

For one theatre is an illusion, for the other dance is growth

DHARMINDER KUMAR
CHANDIGARH, MAY 24

ANAHITA and Sita share more than the last syllable in their names. The girls from Broadway can chat you up while you watch them moving around in their room. And when they speak, every word is jacked up by a more eloquent gesture.

The theatre workshop for children by Durga Das Foundation is an off-broadway experience. "When you work with children, it's a different experience since they come to try a new thing and not to become an actor like adults," says Anahita. Like the kids they teach at the workshop, Anahita and Sita too practice performing arts not to "become" something but because it's the stuff they are made of.

For Anahita, theatre is more than a personal passion. It has been running full-house in the family for three generations. Her grandmother Durga Khote had almost the same relationship with Hindi cinema. Vijaya Mehta, her mother, is one of the pioneers of Marathi theatre. "At a very tender age I understood that theatre was an illusion. I used to see doors on the stage that opened into nowhere," says Anahita as she



Theatre artistes Anahita and Sita, who are in Chandigarh.
Express photo

recalls her childhood spent mostly under the proscenium arch than in the playground.

But ask her if theatre is her life, and she vigorously shakes her head. "I don't want to live anybody else's life. The two hours on the stage don't seep into my life. My husband is in no way related to theatre and so are most of my friends. Theatre is only a part of my existence but, of course an important part," she says.

Anahita did 15 productions in five years in New York and her repertoire runs from Shakespeare to Stoppard. She is soon to start working on an English film with Rahul Bose. The film is about eight characters who unfold their lives as they cross one another's path.

"Children are open and less

inhibited," interjects Sita, the danseuse based in New York. Relating her experience with the children, she says when she tried to get their own movements out of kids, they broke into Bollywood jigs. But slowly she made them come out with their own way of moving.

She was on a holiday in Mumbai when Anahita asked her about Durga Das Foundation assignment.

For Sita, dance is not only self-expression but also a form of growth. "Lessons from dance go into life and from life into dance," she says.

This intertextuality between her dance and her life made her opt for a career which promises little financial security. She realised the extent of her commitment with theatre when she was drawn back to it after saving herself from it for one full year.

Sita has swirled through ballet and jazz and is now poised on modern dance. "Modern dance reaches all kind of audience. And because it's not a set art form, there is no limit to self-expression," she Sita,