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In Conversation with Pravin Mishra

(Student Paper)

Pravin Mishra is at once an artist, a columnist, a painter, a social activist and a politician. His first film was an animated short called *Dharamveer*, which raises the issue of communal violence in the backdrop of Gujarat 2002. This film was his diploma project at NID. His next film *Azadnagar & Gulamnagar*, about bonded laborers in India, won the best short film at the Ahmedabad International Film Festival. He also directed the music video for Indian ghazal singer Jagjit Singh called “Ye Kaisi Aazadi Hai”. His latest film *The Killing Fields of Gujarat* is about the politics of fake police encounters in the state of Gujarat.

In conjunction with classical singer Nirali Udeshi-Shah, he painted for a live audience as Udeshi-Shah performed classical Indian music in Ahmedabad. His works were also displayed at the Hutheesing Visual Art Centre in Ahmedabad. In 2010, IBN profiled him in its series on vision for India 2020.

In June 2010, he began writing a weekly column for the Ahmedabad Mirror. He has also written for the Times of India.

In 2007, he ran unsuccessfully on behalf of the New Socialist Movement party for the position of Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) in Gujarat from Maninagar against the incumbent Narendra Modi.

Presently, Pravin is an Assistant Professor at Mudra Institute of Communications, Ahmedabad. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pravin_Mishra)

Pravin Mishra the Artist; Pravin Mishra the Film-maker; Pravin Mishra the Politician.

Who is the better person of the three?

To me, these aren't separate professions. They are all interconnected. I don't play one role at one point and switch to another later. As humans, we all have an instinct of telling stories and only find different ways of expressing them. We also respond to any given circumstances.

In one of your interviews you have mentioned "My paintings are the result of the turbulence I have seen, within myself and outside." - Do you take inspiration from your own paintings to make decisions in your political career?

Like I mentioned earlier, I don't see these as separate professions, only different expressions. But, there is a difference between expression and inspiration. My paintings are a form of expression but I take inspiration from the world around. What drives my political inspiration is the human desire to see change. When you don't accept social injustice, you work either collectively or individually towards seeing a change happen. We are all political beings because politics is nothing but the art of nation building. I am not in power politics, I'm a responsible citizen seeking a better political order.

In your political tenure for over last 7 years which is the most memorable achievement/ decision you feel you have made, and why?

My most memorable experience was when I stood against the then incumbent Chief Minister of Gujarat in 2007 from the Maninagar assembly constituency. However, it was not my

decision, but the decision of my friends and mentors. It was a fantastic experience in multiple ways. I believe more people should exercise their right to contest in an election. We are a democracy and as citizens we should participate in all aspects of a democratic process, not just voting. A democracy lets you raise your voice. Contesting in an election against the CM wasn't about winning or losing as much as it was about making the right noise.

Entering politics was a decision by accident or decision by incident.

There were several events that led to my entrance into politics. I was the General Secretary at Government Art College, Kolkata in 1996-97 and led a massive movement against the Government of Bengal. The college, back then, wasn't giving us our Master's degree, and we had to fight for it through protests and strikes. Every crossroad in life, in fact, gives you an opportunity to make things better or change what isn't right. Being in politics is not a separate profession; it's just about being alive and responsive. Whenever there is injustice around, you take a stand.

How many more years do you see yourself in the political service of India and is there one particular milestone or reformation you would want to achieve by then?

I have no individual ambition in politics. But that doesn't mean I have no ambitions for the society. Politics is neither limited to geographical boundaries. Nor it has a timeline. It is about making this world a better place. It is about voicing your mind and ideas until you see change happen, however long it takes. So, it is a continuous process of learning, unlearning and relearning.

Many a youth look up to you as a role model - How does it feel to be looked up to. Does this affect you at any time when you have to take up a tough decision in your political career?

Not at all. In fact, it helps. I like being the center of attention and feel more comfortable with a larger crowd. That's no pressure for me. As far as role models go, they are never constant for me or for anyone else.

Does being a role model impact or inspire the artist within you?

I take inspiration from anything around me – a close friend doing something, or stories from my past, or what I see etc. Through my paintings, I celebrate life and don't attempt to communicate heavy stuff, which I otherwise do through my films or writing. I also treat painting as a stress absorber. It adds an interesting dimension and perspective to one's life. More than being a form of expression, art is about absorbing things, which makes you a better film-maker or artist or even a better human being.

Calcutta is the place which is initially responsible for Pravin Mishra, who he is today. Don't you think you must contribute to this city of aesthetic and culture? If yes, then how?

Calcutta is already so rich. I'm not sure if I can contribute, but yes, I want to spend some time there to grow as a human and as an artist. I was there during the most active phase of my life, my college days. There's much more to Calcutta than what I have lived and seen. I definitely want to go back there, to reconnect and grow.

Last three years you have not come up with any gallery/exhibitions, is that due to shortage of color in your life? Don't you ever plan to color the cult of Bengal, or contribute to the theme of Durga Puja?

Religious events don't attract me at all; cultural events do. My challenge is a shortage of time. We are in turbulent times right now, with this new kind of politics in India. And personally, I feel these are the most dangerous times. By the time a sizeable population realizes this, it will be too late. I express myself more now through my writing, and sometimes through illustrations and cartoons in social and political gatherings. My paintings are personal and more about the celebration of life. There comes a lull in an artist's life, sometimes. But even when he is not painting, he is still growing.

Did Pravin Mishra ever fall in love to color his life? If yes, then what is the reason behind staying single? Now, if he gets a sincere proposal to "live happily ever after", will he accept or deny?

I've fallen in love multiple times in life. In fact, I fall in love too often and that's probably the reason I'm still single. I'm not a fan of the institution of marriage. It's outdated and boring. There are several flaws in it, and the whole system has to be redefined. In any case, it depends on whom the proposal is from, however sincere. The more important thing is to be in a relationship that is sustainable. If two people are ideologically very different, then the relationship may not last too long. Every good thing must come to an end. The truth is, that they are good because they come to an end.

Knowing that you may lose the game in Politics, Why did you stand against the then Chief Minister Modi?

Those who fear losing a battle do not have out on a war. It was a very important move to create the right noise at the right place for the larger good of the society and nation.

Apart from Politics, I have heard that you took high interest in Scouting in your Childhood. What are the forms of other achievements you have had there, if you share?

My father was a fire-brigade trainer. So my interest in adventure was natural. I lead my school and (Malda) district team in the state camps. I was also selected for the World Scout Jamboree but the circumstances didn't let me participate.

As we all know that you are a fabulous painter, haven't you ever got any lucrative proposals (the easy path to success) in college days which may have changed your career statistics?

Oh yes, sometimes things look easy if you choose to forget years of sweat and blood that has gone into developing the skill. I do my solo shows once in 2-3 years, and except one show rest all of them were commercial success. Portraits are easy money and the opportunities keep coming every now and then.

***"Less wage, more expense. So many more things left to do in life...Decisions.. Reality..the BIG question haunting in mind-Govt. job or art?.."* There must have been times of turbulence in your life too, so how did you manage to overcome those situations?**

I followed my instinct since my childhood. Many times it turned out to be a wrong decision. But then that's life. Life is too short to even do the list of things that you want to do so why waste in things that you don't want to? My father wanted me to join Railways so he forced

me to sit in a railway recruitment board test. The paper wasn't difficult but I left the answer paper absolutely blank in protest. I was working since I was 9 year old so getting a job was never an issue. Artists cannot do 9-5 desk jobs. So for years I ran my production house and now working in a place that gives me liberty in planning my time.

You have managed to get your PG Degree after 10 long years. Did this not bring any change in your life? Did you not face any sort of difficulties in the start of your Career?

I studied in two prestigious institutes simply to learn. Degrees were never important. After completing graduation at Government Art College in Kolkata, I joined National Institute of Design (NID) in Ahmedabad. During my diploma time, I witnessed the 2002 violence in Gujarat. I decided to put my personal response in an animation film that was my diploma project. I made 'Dharamveer' but it went into some trouble because of its content. I even had to issue a legal notice against NID for not scheduling my jury. I did not change a single frame in my film and presented in my dip jury exactly 10 years after the film was completed in 2013. Interestingly, my film was liked and I convoked. No I didn't face any difficulty because of the absence of the final certificate as the film had won prizes including National Critics Award for the best film at the Mumbai International Film Festival 2004.

We have seen a few pictures of yours exploring Jungle/somewhere seriously lecturing in workshop/painting portrait/and also playing pranks.You direct, edit movies at the same time teach in MICA as well as Paint your Canvas. How? Don't you feel tired? How do you manage your time being into so many performing zone? And most importantly, how you manage to keep yourself so cheerful all the time?

Thank you if you find me cheerful! I am a restless traveler. Exploring new places, Seeing new forms and textures, listening to new sounds, meeting new people, learning new things, expressing in a newer way, they're all part of human instinct. Staying curious is the key. Most of us knowingly or unknowingly suppress it. Some just live life the way it comes.

Anything from your life, which you would like to share with the TTIS reader's and enlighten us?

One simple thing I'd say: life happens just once; make the most of it. Never live someone else's life. *We all have an artist, poet, musician and a child inside us. Nourish it, live it or it may just leave you.*