

By Sidharth Mishra



Last week versatile singer Krishnakumar Kunnath aka KK went down firing, as they would say in military parlance. He was performing on a stage in Kolkata, felt uneasy, passed out and before medical help could reach, he passed away. Following his death social media was flooded with several posts; what got most traction was a picture of his with Musoc – the Music Society of Kirori Mal College.

This was followed a popular column on Delhi in a Hindi newspaper mentioning that KK joined Kirori Mal College because of its music and theater traditions. Poet William Wordsworth once wrote, “Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive; But to be young was very heaven.” He did not write this about Delhi University but those who passed through its portals in 1980s-90s would swear by Wordsworth’s words.

By 1980s, the story of Delhi University was not only about St Stephen’s College on the main avenue and the one opposite to it – the Hindu College. It had travelled further down the road spread to Ramjas, Kirori Mal and Hansraj colleges

In those days there used to be Delhi Transport Corporation (DTC) bus service numbered 210, which started from Ramjas College in Maurice Nagar, turned left went to Bungalow Road, touched Hanraj and then again turned left crossed Kirori Mal College and came back on the main avenue for onward journey to the Central Secretariat. This service would be full in the evenings as many students stayed back after the DTC fleet of now defunct U-Special buses had left, practicing theatre, music, debate, planning cultural extravaganzas and of course playing different sports.

With Rajiv Gandhi becoming Prime Minister in 1984, the spirit of ‘to be young was very heaven’ pervaded the campuses. Each of the newer college started to excel. Kirori Mal College

It was a bliss to be in DU in the time when KK too was there

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stood out for its theatre society – The Players and Musoc, the music group. The theatre group was founded by legendary teacher Frank Thakurdass in the 1950s and in the 1980s was living on the laurels of having produced Amitabh Bachchan, Vishwa Mohan Badola, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Dinesh Thakur and of course Satish Kaushik.

It's said comparisons are odious, but it would not be out of place to mention that the 1980s-90s were more productive than the past three decades not just for theatre but also music. For this credit should go to the two faculty members who helmed the two societies – Keval Arora (The Players) and Sumitra Mohanty (Musoc). They too were young in that time and era. They had a mentor in the stern-looking college principal NS Pradhan.

One of the obituaries mentioned that KK was not a trained singer, that is he did not train in classical music attending a 'gharana' (traditional school). But did he not measure up to those who did go to such schools?

KK belonged to that generation of DU which saw door being slammed open and people charting out onto paths not treaded before. While civil services remained on the platter but music, cinema, theatre, corporate world, social sector, print and television journalism, stock market, and corporate communication among others now featured prominently on the menu.

Economy had opened up and technology missions launched in 1980s in the areas of communications and computers had started to yield results. This touched life and living in every possible manner making the old yield space to the new. KK was lucky to be on the campus during that era as was Shah Rukh Khan, Habib Faisal, Vijay Krishna Acharya, Sushant Singh, Manoj Bajpayee, Vishal Bhardwaj, Imtiaz Ali, the list is endless! It indeed was a bliss to be on the Delhi University campus in that dawn.

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