

# LIGHTING UP THE STARS

MEET BARRY JOHN, THE MAN WHO HAS GIVEN THE TINSELTOWN SOME OF ITS BRIGHTEST STARS TODAY

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COMPLIMENTARY TO THE READERS OF THE TIMES OF INDIA IN SELECT AREAS ONLY\* SATURDAY NOVEMBER 27, 2010



A PRESENTATION FROM THE TIMES OF INDIA

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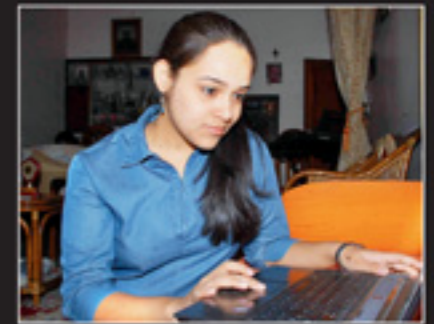
**SAKET\***

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## 3 UNAUTHORISED AND UNCARED FOR

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN A DECADE THAT STREETS AND SEWER NETWORK AT T-BLOCK KHIRKI EXTENSION HAVE BEEN IN A DEPLORABLE CONDITION. YET NOTHING IS LIKELY TO CHANGE AS THE AREA IS 'UNAUTHORISED

## 7



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**BARRY ON DELHI**

I will not list all the clichés attributed to Delhi, but acknowledge that it is a great, historical and beautiful capital city. As large as it has become, I am comfortable traveling the length and breadth of it, with a familiarity that is not possible in Mumbai

*With this generation of young people, after about 20 years, there would be the manpower and expertise to reinvent theatre with passion. They will find funding to turn it into profitable enterprises*

~ BARRY JOHN  
THEATRE PERSONALITY



**LESSON FOR BUDDING ACTORS**

Acting schools are a recent phenomena that offer a wide range of studies and skill development. No one at age 20 or more is a clean slate. Students come with their experience of life, their memories, attitudes, habits, lifestyles and emotional baggage. Each is unique and to develop and celebrate that uniqueness is a part of the mission. An actor without personality, without strength of character is not going to go far, believes Barry John.

# LIGHTING UP THE STARS

HE SAYS HE HAS NO MAGIC FORMULA FOR HIS STUDENTS TO SUCCEED. YET, HIS NAME IS ENOUGH TO ADD TO HIS STUDENTS' CREDENTIALS. MEET BARRY JOHN, WHO HAS GIVEN THE TINSELTOWN SOME OF ITS BRIGHTEST STARS

Barry is a great teacher and above all, he is a great human being." That's what Shahrukh Khan says about his teacher Barry John. Manoj Bajpai wants to return to theatre under the guidance of his 'mentor and guru' Barry John. Having worked and nurtured these bright stars of Bollywood, Barry John is one name that every budding actor wants to work with. Having moved base to Mumbai now, his Barry John Acting Studio and Imago Theatre Group are now holding classes at various locations in Delhi. On a recent visit to Saket, to interact with his students at Select Citywalk, Barry shared with *My Times* his thoughts on theatre, life and Delhi.

**THEATRE: A PREPARATORY SCHOOL FOR THE BIG SCREEN**

It is ironical that theatre is the poor, sidelined relative of film, and yet so rich in the talent that it generates. Theatre artistes and technicians migrate to film in search of more opportunities, more money and more sustainable careers. Virtually everyone in India watches movies, but only a minority go to watch plays. Even so, theatre is more accessible for most people and so has become a training-ground for actors. Anyway, there are very few institutions that offer training in film acting. You have to be impressed by an actor who can negotiate a career in both theatre and film media.

**TRAINING A CLEAN STATE**

I do not run a theatre group anymore, but an apprenticeship with a theatre group is the traditional form of training for a young person. You begin by sweeping the stage, making the tea, and doing sundry backstage chores. You learn by observing experienced actors until you begin to take on small roles, then large ones, over time.

Acting schools are a recent phenomena that offer a wide range of studies and skill development. No one at age 20 or more is a clean slate. Students come with their experience of life, their memories, attitudes, habits, lifestyles and emotional baggage. Each is unique and to develop and celebrate that uniqueness is a part of the mission. An actor without personality, without strength of character is not going to go far. The technical aspects of training are practical, experiential, and difficult to describe. Briefly they are required to work on physical skills, voice and



BARRY BELIEVES THAT IN ORDER TO PROMOTE THEATRE, DRAMA AND THEATRE STUDIES SHOULD BE MADE A PART OF EVERY CURRICULUM, FROM NURSERY THROUGH CLASS VIII

speech, cognitive skills and emotions. Beyond acting, other specialisations that a group may train their members for are scriptwriting, stage design, costume design, publicity, printing, fund-raising and marketing.

**CHURNING OUT FAMOUS NAMES**

There is no magic formula that works every time! Over four decades, I have evolved a system that draws on my experience of working with children, with youth, with disabled and disadvantaged groups, with university students, with theatre groups and with film actors. The system also draws on what other teachers, directors and actors have taught me, either through working with them or through books that they have written. I teach what I know, what I believe in. The methodologies I employ put the onus of learning, discovering, creating and problem-solving onto the students. The objective of empowering students is at the heart of good teaching.

**SEEING MY STUDENTS ON THE BIG SCREEN....**

Sometimes they live up to the expectations,

sometimes they do not. It's a complex question because many other factors have an influence on the quality of their performance, the script, the director, the other actors, the level of their involvement and their suitability for the role, for example. Also, my own understanding of the craft is continuously changing and developing, which means that I may be dissatisfied with an actor's work because it has not matured. Some actors seem to be stuck in outmoded technique that needs servicing. Their work has become mechanical and it shows.

**CLASSES IN MALLS....**

The concept being developed by the business and marketing team of the company came as a shock to me too, but it actually makes sense. Shopping malls have become community centres for young and old alike, with spaces for entertainment, live shows, exhibitions, films, and cultural events, as well as shopping, dining and simply hanging out. While commercial spaces are prohibitively expensive, even schools are demanding exorbitant rents. Our contracts with malls are on a share basis which significantly cuts down our overheads

as well as students' fees. Malls are happening places, especially for the young, and they are open to everyone.

**THEATRE AS THERAPY FOR THE DIFFERENTLY ABLED....**

People with certain physical and mental conditions do live and work amongst us. Current policy and practice has gravitated towards 'inclusiveness', which means they should not be isolated, should not be burned from mainstream life, especially in terms of education and employment, marriage and independent family life. Drama therapy too looks beyond the disability to focus on people's abilities. They are found to be as creative, critical, humorous and expressive as any other group of people, except that they have been deprived of opportunities to show their skills. If they perform in a wheelchair or on crutches, if they mime their dialogues instead of speaking them, if they widen and enrich our understanding of communications, letting us into their world in the process, is that not worthwhile and humane? Drama Therapy works by respecting differently able people.

**PROMOTING THEATRE**

Children are raised on a diet of television and films, in which they are passive audiences. Drama and theatre studies should be a part of every school's curriculum, from nursery through class VIII. Thereafter it should be an optional specialisation in class IX to XII, when it becomes a career option. Even in rural areas, children should learn their regional folk or classical forms. There should be adult companies that specialise in taking theatre around schools. With this generation of young people, after about 20 years, there would be the manpower and expertise to reinvent and rejuvenate theatre with all the passion and imagination that it requires. They will find business models and the funding to turn it into profitable enterprises as is the case in other parts of the world.

**A DILLIWALA AT HEART....**

Definitely. I miss every location, every person that has contributed to my work, my experience, my growth as a person and as an artist. I will not list all the clichés attributed to Delhi, but acknowledge that it is a great, historical and beautiful capital city. As large as it has become, I am comfortable traveling the length and breadth of it, with a familiarity that is not possible in Mumbai.

**BACK TO DELHI FOR GOOD?**

As soon as possible!

~ As told to Anu Bhamhani