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Bharat Rang Mahotsava

By Kamal Pruthi

Bharangam

New Delhi is getting a New Year gift with an opening of the much awaited theatre festival of the country on the 2nd of January. The National Theatre Festival will comprise of 60 plays held at 5 different auditoriums of Mandi House, will continue till the 14th of January. Bharangam (*Bharat Rang Mahotsava*) as it is popularly known by the theatre lovers is celebrating its 8th year of inception. The 12 day long National Theatre Festival has concentrated mainly on Asia this time. Twenty of the plays will be repeated in Bangalore as a part of NSD's Satellite Theatre move which has taken off recently. Though, NSD is still busy in last minute preparation, which is visible from the ongoing renovation still going on at the campus.

Emerging Talent

This year there is a special emphasis on the emerging directors stepping into the national scenario. The class of experiment the selectors have done by giving the opportunity to the young directors to showcase their works would be cherished by the younger generation of Theatre practitioners. Also for theatre practitioners it is going to be an ideal time to study theatre by observing different treatment of the plays by different directors. *Othello* being played in by three troupes in three different languages would prove to be an ideal example. In the same line, Saadat Hasan Manto's widely acclaimed partition story *Toba Tek Singh* will be presented by Pakistan group and similarly Manto's treatment by Usha Ganguly from Kolkata would be ideal choices for comparative study.

The Festival is never dependent on the fancy publicity by putting up the show tickets at the renowned bookstores of the city or such other outlets, rather a single advertisement in the daily Newspaper containing the festival schedule brought queues at the Repertory counter where the tickets are sold. Many of the plays have already sold out much before the start of the festival.

Already in the previous years, the festival has acquired an enormous amount of affection from the audience that the audience doesn't mind standing patiently in long queues with the Newspaper cut-outs in their hands with the wish list of the plays to watch during the Festival. Many of the ardent theatre followers were seen buying tickets for the whole festival to shirk any amount of disappointment, which might cause to those rushing in at the last hours to see the *house full* boards.

Regional Flavour

The entire festival will showcase 9 international plays coming from Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Lebanon, Japan, South Korea, China and Sri Lanka. 28 regional plays will add to the flavour of Indian Theatre as a whole. 12 plays of all are however in Bengali. Since the capital

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has the majority of Hindi speaking audience, the language with 18 plays will hold the majority and will string the chord beautifully with English (7) and a fair share of south Indian language plays including of Kannada (2), Malayalam (4) and Tamil (2) will add on to the flavour. The Punjabis of Delhi will have to manage their timings to catch up with the only Punjabi play *Nagamandala* at the 4 o'clock show.

But to compensate it 2 Urdu plays both from Pakistan might suffice the Hindustani audience. One each in Gujarati and Assamese, 2 plays in Marathi and 3 plays in Manipuri together with Ratan Thiyams *Nine Hills one Valley* will add to the spicy flavour of rich and growing Indian theatre culture.

That's why perhaps it's the first time that NSD is not showcasing a single play from the treasure of their Repertory and not even from their very own T.I.E. (Theatre in Education) Company, which is popular in producing children's plays. This change might discontent the lovers of Repertories plays and the children audience of the city. And to compensate this, there is unfortunately no single play that can attract the tiny tots.

Experimented theatrically

Among the emerging lot Zuleikha Chaudhary will stage her experimented version of Herman Hesse's *Sidhartha*, which received mixed reactions from audience recently at the Bangalore's Fringe Theatre Festival. Maya Krishna Rao, will showcase a totally untouched arena of theatre in her play, which involves an extensive use of technology on stage. Her latest and self-evolved *Deep Fried Jam* received grand applause at the Rangshankara Theatre Festival recently. This year Girish Karnad stepped into his old shoes by co directing his own play *Bikhre Bimb*, his latest script already staged in English and Kannada (originally). Again, the use of technology would be an integral part of this solo act play.

Star Attraction-preview

While young directors will get an opportunity to showcase their talents, the selection committee has left a fair piece of cake for the star attraction to woo the audience. The list is topped by Habib Tanvir's latest venture *Visarjan*. Further, it will include Naseeruddin Shah's directed *Katha Kollage*, a collection of short stories in a form of *Kahani ka Rangmanch*, which will be among the few to open the festival at Kamani. Neelam Mansingh Chaudhary's revisit to Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala* in Punjabi after 15 years is a musical treat, where she has marvelously shown all five elements on stage. The household name in Delhi theatre Arvind Gaur will come up with his latest production *Yama Gatha*. Those who have missed out to see Mohan Maharshi's *Othello* in Hindi may not afford to do so again as his adaptation in Hindustani and the poetic beauty of the dialogues in Urdu makes it possible to comprehend Shakespeare much at ease. Among all Nadira Zaheer Babbar's *Operation Cloudbursts*, Barry John's *It's all about sex honey* and Roysten Abel's *Ladki Seedhi Rahegi* in Hindi will remain the star attraction.

Evergreen hits

Shakespeare remains the heart favorite of the directors and leads the marathon with 4 plays of the same playwright will be staged under the banner of Bharangam including *Hamlet* being staged in English/Hindi, *Romeo and Juliet* in Korean and Hindi. *Othello* being played in Hindi, Malayalam and Japanese and the most unpopular of Shakespeare's works *Measure for Measure* in English will get a different treatment by a Sri Lankan troupe. After the recent Indian tour of the U.K. group Complicité with their highly techno performance of *Measure for Measure*, the theatre community will have enough food to do comparative criticism of the two.

Theatre in turmoil

During the Festival, from 6—8 there will be Seminars on "Theatre in Turmoil" at Sahitya Academy Auditorium, Ravindra Bhavan everyday at 10 am to 1 pm. The panellists will be the distinguished theatre personalities including playwright Satish Alekar, Theatre critique Sadanand Menon, Amit Aheri, MK Raina, Samik Bandhopadhyaya. The keynote address will be delivered by Dr. Richard Schechner. Theatre Community of Delhi will get benefited from these seminars. Though there's a lot in cards for the theatre community to get from the festival including the performances, seminars, workshops, discussions, NSD would still be reminded of the late

evenings open air performances in chilly winters at Meghdoot and Vikrishtamadyam which are not going to be the part this year. Vikrishtmadhyam, which has to its credit number of performances, has unfortunately already been uprooted and an empty green grass lawn has taken its place.

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