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# Are you ready to turn into a clown?

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When I introduce myself as a professional clown, people find it hard to believe. They think I am joking,” says Sukhmani Kohli, a theatre practitioner who has been practicing and propagating the art of clowning along with Vibhuti Agarwal, another professional clown. Out of the handful female professional clowns in India, Sukhmani and Vibhuti are pretty popular. They were introduced to the art through clowning workshops. “I took this up seriously in 2012 and directed a play Romeo Juliet and Seven Clowns, where even my mother plays a clown. I find this art to be liberating. It allows us to be who we wish to be in that very moment,” says Sukhmani, who fell in love with clowning after attending a 40-day workshop held by a Portuguese clown in Chandigarh.

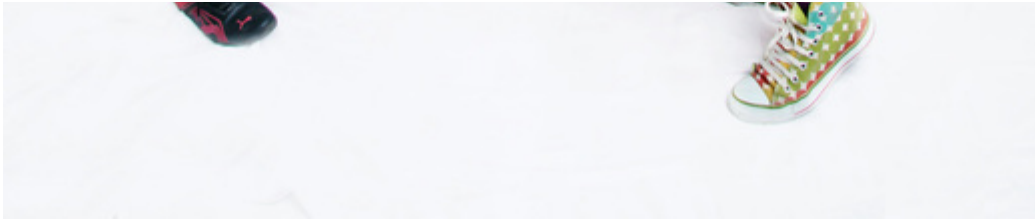




Vibhuti agrees and adds, “Being a clown lets you be free. My first experience with this art form was two years ago in Ahmedabad, where I attended a workshop and felt an immediate connection with the clowns performing. There was a part of me missing that expression. Here, there is no pressure of looking good or behaving in a certain way. Simply put, it’s liberating.”

After her introduction to clowning, Kohli decided to use it as a theatrical tool to help youngsters unmask themselves and get rid of their inhibitions. “The red nose of the clown is a small mask but it helps you be yourself. It gives you the licence to just be yourself; without the fear of judgement, without the need to fit in and without inhibitions,” says Sukhmani.





Clowning, she believes, is a powerful tool to become self-aware and to learn to accept ourselves for who we are. “People instinctively think of clowns as below-the-line entertainers. This is because of a lack of clowning culture in India. Being a clown is not about being silly or acting funny. The clown is a spontaneous storyteller, a master of creating magical stories out of nothing,” she adds.

Vibhuti shares, “The art helps me see the world from a different point of view; that of empathy and humour.”

Wearing makeup and a red nose may be perceived positively in case of a male clown, but it is not the same for women. “Initially we hosted birthday parties. People there were shocked to see three women dressed as clowns,” says Sukhmini, adding, “But the perspective is changing. People are now receptive and many women too are coming forward to learn the art.”

Vibhuti initially found it difficult in making people understand the art form. “My friends refused to accept this as an art. They had an image of a circus clown in their minds, but now they understand the art form,” she adds.