



INAUGURATION  
OF THE  
TATA THEATRE  
BY  
PRIME MINISTER INDIRA GANDHI.

(Excerpts from the illustrated brochure on the Inauguration)



इस नाट्य मन्दिर  
को  
भारत की प्रधान मंत्री  
इंदिरा गांधी  
ने  
उद्घाटित कर  
कलाओंकी सेवा हेतु समर्पित किया  
शनिवार दिनांक ११ अक्टूबर १९८०  
राष्ट्रीय संगीत नाट्य केन्द्र

THIS THEATRE  
WAS INAUGURATED  
AND  
DEDICATED TO THE SERVICE OF THE ARTS  
BY  
INDIRA GANDHI  
PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA  
SATURDAY OCTOBER 11 1980  
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

## J. R. D. TATA'S WELCOMING ADDRESS



Madam Prime Minister, Mr. Governor, Mr. Chief Minister, distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

My duty today is a very pleasant and simple one to welcome you all to this—to us—exciting inaugural function. It is for me a special happiness to welcome the Prime Minister and to thank her for taking the trouble to come all the way from Delhi and joining us. To us directly concerned with the National Centre, her presence today has a special significance because 11 years ago Mrs. Gandhi, then also our Prime Minister, came similarly from Delhi to inaugurate the very beginnings of this Centre in the much more modest home we had then elsewhere in Bombay. And ever since then Mrs. Gandhi has extended to us her moral support and that of her Government. My colleagues on the Council are, therefore, particularly grateful to her for agreeing to come again to inaugurate this new step that we have taken in the development of the National Centre for the Performing Arts. Although a theatre is an essential part of such an activity, it is only a part of the totality of our endeavour—one step in the long journey we have undertaken in the service of the arts of India.

I am sorry that it has taken us so long to bring to fruition this particular part of our programme. It was a long and arduous job not only to raise the necessary funds but also to ensure that we incorporated all that was best and most up-to-date in this theatre. We were not going to be content with building just another theatre, of which there are many in Bombay and elsewhere in India. This was to be a theatre to cater mainly to the needs of Indian music played on delicate, pure-sounding instruments, and also of dance and drama. We were anxious that this should be a theatre totally adapted to those particular needs. And that required very exceptional, conceptual designs, and of course absolutely impeccable acoustics. We may not have achieved perfection, but in this imperfect world all that one can really hope to achieve in the pursuit of perfection is excellence.

I hope that this audience and all future audiences will agree that, in addition to its beauty—admittedly a subjective matter—and its excellent acoustics, this auditorium fulfils in an admirable manner without electronic amplification the exacting requirements of Indian music and allied arts.

Some amongst older generations, like myself, may miss the gilt-lined proscenium and the curtain that add a pleasurable element of mystery and anticipation to the performance that is to come, but I am sure that our younger, scientifically-minded generation will approve of it. And to make up for this lack of a curtain, we have incorporated a rotatable stage on which we are now sitting. I may say that I made personally sure that no one is going to press a button and revolve us out of the hall until after the speeches. Come to think of it, I must say the possibility of doing so would seem to offer fascinating opportunities at any time in the future when it is desired to shorten a speech or a performance!

Before concluding I feel I must mention, with some embarrassment because I am referring to a very close associate and a very close friend of mine, the role of Jamshed Bhabha in the building of this theatre and of the National Centre for the Performing Arts as a whole. Were it not for Jamshed Bhabha, neither would be in existence today. Over the years, Jamshed has devoted, with unrelenting persistence, untold anguished hours and sleepless nights, conceiving, studying, travelling, working for the benefit of this institution, and I would like it to be publicly known how much the performing arts of India and the citizens of Bombay, who will enjoy the fruits of the job he has done, owe to the role he has played.

Thank you again for your presence with us tonight and for your encouragement.

*View of the Main Foyer of the Tata Theatre*



## JAMSHED J. BHABHA'S SPEECH ON THE GENESIS AND CONCEPT OF THE TATA THEATRE



Madam Prime Minister, Governor Sadiq Ali, Chief Minister Antulay, Ladies and Gentlemen. Today is truly a great day for all who work for the National Centre; for artistes, teachers of music, dance, drama and all the arts, for our many benefactors, donors, supporters and collaborators. For today we witness the official inauguration at the hands of our Prime Minister of not only India's first national theatre but also the first theatre in the world, conceived, designed and built to serve the exacting acoustic and visual requirements of Indian music, dance and related art forms.

From the beginning we had vowed that we would build an auditorium where an audience of a thousand persons could hear our delicate Indian instruments and voices without the customary recourse to electronic amplification. For our success in this purpose, we owe our thanks to all who have been involved in the design, detailing and construction of the theatre, and particularly to two men, Philip Johnson one of the world's greatest architects and Cyril Harris regarded by many as the world's leading acoustic consultant. Mr. Johnson who has won numerous international awards brought to his task the personal experience of designing the State Theatre of the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York. Even though these distinguished men did not charge their professional fees, their office costs of preparing the architectural drawings and details could be covered thanks to a generous grant of \$200,000 from the Ford Foundation, for the purpose of acquiring



*Philip Johnson*

for our India expertise which would be useful not only for the construction of the national theatre in Bombay but also for similar projects elsewhere in the country.

Mr. Johnson made several visits to India and spent many days in Bombay listening to Indian music and witnessing Indian dances and drama. What struck him forcefully was the fact that the audience generally sat around the musicians on three sides and by their appreciative responses stimulated the artistes in their performance. He therefore felt that a theatre for India's requirements should not be in the traditional shape with a

proscenium curtain. It should instead have a thrust stage, almost semi-circular, and an auditorium with a similar fan shape. That is how we have this theatre with five equal segments, each of 208 seats, making a total capacity of 1040 seats, and that is why its last row is so much closer to the stage than the last row of a traditional theatre of the same seating capacity.

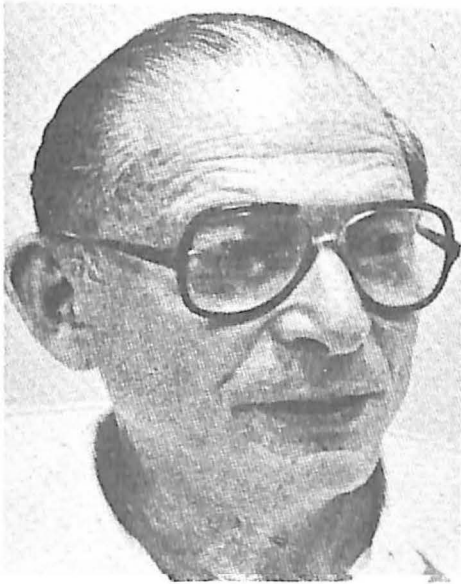
Associated with Mr. Johnson in this task was another perfectionist like him whom I consider to be the world's greatest Acoustic Consultant—Prof. Cyril Harris, Professor of Architecture and Electrical Engineering of Columbia University. Mr. Johnson and Prof. Harris jointly designed the three-sided forms which you see overhead and on the walls, placed alternatively convex and concave, to ensure even distribution of the sound over the whole auditorium. What my colleagues and I did not know till about a year or so ago, when the interior of the auditorium was nearing completion, was that these acoustic forms of high-density compressed plaster had to be hand-made on the ground and lifted up into their positions. An enormous amount of hand labour was involved in their construction and placement, and it was only then that I understood why these friends of India who had freely given their services for the design of her first national theatre, and made no profit out of it, were so anxious to know when its construction would start. They then explained to me that because of the enormous amount of hand labour involved in the construction of this auditorium, they could not build one like it in Europe or America for love or money. I find it a very heartening thought that it is India's traditional hand-skills that have been harnessed with success to build this national theatre.

For reasons of health and prior commitments abroad, Mr. Johnson cannot be with us today, but we are happy to have with us Prof. Cyril Harris. With your permission I shall request him to stand up and get a well deserved ovation.

I also want to express my sincere thanks to Mr. Rustam B. J. Patell, Fellow of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, and his colleagues, and to the entire organisation of Tata Consulting Engineers who functioned as Civil, Mechanical and Electric Consultants, and whose devoted and painstaking services helped to

bring to fruition this extremely complex project on the basis of the conceptual and key architectural drawings supplied by Philip Johnson and John Burgee and Prof. Cyril Harris. I also want to thank Mr. Burjor Mistry, Theatre Consultant, and the distinguished Interior Architect, Mr. Dale Keller, for their valuable contributions to the completion of the project.

Since Mrs. Indira Gandhi, as our Prime Minister, inaugurated our programme of work over a decade ago in December 1969, we have enlarged our Reading and Listening Library in our Teaching and Research Block (Phase I) and provided better Music and Dance Practice Rooms for our free Master Classes. Several hundred hours of our finest music have been recorded in our special recording studio for our archives which are kept for posterity in a special air-conditioned vault at constant temperature and humidity. We have used our air-conditioned recording van for extensive recording of folk music and related art forms in our rural areas.



*Cyril Harris*

We have also launched on a pioneering research project, using computer technology into the construction of our traditional Indian musical instruments with a view to standardising and optimising their construction in a manner that does away with waste, secures a more stable livelihood for our craftsmen and ensures uniformity of high equality such as would be particularly helpful for the country's export of Indian musical instruments.

Recently, we have established the nucleus of a museum of modern art, and, while mentioning this, I may remind our friends and supporters that, though in the name of the Centre, the word "Arts" is qualified by the word "Performing", this Centre has from the outset been conceived as a Centre for all our national art forms because they are all so closely integrated with each other. It is only because of the danger of loss and deterioration faced by music and related forms dependent on oral traditions and master-pupil links, that the stress on "Performing" was laid in the name of the Centre.

A generous sponsoring grant of Rupees forty lakhs from Sir Dorabji Tata Trust, supplemented later by a donation of Rupees ten lakhs from Sir Ratan Tata Trust, made it possible for the National Centre to reclaim the magnificent area of eight acres of the ocean generously leased to the Centre by the Government of Maharashtra for 99 years at a token lease rent. Although the whole of the Rupees fifty lakhs from the Tata Trusts went into reclaiming this area from the sea, we are immensely grateful to the Government of Maharashtra for giving us this splendid plot on Marine Drive. For the subsequent financing of our Teaching and Research Block (Phase I) and of this national theatre, we are grateful not only to Tata Companies, such as the Tata Iron and Steel Company, Telco, Tata Chemicals, the Tata Electric Companies, Tata Oil Mills, Voltas and Forbes, but also to numerous

other generous benefactors of whom I will name only a few—the Godrej Foundation, the Chowgule Group, the Ness Wadia Trust and Companies, the Mafatlal Foundation, the Mahindra Foundation, the Dahanukar Group as well as individuals like Jehangir Nicholson.

We are now counting on an equally generous and wide measure of support from all over the country to continue with our building programme which envisages a second and larger Teaching and Research Block with an Experimental Theatre, an Academy of Dance, a Cine-Art Theatre and an extensive Reading and Listening Library, and finally, God willing, a 2000-seat auditorium where larger folk groups as well as large visiting orchestras, opera companies and ballet groups from abroad can be featured. Another important facility which we are hoping and praying we can install at an early date, is a giant television screen, fifty feet by forty feet, on which we could project in colour, performances in the national theatre to an audience of up to 5,000 persons seated in the central plaza of the National Centre. This facility is essential because, regardless of how the tickets are priced, low or high, or even if

*Seen below in the front row (left to right) are Prof. Cyril Harris, Mrs. Betty I. Bhabha, American Ambassador Robert Goheen, Mrs. Elizabeth John Thomson, Mr. Ratan N. Tata, Mrs. M. S. Gandhi and British High Commissioner John Thomson.*





admission is sometimes kept completely free the theatre cannot hold more than a thousand persons. Accordingly, when we feature performances by famous artistes like Pandit Ravi Shankar or Mr. Yehudi Menuhin or Mr. Zubin Mehta or Bismillah Khan or Yamini Krishnamurti or M. S. Subbulakshmi, who is going to sing for us during the Festival this week, there are bound to be a large number of disappointed persons who could not secure admission into the theatre. I would like to stress that those seated in the open-air plaza facing the television screen would have certain advantages which even those seated in the auditorium would lack, because they would be able to see close-up views of the artistes in action, for instance, the hands of a sitar-player, or the expressive face, eyes and hands of a dancer, which those seated in the front row of a theatre would not see in as much detail.

The high fidelity equipment for our archival recording was donated by UNESCO, and the equipment for our rural recording programme by the JDR III Fund, and by UNESCO's International Fund for the Promotion of Culture.

I cannot do better, with your permission, than conclude by reading out the fine words of a great artiste and lover of India, Mr. Yehudi Menuhin, and also the message I have received this week from the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Amadou-Mahtar M'Bow.

Mr. Yehudi Menuhin writes:

"I have felt all along the necessity to protect the arts of India, particularly now that their great beauty has already become, in the last fifteen years, an inspiration to the whole world, and by this very token are open to corruption.

It is good to know that in the midst of so many disastrous events, there are a few projects which aim at the realisation of ideals which refuse to be drowned or destroyed."

The Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. M'Bow, writes:

"On the occasion of the inauguration of the national theatre, I should like to extend warm greetings of my own, and UNESCO's behalf, to the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

There is perhaps no better means of insight into the soul of India than through its performing arts. They are an integral part of a way of life, reflecting and expressing the common beliefs and common values of Indian society.

I wish the National Centre for the Performing Arts every success, both in the events marking the inauguration of this splendid new facility and in the continuation of its sterling work."

## THE PRIME MINISTER'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS

In all ancient societies, music and dance were very much a part of daily life, deeply rooted in religion which permeated all activities. No occasion of joy or sorrow was complete without them. The arts were an integral part of society and there was interaction between different art disciplines. It is said that when a student went to learn sculpture he was told to first study architecture, but to learn architecture he had to know music, and to know music he had to study poetry. In society as a whole this interrelation has gone, although still found amongst some of our great artistes and scientists.

Aren't all aspects of life so interlinked? Neither life nor an individual can be divided into compartments. Each part opens out to the other and many overlap. With the initial advance of science, the superficial materialistic way of thought pointed in the opposite direction. Personally I had always rejected the view that science and religion or spirituality, if you would rather call it that, were irreconcilable. Now the wheel is coming full circle again. The discoveries of eminent scientists have upset confirmed notions, and modern physics has a new philosophical outlook.

There can be no civilization without music, dance and art. For one isn't fully, vibrantly alive without them. But it is a sad commentary on contemporary civilization that what had flowed so spontaneously, so full of the celebration of life, and even death as an inseparable part of life, should today be an extra, something for which one has to strive, and, for people like me to make time with difficulty.

The artiste should be free. Yet there never has been a time when he was truly free. The artiste looks to Government for help and yet resents it. With our multifarious problems the role of Government can only be a limited one. It is organizations like this National Centre for the Performing Arts which can fill the gap and give enlightened patronage. The Government and voluntary effort should both feel involved. Perhaps the time has come for the Government to evaluate its policies and work for artistes, and, if so required, redefine its priorities.

We in India are proud of our heritage and can be equally proud of our present day musicians. But how many people have the privilege and pleasure of hearing and seeing them? Many more than in earlier days, but still it is a minuscule proportion of our people. Something must be done to bring the average citizen closer to this wealth of beauty, of movement and of sound. It is also necessary to encourage our budding young artistes and give them opportunities of learning and performing. We need to preserve the pristine purity of the traditional, but we also need new ideals, new combinations, and original interpretations and conceptions. The Performing Arts Centre could be a valuable catalyst in creativity and a meaningful bridge between tradition and modernity. The Centre is a worthwhile addition to our cultural life. I have no doubt that its influence and value will extend beyond Bombay, enthusing our artistes and our people.

How does a centre become national? Not by any label attached to it but by making itself a meeting point of the many streams which have made our culture the many-splendoured thing it is. At the moment the Centre has an elitist air about it. I hope you will work out a new concept of protocol and a new way of establishing who is important. If the Centre is to serve the purposes it is intended to serve, it must not remain an island of opulence. It must give to the great creative artistes of India the feeling that the Centre belongs to them and they to the Centre.



The Centre has taken up many activities and has drawn up a programme of work which is interesting and also useful for the preservation and development of the arts. Centres such as this one can flourish and attract good audiences only when popular interest is aroused and sustained. The philosopher C. E. M. Joad said: "Good taste is not instinctive but acquired. It grows slowly through the effort to understand what is beyond us, the endeavour to appreciate what we cannot yet understand. It depends on our willingness to be bored with what is good in order that we may become bored with what is bad and so demand something better."

There are different ways of doing this. In the Soviet Union, where prices are entirely controlled by the Government, classical music and classical literature used to be sold much cheaper than popular music and novels. To be allowed to attend a concert, an opera or the ballet was a special privilege bestowed on those whom the State wished to honour. Before the Second World War, Britain was regarded as an unmusical country, but during the War the Government arranged free concerts in the lunch hour, and people who had never before bothered about music went to them as a relaxation from the continuous strain of the bombings and other dangers and hardships. The best musicians performed in halls as well as odd places, and little by little appreciation was built up, and London grew into an important centre for good music.

What does one seek from art? A few hours of pleasure or an experience which has the seed of timelessness that touches one's innermost self. In all things, however fleeting, there is a spark of eternity wanting to be recognized and enshrined in memory. It is the sum total of such experiences that makes for the richness of the human personality.

To all those connected with the National Centre for the Performing Arts, to the Centre and its future works, I give my good wishes. We expect much from it.