

## I SPEAK WHAT I CAN SPEAK

By Rajar Nayyar

It was during the lectures by Susan Adahl, titled Anthropology of the Mind, that for the first time in my life I began to ponder deeply about what is normal and what is abnormal. Is there anything such as normal at all? I was brought up in a Hindu religious family where we are encouraged to listen to the voice within ourselves and follow it. During the lectures, I was surprised that a spiritual man could be a schizophrenic in a different culture. The classes filled me with a lot of anxiety and I had to do something about it.

Some casual online research led me to Pahkla Camphill Village near Tallinn, Estonia. According to their website, Pahkla Camphill Village offers to adults with needs for special care the opportunity of living in the community through participation in the village activities, giving them the opportunity to feel appreciated and valuable members of society. Pahkla belongs to a larger world movement of Camphill Villages around the world. Some of its founders were physicians and psychiatrists, including Dr. Karl König, who emphasised on providing holistic treatment to people with needs for special care.

I met Jaak Herodes, a retired Estonian psychiatrist, who helped in building up Pahkla. In his words,

*"The mentally handicapped people were trying to find new ways of treatment and therefore we had to open up such a place. We visited the Norwegian Camphill Village and we were very impressed by it. We found that patients were not really improving with the medicines, they needed a life where they could be involved in activities such as gardening, animal farming and even painting. They needed a community to live in. It was important to allow the people to develop themselves."*

Today Pahkla Camphill Village is home to 25 villagers, which includes the Manager (Katarina) and 4 German volunteers who have taken a year off and have come to contribute in this community. Out of the 20 villagers, some have down syndrome and some have had the history of other psychotic disorders.

Jack Herodes took me to Pahkla for the first time and introduced me to the village. We all sat down for lunch together, a tradition followed at Pahkla. The villagers couldn't speak English but constantly kept asking Katarina about me. I became interested to know them as well but did not know where to start. What

were these answers I was looking for anyway? I was not there to know what kind of experiences voice-hearers have had nor was I there to understand any other kind of mental illness. I was at Pahkla to remove my own fear of the "abnormal". The anxiety that was produced in me during those lectures was a yearning of sorts, to expand my heart a little more by removing a few barriers.

We finished the lunch and the villagers returned back to their daily lives, which involves milking the cows, cleaning the shed, making cheese, baking and (those days) rehearsing for the Christmas play. Kristina, a villager, was very interested in communicating with me. She was the only villager, other than the manager and the volunteers, who could speak in English. Kristina, as I was told, is the only villager who can decide things for herself. To follow any other villager in their daily lives at Pahkla, would require permission from their parents. While Katarina was telling me this, Kristina was also present and gave me a smile, which I returned back to her.

During the film Kristina sings out loud in the kitchen "I am so interesting for you, I am so interesting for you". She is so interesting to me, but why? The film is about finding an answer for this question. I had heard so much good about Pahkla that I wanted to know from Kristina how it was for her.

During the lectures, we had read Tanya Luhrmann, who emphasised through her research that the worst we could do with someone who needs special care was to deny them their basic right to work. This became clear as I began to follow Kristina. Kristina loves her books and never gives them away. If you go to her room and touch her books, she will not spare you. While she is busy arranging her books in the shelves, she tells me that she will be going home after the play. She is happy to be visiting her parents but within a few seconds of silence, she states that she must return back. When I asked her the reason, she said, "When I am bored at home I will return back". I wanted to know if she was ever bored here at Pahkla, to which her only response was, "Maybe I should come back, Katarina needs me here. I must come back. I have to work. One has to work."

Each villager has a private room, which they decorate and arrange themselves. She told me thrice, when I was invited by her to be in her private room, that she cannot give her books away. "They are mine, I cannot give them away". Kristina was expressing about her attachments. About what made her so attached to her books, especially old ones, which have been read and are occupying space. It's a problem because she cannot buy new books for the

lack of space. The topic then jumped to her mother. "My mother also collects books. She did it once. She gave all her books away, but I wont."

This ethnographic film is about these emotions that Kristina conveys through these short messages. She would like to return back home, but must also come back to Pahkla where she can work and be involved. She would like to buy new books but cannot give the old ones away. The film is about this middle space where she finds herself currently.

Kristina has been participating on the Christmas play for the last 10 years but this time she chose to watch rather. It made me feel that she would like to be a part of the audience. An audience, which mainly consists of parents and family members of the villagers, who are "*normal*" and leading "*normal*" lives working within the system that generates a collective gross domestic product. When she was alone in her room or baking a cake for everyone, the others were rehearsing in the hall upstairs. Kristina allowed me to film the final rehearsal. When I reached there, the villagers were in their angel, shepherds and kings costumes. They were becoming more and more excited and asked each other if their parents were coming to watch the play. It made me feel that the parents were the real audience for them. The rest of the world doesn't matter to them. It was the parents who brought them there. The angels had the star in their hands and the basket for the baby Jesus was ready.

The film, however, does not include the play. When the final day arrived, the parents and friends had started to come to the hall, while Kristina had already taken her seat. I must not film the audience, I was told. So I moved into the dressing room. The excitement, anxiety and nervousness in that room were on the peak. One villager stood with her ear on the door trying to listen what was going on outside. She looked back excitedly and told a fellow villager that his parents had arrived. When the signal of music was received, the villager in the front opened the door and everyone started to sing "Oh Lord, Bless our coming" and moved out in a line.

This film is for Kristina because, when I watched the video in the dressing room, in her absence, I felt that the eye of the camera is Kristina's eye: one that is observing, participating and self-reflecting. Through the film, she makes us think about our own selves and about the society that we have designed for ourselves that excels in alienating people. Alienating the other. The other, who for us is abnormal. Through the film, my intention is to highlight the state in which Kristina finds herself, in the middle of two worlds: Home and Pahkla;

Participating and Observing. In the middle of this, her private room at Pahkla serves as that space where she finds her own place.