The elements of drawing will dissuade those who want to draw but are not great at it." Instead, Sen advocates reflective drawing, which allows the freedom to draw without having to focus on the product.

She points out to works such as *The Plague of Memory*. There are rats, sitting on a lemon or coming out of a fruit. Sen associates rats with stairs. Or specifically, to the painful memory of climbing stairs. For two years, she had a traumatic relationship with staircases as climbing up or down then meant excruciating pain. "This fearsome association continued well after my injury had healed. Every time I so much as saw a staircase, I had pockets of fear in my mind. This fear spread like the plague, tarnishing every ounce of my confidence." A particularly jaun-



ty-looking emu with parrots in the scene depicts the unsolicited advice given to her about taking care of her foot. Turtles denote truths (or pain) known for very long.

Details that figure in the drawings are astonishing and prolific. Sen attributes this to the rigorous training for five years in Madhubani painting by her guru Shashikala Devi, a Madhubani painter from Bihar. She was then in high school. A takeaway came from her rural teacher that Sen says helped her flourish as an artist. "My guru told me that if she had to teach me everything then I would not give discovery a chance. That was when I evolved as an artist."

MARKET MATTERS

Sen's agent in the US has helped her put a price on the drawings and even sold some of them. She says it is only in India that the artist has to decide on the price. Elsewhere, art appraisals and evaluators decide on the price after looking at the technique, size and time taken to complete the work, apart from the market value of the artist. She has an app that helps her calculate the time spent on each work — it ranges from nine hours to 20 plus hours, which gives a definitive idea about how to price her works. "It is sad that in India there is no appreciation for the time an artist puts into the work. Take Madhubani paintings. Buyers haggle over the price without caring if the artist is a National Award winner or if the details are painstaking. All they want is a nice colourful work for cheap."

Sen's works are colourful, whimsical and attractive. That the works embody memories of pain make them reflective and worthy of study.

The Efficacy of Exquisite Pain, 11 am to 6.30 pm till July 4th at Gallery 545

