

**To Envision means to See!**  
**by Birgit Fritz**

“There are some days like today, when something that has never happened before, happens for the first time, that something that has never existed, is born. This today is one of those wonderful days. Men and Women, who believe in creating a new society, have come here, to declare, that what they have promised, that what they want, what is needed, is possible.”

(Augusto Boal in the beginning of his speech addressing the many thousands of people who gathered after an incomparable SpectActors’ Rally at Wellington Square, Kolkata, 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2006)

Jana Sanskriti’s Mukthadara II Festival has made the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October 2006, the day of the SpectActors’ Rally in Kolkata, a mile stone in the history of the Theatre of the Oppressed. The most quoted statement during the whole festival and certainly that very day, was Antonio Machado’s, *caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*, in its shorter English translation – ways are made by walking!

“Something that never happened, happened for the first time.“ It was what we could feel, not only emotionally, but intellectually as well; we could grasp the meaning of being in the right place, at the right time. Meaningful being!

The participants of the workshop, the visitors to the festival, the convention, we, the international guests, practitioners, who had come to see, to learn, to support, to witness a most spectAc(t)ular phenomenon.

Quite a few of us said, that they will never forget that day, that being part of the Mukthadara experience, lives changed, attitudes, understanding of the Theatre of the Oppressed Movement. Ideas have become alive, visions proved true, suspicions were confirmed. TO can actually change the world around us, as we also change when practising this art.

The preparation that went into the organisation of the SpectActor Rally we might not have been able to comprehend. How and with what strength, optimistic energy and collective spirit, the network of TO groups that Jana Sanskriti represents, could pull off a rally with such a breathtaking number of participants, disposing of the humble means they have, we do not know. We suspect it has to do with endurance, love and conviction.

During the days before the 22<sup>nd</sup> the organisational team was confronted with numerous phone calls, beaurocratic barriers and administrative chores, while at the same time catering to the visitors, preparing the convention, covering the media work. A lot of patience and good strategy was applied until in the last moment all permissions were granted and things could, also officially, move ahead, when in reality they had to be prepared a long time ahead.

Jana Sanskriti Headquarters in Badu near Kolkata, as we have seen, disposes of two telephones, a computer, a car and a motorcycle. How could it all be accomplished? The answer is, the answers are – the PEOPLE!

Communication between Jana Sanskriti members is one of the miraculous things of this world. It must be something close to perfect. When one is not there, the other go on doing his or her work, people jump in, they ARE one. Be it act, sing, play the drums, teach, cook, drive, discuss, solve problems, answer questions, show the way, translate texts, make announcements, together they do it all. They have a common cause and have lived an improvement in their lives through the work they do. And most obviously, this driving force behind their commitment, is what unites and strengthens them enormously - an essential lesson!

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October instead of 5.000 expected SpectActors, more than 12.000 came. Seventy percent of the walking spectActors were spectActresses. An enormous gathering. Men in part had stayed at home looking after the children, but also, protecting the houses, as it happens, that empty slum dwellings, are being destroyed by the forces of the State, without offering alternatives.

For European standards it was a most quiet march. The marching was the message, the posters, the silence, some songs and women blowing the conch shells. In India, people march in lines, one person behind another. There were two parallel ones, both seemed endless.

They were headed by Augusto Boal and his team. Augusto was flying, at least his hair was! The sun not only shone from the sky but also from his and all eyes around. It was harvest day, as he later said.

The rally went right through Kolkata, right through the madness of its traffic, the astonishment of its inhabitants. We, the international guests, from at least 14 different countries, that I can recall, were awaiting the end of the line and then marched along, singing a song that we had been taught by Sima and Soto the nights before. Oh, shobai mile jot badhi re ay – let everyone unite and come!

At the moment of learning the song, it had been a strange thing to do (for me), at least for some moments. It made me think of primary school and the anthems we had had to learn, and some old grudges were awakened, at this event so far away from my childhood traumas. It was a confusing moment (whose words do I learn, why do I sing them, what do they mean, can they also be my words ???).

Then, at the moment of seeing the spectActors walk and us, being able to contribute voices that might hopefully have been understandable to them taking into consideration our accents and pronunciation, to also acoustically show our support, it did not only make me shiver and laugh at the same time, but also move and shift all I had ever thought about solidarity with so-called developing countries, a term that I would like to have replaced by the one of majority world. We are the odd ones out. At least the ones who come from the so-called first world, the minority world. And I mean everywhere not only in India.

The posters made the following statements and also asked some questions: