

## Moving from a Monologue to a Dialogue

Brazilian by birth, Augusto Boal is a theatre director, writer and theorist, whose path-breaking book *Theatre of the Oppressed* which proposed ways of returning theatre to the people, has become a seminal text for theatre practitioners. Taking off from the work of Paolo Freire, his theatre techniques and games are now being used all over the world, including institutes of psychotherapy. In November 1991, the International Association of Theatre of the Oppressed was formed. The Indian cultural organization Jana Sanskriti, which for several years has been using Boal's ideas and methods in its own grassroots theatre work in rural Bengal, is a member. Early this year, Boal was in Calcutta for a workshop organized by this group.

Theatre has a long tradition of being a medium for political intervention—a forum for criticism, analysis, satire, debate, revolutionary rhetoric, suggestions for change. Within India this tradition has always been strong, a parallel stream alongside the 'theatre as entertainment' or 'theatre as art for art's sake' schools of thought. We have several active people's theatre groups functioning at the urban, semi-urban and rural levels. These groups usually work outside the proscenium, with a kind of theatre that eschews the baggage and technology of stages, sets, lights, and elaborate costumes. Poor theatre, Alternative theatre, People's theatre, Third theatre are some of the terms used to categorize such activity, which uses human bodies and flexibility as its basic organizing principle. Call it by whichever name you like, it is theatre for change—social, cultural, economic, political. A desire for change presupposes dissatisfaction with the status quo, which in turn implies the presence of oppression, of an unequal relationship between two individuals or parties, of a 'monologue instead of a dialogue', in the words of Augusto Boal: 'Whenever a dialogue turns into a monologue, you have an oppressor and an oppressed. And that's where the Theatre of the Oppressed comes in.'<sup>2</sup>

To grasp the fundamental concepts of Theatre of the Oppressed one can do no better than to turn to Boal's own words:

Aristotle proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the dramatic character so that the latter may act and think for him. Brecht proposes a poetics in which the spectator delegates power to the character who thus acts in his place but the spectator

reserves the right to think for himself, often in opposition to the character. In the first case, a 'catharsis' occurs, in the second, an awakening of critical consciousness. But the poetics of the oppressed focuses on the action itself: the spectator- delegates no power to the character (or actor) either to act or to think in his place; on the contrary he himself assumes the protagonic role, changes the dramatic action, tries out solutions, discusses plans for change-in short, trains himself for real action. In this case, perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself, but it is surely a rehearsal for the revolution.<sup>3</sup>

So how is Theatre of the Oppressed different from people's theatre as it has been understood and practised here? Is it just another label, or do the differences lie deeper?

Boal sees a fundamental difference between the approach of the Theatre of the Oppressed and people's theatre as it is widely practised in this country. According to Boal, theatre for the oppressed was the earlier political theatre of the fifties and sixties, where artists and intellectuals considered themselves the vanguard of the revolution and took their exhortations to the peasants and workers. 'Sometimes we stimulated people to do things that they could not do, we could not do.' It failed because it didn't give the people the means to change things, to act. A space was needed, 'a theatrical space, in which people activate themselves. 'Theatre of the Oppressed helps the oppressed to find their own solutions, to plan their own changes.' Fundamental to this concept of theatre is the freedom from didacticism. It is a process of learning together with the audience, of assuming that the audience knows the answers, and has as much of a right to shape the performance as the performer does. 'No more spectators. Only spectators. Everybody acts. Everyone is an act-or.' The invisible dividing line between performer and spectator which is maintained even in the most open form of people's theatre practised here, dissolves in Theatre of the Oppressed, where the active intervention and contribution of the spectator is essential to the very structure of the theatrical method.

Although Theatre of the Oppressed began in an attempt to deal with concrete socio-economic oppression in the under-developed, exploitative societies of Latin America, his home continent, Boal refuses to lay down a hierarchy of oppression. To him psychological oppression is as real as economic exploitation. 'When I ... asked people to talk to me about oppression ... In Brazil and in Latin America ... they talked about police, salaries, violence in the family. In Europe they would talk of lack of communication, fear of emptiness ... oppression that I could not understand.' In response he began to develop techniques like Cop in

the Head-'the police is not outside but inside the head. All these techniques were developed to help the people who have internalized the policeman psychologically.' By incorporating the broader spectrum and subtler nuances of psychology into his scheme of oppression, Boal extends the flexibility and applicability of the Theatre of the Oppressed across class lines. This psychological dimension of the Theatre of the Oppressed is largely missing from the activist theatre practised by people's theatre groups in this country.

Through what techniques and methods does the Theatre of the Oppressed cause people to 'reassume their protagonistic function in the theater and in society?'<sup>4</sup> There are three main forms of theatre used by the Theatre of the Oppressed-Image Theatre, Forum Theatre and Invisible Theatre.

Image Theatre is a series of exercises and games which break away from spoken language, based on the premise that images can come closer to true feelings, even subconscious feelings, than words, bypassing the censorship of the brain, the 'cop in the head' which society or personal experience causes us to carry around. Boal supports the belief that the personality is a reduction of the self. Each of us is capable of being and doing more than we think. Introspective techniques like those of Image Theatre can help us discover these inner possibilities.

Boal has evolved several different systems of using Image Theatre as a form of psychotherapy which helps the individual to concretize, recognize and face up to his/her hidden desires and attitudes in order to solve personal problems. For example, in the technique he calls Rainbow of Desire he invites a volunteer to come up and enact a recent experience of oppression in his/her own life-a marital problem, perhaps. (Boal insists on a clear distinction between a situation of oppression and one of aggression-in the latter, matters have progressed beyond solutions to a point of physical force: the gun at the head, the order to shoot. At such a stage, only physical force can counter the violence, and theatre is rendered ineffectual. Intervention through theatrical techniques can only be effective much earlier in the process.) After the enactment of a particular scene which typifies or encapsulates the problem, the protagonist is asked to come up with his/her strongest desire regarding the problem. This desire is frozen into an image by one of the other spectators, who follows the protagonist's non-verbal directions. Next s/he has to express another desire, then another-often contradictory. Each of these is crystallized as images formed by the bodies of the spectators. At the end, the

protagonist can see clearly that an entire spectrum of desires /emotions exist inside him/her-yet usually only one of them is chosen and acted upon. Why not the others? Here theatrical techniques are used to understand one's self better: but the most significant aspect is the analysis that follows each image, the probing that helps the participants recognize what the images reveal about their own ways of looking at the problem. Its value lies in presenting each participant with visual indications of his or her own attitudes. Without this analysis, Image Theatre loses s most of its power; and it needs someone very skilled in psychiatry and semiotics to decode the images and signs for the benefit of the spectators, and to do this by involving them in a discussion, rather than lecturing them. It has to be so skillfully handled that only a trained specialist can do justice to it without emotionally damaging (or at best hurting) the protagonist. Moreover, this kind of therapeutic Image Theatre should only be tried in a small, intimate group where the protagonist feels totally comfortable and secure. It can be very traumatic otherwise, destroying self-confidence and reinforcing inhibitions. Not just that-at this vital stage of the process, the use of language is unavoidable, and unless a common language is shared, the intricacies of analysis get lost. This was evident from one exercise in Image Theatre which Boal tried at the recent workshop-he- attempted to lead a discussion about what the images signified, but the problem of trying to communicate subtle concepts in an alien language (English, which is not the language he is most comfortable in) via a translator into an Indian language, defeated him. As a result the exercise lost a vital dimension and most of its effectiveness. Moreover, Image Theatre becomes a sterile exercise when the participants are not responding entirely spontaneously. There is the danger of clichés and stock images, or a selfconscious approach in which the participant projects what s/he thinks is the expected, correct or desired image.

Forum Theatre is a technique which is particularly useful in addressing concrete problems. A specific problem-inevitably a situation of oppression-is shown in an unsolved form and the spectators are invited to criticize, suggest and enact their own solutions. The process begins by enacting a scene (known as the 'model') which demonstrates the situation. To take as an example the Forum presented by Jana Sanskriti at the recent workshop: A scene is enacted in which a woman slaves hard all day at home, drawing water, looking after the baby, cleaning, washing, sweeping, preparing food stuffs. Her

husband returns and throws a tantrum because his meal is not ready and waiting for him. He accuses her of idling and wasting time. Her explanations only anger him further, and they quarrel. At this point the enactment stops, and the audience is asked to comment or intervene-do they approve? Have they an opinion? Can they suggest alternatives?

The scene is repeated, slightly speeded up, and spectators are encouraged to stop the action at whichever point they wish to and suggest solutions or alternatives, either by directing the actors, or by stepping in and replacing them. From here on it becomes a contest between the actors (playing the oppressors) and the spectators (playing the oppressed), with the latter trying to change the situation in different ways and the former making this as difficult to achieve as it would be in reality. The Forum ends when the audience is satisfied with a particular solution, accepting it as possible and desirable, though often it is left more open-ended, and the audience continues to debate and analyse even at home. Throughout, explaining the rules, subtly guiding and presiding over the exercise, ensuring that it runs as smoothly as possible, is a figure called the 'Joker' (as in a pack of cards). 'All the theatrical possibilities are conferred upon the 'Joker' function: he is magical, omniscient, polymorphous, and ubiquitous. On stage he functions as a master of ceremonies ... He makes all the explanations, verified in the structure of the performances. Like any of the other participants, the joker can be replaced if the audience is dissatisfied with him/her.

Conceptually, the Forum is exciting because of its democratic approach and structure, because it draws solutions from the very people who are experiencing the problem and therefore who know the reality better than anyone else. Moreover, since several different solutions are tried out, it results in a valuable pooling of knowledge, strategies and experience. However, this kind of theatre often fails unless it is being practised in a totally homogeneous group, in which all the people present are experiencing the same kind of oppression. It needs a community. It has been successfully used in schools, factories, community centres, homes for the aged and disabled, groups of homeless people, racial or ethnic minority groups and so on. A Forum is only successful if those undergoing the oppression themselves come up with solutions, however partial or tentative; if others (for example, actors planted in the audience) act/speak on their behalf, projecting idealized or

impractical ideas of how they 'should' deal with the situation, Forum Theatre degenerates once again into a theatre for, as opposed to of, the oppressed, in however disguised a form.

Invisible Theatre occurs in a public space, and involves the public in the action without them being aware that they are participating in theatre as opposed to 'real' life. The point is that it is both-it is actually happening, the people are real, the situations are real, and the reactions are real. A team of actors rehearses a scene which they then play in a suitable public place: a restaurant, a railway platform, a town square. The scene usually shows something 'abnormal' to that society, a subversion of the normative. This unusual behaviour sparks off reactions among passers-by and spectators, who become spectators as they comment, respond, argue or intervene. This process of activating dialogue is encouraged and stimulated by a few actors who mingle with the crowd and keep the arguments going. Often, long after the incident is over and the actors have dispersed, the discussion continues among the spectators.

Invisible Theatre is a technique for stimulating debate by the people in a public forum. It is essentially an urban form, since it can only work if the actors and the spectators are strangers to one another. Unlike the Forum, which needs a close community, Invisible Theatre needs the busy street or city crowds. It raises questions but does not dictate answers: what is important is the awareness, the questioning, the debate. Like all Boal's theatre techniques, it evolved from the inside out-in other words, it began in practice, in response to a specific socio-political problem (in this case censorship and the crackdown on Boal's theatre activities, which forced the group to perform in this 'invisible' manner rather than give a formal theatre performance), and the theorizing followed later, after it had taken shape on the ground. In that respect, it has been proven to work successfully. However, it requires immaculately detailed and careful planning, and a core team of extremely skilled and experienced actors, who can adapt and improvise on the spot in response to unforeseen twists and turns of the action, since no one can actually control the developments. In some cases there have even been outbreaks of violence. Inexperienced actors could get completely thrown; and if the 'invisible' theatre is unmasked it could result in a negative reaction among the spectators, who would, quite understandably, feel manipulated. The power of Invisible Theatre rests in its invisibility; and the completely unselfconscious simulation of reality, as any theatre practitioner knows, is the hardest effect for actors to achieve.

Can Theatre of the Oppressed be effective in the very different cultural contexts of this country? Only if it is adapted to suit the specific social and cultural situation in which it is performed. As Boal is careful to explain, Theatre of the Oppressed is 'like a key. A key does not open the door. It is the person handling the key who opens the door.' Moreover, only certain doors can be opened by certain keys—for example, the introspective and psychotherapeutic purpose to which Image Theatre techniques can be put are very different from the problems which Forum Theatre can help solve. It is only when more groups using theatre for change, doing community or conscientizing theatre, begin to utilize the methods of Theatre of the Oppressed, that we will know how powerful and useful it can be—here, for us.

Anjum Katyal

### Notes

- 1 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (Pluto Press, London, 1979).
- 2 Augusto Boal, in an interview with STQ in Calcutta, February 1994. All subsequent quotes are from the same interview, except when otherwise credited.
- 3 Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*
- 4 Ibid., p119
- 5 Ibid., p182

## **. . . the dialogue continues'**

**AUGUSTO BOAL spoke to STQ over several days while he was in India recently.**

Q: Does your theatre stress sociopolitical oppression more than less tangible oppression?

A: Sometimes you can oppress by giving, you can oppress through tenderness, you can oppress through suffering. You are not exploiting in that sense or taking out something, but you are imposing your self so much that you are actually oppressing someone.

All over the world there are three things that come up, wherever I go. One, oppression against women; two, racial oppression and three, money oppression or salary oppression. These three forms of oppression change from country to country but they exist. One day I was working in Sweden and a woman proposed discussing the oppression of women. Another woman said that in Sweden women are not oppressed. I said, 'Happy you. This is the first country where I hear that. Are you sure?' She said that in France and other countries the women are oppressed but not in Sweden. I said it's true that in France when men and women do the same work the women get less money; here in Sweden you must get the same, because you are not oppressed. She said, 'No it is not exactly like that. In France women get 'less' than men, here men get a little bit 'more' than women.' So in her head she was not being oppressed. Because it was the men who got 'more', she did not get 'less.' The oppression exists, but she was not conscious of it. In all countries oppression exists, sometimes more violently, sometimes in a more refined way, like in Sweden. Sometimes with kindness also you can drive a woman crazy and send her to psychiatric hospital. And internalization of oppression also exists even in violent countries like yours or mine, Brazil.

Q: How does your theatre address this wide range of oppressions?

A: In Forum theatre we can ask the audience, 'What can we do in this case?' Forum Theatre is not what the political theatre of the past was. In that a group of actors came with an idea of what to do, came to teach a lesson, to say-as in the didactic theatre-in this case you should do this, in that case you should do that. The artists were the ones who knew better and would impose on other people. In the Theatre of the Oppressed we don't say, 'You should do this or that.' We ask, 'What can you do?' So the technique is to allow the people to think about the situation, to try to find a solution. We all learn together. It is an enormous difference. Because when spectators see an image of the world as



we present it to them they are consolidated in the function of 'looking at' and not acting or participating. But when the spectator becomes a spectator and enters the stage area it is a form of transgression which is the basic necessity for changing the world around us. When the spectator enters the stage he penetrates into that world from outside. What happens to him or her there profoundly modifies the spectator. In Forum Theatre some structure has to be followed. For example, the protagonist cannot be someone who wins in the end. There has to be a moment of crisis because he chooses the wrong way, so the spectator can say no, I don't want this, I want to change.

Q: Could all the interventions confuse the audience between different alternatives?

A: No, on the contrary. Because the goal of Forum Theatre is not to find one perfect solution, but to dynamize the spectators as spectators, to think about solutions. You may show ten alternatives to a particular problem and none of them can be completely satisfactory or correct in your opinion. You start thinking. Because a good solution can also be good only for me and not for you.

Q: Do you think that your techniques can equip the actors or the spectators with enough tools to handle this kind of situation?

A: I would like to give you an image to make clear what the Theatre of the Oppressed is. I say that it is like a key. A key does not open the door. It is the person handling the key who opens the door. It is up to the people who use it. If people use it, it can be useful.

Q: You started with political theatre and then developed Forum Theatre. How did it evolve?

A: In Brazil, as a director of plays, what interested me was not only theatre for the people but how people can use theatre. For me theatre is a language. Theatre speaks about people. What really interests me is the people. Through theatre I understand people better. And if people can understand one another through theatre it's even better. For me the most important thing is the human being. The society where I worked has changed, people in that society needed something different. I was led to try to discover other forms of theatre that could answer to their needs. In the beginning, when I was doing normal realistic theatre I felt that we should nationalize the classics, then I felt that we must use music also, because Brazil is a very

musical country and we started a series of musicals. When I had to shut my mouth because of the police, then I started the 'newspaper theatre' to teach people how to transform news from the newspaper into scenes of theatre, and we did this all over Sao Paulo in Brazil at that time. It was a necessity because we could not go to the people with our plays. We said, 'Let's teach the people to do their own plays for themselves.' Because the theatres were closed and plays were censored most of the time. So it was not something that came from my head, or that I thought I must do this or that. It was the society. It came from the people. That is why I started Invisible Theatre.

Q: Can you please explain Invisible Theatre?

A: I will tell you the origin. I was in prison in Brazil in 1971 and then I was released and went to Argentina. We were preparing a play about a law that said that no Argentine should die of hunger. If you were hungry you could go to any restaurant and ask for whatever you wanted except dessert and wine. And you could sign and leave without paying anything because the law protected you. But what would happen if you really did that? So we prepared a play about that. I helped to write the play, and then we decided to go to the street and play in the street. I said, 'Okay, only I won't go because if I get arrested the police will send me back to Brazil.' This was a risk I could not take though I directed the play. They said, 'No you have to see the play. If you cannot come to the street because of the police then we should do the play inside a real restaurant and not tell anybody that it's a play, and you go before the play, sit down and see the play.' I said okay. Then we went to a restaurant and did the play there. We did not tell anybody that it was a play. One actor was sitting at one place, another was sitting at another place and I was sitting at a different place. Then in came a young actor asking for food, saying that he didn't want dessert or wine and that he was an Argentine and he was hungry. Then the waiter came and said, 'Don't tell me what you don't want, tell me what you want.' He said, 'I want a big steak, I want two eggs, I want this and that but not wine and not dessert.' And then they started discussing the food and then he signed the bill and the waiter came and ... we had one of our actors playing the waiter but the real waiter came and discussed exactly what was in the play and our man did not intervene. The actors at different tables started discussing what was happening very naturally, but it was all prepared. It was full of theatrical energy that was

very strong, very powerful. Then I realized that this was a new form of theatre, Invisible Theatre, because you don't see that it is theatre.

Q: What was the reaction like?

A: They reacted very strongly. They participated and discussed many things. 'If we have so much food in Argentina why should people die of hunger? If we have medicine why should people die of sickness?' We have a play about the oppression of women. It started in Italy. It's about a man and a woman who go to a shop where they sell things for women. She wants to buy things and he says, 'No, come with me.' They behave more or less normally, only that she has a dog collar and he pulls her by the leash. Then up comes another actress and protests and says, 'Why do you allow this man to do that?' And she says, 'Oh, he loves me. Why not?' Then another woman comes along and discusses women's oppression. I did this play in many countries. In Switzerland the police came after fifteen minutes. When we did the opposite, with the woman leading the man around in a dog collar, the police came in fifty seconds and did not allow us to continue. This is Invisible Theatre. It was created out of necessity.

Q: How does a performance of Invisible Theatre end?

A: Invisible Theatre never stops. Because we people, we never stop.

Q: But there must be a moment when the actors withdraw.?

A: Yes, but when the actors withdraw, some other actors whom we call the 'warmer ups' stay on and they keep talking to the people, continue the dialogue, give them information. Those 'warmer up' actors are not in the play, they don't play the main characters. The actors who play the main characters withdraw, but others go on talking. We did a play about racism and after the main actors went out-there were ten or more actors because it was also a workshop-the play lasted three hours. What we want is that the discussion should go on, at the homes of the people who participated. Likewise, in the Forum Theatre we don't want to finish, we don't want to find the perfect solution, 'Oh, now we've got it.' No, we want to help people to get used to thinking about solutions, because the solution that we find today may not be considered a good solution tomorrow.

Q: So the performance ends, but the dialogue continues.

A: The dialogue continues. Theatre is the art of looking at oneself, and we want it to go on for ever. Look at ourselves, look at others, and look at the future. Theatre of the Oppressed tries to create the future, not wait for it. And it is always in transformation.

Q: You talk about the fact that you don't bring the solutions, they have to come from the community with which you work. What happens when the community cannot think beyond certain limits in offering solutions? Can the people who do this work of change lead the community towards a solution which they can see, but the community cannot?

A: I don't believe that the theatre can be so powerful that a simple exhibition of a play is going to make people who are not ready to see anything suddenly open their eyes. That was the mistake we made-myself also-in the political theatre of the fifties and the sixties. We believed that as the vanguard of the people we knew better. I had a group in Brazil doing a play protesting racial prejudice against the blacks, but we were white people. We produced plays about peasants but we lived in the cities and not in the countryside. We tried to teach women how to fight against oppression, but we were mostly men. We were telling the women that you have to fight. 'Fight against whom?' 'Against us, men.' It was so incoherent. We were city people teaching peasants, whites teaching blacks, men teaching women. Even though we had good intentions it could not work. One day we were performing a play in northeast Brazil that incited the peasants. The play ended with all of us with rifles in our hands saying, 'We have to fight and spill our blood to free our land.' Then a peasant came to us and said, 'Yes, we also feel exactly like you, so why don't you come with your rifles and fight with us?' Then I realized that we were lying, because we had to say, 'Look, these are not real rifles, we are real people but the rifles are not.' But they didn't understand that, they said, 'What is the use of making rifles that do not shoot?' So we said, 'We have made these rifles because they are graphically beautiful, it is nice to have rifles in this play as we say, "we have to spill our blood to free the land."' They said, 'Okay, you don't have to bring your rifles. Come with us, we have enough rifles for everybody. They are real rifles. So come and shoot with us.' Then we told them, 'Look, there is a misunderstanding here. We are artists and not peasants.' They

said, 'Oh, you are truly artists, talking about spilling blood, but not your blood, our blood.' I was so ashamed of that. From that day onward I said, 'Never again will I do a play asking people to do this or that, and then go home.'

I have no right to advise people, I cannot tell them what to do, I have to ask them what they can do, I have to make a theatre that will be at their disposal. I know how to do theatre. I can only help you to make plays for yourself, to help you discuss. Before, we used to have a theatre for the oppressed. That was good and honest, but sometimes we stimulated people to do things that they could not do, we could not do. I like all forms of theatre. Theatre of the Oppressed is not against any forms of theatre, it is a new form. It does not replace any other forms, but it is irreplaceable itself.

We have to create a space, a theatrical space, in which people activate themselves. Because only women are going to free women, only blacks are going to fight against racial prejudice, only the peasants are going to fight for their land. It's not for the intellectuals to come and say, we know better than you, you should do this and that. When I was in Algeria, in Africa, a woman told me something that was very important. She spoke about those women who wear the *chaddar* (veil), 'For many women to take off the *chaddar*, uncovering the face, would be much more violent than for a Parisian to take off all her clothes.' To uncover so little can be so violent. I know that men and women should be equal, blacks and whites should be equal, the countries should be equal, that there should be a dialogue between races, between countries, between sexes. All human relations should be a dialogue. But there is always one who commands and another who obeys. This is what we call oppression. It's when a dialogue becomes a monologue. So what we want is to help people to speak, to say what they want, to say what they desire for the future. 'That's all we can do in terms of theatre. But we also have to work in terms of political parties. That's why now I am doing my theatre and I am also a politician. I was elected to the city council of Rio de Janeiro and there I do political work with my political party and we hope to win the next election for the presidency and change quite a lot. Now in Brazil I am trying a new form of theatre-Legislative Theatre. I am a legislator now, I am helping make the laws. I have a group of fifteen people in my office, professional actors from my group, who are culture animators. They go to people and organize plays about their problems in the Forum form and people take the place of actors and give suggestions. Then I try to collect all the information coming

from the people. In my office I also have a lawyer, technical people, and they try to transform these into projects of law. Then I go to the Chamber and offer a proposition for a project of law that comes from the people in the streets, from the trade unions. So we call it Legislative Theatre.

Q: Introspective techniques like Rainbow of Desire probably have more usefulness as psychotherapy and not as performance.

A: Many psychotherapists nowadays use these techniques. In Stuttgart there is an institute called Moreno Institute which gives classes in Theatre of the Oppressed to show techniques like Rainbow of Desire and Cop in the Head. I myself work with psychotherapists in Switzerland, show them the new techniques.

Q: Do you think that these techniques are tools for the theatre workers rather than a form of theatre itself?

A: They can be used by psychotherapists. They can also be used theatrically by a theatre group, by trade unions. What is the difference? The difference is that when you use these games for psychotherapy you go from a particular case that is being told by the protagonist to the singularities of the protagonist, you have to understand him, his problems; but when we do that socially, in social work, we try to go from the particularities of the person to the generality of the group. You say, okay, you have this 'Cop in the Head', but so do I. Let us compare your cop with my cop. In therapeutic work there will be a moment when you have to concentrate firmly on the individual, on the singularity of the individual. One of the characteristics of the therapeutic work is that it has to last for some time, the therapist has to have a deeper relation with the patient, to follow up. But I also use these techniques as a director. When I direct a play I use them to train, to develop, to create images. For example, when I did *Phaedre* by Racine I used those techniques to understand Phaedre. It was theatre.

Q: Do you often find participants using stock images while doing Image Theatre?

A: Sometimes the first images that come are clichés. But then they are not Image Theatre. If you make an image like this—close your eyes, close your ears, close your mouth—the image of

three monkeys, that's not really an image. That's a symbol of something that has a legend behind it. You can neither interpret it nor project anything on it. But the real Theatre of the Oppressed takes the image as being polysemic, with many meanings, and the richest image is one when you create an image but don't have to explain it. So people can project whatever they want on the image you have created and then learn from it. If I create an image and say, this is my father, everyone will say, okay, this is your father, so what? But if I show the image and ask 'What is this?' people would project on my image without knowing that this is my father. So they will project a teacher, a sergeant, a priest, a friend, whatever they want. I will learn from that projection. If someone sees a sergeant in my father's image I realize a military or authoritarian angle which I was not aware of in my father's image. This way we can provide the protagonist with a multiple mirror. This will not be the same objective image as a mirror gives but subjective images coming from the mirror of your sensibility, your intelligence, your experience. Then I ask, what's come through in those images? What's not come through? What stimulates me most? So I can learn from these images ...

Q: Do you work with children?

A: I don't work very much with children personally, but my groups, both in France and Rio, work with children. In the Rio group there are persons who have specialized in working with children. I have worked with mentally handicapped children at a place close to Paris.

Q: Did you use any particular method?

A: I used Forum Theatre, but instead of doing the regular Forum Theatre they built their own images. For instance they made a Forum on their own situation in which the classroom was like a sea, the table of the teacher was an island, they were far away, and there were some fish which were the books. They created that, it was not my idea. The point was, how can one reach the island. They knew what they wanted to say. I enjoyed it very much because I noticed that they had already started to symbolize. For the mentally handicapped it is very difficult to symbolize, and they achieved this through Forum Theatre. No one can play what is not inside. Realism sometimes hides without revealing reality and to be real does not mean to be realistic. There are so many realities.

In Brazil we work with children of the streets. Recently, during our theatre festival, seven street children were killed in front of a church where they were sleeping. It was very painful. A few days later a group of street children that worked with Theatre of the Oppressed went there to do a play about themselves. It was very moving to see the real children of the street, not the artists in the place of real children, talking about their problems, why they are in the street, what their fears are, what the dangers are in the streets? Next morning all the theatre groups present there, groups from Africa, India, England, went to a nearby park to rehearse images to protest against the killings, show solidarity. I remember that someone came and said that the President of the Republic was in a nearby hotel. 'Why don't you go there to protest?' There were 144 of us from more than 20 different countries and about 100 Brazilians who happened to be there. We went to the hotel and said, 'We want to talk to the President. Please call him.' So his secretary came and finally the President himself came down to talk to the foreigners and the Brazilians. It was very moving. We told him that the foreigners were not there as foreigners trying to interfere in the internal problems of Brazil, because what had happened was a crime against humanity and not a crime against Brazilian children. They were protesting as human beings and the President listened to them.



## Using Boal in India

### Puma Chandra Rao and the Ethnic Arts Centre

As I started making the rural working class my target audience for theatre, I was increasingly uncomfortable with the Party based Marxist aesthetics in India because of its cultural bankruptcy. The Party was just carrying on the influence of crude Company drama, melodrama and spectacular western commercial theatre. Brecht started talking about systematic Marxist aesthetics from the 1920s, but the Party did not absorb any of it during the time of the first armed struggle in Telengana; nor did it learn from any of the Latin American experiences for later struggles. It did not even take any inspiration from the countless Indian indigenous theatre traditions to create a modern alternative theatre in India for contemporary struggles. As an individual only Badal Sircar tried to achieve a formal synthesis in theatre, taking the right bits from the alternative European drama, yet keeping his own artistic integrity intact. But the Party or parties ignored him, though many made just his *Michil* a prototype for a hotchpotch street theatre movement, ignoring his concepts and the great range of his total repertoire.

In Andhra Gaddar, the popular alternative performer, revolutionized the form of song only, taking inspiration from folk songs. Narrative singing forms like Burrakatha and Voggukatha served the people's cause, but never did a theatre in its complete modern sense flourish through a party system. The present mushrooming of so-called street theatre activities under party rhetoric and of a kind of 'developmental theatre' under various nondescript persons, pathetically exhibits a total lack of theatre education, whether modern or traditional.

I was forced to develop my own tools. One of my foremost influences was Badal Sircar. He laid the foundation. I found his tools very simple and felt that I could handle them to do my own theatre. A great theatre system should be like that. It should make others feel at home, tools-wise.

Though I was moving away from Badal's bit by bit, I kept the spirit intact. For example, I moved away from the collage approach of Badal's to a simple narrative, because my rural audience is more tuned to the age-old pattern of storytelling or listening. Even 'story viewing' is modern to them. One should cultivate their eyes to more and more visuals, even

stylized visuals, but without leaving the story pattern and also without ignoring their highly sensitive ears! These are the fundamentals of working with the rural folk. I was forced to bring all my learning of theatre to this basic level. We can't show off our so-called theatre knowledge. We need to shed all our layers to work at the grass roots. This is the challenge.

My trial-and-error practice forced me to read theories. When I started exploring alternative aesthetics from the west, I found the first Marxist aesthetician in Brecht, who in turn inspired me to learn from the non - Marxist traditional aesthetics back home, particularly to study the countless systems of alienation in Indian traditional forms. I found great beauty and power in my own Telugu theatre form called Kuchipudi and its variations. I also discovered a great power of communication in many semi-theatrical forms and games. Otherwise, like so many arrogant urban folk, I too had ignored all the rural forms for a long period. Since then whomever I read, be it Alfred Jarry or Dario Fo *or* John Arden or D'Arcy or McGrath or Artaud or Grotowski or Barba, my faith in traditional forms was just re-emphasized. I took inspiration from the agit-prop arts of the late sixties and seventies from Latin America.





Paulo Freirean micro-tactics and Augusto Boalian games both tried to communicate an alternative Marxism, packed with the grassroots culture of the people. But I never copied any of my influences as they were. I absorbed them and tried to evolve my own practice, aimed at my own audience, the rural working class and my own actors, who are also of the rural working class.

The same holds true for whatever I have taken from Augusto Boal. You could call mine a 'theatre of the oppressed' or even a 'theatre by the oppressed' but I never tried to copy his brand of forms called 'Invisible' or 'Image' or 'Forum'. After all, the concepts are more important than the brands.

Boal gave me the strength to explore an alternative aesthetics, a theatre aiming at micro struggles within the Marxist framework and yet separate from the Party. Boal's concepts are highly suited to the third world situation.

When I read Grotowski's *Towards a Poor Theatre*, it stunned me with its bare and purist ideology which can be partly traced back to Artaud. But when I read Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, I felt like practising it. Grotowski at one level tried to get rid of the 'rich burden' of theatre formally, offering a purist theatre to the bodies and minds of actors, but at another level his entire journey is aimed at the individual's internalization. While Grotowski aims at repairing the individual self, Boal is still aiming at repairing the social

self. The difference is in the political context only. Formally, both are suited to India, but conceptually Boal suits us more because we need to handle countless struggles politically.

If you look at my plays alone, they may not appear Boalean. But if you study the entire process from my very first contact with the people whose issues I have taken up, elements of Invisible Theatre can be found. Many in the Hyderabad slums may have seen my fulllength production on the housing problem of rickshaw pullers, performed by a team of rickshaw pullers, but there was no audience for the 'pre-play preparations' through which I convinced the rickshaw pullers to take up theatre for their own cause. Because in this I employed the tactics of Invisible Theatre. The spectators phase was too subjective for them-it happened before their becoming actors in my full-length play. This 'pre-play making drama' is known to only a few friends.

The same is true of my play on the issue of tribal land alienation done by a team of tribals, which turned out to be a great hit even with university audiences. But they did not know how I convinced the- tribals to take up theatre for their own cause in the first place. I interacted with them through Invisible Theatre. I confronted them with a series of game-like situations to extract their reactions. Very often I have obtained the content of future full-length plays through these Invisible Theatre-exercises.

The elements of Image Theatre can also be found in some of my recent plays. In my latest play with a team of weavers on the question of starvation deaths among them, I used a series of 'images' within the narrative. Not that I allowed a discussion openly with the audience on each of these images, but I provoked a process of thinking in the audience. At the end of each episode an image comes, like an illustration in a story book, to re-emphasize the content of the episode. After psychologically centring the audience through a realistic drama in each of the episodes, I tried to alienate them, provoking them to think by bringing in an 'image' at the end of the episode. To facilitate the thinking process, I froze the image for a while, overlapping it with a line of song; and we noticed many comments from the audience during this time.

This style totally changes in the second half of the play, which turns into a farce, with two enacted cartoon strips and with two lengthy opera-type discussions through songs and dance-like movements.

In an earlier musical play with a group of rural working kids I had also used 'images', this time in animation, to stimulate the rural audience. These images were thematically connected, but not part of the narrative. In the beginning of this play, a single boy attempts to move an invisible boulder in vain, but as the other boys and girls one by one come and join him, the boulder is moved away by their collective force. This image worked as a stimulant and set the play rolling, even though it was not part of the story. The audience, mostly rural working kids, would talk aloud about this simple image, which is a part of their existence. In the same play, when the widowed mother is forced by the landlord to send the boy to work as a bonded labourer, removing him from school, the boy turns out to be a 'bull'. As the bull goes to the landlord, we noticed many excited comments from the working kids. That's what is intended by the use of such images. As the story is not an allegory, the image ends there. Such an image works on its own without being a part of the total narrative, as an alienation device to break the flow of a realistic story, and to stimulate the audience.

In the middle of our two-hour play on tribal land alienation also, I used the image of a 'human pyramid' being formed and getting dismantled, to depict the brutal police repression against the Andhra Naxalites who are the guardians of the tribal lands. In fact, the play is not about the Naxalites as such. The first half of the play deals with the several ways in which tribal land is alienated, including the ones facilitated by the Government's anti-tribal regulations. The second half deals with the impossibility of justice coming through the tribal courts (LTRP) established after the Emergency, as an eyewash. Against these two injustices, the only hope of justice comes through the Naxalites. But expecting the wrath of the police to descend on our play, I decided not to have a clear narrative piece on the Naxalite phase of the story. Instead I decided on the image of a human pyramid being formed by the tribals and brought down by the invisible firing of the police. Just this image alone communicated the untold story very powerfully, creating tremendous vibrations in the tribal audience during our initial campaign in the tribal villages and later even among the university audiences.

I have never used the most popular form of Boalean theatre, Forum Theatre. I have seen a number of 'forums' in Paris, where Augusto Boal invited me to attend his International Meet on the Practice of Theatre of the Oppressed in 1991. Many of them

proved to be a great disappointment, because they were just black and white, content-wise, and never touched the complexity of any problem. But I still hold the hope that the Forum is a great device to facilitate a range of discussions by changing the play through the participation of the audience.

I am planning to test out the power of the Forum in India systematically, applying it to the most complex and controversial subjects, like the man-woman relationship in our society. Instead of little 'models', as in the west, I would like to do a full-length play as a Forum, continuing for five or six hours in an intimate theatre situation, inviting various women's groups and theatre workers to form the audience which 'interrupts' the play.

Earlier I had done a spoof on Manu in Telugu from the women's point of view, but it became a controversial play. Many women's groups liked the play in general but each of the groups wanted to change it at different places to suit their school of feminism, which was not acceptable to me at that time. But now I think that this could be the best play for the Forum. I am planning this play in Hindi now, to take around to various cities in India, and to document the proceedings of each Forum in a systematic way for further analysis. I believe that the Forum can go well with complex plays where a great range of opinions is expected from the audience, without sacrificing the total experience of theatre.

I feel that Boal is far ahead of Brecht in conceiving of a system called Forum Theatre which can facilitate the participation of the audience in a more meaningful and theatrically interesting way. The idea of the audience being allowed to change the play is really revolutionary and an ultimate example of democracy in theatre! But for this one must cultivate the audience before the start of the play. The core actors should equip themselves with an array of improvisational skills to face all kinds of interruptions, and the demand for all kinds of enactment from the unknown 'Spect-actors'.

The very concept of theatre has to change. It might sound too extreme, but I believe that theatre should no longer serve as entertainment for the middle and upper classes, which are hopelessly TV-struck anyway. The onslaught of TV with its thousand faces is a death blow to all kinds of theatre in India. The best talent of Indian theatre is being swallowed up by TV and cinema; and yet TV is not doing better than the best of our theatre. All this is being justified by many celebrities. 'Make your living in TV and cinema; and

occasionally come back to do a bit for theatre' has become a stock attitude in India. Theatre should change its audience to an 'alternative audience' that needs its services.

In a country like India, the alternative audience that needs a change at all levels-the oppressed-are more than 70% of our population! The oppressed need not be the traditional working class alone. Apart from them, a great number of ethnic groups or communities are being marginalized by the so-called mainstream; many genuine nationality questions are being bulldozed out by the mainstream. All these communities are also oppressed. The women, the children, the aged and the handicapped are also oppressed, irrespective of class. All categories of the oppressed need an alternative theatre of the oppressed. But in terms of issues and target audience, this theatre should be 'local' and proudly 'local.' This negates the age-old rhetoric that theatre should be 'universal'. Theatre should be politically conscious, and grapple with the complexity of its subject; it should even contribute to the struggles of the oppressed. For this, theatre has to be 'local'. Look at the contemporary African theatre, Latin American theatre, the ethnic theatre in America, Filipino theatre, Maori theatre. They are not merely catering to a superficial 'universal' taste by peddling exotica. They are proudly 'local' in their political struggles.

There is scope for a great range of experimentation in this alternative theatre of the oppressed. A number of marginalized rural ethnic groups have their own traditional performing forms, and even their own traditional protest forms. The modern theatre of the oppressed in India should absorb the elements of those ethnic forms and games. Not like our 'martial-arts-theatre' which is being made into a commodity for the international market. The martial elements should contribute to our own political theatre. And above all, I firmly believe that the power of theatre has to be handed over to the oppressed without sacrificing the formal quality and without tending to rhetoric.

At the Ethnic Arts Centre we specialize in a system called Victims' Theatre, where we train the victims of the issues we take up to enact their own roles in all our plays. The results can be quite professional.

I am essentially working on a training method for the illiterate rural actor through the tradition of oral culture, as many of these actors cannot read or write. Hence I abandoned the pre-written script. Many of the Boalian and Grotowskian actor's training tools, games

and exercises apply perfectly to the illiterate rural actor. Improvisation occurs only during the training, which includes the rehearsals.

What we need is for the playwright, the director and the trainer to together form one complete 'Playmaker'. The 'Playmaker' should take the content, dialect, culture and even some formal elements from the grassroots. And then he should use the best of his theatre knowledge to fuse all these vital ingredients into a theatre that can truly be called the 'theatre of the oppressed'.



## **Sanjay Ganguly and Jana Sanskriti**

I was drawn to Boal because of my growing frustration with the political culture of the times. Not only the political philosophers but also people like us working at the grassroot level with a definite political ideology realized that the political culture that was prevalent in both the left and right camps was not going to work. It was not that we realized this only after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakup of East Europe, but much earlier.

People like us who wanted to apply a political philosophy through theatre started thinking about the problems inherent in the very political culture we were advocating. When communists went to the villages in the fifties and sixties and built up the farmers' movement, the villagers still looked upon the old feudal lords as leaders, seeing them as benevolent because they had come to liberate the masses from oppression. It never occurred to these activists that the oppressed masses could find a way out by themselves, without their help. As a result most plays of that time portray such figures as great men. But this is not the real picture: Glorifying such characters only results in destroying the faith of the ordinary working class people.

When I was in the student front of a left political party I realized that as a student I didn't have any role in the decision making, I saw only the non-students taking decisions. At the party level it was the members of the politbureau who were taking decisions on certain issues. Then it was transformed into a 'document' and 'given' to us to carry out. I had no right to contradict it, challenge it. There was no room for debate. The leadership was not accessible to me. This 'monologue' led to a desire to fight against this culture of silence, to break away from our dependency on centralized leadership.

To do this I realized we had to establish a dialogue. I wanted to achieve this through theatre- which should be a theatre of the oppressed. If it was theatre *for* the oppressed it would once again be a form of monologue, which I wanted to resist. This is the biggest problem with theatre for the oppressed. One has to consider the fact that the feudal value system is still very prevalent in rural India. The people in the village believe it is only the urban babus who know what to do, that all they themselves are capable of is obeying orders. The man in the village will see, but not show; will listen, but not speak. He considers himself inferior, weak, incapable of analytical thought.

There was a time when we were doing political theatre, but didn't leave any room for an individual's problems. We created a real ism for the collective and imposed that on the people. We were involved in the trade union movement but failed to address the inter-personal problems that existed within the workers themselves, at their works and in their homes. The problems of drinking, for example. We didn't realize that oppression also exists within a class. Individual experiences and aspirations have an extremely important role to play in the broader, collective activities like political movements and so on. While class oppression is the oppression we ultimately have to fight, we need to give sufficient importance to the individual too.

Anyone who believes that 'oppression exists wherever monologue exists' will find Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed useful. It is wrong to think that the concept of the Theatre of the Oppressed developed by Augusto Boal has come from a particular cultural background and it would be problematic to adapt his techniques to another culture.

This theatre is based on the concept of 'dialogue' as opposed to 'monologue.' It tries to foreground the humanity of the individual. In that sense it wants to humanize the human being. Theatre of the Oppressed does not allow the village person to feel inferior. He is made to feel independent, and this makes him expressive. He gets a chance to think of what he can do to improve his own future.

It is not that one cannot practise Boal unless one practises Forum Theatre, Image Theatre or Invisible Theatre. In a sense, I had started practising Theatre of the Oppressed in my own way even before I came to know about Boal and his theatre. We decided, politically speaking, to do theatre of the oppressed and not *for* them. We realized that we must let the oppressed talk about themselves, about their problems, do their own theatre. It is not necessary for an urban actor, who has never been in a village, to act as a peasant and make a caricature of him. In our case, when we started our theatre activities, we started going to the villages and through a lot of interaction learned to look at their problems in a different light. For example, we are familiar with the problems of the purdah system. But only in a village did I realize the real plight of the Muslim women in purdah. One Muslim woman told me that she had fractured a leg and though she could see the local hospital from her window it took six days to reach a doctor because her 'man' was not at home at the time. She told me that if she was attacked and killed by someone and her body discovered somewhere in the village the villagers would not be able to identify her because most of them have never seen her face. While conducting a

workshop for a group of tribal and non-tribal youngsters from north 24 Parganas, a wide range of previously unexpressed wishes and desires came up. At first they came up with stock stereotyped answers. After more discussion and probing, what came out was quite revealing. One tribal boy wanted to become a driver, but had one underlying fear-that the brakes would fail. Another boy wanted to open a school, a result of his personal experience of not being allowed to study. This is the real situation. There are theatre groups who go to the villages and perform, but they stay with the rich people and not with the peasants and since they are well known theatre personalities the rich villagers or the village heads treat them well. They are not aware of the kind of disregard the villagers have for the so-called village elites. But our theatre is different. For example, take a play like *Ballad of a Village*, produced by us and also by a group like Living Theatre. If you look at the two productions you will see that ours is distinctly different. In our production we presented the problems of the village as the villagers see it. It was possible because we live in the village and it is the villagers who do their own plays.

We started practising Forum Theatre only in mid 1991, but before that we used to perform in the villages regularly. Before a performance we used to march through the village singing songs and the villagers would join us. After a performance there would be a discussion with the audience on the issues raised in the play. We noticed that this form of dialogue could lead to some kind of political action. When we first performed the *Ballad of a Village* at Lakshminarayanpur a struggle for minimum wage was also launched. It was possible because of the play itself. The landless labourers who were in the production started leading the movement. In the play there was a scene in which the villagers rang a bell as they marched to the field. The significance of this was that the bell marked time. In real life, the villagers, who had no idea of how long eight hours was, would slave all day long without realizing that they had put in many more hours than they had to. When there was a strike, the villagers used a bell. They took this from the play. This exchange, this dialogue, became very important in our theatre work. We have a play which demanded work for the landless labourers round the year. After the play was over we started a discussion on the problem and the audience started signing a mass petition. This form of dialogue was there in our theatre even before we started Forum Theatre. We realized that cultural action can lead to political action.

When we came to know about Boal, read his book, learnt why he calls his theatre a 'rehearsal for revolution' we found a support. I realized that Boal had theorized excellently what I was already practising in my theatre activity. Then we got in touch with him, his group visited us in 1991 and later in 1993 we went to Rio and worked with him.

Theatre of the Oppressed is an educational tool. Forum sessions can be seen as an alternative style of holding meetings. In the traditional way of holding a meeting, one person, very often an urban middle-class activist, speaks and others listen. Very little discussion takes place. A political meeting can be very oppressive. Take for example the recent meeting at Delhi organized against the Dunkel proposal. People had to sit for four hours under the summer sun. This is unjust. This is oppression. Our meetings have been replaced by Forum Theatre, and we no longer have a passive audience because everybody can take part. Even when we act the audience thinks about it, gets ready to intervene, participate, give support. This is a much more useful situation. Forum sessions give everyone a chance to speak out without feeling selfconscious, and facilitate very fruitful discussion. In a way one can say that this alternative style ensures the participation of the people.

When we first started Forum Theatre we were not sure whether people would really participate. After all, audiences come to see a play and not to act. Those of us who come from an urban background wonder-will they participate in the way we want them to? Will they be free enough? Can they really do it? These questions were bothering us at that time. I won't claim that large numbers of people spontaneously participate in a Forum Theatre. From an audience of 200 you may have five interventions, one particular person may intervene thrice. If it is really a good Forum you may get three or four interventions. In the beginning some members of our group sitting among the audience used to initiate interventions. But there are techniques to stimulate people, to involve them in such a way that they feel like intervening. In the beginning we were uncertain about it because at that time we also didn't know all the techniques. Once we learnt about the 'Joker' things became easier. But that doesn't mean that the problem doesn't exist any more. People do come to 'see' a play and to make them 'act' or participate remains a difficult task. The participation is limited but nevertheless this serves our purpose. If we get five interventions, at least they have all come from the audience. The rest of the audience, we noticed, either support or

disagree with the interventions. In this way the entire audience gets involved and this serves our purpose. The number is not as important as the quality of the intervention.

Critics of Forum Theatre, who think that intervention from the audience will not be possible at all, are biased by their own urban intellectualism. They have a state of mind which is limited by the thought of 'educating' the oppressed people. But if you don't believe in people intervening, if you think only in terms of artists as the vanguard, then you won't even give it a try. And if you haven't tried Forum Theatre even once, how can you claim that it won't work? The urban participants in the so-called third theatre groups are mainly composed of middle-class, office-going people. They can't take the strain of going to the remote villages, staying there and working with the village people. Politically they also believe that to bring about any social change one must work under the leadership of a centralized political party. Forum Theatre, on the other hand, is a democratic, participatory and decentralized theatrical system.

Oppression often stems from the imposition of certain social and moral values. This kind of oppression may get so internalized at times that the person is not even aware that s/he is being oppressed. Theatre of the Oppressed helps identify this type of oppression. I believe it can really work at the individual level. Techniques like Rainbow of Desire or the Cop in the Head can actually help an individual to introspect, discover one's own self. It is very important. People do not know what they really want, they only know what they do not want. A common man is so busy in his daily struggle for bread that he hardly gets any time to think, to introspect. But if we can create a situation and help him to introspect, to see his problems and desires clearly, probably he will be able to work out his problems on his own. Otherwise whatever we try to do for him will be an imposition of some sort. An example comes to mind. Uma (not her real name) was married off at a very young age. Before she could understand what was happening, her husband sent her back and remarried. Uma grew up to believe that she was a married woman who must wear all signs of marriage and never think of remarrying herself. She was ready to live her life like this, but after coming in contact with theatre, she has slowly opened up and realized the extent to which she had submitted to this patriarchal system. Today she has given up all signs of being married, and is confident and ready to face the world as a single, independent woman. Moreover, she always comes forward to empathize with other women in the same plight.

Theatre of the Oppressed is equally capable of portraying and handling situations where the oppression is very obviously class based. In one of our plays there is a scene where a number of political parties, each claiming to be the original party, are trying to lure the common people and as a result the masses become very confused about what they should do. In the Forum session, no solutions seemed to be forthcoming-the audience did not seem to know how to fight this problem. Ultimately, a solution did come-one spectator pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket and started waving it-an alternative flag, an independent mass organization.

Interventions in Forum sessions can be used constructively in political action, as in the case of a woman who has divorced her husband but is not getting the maintenance that is due her. A number of suggestions come up during a Forum session which can be recorded and analysed and then suggested to the women's organization that is dealing with the case. The women's organizations we are working with are greatly benefited by Forum Theatre. (Jana Sanskriti does not work on its own but in collaboration with local organizations. This helps us to work freely in the locality and with their help we make faster progress. The women's organizations allow us to use their bases and we train them, help them to create their own teams. Then our job is to follow it up.) To break the inhibitions of village women about coming out of confinement and opening up we initially had to face a lot of problems. Forum Theatre changed them completely. Before we started organizing public Forums we used to organize Forum Theatre in camera with homogeneous groups, often with women's organizations, where the members know each other. Through Forum Theatre they were able to discuss their personal problems freely. This gave them courage to talk, to act. Now they have learnt techniques of conducting Forum Theatre and they can even do it in the open, in public. They are doing it now and getting a good response. They have also practised many introspective techniques and now have the tools to make a Forum successful. We have noticed that those who take part in this theatre become very expressive. The women's organizations have found Forum Theatre very useful for their purpose. Now there are three all-women teams working independently in three different districts. These teams work with local women's organizations.

Sometime back all our district teams met at one place and we underwent an exercise of critically analysing the work that has been done so far. All the members were divided into

groups and each group was given a questionnaire to answer. One question in it was why do we do theatre? I will narrate to you some of the answers, which will demonstrate why we need to do Theatre of the Oppressed: 'I used to see so many unjust things happening in my village but I could never say anything. I had no right to express my opinion on any subject, even if it concerned me directly. Now, in Forum sessions I get a chance to speak my mind and everyone actually listens to me.'



'Even if I am in the audience I can now participate in something as important as bringing about a change in our circumstances.'

I had never even dreamt of being able to do this before.'

'I used to perform in jattras earlier. Now, after experiencing this theatre, I never want to go back to jatra. But my family is forcing me to because of the money I get from the jatra company. I am torn now between economic necessity and my deeply felt urge to be a part of this theatre.'

What we have achieved through our theatre is that theatre activities and political activities have become one. The way we have adapted Theatre of the Oppressed can really help people in practical terms, help them to fight against different forms of visible and invisible oppression, and at the same time help to sort out personal problems. This theatre not only makes people creative, but also free and confident.

## The Theatre Games of Augusto Boal: A Workshop Diary

Jana Sanskriti, a cultural organization working in West Bengal, organized a four-day workshop with Augusto Boal between 22-26 February. Apart from Jana Sanskriti activist theatre workers, other participating groups from all over the country included: Living Theatre, Anubhav, Annwiksha and Angan Theatre Group, all working in rural West Bengal; Udaya Kumar (Kodagu), Budakattu Ranga Vedike (Coorg Dist.) and Communications (Bangalore), all from Karnataka; Vikas Niketan from Muni Guda, Orissa; Asha Kendra Arogya Nilay from Maharashtra; and Lok Sanskrit Manch from Raipur, Madhya Pradesh. These are all organizations working in rural areas, tribal areas and small towns. STQ requested Jana Sanskriti if a representative, JHUMA BASAK, a trained dancer who is interested in movement as therapy, could participate in the workshop and, in the process, document the entire process.

The result was a comprehensive workshop diary that functions on two levels. First, by detailing the exercises and theatre games Boal introduced, it acts as a way of disseminating some of his techniques to interested theatre practitioners; second, it throws up, in a concrete, empirical manner, several of the issues and concerns talked about elsewhere in this issue, over the whole concept of workshops as a theatre method.

### *Day One: 2pm-6pm*

The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore him to his capacity of action in all its fullness. He too must be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. All these experiments of a people's theatre have the same objective—the liberation of the spectator, on whom the theatre has imposed finished versions of a world—*Theatre of the Oppressed* (Pluto Press, London, 1979) p155.

The workshop opened with Boal introducing the idea of theatre as he sees it, using two hand drawn posters to graphically illustrate his points. What is theatre? Fundamentally, for theatre you need two human beings - theatre is what happens between them. In other words, it is about



communication. In addition, you need passion. And you need an aesthetic space, which does not necessarily mean a stage or platform: this space is created by a performer and an audience, which uses its memory and imagination to create the space along with the performer. This aesthetic space is dichotomic (double: even a single person is double in this space the individual and the performer); plastic (changing form: nothing rigid in/about it. The audience's memory and imagination participates in the dynamism of this plasticity); telescopic and microscopic (bringing close the distant, enlarging the small; bringing the past to the present, focusing on something in order to enlarge it).

Every human being has within him/her a chain of sensation/emotion/reason, one leading to the other, ending in action. We are all much richer within ourselves than we appear to be in our daily lives, with both 'good' and 'bad' inside us. The actor is like a pressure cooker, reaching in to pull out all the mixed-up qualities inside.

After this brief introduction came the first exercise, chosen to break the ice, and encourage the participants to introduce themselves and express themselves through a gesture or action.

### **Game 1:**

All of us stand in a circle. One person at a time runs into the centre of the circle and yells out his/her name to the rest of the group. Along with the name, s/he yells out one word (in the mother-tongue) that begins with the same phonetic sound as the person's name, simultaneously performing a body movement and rhythm to express it. The rest of the group does exactly what the person at the centre does. This is repeated thrice by everyone. Gradually the tempo of the game is increased.

The whole game is repeated again. But, this time the person who runs to the centre of the circle does not say his/her name. The group has to scream out the person's name followed by the word and action done by him/her previously. Again repeated thrice.

The game ended with Boal introducing himself-'Augusto, animal'-and we all yelled it along with him.

This was a good way of dissolving all initial inhibition, of breaking the ice, getting to know each other and getting ready to work together.

## **Game 2:**

### *Force*

(i) In partners. Facing each other. Preferably two people of more or less equal strength. Hold each other by the shoulder and push each other with their entire strength. However, the idea is not to push so hard that one falls off balance. The intention is to create a third force with the two individual forces.

(ii) Sitting back to back. With spines touching, give the full weight of the body on the other. Once again using two individual forces to create one common force that acts like a support to stand up and sit down. Repeat a few times.

(iii) Another variation. Using the same technique, this game is with four people. Facing each other in a small square, sit down with knees straight. Hold each other by the arm. While two opposite partners stand up (from the previous position, without altering it), the other two remain in the sitting position and vice-versa.

These games show how force can actually become a support. It also creates a sense of trust between the partners. Since the games constantly demanded a change of partners and sometimes three/four people working together, it promoted a wider range of interaction between members. Very soon a total group feeling was created.

## **Game 3:**

### *Mirror*

(i) Partners stand facing each other. One holds up the 'mirror' (his/her palm) while the other 'looks' into it. In whichever direction the mirror moves, the partner has to move in that direction. But the forehead must always face the pointed end of the palm. The intention is to make the partner move in unusual ways ... very slow movement.

Change roles.

**There are a number of exercises designed with the objective of making each person aware of his own body, of his bodily possibilities, and of deformations suffered because of the type of work he performs. That is, it is necessary for each one of us to**

feel the 'muscular alienation' imposed on his body by *work-Theatre of the Oppressed*, p127.

(ii) Variation of the same game with three people. The person with the mirror has to hold up both palms for the two partners (while previously it was only one palm), and move the mirrors simultaneously in two completely different directions. Very slow movements.

Change roles among the three.

This is a game that requires, and helps build, both concentration, and eye-body coordination. As long as it was between two people, it was fun and quite easy. But as soon as three people started interacting, the mirror-person had to concentrate much, much more. There is a tendency for the mirror-person to either stop one mirror and move the other or to move both in one direction, so the mirror-person has to be much more careful while operating his/her mirrors.

#### **Game 4:**

##### *The Blind and the Guide*

(i) Once again, take partners. One is to play the blind person (eyes closed) while the other is the guide to the blind person. The partners decide upon a sound that the guide will make (preferably an animal noise as if in a jungle; very soft) and the blind person has to go about the space following the sound given to him/her by the guide.

(ii) Variation of the above game. Both the partners are blind. They start walking about the space, separated from each other. Both start making the sound that they had decided upon before parting, trying to look for the other while still making the sound. Only when the couples have found each other do they open their eyes.

While playing this game, one had to be aware of quite a few of one's senses. Firstly, one had to use one's ears, trying to locate the partner's sound, especially amidst a group of 45 members all making animal sounds together. Secondly, when more than one person made a particular sound effect, how did one recognize the partner's voice along with the

sound? It required concentration. And finally, one had to be aware of the others' presence to avoid collisions.

### **Game 5:**

#### *Both Blind*

(i) Partners face each other. Embrace each other and remaining in that position, close eyes. Gradually move backwards in a straight line, eyes still closed but hands in same position ... When instructed, stop moving backwards and come forward, returning to the same original embracing position. Open eyes only after getting back into the original position. The whole game is done very slowly.

(ii) Keep the same rules, only change the posture to shaking hands. In this game, one had to be particularly aware of one's sense of direction. The more slowly one has to move, in the blind state, the more difficult retaining the sense of direction becomes. Shaking hands, then moving backwards with eyes closed and returning to the same posture, was very difficult (much more so than embracing). Because the point of contact between the two bodies is so limited, one had to have a very good sense of direction so as to move back and forth in a straight line and return to that point of contact. Several of us (including myself) could not return to the point of contact with our partners.

**The plan for transforming the spectator into an actor can be systematized in the following general outline of four stages:**

**First stage: *Knowing the body*: a series of exercises by which one gets to know one's body, its limitations and possibilities, its social distortions and possibilities of rehabilitation.**

**Second stage: *Making the body expressive*: a series of games by which one begins to express one's self through the body, abandoning other more common and habitual forms of expression.**

**Third stage: *The theatre as language*: one begins to practice theatre as a language that is living and present, not as a finished product displaying images from the past:**

**First degree: *Simultaneous dramaturgy*: the spectators 'write' simultaneously with the acting of the actors;**

**Second degree: *Image theatre*: the spectators intervene directly, 'speaking' through images made with the actors' bodies;**

**Third degree: *Forum theatre*: the spectators intervene directly in the dramatic action and act;**

**Fourth stage: *The theatre as discourse*: simple forms in which the spectator-actor creates 'spectacles' according to his need to discuss certain themes or rehearse actions-*Theatre of the Oppressed*, p126.**

Debashish Basu (Angan Theatre Group, West Bengal) comments: 'Boal divided his games into four categories. Some games helped us to develop our sense of feeling by touching things, human beings, or running our hands over various objects, while others were exercises in training us to recognize, identify and make sense of various sounds. A third set of games endeavoured to school our senses and reception capacities. Lastly some were directed to tutoring us to be perceptive, responsive and sensitive to all that happens around us.

'Boal constantly altered or modified his games. However, the distinctive features and nuances of these games were retained even if the forms underwent changes. Thus the monotony of repeating the same sounds and movements were averted. The same game could be played in a number of ways, with a difference in the number of people required in playing it. Thus, a game often began with just two people, soon some more joined in, and at the end it was seen that the entire team of participants had become involved.'

### **Game 6:**

#### *The Leader or The Liar or The Lie*

(i) The group is divided into four circles with approximately ten members in each. Everybody with eyes closed, standing, facing inside the circle. The instructor (Boal) moves around the whole space, touching whoever he wishes to. The touched person becomes the leader (only one person per circle). But nobody has seen it; neither the leader nor the

instructor are to disclose it, only they share this secret. Cue follows for all to open eyes. Standing in position in the circle, everybody starts searching for the leader. Only eyes move and search, no verbal exchange. The leader also pretends to search. When someone feels that s/he has discovered the leader, s/he raises a hand. When every member of the circle has raised a hand, ready to point out their leader the conductor says, 'go', and the members point out their chosen leader, including the actual leader, who pretends.

(ii) The entire game is repeated again.

After this the whole group sits down for a discussion. The members talk about why they thought someone was the leader. What signs did they get from their respective chosen leaders that made them think that s/he might be the leader? Some said that it was the confidence seen on the other person's face or posture that made them think that was the leader while others pointed out a seriousness of attitude or a smiling look.

It was only after this discussion that Boal disclosed that in the first round of the game, he had touched nobody at all; while in the second round, he had touched nearly all! This game was very revealing. What we did was, we believed Boal; he was not questioned at all, yet he was the one who actually lied. This game not only shows up individual psychological traits, but also those of group psychology. How blindly we follow! How blindly we believe, and how blindly we suspect.

### **Game 7:**

#### *Bottle*

(i) The participants were given a plastic bottle and asked to show various ways of using the bottle, whereby the bottle becomes what the person wants it to be. This makes it very clear that an object gains its identity from how it is regarded and used. For example, the bottle was used variously as a baby, a weapon, a machine gun, a knife, a microphone, a guitar, a walking stick, a god, a harmonium, an ektara, and a football.

(ii) Variation of the above game: The same thing repeated with a chair which became by turn a steering wheel, shield, weapon, dance-partner, a cot, bicycle etc.

This exercise prods the creative imagination, develops the ability to improvise and emphasizes the flexibility that is so important in theatre .

It was interesting to note that every culture has a gestural language of its own which may become difficult for a foreigner to comprehend if s/he is not familiar with or doesn't share the idioms of that culture. When the bottle was used as a harmonium or ektara or an idol, it was difficult for Boal to comprehend the gestures. Similarly, when Boal was miming a typewriter (electronic or manually operated), it carried no meaning to a villager who had never seen one, as was pointed out by Babaji from Asha Kendra Arogya Nilay, Maharashtra.

### **Game 8:**

#### *Image of the Hour*

The instructor calls out a certain day and time, like Sunday 7 am, 8 am, 12 noon and so on. The members have to enact what they usually do in real life on those days at those particular times. They are free to talk. Everybody does it together.

In this game another cultural difference was noticeable. For example, Boal gave the first cue for action as 'waking up on your birthday' but he soon realized that most of the people there did not know their own birthdays. In their cultural and social context this had never been a special thing. Some of the members who knew their birthday did not regard it as a great event at all, nothing extraordinary. So Boal changed it to 'midnight of 31st December'. Once again the same problem. For most of the members there, New Year's Eve bore no significance, so they were left with no reaction. If they had been city dwellers, it might have made some impact. Social class also plays a role in the relevance of something like New Year's Eve in one's life.

At that point, advised by the translator, Boal changed it to 'the morning of Ashtami-puja' and there was an immediate outburst of reactions. Most could relate to it immediately. Though there were a few for whom Ashtami was like any other holiday, so they were either lying on the floor reading, or sleeping or playing cards. The participating members from Maharashtra, Orissa, Karnataka had problems. More cultural difference. One wonders what the reaction would have been if it were Holi, or Diwali or Raksha-Bandhan. Very obviously there was not much involvement simply because they could not relate a cultural event like Ashtami-puja to their lives.

**STQ: In one place you mentioned how gestures differ in cultures. You talked about how in one culture people can touch each other very easily and elsewhere it is very difficult. Has anything struck you particularly about the people you work with here?**

**BOAL: Yesterday we were doing a game called the Game of the Hour or the Image of the Hour in which people do movements corresponding to the particular hour of the day. At seven in the morning if you are usually asleep, you lie down. Or perhaps take breakfast or talk to the children. So you reveal what you do during several moments of the day, of the week, of the year. One of the things I said was, 'Show me what you do when you wake up on your birthday.' And they stopped the game, because most of them don't know which day they were born. There was another thing. There is a game called ... Machine of Love and some women were working. So it was love of working they showed. Another game was to create an image of happiness. And yesterday two people showed images of adoration of gods and goddesses. I have never seen an image of happiness as adoration of gods and goddesses. There are many things that are new here, new for me.**

### **Game 9:**

#### *Rainbow of Desire*

(This particular game was just introduced here, the details of it followed on the third day of the workshop.)

As the name suggests, a voluntary member has to come up and express his/her desire (i.e. his or her ideal happiness, dream in life). Freeze in that posture. S/he is asked to go on elaborating the images to more desired happiness. Choosing members from the group, s/he goes on sculpting his/her desired 'happiness' images. There is to be no verbal communication. S/he simply sculpts the desires into images, using the chosen bodies as 'clay'. Seven images of desire are formed, frozen independent of each other. A discussion follows where the group says what the images convey to them and then the image-builder explains them from his/her perspective. Then a comparative study is made of how expressive the images have been,



whether they have been able to express the desires well enough, and how they were able to reach the group.

**The young woman from Otuzco composed the image of castration, placing one of the participants on the ground while another pretended to be castrating him and still another held him from behind. Then at one side she placed a woman praying, on her knees, and at the other side a group of five men and women, also on their knees, with hands tied behind their back. Behind the man being castrated, the young woman placed another participant in a position obviously suggestive of power and violence and, behind him, two armed men pointing their gun at the prisoner. This was the image that person had of her village. A terrible, pessimistic, defeatist image, but also a true reflection of something that had actually taken place. Then the young woman was asked to show what she would want her village to be like. She modified completely the 'status' of the group and regrouped them as people who work in peace and love each other ... Then came the third and most important part of this form of theatre: how can one, starting with the actual image, arrive at the ideal image? How to bring about the change, the transformation, the revolution?-*Theatre of the Oppressed*, pp 135-6.**

What is good about these discussions is that they analyse each image and help individuals to understand not just the work but themselves. After the Rainbow of Desire Boal sat down to talk to us about why one loves doing something and hates doing something else. How this is related to our social standing, daily work and duties and society at large, finally leading to our hidden desires which are expressed through the images. So to understand these images it is necessary to go through this analysis step by step.

**This form of image theatre is without doubt one of the most stimulating, because it is so easy to practise and because of its extraordinary capacity for making thought visible. This happens because use of the language idiom is avoided. Each word has a denotation that is the same for all, but it also has a connotation that is unique for each individual ... The image synthesizes the individual connotation and the collective denotation-*Theatre of the Oppressed*, pp137-8.**

## **Game 10**

### *Image-formation*

A volunteer is to choose at least one other member (and at the most two) to form an image of what s/he wants to express. In Rainbow of Desire, the images were independent of each other, whereas in this case, one has to incorporate the three bodies into one complete image that expresses one particular desire or emotion.

After completing the image, while it is frozen, the rest of the group discusses what it expresses to them. This is followed by the person who forms the image explaining what s/he actually wanted to say through them. In some cases, there was a disagreement regarding the two views, while in others, the images were clear enough to leave no room for disagreement. Many participating members (i.e. the non-Bengali speaking members) did not understand the game at all simply because there was no language to explain the basic principles to them. So when they joined in, it became a mere imitation of action or reproduction of an image/action; otherwise they did not join in the game at all. Thus the participation of members on equal terms was quite difficult. Somebody like Rajappa from Karnataka, who spoke only his own tribal language, had to wait till the night for his friend Uday, also from Karnataka, to explain to him the day's proceedings from what he had managed to comprehend.

### ***Day Two: 2pm-6pm***

The daily sessions started off with Boal enquiring if anybody had any questions or doubts regarding the previous day's work, but there was not much of a response. It was only on the final day of the workshop that a few members did ask some questions. Perhaps a major reason for this was the language barrier.

Even when there were questions bubbling in the minds of the participants, there was an awkwardness about voicing them: In order to create an atmosphere where one feels free to ask questions or raise doubts, there must be some kind of equal footing that gives one the right to question. Such an atmosphere was missing.

## **Game 1:**

### *The Machine*

(i) Everybody stands in a circle. One voluntary member from the group goes to the centre of the circle and starts off with a definite movement that depicts the mechanical action of a machine. Along with the gesture, s/he has to make a rhythmical sound effect. One by one every one joins in the formation, constantly adding new machine images, adding rhythmical sounds to that image. The whole thing continues till every member is a part of the machine formation.

(ii) *Love Machine*. The rules are the same. The only difference is that this particular image and sound speaks of an action that emotes love. Started by one person, gradually joined by all the other members with their own images of love.

This game dramatizes the various gestures by which one expresses an emotion. Through mechanical repetition they get highlighted and stylized. Also, it helps the actor collect a wide variety of gestures and actions expressing a particular emotion.

(iii) *Hate Machine*. Exactly same procedure. The only difference being that the action speaks of a hateful emotion.

(iv) *India Machine*. The final machine formation was that of India. The same rules and procedure for the game as before. In this, one had to present an image of what one thinks of India along with the action, sound and rhythm.

This game was quite chaotic. There were too many of us. Quite naturally somebody did something out of turn, followed by another and another. There was not enough time to stop the game and start all over again. One just had to continue till the end. So it became more a case of going through the motions than actually understanding it, its working, why it is done. So, by the time the India Machine took shape, a lot of the members were standing outside it, not being able to take part. At the end of the formation, Boal made a study of the images and found that most of the women in the formation had created images of suffering, except one, who was singing. Personally speaking, I had a problem with this game-it became quite difficult for me to think of only one image of India and present it in an action. My mind is too full of various images of India. It becomes quite impossible to make a choice because no one image would encapsulate all these images. I just ended up showing a very, very minor image of India, a very

small part of India. No single image can stand for what I conceive of as India. I think any country of the world is too vast for that.

There was quite a lot of controversy over the India image. At night when I went to the dormitory, I found that there was much dissatisfaction among the members regarding the India Machine. Noorsingha Soorangi (Vikas Niketan, Orissa): 'When we were doing the -India Machine, I lost my mood to a certain extent. I saw it and wondered, is our India that degraded! ... and I didn't like it when that person from Paris [Pierre-Alain Baud] and even Boal's son [Julien] started taking pictures and so many of them. Before that there was no flash at all.'

Samir Kundu (Annwiksha, North 24 Parghanas): 'Most of the people who had come to take part in the workshop were from middle or lower middle class families, and many were unemployed as well. If one of them was asked what s/he would do, if s/he was made a king all of a sudden, no doubt the answer would be: "I would keep two huge stacks of muri [puffed rice], beside me, and whenever I felt like it, I would eat from the stack on the right and then from the one on the left."

'Unfortunately this is the most that the wretched of our poor country can contemplate. So when Boal asked a participant to enact some kind of indigenous activity, which he loved to do, with his constricted inventiveness he could show nothing other than himself seemingly working at a handloom: sound and rhythm expressed through a combination of movement.

'I heard the excited Boal proclaiming "Oh, this is India." I felt perturbed and alarmed. The apprehension heightened when I saw that as the 44 of us were trying to express something, no less than thirteen snaps were promptly taken by Boal, his son Julien and companion Pierre. They were so eagerly taking snaps that by this time the resentment and subtle consternation in me had given place to great annoyance.'

## **Game 2:**

In partners. Both decide upon two different sounds by the two individuals. They practice the sound so that they will be able to recognize it later on even with their eyes closed. Once

they are sure about their sound and feel that they'd be able to recognize it, they venture out in the entire space in different directions, with eyes shut.

After a certain period Boal gives the cue, after which all the members start making their respective sounds in a very low voice. The intention is to seek out the partner, keeping one's ears open (but eyes closed) to hear the partner's call while at the same time making the sound to help the other person locate you.

This game is a variation of the Blind and the Guide game. In that game, the partners were to decide upon one sound but here there are two different sounds. One has to work one's memory, hearing, and voice all simultaneously and at the same time be aware of others' presence in the space so as not to bump against them.

### **Game 3:**

#### *The Empty/Blank Character*

Partners. One person plays the blank character (the oppressed) while the other plays the protagonist (the oppressor). The protagonist plays the part of someone who oppresses him/her in real life without disclosing which character s/he plays. It has to be a direct relationship of oppression (not something like the Prime Minister, or a system). The blank character has to react to the protagonist. Boal gives a certain timing with a cue whereby, with every 'change' the protagonist has to add something, like

1st change of the protagonist/oppressor-only facial expression.

2nd change of the protagonist/oppressor-add body gestures.

3rd change of the protagonist/oppressor-use space, i.e. move along with gestures and expression.

4th change of the protagonist/oppressor-add sound (not words)

5th change of the protagonist/oppressor-to everything, add dialogue.

In the case of the blank character, his/her changes in reaction follow the same arc as the protagonist. A complete exchange of movement, gestures, expression, space and words takes place between the two characters only on the final 5th change.

After the game, a discussion follows. The protagonist discloses the actual character s/he wanted to represent and the blank character speaks of what s/he perceived the character to be.

Usually the communication is clear. Only in rare cases did a misunderstanding take place. An entire reversal of gender did happen, but *only* in two cases.

Unfortunately there was no time to change roles between the protagonist and the blank character and do the game again. (As a matter of fact, lack of time was a major issue in the workshop. There was a general feeling among the participants that too many things were happening too fast. Either there should have been more time or fewer games.)

This game was enjoyed a lot by all the members. Once again the discussion which followed it was even more interesting and revealing. This particular aspect, of analysis, I find very positive about Boal's method of conducting a workshop. He emphasizes analysing the game, understanding its process of working. This helps one to understand one's self, why one created a particular image, and in a broader perspective, also to understand others in respect to one's self.

But there are a few doubts arising out of the game. The game needs a protagonist to choose a character who oppresses him/her and with whom there is a daily, direct exchange in his/her real life. My question is, what if the oppression comes from a certain 'system' like an office or some kind of an institution? The system makes my oppression general, shared by a few, therefore public in a sense, but at the same time it is personal because it affects my personal development-in that case is it the system which is oppressing me or the representatives? Then what or who shall be dealt with as being oppressive, or is it both? How does Theatre of the Oppressed work this out? Both the oppressor and the oppressed are victimized by the entire power-structure itself-then is it that easy to demarcate some individuals as oppressors and some as oppressed? Does not the 'system' become a much greater source of oppression? And it is also very personal because it does affect the development of every individual. In that case, the 'public' is the 'personal'. Then can one question whether Theatre of the Oppressed is limited to a certain pattern of oppression?

## **Game 4:**

### *Image and Counter-image*

Partners. One is the pilot, the other is the co-pilot. The pilot has to think of a true story from his/her own life and relate it to the co-pilot. They are given 10 minutes. They have to close their eyes while one relates the story, and the other listens to it attentively. At the end of those ten minutes, they both have to make images of the story with the help of the other members, but independently of each other, without discussing it or consulting the other members. While the pilot and the co-pilot work out their images, the rest of the group observes and analyses what the images are trying to say.

Next, they are given 3 more chances to make changes within the set image (maybe make it into a completely different image according to their desire to express the story more explicitly.) Then a comparative study follows where the entire group, including the pilot and the co-pilot, sits down to an analytical discussion about the pilot's conveying the story and the co-pilot's receiving the story (while the images freeze), and how clearly the images depict the story.

This game needs one to have a very clear grasp of the story told to one, and to represent it through gestures and images that clearly convey the basic points of the story.

By the time this game started, it was late afternoon. There was no time to go through all the pairs' images and counter-images. There were no less than 20 couples and it was quite impossible to do the image/counter-image for them all. So only one pair was taken up and analysed in some attempt at detail. Thus the understanding of the working of this technique for this particular game was clear enough, but there was not enough time to apply it to all the members.

## **Game 5:**

Boal invites a volunteer to come up and enact a scene between a couple which is fairly typical of our society. The volunteer can pick a partner to do the scene with. After a quick discussion, the scene began-it had to continue until Boal gave the signal to stop.

The scene begins with a quarrel between husband and wife over dowry, with the man demanding that the wife's father pay up as promised, and she protesting that her father does not

have the money. It progresses from words and tears to blows. He tries to throw her out of the house, she clings to him, refusing to go, he douses her with kerosene, lights a match and sets her on fire. She writhes, screaming for help. Once she dies, he drags out her body secretly and begins to bury it.

At this point Boal stopped the scene. He seemed confused-was this a fairly typical scene between a man and woman in our society? Did the woman really have so little power, was the relationship so unequal as to have no scope for a dialogue? Because there cannot be a dialogue in situations of complete and total inequality. There was some dissension in the response of the participants, but one segment spoke up clearly stating that such a situation between husband and wife was quite common here. •

Boal then said that he would have to rethink his approach, and come up with some other technique to address such a situation. He explained that theatre can only offer solutions in a situation of oppression, but once it develops to the point of physical violence or, as he put it, aggression, then theatre was helpless.

### ***Day Three: 10.45 am-1 pm, 3pm-5 pm***

The morning session started off with Boal's enquiry about any doubts or questions. There were only two or three questions and then straightaway we moved on to 'action!'

#### **Game 1:**

Facing inside the circle, stand very close to each other. Everybody turns to their right and sits on the lap of the person behind him/her.

In that sitting position the whole group has to move taking very small steps. Everybody together takes a right step forward and then a left, right and so on. The entire circle starts moving. The whole group fell down because one person took a fast step, missed the rhythm and fell down. To have the circle move, it is very necessary to all take steps together ... this game builds group cooperation. Everybody enjoyed this very much and we were ready and eager to start work.



### **Game 2:**

(i) The game starts off in a circle. But after the game gets going, it is not important to maintain the circle, one can move in any direction. Very slow tempo. The rule is that while moving one has to try and touch the ground with as little of the body as possible. One does not necessarily have to move in a vertical position, but rather explore one's own body through various other ways of moving (like standing on one's head, rolling on the ground, moving on one's knees and so on). (ii) Variation of the above game: The game continues, the individuals moving on their own. On a given cue by Boal, they get into groups of three, four, eight, according to the number he calls out. While moving in the said groups one has to maintain body contact with at least one person. Gradually all the 45 members get together, carrying on with their movements. Finally they separate again (on a given cue by the conductor) and start working individually as they had started off doing in the beginning.

This game went off very well. Everybody enjoyed it and felt very involved. This was perhaps because there was not much to explain by way of technicalities, hence no problem in understanding the rules of the game. One simply had to explore one's own body and those of others. Language was not a problem in this game. It was non-verbal communication.

### **Game 3:**

(i) The whole group starts walking (but not running) about the space at a very fast pace. As Boal calls out a certain number, the group has to divide itself according to that given number. (ii) Variation of the above game. Instead of just by numbers, groups have to form by shape as well. For example, get together in a group of 15 in the shape of a rectangle or circle.

This requires alertness, quick reflexes and cooperation between group members.

#### **Game 4:**

The group runs very slowly (but can't walk) in various directions. The conductor calls out maybe a certain category (like 'all those in black trousers'), and all the members wearing black trousers have to get together.

This was also a good deal of fun. One had to run about the whole space looking for his/her family of green tops or black trousers. These games got the group generally charged up.

**STQ: As a theatre person conducting workshops, what do you do when you encounter scenes/games spontaneously created by the participants leading to extreme situations like violence against women, bride burning, police inaction ? How do you handle such situations?**

**BOAL: In fact the Theatre of the Oppressed started with situations which were extreme. Usually for cases like these we use Forum theatre. We try to see how it could come to such a climax. Of course if a man beats a woman inside his house you can't do anything. She is weaker than him. But what led him to do this? What happened before? Could we go back moments before [that climax]? Could she have done something about it or not? We cannot do a Forum theatre about a man who is facing a death squad with the sergeant about to say fire. You cannot replace the protagonist and have a Forum theatre at that point. But we try to see what led to such a situation. We cannot do Forum in a situation of aggression. A situation like that is no longer oppression-that's aggression, physical force against physical force. We should go in before. That was what we did in Latin America.**

The Forum, I believe, is adequate to treat objective conflicts like this one [the bride-burning incident enacted by the participants]. That does not prevent us, for instance, from trying to analyse the situation. Psychologically how did the people involved get to that point? This is a social problem, it's a political problem, it's an economic problem. But there is also a psychological side to it. So I would like to analyse a man who does that. What goes on in his head? A man who is capable of first accepting a woman just because of the dowry, without knowing if he likes her or not, it's not for love, he wants the dowry; and secondly,

**he is capable of killing her, and third, to, hide the corpse. So what goes on in the head of this man? He is very sick. But he is sick because the society is sick. So we should study it more carefully. I stopped there, because the technique that I had proposed would not be useful. It would be useful only if there was a balance in the relationship, if both had the same power. Then you can have an analytical image. But when there is inequality you cannot use it, you can use the Forum theatre maybe, or the Cop in the Head. Tomorrow I will think about that. We can do other things.**

### **Game 5:**

#### *Rainbow of Desire* –

A voluntary member has to come up and enact a real-life situation of oppression in his/her life. Once again the oppression should be very direct. It must be a situation of oppression and not aggression; that is, it should be a situation of extreme tension but in the form of verbal exchange, not physical violence. It had been decided beforehand that the crisis should be a man-woman relationship, since it is a universal problem.

After the enactment of the particular scene of oppression the oppressed person is asked if s/he holds any desires which can alter the situation, leading towards a solution. The desires are then frozen into images using the bodies of the spect-actors according to his/her direction (not verbal direction but gestures). The desired images of the oppressed are frozen in visual form while s/he along with the spect-actors observes and analyses them. The discussion that followed showed clearly that the oppressed had those various desires in him/her which s/he could have chosen as reactions in his/her real life situation. Since all those images were in that person, what made him/her choose a particular way of reacting and not the other ways ? Does that mean that s/he is conditioned by social upbringing to behave, react, interact in a certain given manner?

For the oppressor, a similar analysis followed from the way he interacted with the various images.

**STQ:** After going through the workshop, what are the things that you found most challenging, what have you learnt, how do you respond to the whole experience?

**BOAL:** This is the first time I am in India, and culturally it is quite different from the other countries I have worked in. I have been all over Europe but Europe is part of my culture, I have been all over United States, but United States is even more present in Brazil than Europe. I have been in Africa, but we have a very strong African influence in Brazil. Half the population in Brazil is of African origin. Brazilian music is also highly influenced by African music. So, wherever I have been before, in Latin America, in North America or in Africa, I more or less knew the countries and I could handle it without much difficulty. Of course, even when you work in the same country, same city, every new group that you have is a surprise. In Rio de Janeiro you work with one group and the next group is not the same, because people are not the same. There is always surprise. But you can more or less foresee, you have an idea. Here there were many things that I could not understand. So, I used to go very slowly. For example, on the third day we were trying to do a technique and suddenly I saw that the protagonist wanted to talk about her problems with her husband. In the beginning she wanted to talk about her desires, but as soon as she saw her desires made concrete by other people she made an image of a desire in which she wanted to strangle herself, she made an image of a desire in which she wanted to hit her husband. Then she made an image of herself trying to make love. All these images made perfect sense. But what motivated her was seeing her desires made into concrete images, to see other people symbolizing her desires. Therefore when she saw her own desires done by other people she was afraid and then her only desire for the moment was to go away from the protagonistic role. That was the desire for that moment, 'I don't want to go on, I want to get out of that place'. Then I had to jump some steps we usually go through, to place the emphasis not on her but on the group, on other people.

**STQ:** So you had to adjust your method.

**BOAL:** Yes, because what is important is not the method but the people. Techniques are developed because people need them to solve problems.

**S'TQ: What happens at that point, if you feel that a person is suffering?**

**BOAL: I try not to let her suffer. Because, let's say, there are kinds of suffering that are not bad in themselves. If you suffer but you also learn something, that is good. But sometimes what you learn is too much for that particular point. Then you don't want it, you suffer because you cannot absorb that knowledge. In this case she was suffering because she was not able to absorb, to understand what was visible. At that point not to stop her would have been traumatic for her. So I stopped her. But you cannot say, 'We are stopping because you are not capable of doing it: That would be horrible. So we don't stop, but go in a different direction and thus the pressure is taken away from her and we put our concentration on somebody else, so that she can become a spectator.**

**There is a feeling that I have ... that this society is extremely violent, because the expressions are also extremely strong. Extreme violence meets extreme repression: that is the feeling I have. This is not a diagnosis. I may be completely wrong. But this is the way I feel. There is an enormous drive to break the structure but the structure is so ancient and so strong that it is not possible to break it. Why do I say this? In the game called Two Revelations most of the participants talked about marrying out of their caste. I have been told that the caste system does not exist any more in India, it is against the law and so on. In fact that is not true.**

**Q: Going back to the man-woman relationship that you were doing on the third day through the Rainbow of Desire, do you think that if the spect-actors were from the same social background and had gone through the same crisis in life, the protagonist would have felt much more relaxed with the situation?**

**BOAL: Sure. Some sort of homogeneity would have made it easier. People have come from different groups and they don't know each other. Sometimes you look at a face and you don't know what is behind that face, it scares you. That is why on the last day it worked extremely well, I think. I deliberately I asked them not to tell a story from life, but to tell something that could have happened. And as soon as they were sure that they didn't have to talk about themselves, they started talking about themselves. Because once you start talking you usually talk about your own feelings, about your own self.**

For the Rainbow of Desire, Boal asked for a voluntary member who would come and relate his/her story, a situation of oppression from real life. But this is not what happened. X was made to get up and 'volunteer' for the part because she happened to be the 'fortunate' one who was going through tremendous oppression by her husband, including physical aggression. She was struggling to cope, along with a daughter of six. X did not come forward of her own choice, though Boal was given to understand otherwise. It must be remembered that X was enacting something that had happened to her. She was still facing the aftermath of that crisis. It was her reality. While the man was *playing* the role of her husband.

The dispute in the relationship arose out of the inability of the wife's father to fulfill the dowry demands. The scene started off with a verbal exchange which went on for a while. The husband took the initiative in the verbal fight. It was very difficult for X to carry on the verbal fight for long. For her, I don't think it's possible to sustain any kind of confrontation, whether verbal or physical. One needs to see her to realize this. So after a point she just kept quiet, sitting absolutely quietly, no words at all. Boal let the silence continue. The tension that was created by her silence was much more laden than any verbal exchange or gesture. The silence continued for 3 to 4 minutes. It was very intense at that point. X's eyes were fixed blankly, lost somewhere. After that the verbal exchange was started again, the husband shouting and abusing. Boal stopped at this point and asked X what she wanted or desired most at that very moment.

In answer, X took the *aanchai* of her sari and wound it round her neck, without saying a single word, ready to hang herself. At that point, she had tears rolling down her cheeks as silently as she had been sitting and staring blankly a while ago. We all saw that and heard Boal say, 'What is your next desire?' X was urged on to carry on with her next desire, to show them in images. She wiped off her tears and carried on ... I was standing there, observing her with the rest of the group, saw her cry, felt my own tears fill my throat but did not have the courage to run and give her the support we all look for at a time like this. But of course our interest was meant to lie more in analysing the images and understanding the form of the game than worrying about what X was going through at that very instant, then and there.

**... an intense emotion memory exercise, or for that matter any emotion exercise, can be very dangerous unless one afterwards 'rationalises' what has happened. Actors discover things when they take the risk of experiencing emotions. Which doesn't**

**mean to say that we should dismiss emotion exercises; on the contrary, they must be done, but with the aim of 'understanding' the experience, not simply feeling it. We must know why a person is moved, what is the nature of this emotion, what its causes are-not limit ourselves simply to how. We want to experience phenomena, but above all we want to know the laws that govern these phenomena. And that is the role of art-not only to show how the world is, but also why it is thus and how it can be transformed ... Thus we must be absolutely clear that emotion 'in itself', disordered and chaotic, is worth nothing. The important thing about emotion is what it signifies. We cannot talk about emotion without reason or conversely, about reason without emotion; the former is chaos and the latter pure abstraction-Games for Actors *and* Non-actor's (Routledge, London, 1992), pp 47-8.**

Did Boal understand what X was going through? With his age, experience, sensitivity, it is quite difficult for me to believe that he did not feel X's distress. Was he too engrossed in explaining the technical aspect of the Rainbow of Desire to notice her tears, or did he decide to ignore that part? There were suggestions coming from all over, advising her, encouraging her to continue. There were too many things happening at the same time, it got out of hand. Boal started pressurizing X to go further with her desires. To be hanged was her first desire, she had to go on till her seventh desire (the seven colours of a rainbow). Boal shouted at the other members saying,

'Don't speak ... nobody... only me and the translator.' By this time there was agitation with the group talking, discussing among themselves. All at once I heard Boal say, 'Pay attention or go away.' Pay attention to what? Another oppression on X that I witness? Were we not, each and every one of us along with Boal, being an oppressor of X at that very moment? We were all part of that oppressive situation and equally responsible. If we are both oppressed and oppressor ourselves, then what gives us the right to talk of oppression when we are being part of that very chain of oppression? Are not our biases likely to rule us, as in this situation? What when there is intellectual oppression, what when love itself might also become an oppression? Then we come back to an earlier question-does Theatre of the Oppressed deal with only a certain pattern of oppression?

Rainbow of Desire worked as a group analysis but at the cost of what? What about that individual whose pain was being 'shown', 'sold' in a very different way? 'Why don't you go and do it?'-Boal asked X when she was hesitating. Was Boal so inexperienced as not to understand the confusion on her face? Are we so inexperienced as not to understand that coming from the social background that X comes from, it was impossible for her to say 'no' to all of us? Is it possible to share one's pain so 'publicly' and with so many unknown, strange people who don't even mentally share her background? Perhaps if it had been a homogenous group of just women, women who had gone through experiences of a similar kind, X would not have felt as 'exposed' as she did. Once the session was over we dispersed for lunch, but for X, who had relived her humiliation and pain in front of-us, lunch was impossible.

Perhaps Rainbow of Desire should be used specifically as therapy, in a small group, and only with genuine volunteers. It can have a very positive impact as well. Samir Kundu feels, 'Rainbow of Desire, both the game and its techniques, will be of a great help as long as I live. Boal believes that in addition to deliberating on the character that the actor impersonates i.e. the role he plays, he must also strive to know himself completely and must endeavour to bring to the fore the things that lie hidden deep within his own psyche. In our lives, even the closest of relationships break off owing to misunderstandings, or lacunae of communication. If this game could only be taught to a few others, then nothing would go wrong between man and man.'

### **Game 6:**

#### *Two Revelations*

Partners. One plays the parent (mother or father) and the other is the child (son or daughter). A man can play the role of a mother or daughter, similarly a woman can play the role of a father or son. Fifteen minutes are given to the pairs within which the parent has to disclose a secret to the child and the child has to disclose a secret to the parent. Both have to decide upon a fixed age for both the parent and the child and the nature of the secret depends upon it. Each has to tell a secret to the other which will shock the other, shake the very roots of the relationship and serve as a cultural shock..

After the two revelations had been made to the respective partners, a group discussion followed where each pair talked of their two revelations. A study of the revelations showed -



Caste problems: where someone wanted to marry somebody for love but the father/mother/family disapproved because of difference of caste or inequality of caste (About 10 couples)  
Sexual problems: mostly revealing secrets of conception before marriage.

A few extra-marital affairs.

One or two on the dilemma of abortion

One of theft.

Boal pointed out that all over the world, sexual problems are the major revelation. This is because sexual repression is the greatest pressure on society. In the case of India, it seems to be the same.

Interestingly enough, the caste problem and its reading through the game tells us of another major repression in our culture. This kind of a study actually helps in understanding the basics of a culture, where its repression lies and how that actually builds up the individual's psyche. I am not sure how much this game was able to reach all the participating members. As I have pointed out, the Hindi speaking members faced a major communication gap because of language. Since this game has absolutely nothing to do with the physique or 'action' but on the contrary needs one's cognitive faculties and an ability to understand the reason for playing such a game, I doubt how much was accessible to one-third of the total group members.

This was the final game of the day; resuming after lunch, after the morning's experience with X's incident, there was a certain unrest in the group. There was a distinct lack of enthusiasm and a feeling of disappointment.

Samir Kundu: 'In this game, each one had to confess to the other some act committed on his or her part which would destabilize the very foundation of the relationship as it exists in Indian culture. I found it extremely objectionable that we would have to play a game of this nature before an outsider. Hence I chose to dissimulate. During this game I was trying to gauge what Boal was aiming to find out. Boal was asked, "How does this game help in theatre?" His answer, "Even I'm searching for a solution."'

### *Day Four: 3pm-7.30 pm*

Started off with the question-answer session. There was more questioning today in comparison to the last few days.

Some of the questions asked were as follows:

**Q:** There are many desires not referred to, and there are many desires overlapping. Sometimes some get expressed, others don't. Is it possible that some desires suppress other desires?

**Boal:** Yes, in yesterday's game [X's experience] we saw desires that are contradictory. In one the woman wanted to kill herself and in another she wanted to make love; she wanted to go away from the house and try and talk to her husband. They are contradictory. What we showed yesterday was the basic technique. But there are many more elements. One of them is the wish to make the desires fight one another-and then they could improvise a debate and discussion between the woman who wants to go away and the woman who wants to talk. Then, there is one image in which the woman wants to strangle him, and in another she wants to make love. These are contradictory images. So there should be a dialogue among themselves. One side should try to convince the other. This is what we call the Agora of Desires. Agora in Greek is the place where everyone can go and discuss.

**Q:** We have a lot of negative desires also. Is there a way of working them out through the methodology you are working with?

**Boal:** What's a negative desire? Because all desires are affirmative.

**Q:** For example if someone wants to die, or jealousy, anger, sexual desire?

**Boal:** They are not negative at all. Sexual desire is not negative at all.

**Q:** But it is considered as negative by the society. Is there a way to work it out?

**Boal:** The game we did yesterday, Two Revelations, showed that there is a strong sexual repression. What the theatre can do is to show things that happen, to clarify them, to make them visible. But as I said on the first day, it is not the key that opens the door, but whoever handles the key. Theatre is only a means to know reality. What has to be worked out is what she can do and what she cannot, what she wants to do and what she is afraid of doing. I said on the first day, we have a personality which is a reduction of a person. Inside a person we

have a lot of desires. Each one must try to see them. One of the means can be theatre, but theatre doesn't give a recipe. In general, one way to control the desires is to satisfy them. But we cannot satisfy all the desires. We must remember that. A law or a norm is an abstraction and it is the same for everyone, but each one is a different person. Sometimes there is a law we don't obey, but we should because it is good for all. For example, you should not kill. That's a law. We have to have laws to keep the society together. The problem is when in a given society those norms make people oppressed, make people unhappy. If we are living in a society and there are laws that make people unhappy we have to change it. Because it's not fair. One of the things we are discussing is the oppression of women. This is not fair, we must change it, fight it, because it brings unhappiness.

**Q:** You talked about personality on the first day. You gave the example of a pressure cooker and said the work of theatre is to let the good things repressed inside the pressure cooker out and integrate them into \*the personality. This would lead to a change in the personality. Today, when you are talking about this, why are you not talking about the changes that can take place in the personality? You are talking about taking them out and understanding them, but you haven't mentioned whether it's possible to change through this process.

**Boal:** Yes. The fact is that if one participant is capable of doing something here, he will say, 'Yes, I have done this here, now I do it there.' To do it here as a fiction is a rehearsal for doing it in your reality. If you want an example, there was a girl in France who had to take a train every midnight and had to wait one hour at the station. There were always men who would provoke her, abuse her, because she was alone, reading a newspaper and taking a glass of wine. She said that she wanted to fight against them. So we made a scene in the form of Forum Theatre where someone else replaced her and showed her what she should have done to get the men away from her. We rehearsed that. Then she said, 'Well I have done it in a room. I have chased the men away. But it is not a real rail station.' Then we said okay, we are going to do an Invisible Theatre in the railroad station. And then we went to the station and did the play there. Only, instead of an actor a real person came and provoked her, someone who used to do it every day. But now she had rehearsed it before and she knew what to do. She started shouting at the man. She felt good because she had already done it.

**Q:** About the game called Two Revelations. In that, sex, which is a taboo in our culture, played a very major role. What is taboo in Brazil or in France? What are the taboos that have come out when you worked there?

**Boal:** Sex is taboo all over the world. But in some societies it's more taboo than in others. In the same game one revelation that came out is the fear of not being what we are. Identity. A father or mother reveals that he is not their son. This comes up very often. And the desire to go away. Not to stay where you are. And there is one fear that is revealed very often in France, United States and England-the fear of AIDS.

**Q:** Yesterday we talked about the oppressor and the oppressed in our own self. That we are oppressors at various levels. Is there a possibility of intellectual oppression?

**Boal:** Sure. When I talk about oppression I don't talk only about oppressions like salary oppression. Of course intellectual oppression exists.

**Q:** The question is whether Theatre of the Oppressed can become intellectual oppression? Isn't that the question?

**Boal:** Can the Theatre of the Oppressed become oppression? I think not, because it is democratic. Whoever does not want to do it doesn't have to do it. So Theatre of the Oppressed is a choice. It's not an obligation. So it cannot be oppression. But I am not quite sure if I have understood your question and whether my answer is correct.

**Q:** I am wondering, since we are both oppressed and oppressor at the same time, what gives us the choice to do theatre for the oppressed?

**Boal:** It is Theatre of the Oppressed and not for the oppressed. It's a big difference. In theatre for the oppressed, in whatever form you do it you offer something readymade. Theatre of the Oppressed is when the oppressed himself or herself does it. It is not for them, it is by them.

**Q:** But we at various levels tend to be oppressors in various stages of life. In that case, how does the Theatre of the Oppressed work?

**Boal:** Sometimes it works in the sense ... to show that even if we are oppressed we behave oppressively against other people. When we were working in Chile we met one of the most

important trade union leaders against Pinochet, against dictatorship. Outside he was a trade union leader fighting oppression, but inside his house he was a dictator like Pinochet was. He discovered that through my play. When we analyse a situation, the oppressed in that situation is not oppressing, he is the oppressed. We analyse that moment. This doesn't prevent him from being an oppressor in another moment. It is not that he oppresses and at the same moment is himself oppressed. For example, a worker is oppressed by his boss because of the conditions of work, because of his salary etc-that's the moment we are analysing. And then, for example, he oppresses his children. But we are not analysing this. We should not say that as he also oppresses his children let us forget about him being oppressed. No, we should analyse each moment and try to find a solution for fighting against the boss and also not allow him to oppress his children.

After this session, the games began.

### **Game 1:**

The whole group is divided into two equal halves. From both the sides, one representative is chosen who acts as the head. They stand facing each other. One group 'attacks' with a sword while the other group tries to dodge the 'slash'.

The movements are with free hands, though it must look like real sword movements. The attacker can move in 5 directions: up and down, right and left, horizontally, vertically and piercing through the stomach. The speed of the game is gradually increased. Participants have to drop out if they fail to 'dodge' and are 'slain'.

This is a reflex-building exercise, requiring concentration and coordination.

### **Game 2:**

#### *The President's Bodyguard*

In groups-one person walks like a VIP, and facing him another mirrors his actions, while beside and behind others imitate him. At a given signal, the 'President' turns and then the person now facing him becomes the mirror, and so on.

Next, sounds are added to the gestures, and the changes are speeded up.

Like the preceding game, this also is a reflex-building exercise that helps develop observation and perception.

### **Game 3:**

Everybody walks about the space with closed eyes in any direction. They continue walking in that state till Boal gives the cue to stop.

Hold onto the nearest person with eyes closed. Then start feeling the person through touch- (i) try to understand whether it's a man or woman (ii) hair length, hair cut (iii) eyes, nose, ears, forehead and so on. While touching, create a mental image of the person that one is touching. Later on when the cue is given to open our eyes, we see the real image and compare it with the image in our minds. During this game, Boal repeatedly said, 'feel what you touch.'

The reason he said this was probably because the mental image that we created was to bear a resemblance to what we touched. It was not merely a question of touching, but feeling: the texture, curves, and so on, creating an image of that person with the help of that. There was only one pair who had created an image of a woman when the real image was of a man. The image that I created of the man I touched was very different from the real image. Perhaps I did not concentrate enough. Or perhaps one's own fantasies start working.

### **Game 4:**

Once again the man-woman relationship is taken up. Here is it between husband and wife: a situation of oppression which must have a dispute in it. Today Boal stated that the incident does not have to be a real-life one for the person who is to play that particular scene.

The situation is rural. Both husband and wife have come back from working in the field. The husband decides to go out for a chat while the wife cooks, takes care of household work, the children etc. The dispute arises over the wife wanting the husband to stay home and help her in her work while he wants to go out.

After the scene has been enacted, Boal requests five volunteers from the rest of the group to come and show five different exaggerated images of the relationship, for the man

as well as the woman. Interestingly the five images of the man are to be done by five different women spect-actors and the five images of the women by five men.

The rest of the spect-actors observe the different images and pair them up by comparing and matching them. Now all the five image-couples have to go through a verbal exchange one by one in their frozen image positions; keeping to the same crisis point that the original couple had started off with. The idea is to make the scene as distorted as possible, but aggression is checked by keeping them in frozen postures and through verbalization.

After that the five images of the wife are done by five men who take their frozen positions and go on talking in a low voice, all together. The original 'husband' moves among them and only when he comes up to individual images do they speak aloud, exchanging dialogues with him. A very interesting situation took place here when one image started talking in Oriya and the husband continued talking in Bengali. It became clear that to express basic emotion language is not all that important. It is, rather, the tone that is important.

Similarly, the five images of the husband are done by five women.

After seeing all these interactions, the original husband-wife team has to re-enact the scene keeping all these exchanges in mind, how they would incorporate these elements into the particular scene enacted now. The spect-actors are invited to give suggestions and help the couple to choose. This gives a wide range of ideas that can be worked upon while forming a scene.

In this particular game Boal said that a voluntary member can come and enact an incident of oppression which does not have to be a real-life incident. Though this helped us go through the whole game much more easily and in a relaxed manner, to analyse every layer and comprehend it, I personally find that this can actually change Boal's entire emphasis of using drama in a therapeutic manner. If one is free to play a role then it becomes a 'performance'. The whole objective changes. If I am not mistaken in understanding Boal, then he is not interested in 'performance' or a 'production' but rather in finding a way of using theatre for the individual's inner development. The discussion that followed after every game was primarily a method that took one back to one's own self, one's psyche and at the same time helped one to study others. Theatre becomes a kind of

therapy, a method for introspection leading to self -development as an individual. Boal himself calls this technique an 'Introspective Technique'. For this kind of work I definitely think that one cannot function on a mass scale. It demands privacy and intimacy. The intensity is lost when working with such a huge group. It needs to function in a homogeneous group, over a longer time span.

## **Game 5**

### *Image for Word*

Stand in a circle. Face outside the circle. Form an image in your mind of 'What Theatre is to you.' When ready with the image, face into the circle. When the whole group has faced inside the circle, Boal gives the cue 'go' and we all freeze in our image positions.

Next, look for the family to which your image belongs (like images that speak of revolution, hope, suffering, happiness) and gather together.

Then each family is taken up while the rest of the group observes. In the first change the 'family-members' make individual movements. And in the final change they add words to the action, but not more than a phrase.

Once again I did not know what to do. Though it happens to be my favourite game (not because of the game as such but because of the question) it was very difficult for me to do any one thing showing what theatre is to me. It means so much, the images are so vivid that one either has to find a way to show all these images or not do any action at all. Hard choice. I faced the same problem while doing the India Machine.

An interesting study would have been to ask this question at the beginning of the workshop and again right at the end. One could have traced some kind of development-what we thought of theatre then and what we think of theatre now, after having gone through the workshop with Boal. Has it changed or remained the same?

### **General Observations:**

When Boal walked in to begin the workshop, he did not greet the group waiting for him. He walked in with his shoes on-the only person who ever wore shoes in that space, where it was clearly stated that footwear was not allowed-and sat in a chair, while all of us sat at his feet looking up at him. (Perhaps he needed to use a chair because of his age or a back



problem, but he never explained or talked about it, not even as a joke.) Boal himself taught us how such gestures, such images, can speak volumes about an attitude or relationship. We felt very clearly that he was not one of us, there was a distance maintained right from the beginning. This distance was emphasized by the fact that he was not living in the same compound as all of us, nor did he spend time with us informally, getting to know us or our backgrounds. He is doing Theatre of the Oppressed, yet with so many theatre activists from all over India under one roof, why did he not once try to know about their work, the problems they face while working in remote villages, while working with the tribals, in the forests? Was there was no desire on his part to get to know the members there, where they came from, what kind of work they did? The other participants noticed this lack of interest and commented on it:

Samir Kundu: 'He (Boal) is not even having a cup of tea with me, nor does he chat with me ... so I haven't been able to form a relationship with Boal. On the other hand I have been able to build much better relations with Pierre ... maybe because he wanted to talk to me as much as I wanted to. It is together that something is formed. But I've never felt that Boal wanted that. Here we don't have a workshop but a class. The relationship is like a teacher-student one.'

Thus the distance between Boal and the participating members kept getting wider and communication of any kind became very difficult, as we saw in the question-answer session every morning. The personal distancing was making professional work difficult.

A very basic problem in the workshop was the language barrier. Communication between Boal and the participating members was quite difficult, and, for some, impossible. Because of the communication gap due to language many games were inaccessible to quite a few members.

The entire communication between Boal and the rest of the members was through translation. Thus the translator held a very responsible position. But there were a few technical problems regarding the translation. Often terms and concepts were inaccurately translated. (For example, Theatre of the Oppressed was translated as theatre of the *shoshita* which is more akin to 'exploitation' than 'oppression'.) Moreover, the translation was only into and from Bengali, whereas the members from the other states like Maharashtra, Kamataka, Orissa, could only follow Hindi and a very slight amount of English, besides their own language. Very obviously,

for this section of the participating members, there was a gap created which made their understanding Boal quite difficult and hence their doubts /questions remained unexplored. Speaking in Hindi, translating it into Bengali for the rest of the group and again into English for Boal and back again the same way would have been too time-consuming a process.

There was a general grievance among the participants regarding the time factor-that it was too short a period for such a deep training process, that too many things were happening much too fast. There was no time within workshop hours to follow up on the previous day's work, no revision of the games. As it is, because of the large number of participants, there was a fair degree of confusion while doing the games, and without consolidation there was a danger of becoming mere imitators. These games and methods were reduced to merely new 'things' which increased our stock of tricks. What about the time and discipline necessary to really understand why a certain game is useful, which sensory organs we are developing and why, how to incorporate the methods into our own systems, the psychological aspect and so on? This is what scares me about workshops. They tend to become, as Boal himself said, mere 'trailors of a film', exhibitions of techniques, with us reduced to photocopying gestures and obeying commands without understanding how to implement them in our own situations.

In the case of this workshop, time was also badly organized. There were hours of free time in the mornings and evenings which could have been used in some useful way. The workshop did not start before 2 pm on most days, which gave us entire mornings free; after 6 pm we were free. The organizers had not thought of ways to keep us occupied, not even arranging inter-group exchanges. Moreover, Boal was consistently unpunctual. I wonder if he would have offered the discourtesy of this unpunctuality to a workshop in Europe?

The members from other states and from groups working in North 24 Parghanas felt that they learned quite a lot from each other in the dorm., through *addas* and long discussions-basically outside the workshop situation.

Babaji: 'More than the workshop we have learnt from our exchange of ideas. Discussing with each other has helped us more.' Samir Kundu: 'The expectation I had from this workshop - well, if I could get even 10% of that from the workshop itself! ... But outside the workshop I have got a lot, from Maharashtra, Orissa, Karnataka . . .'

However, the same closeness was not felt with the Jana Sanskriti members. I was lucky enough to be staying in their dorm., so I got to know them better, but the other invited members remained more or less strangers. Samir Kundu commented, 'I wanted to know Jana Sanskriti members more deeply. Had we been staying in one room, it would have been much better. I have felt this deep involvement with Babaji, Udaya, Shankar, why not with other Jana Sanskriti members? So much so I don't even know their names.'

Therefore a total group feeling, integral to a workshop situation, was not there. As Biplab Pal, also of Annwiksha, pointed out very clearly, 'In the earlier workshops that I have attended, there was a tremendous intensity among the participants, without which it is impossible to do theatre. This is a major gap here.'

On the final day of the workshop, Jana Sanskriti did a Forum Theatre for us, the only demonstration of Boal's technique that we got to see. However, it was not done in a real situation but in order to show us, to explain Boal's technique of Forum Theatre.

**[ In Forum theatre] everything is subject to criticism, to rectification. All can be changed at a moment's notice: the actors must always be ready to accept, without protest, any proposed action; they must simply act it out, to give a live view of its consequences and drawbacks. Any spectator, by virtue of being a spectator, has the right to try his version, without censorship. The actor does not change his main function: he goes on being the interpreter. What changes is the object of his interpretation-Theatre of the Oppressed, p134**

It was a situation in Peru where a drunken husband comes back home to his wife, who is fed-up with her husband's irresponsible ways. The wife is quite incapable of changing her husband's addictive behaviour. The spect-actors give suggestions to the wife as to how to get him under control and break his drinking habit. Many suggestions are made, but ultimately a broomstick on his backside teaches him his lesson. Though the situation was that of a Peruvian peasant family, yet it felt as if it was happening in one of our own villages.

Whenever I have talked about the possibility of Forum Theatre working in our village situation, the reaction has been always very negative from the activists present. The theatre activists from the other states felt that it was most unlikely that villagers would give suggestions about finding an alternative for an oppressed person in a particular situation. They said that the villagers

would never open their mouths, let alone give suggestions, or enact parts in front of others. As for women, the question does not arise at all. Their oppressions are so many that it is inconceivable for them to cross all barriers and come up with alternatives and suggestions on the spur of the moment. Moreover, if the group is a heterogeneous group, with different classes of people, the chances of Forum theatre facing resistance are much greater.

Another problem in such a simplistic way of dealing with problems and looking for immediate solutions is that it tends to become 'stock' images of 'stock' problems. Each and every individual is different, each and every family is different and their problems vary according to class, social and cultural upbringing. Solutions are not so easy to find. It is much more complicated

than beating up one's husband and getting him to leave drinking altogether. Don't we all know that it is not so easy?! What an amount of hesitation, doubt, dilemma will play upon his/her mind before s/he can find the courage to make his/her choice?

Samir Kundu makes a further point: 'The principal thrust of Forum theatre is that the audience ceases to be mere onlookers and has to take active part in the enactment. After they have seen the model being performed, the spect-actors are given some time to contemplate. This is followed by a second round of acting and as the play progresses towards the denouement, the spectators are given the liberty of stopping the performance at any point they decide to. Simply any one can walk up to the arena and start acting, thereby directing the course of the action of the play to a solution he considers best. In this manner, more and more people can go up and start enacting alternatives to the given situation. Thus, from a single evening's shows, Boal's theatre is capable of generating multifarious texts from the assembled multitude. Boal also believes that this technique ensures that the initial (and the original) set of performers do not impose a pre-set, predetermined singular reading of the play with its problem and solution but leave it open-ended for an unlimited number of possibilities. 'Direct People's Participation' could be considered productive in the sense that it has possibilities of generating a wide range of scintillating, thought-provoking views. But can our theatre really do that much? Coming to see Forum Theatre and being surrounded by isms and ideologies of various orders, our audience usually do not open their mouth beyond customary remarks like 'good' and 'well done.' Let's assume that the audience does take part in the intended way and provides so many options, opinions-that would really be great. The only fear I have is that by

bringing in different ideological positions a Forum theatre might be a negative force leading to separation and groupism among the audience. This can be labeled as 'democratic' but would fail to propagate the concept of 'unity'.

Unfortunately, there was no encouragement for this kind of questioning and debate to be carried out within the workshop forum, and so the doubts will remain instead of being clarified.

**Sanjay Ganguly (Jana Sanskriti, West Bengal) analyses why some of the problems with this workshop were felt by outside participants:**

The idea of this workshop was to familiarize the group with Boal's latest techniques which we wanted to learn. At the same time we thought that since Boal was coming to India for the first time we should not keep our doors closed to other groups. They should also benefit from Boal's techniques. So we decided to invite those groups who believe in some sort of political theatre/ people's theatre. As a result there were only 14 participants from our side while there were 31 participants from other groups.

The problem is that for many of us workshop equates exercise. One must really 'work' hard, sweat, and in such workshops you have a 'no pain no gain' situation. Such painful physical exercises have no significance and earlier when we tried to do this in the villages it flopped. It failed to generate interest. On the contrary the techniques given by Boal come in the form of theatre games, they are playful, but at the same time the games always retain an ideological position and help one to internalize this.

In the workshop Boal was talking about introspective techniques and he was talking about something we usually never think about. We understand class conflicts, but not the problems that exist in our own families. We follow our leaders blindly, we never question, we have our ego problems, we are so confident about ourselves that we hardly introspect. This attitude, I believe, has affected this workshop badly. We should have identified the right participants for the workshop, we should have been more selective. Maybe, as you say, a preliminary session with a tentative group of participants to discuss the workshop theme could have been useful. But what do you do with those who are dogmatic? One workshop like this won't change them.

Another problem was that it ceased to be a homogeneous group, even in terms of mentality and commitment, not just social or class differences. There is also another problem. An educated urban participant may understand things faster than a participant from a village and then he is bored, frustrated, by what you may call the 'slow progress' of the non-urban participant. He is not ready to wait for others catching up slowly. Even so, I think, we have learnt some interesting techniques, like Rainbow of Desire and the Cop in the Head.

## On Workshops

**Actor/director ANMOL VELLANI thinks back over workshops he has known to identify some basic guidelines for a successful workshop.**

I suspect that the word workshop is loosely used to cover a catholic range of activities. A workshop requires at least two participants-persons or groups-frequently though not always coming together from different working environments. The growing workshop culture in India may reflect an interest among people from different artistic contexts and disciplines in having greater opportunities to work together.

Characteristically a workshop involves horizontal interaction, which distinguishes it from a symposium or a seminar where participants address their response to a main speaker, or react to a demonstration, usually via a moderator. Workshop processes are typically more improvisatory, open-ended; they often advance by trial and error, and allow for sudden unexpected discoveries on which the participants can build. The more rewarding theatre workshops have fairly narrowly defined goals or parameters. Five or ten workshop days can be profitably spent on, say, acting with masks, but not on something as general as actor training.

A workshop is unlikely to be productive unless the participants are involved in its planning and conception. And this very rarely happens. Usually it is some privileged institution that decides to structure a workshop around, a particular theme and invite persons or groups to interact in a predetermined way. The participants almost become instruments of somebody else's agenda; if they profit from it at all, it's almost by accident. A so-called workshop was held on actor training in Bombay some time back. International and local theatre training expertise came together. My guess is that the host institution saw the 'workshop' as a means of generating ideas to advance its own plan to develop an in-house actor-training programme. Some Indian theatre groups were invited to demonstrate their training processes and another group of people were invited to react to the demonstrations. There was no horizontal interaction. It was structured like a seminar, except that instead of someone reading a paper, you had actors demonstrating a training process.

Can such processes be thus encapsulated and easily appropriated? I am opposed to allowing actor training processes to become an object for other people to study. Showing an actor-training process can violate its integrity. For example K. C. (Manavendranath) has developed certain pieces for his actors which are meant to be internalized. When the actors demonstrate these to outsiders, his complaint is that they begin to perform the pieces. It later becomes very difficult to return them to the point where they treat these pieces as an object for their own private study of themselves, if you like. If you bring different theatre groups together for an actor-training workshop, surely an important objective should be to give the actors themselves an opportunity to exchange skills, techniques, repertoires and processes.

I'll give you an example of a workshop that was not successful overall, though some participants benefited from it, almost by accident. Lokendra Arambam was the coordinator of the workshop, which was conducted by Manipur University in 1989. There was a brief planning session among leaders of certain theatre groups, who decided that it would be held in Manipur, and that there would be two kind of activities: on the one hand, the visiting theatre persons would collaborate to implement a month-long schedule of training sessions for young Manipuri artists and students; on the other there would be opportunities for interaction among the visitors and their group members. The second goal was not realized. Manipur's remoteness hampered communication among participants prior to the workshop, and there was no follow-up planning meeting to sort out the enormous problems of logistics. People arrived on different days, uncertain of their role in the whole scheme of things. It took almost a week for any systematic, inter-related set of activities to begin, following dialogues and adjustments among the visiting 'faculty'. Nevertheless, the theatre students benefited from the exposure to different approaches to theatre training and activity.

While there was very little interaction among the visiting theatre groups, they did watch one another working with young Manipuris over an extended period. This had its own positive impact. For instance, witnessing so many directors working with actors in different ways gave the playwright Muthuswamy the confidence to try workshopping with the actors of his own group in Madras. He was inspired to develop a new production with his actors, fleshing out certain concepts and ideas through improvisation. Words and



dialogue emerged through this process, sometimes prompted by improvisations, at other times written to stimulate fresh theatrical invention. It was thus that *England* began to take shape through Muthuswamy's new interest in play-making as opposed to playwriting. It was a complete change for him, marking a new phase in his dramaturgy.

K. C. was also rewarded by the workshop experience. He found the Manipuris less responsive to certain training routines. So he began to ask himself certain, fundamental questions. Which elements in my training method are culture-specific, and which are applicable across cultural boundaries? He was led to this question as a result of this experience of trying out his training process on a group of raw actors with a culturally different sense of space, body, expression.

When one group invites an outside resource person or trainer for a workshop, it's risky to just throw the actors and the guest expert together and say 'let's see what happens'. It's important for the host institution to know what its actors are ready to assimilate, and how the resource persons' intervention could contribute to the artistic growth. Otherwise the workshop could result in destabilizing the group, even make some actors feel completely inadequate and ill-equipped to continue working in theatre.

Alternatively the resource person should already know the group well. It would be dangerous if an outside theatre person simply imposed his own theatre ideology, training methods etc. on the artists of the host group. What he has to offer may be too unrelated to the theatre culture or psychology of the participants. When two groups do not know each other, any workshop between them may need to be preceded by an effort to understand each others' artistic temperament, aspirations, limitations. Such exposure might precede workshops, but workshops themselves are not intended to provide exposure to alternative systems of activity. Without horizontal interaction, as I've said, there is no workshop.

A workshop is time bound and you never know how far you will go, or what you will discover. You might start with a particular set of objectives and discover something you never planned for. Often you achieve less, sometimes surprisingly more, than you anticipated. Sometimes you wish there was more time to pursue interesting lines that a workshop opens up, but you can't. Perhaps workshops should be planned with possible follow-up sessions in mind. Not necessarily additional workshops. For example, a workshop between two groups of actors may be followed by some actors from one group

spending a longer 'in residence' period with the other group, so that lines of enquiry that the workshop opened up can be pursued further.

In,- short, theatre workshops will get a bad name if they continue to be directed from above. Nor should one adopt an entirely anarchic 'let things evolve on their own' approach to workshops, based on some confused notion that this introduces greater democracy into theatre activity.

**LOKENDRA ARAMBAM is an integral part of modern theatre in Manipur, contributing in various ways as a researcher, dramaturg and director, to its development. Here he discusses the role of workshops in modern Manipuri-theatre.**

When most of our young theatre workers in the state of Manipur, like Kanhailal, Shyam Sharna, myself and~ older theatre directors like G. C. Tombra, began enquiring into their own lives with theatre in the early seventies, we were experiencing some changes in our own systems, habits and work in spite of our link with tradition. Because as artists we definitely had an urge to create at different levels of experience and the question was, what kind of work, what kind of inputs would be best suited to create the kind of idioms we wanted to work on? There was a new kind of aesthetics, an emphasis on the individuality of the creator. At the same time we heard of changes taking place elsewhere in the country. The yearning for the new forced the Manipuri theatre worker to interact with many outside influences and trends; he wanted to absorb them and create something new. So the seventies was definitely a period when the desire for new things, disruption and destruction of the old order, and the tradition of the proscenium stage of the early 20th century, were being challenged.

This needed collaborative work, the building up of creative tension through individual creativity in contact with the creativity of others. Out of that positive tension, we hoped, would crystallize new forms which had not been in our experience before. So, during those days some of the young theatre workers gained some exposure to outside theatre.

In 1973 we invited Badal Sircar to take part in our first modern theatre workshop, with a Manipuri adaptation of his play Spartacus. He worked with us, created new psycho-physical exercises for us, giving us the confidence to depart from the proscenium, to use the non-verbal, physical language of Third Theatre. The kind of interactive culture which he brought was very

exciting for us. After that Kanhailal became the leading young group director who worked with Badal da, came back and interacted with the local groups, went to villages, worked with tribal groups. For the kind of expression that he wanted he consulted us and we gave critical and dramaturgical support to his work. This kind of activity then became part of our own experience.

Therefore, after the seventies, the culture of Manipuri modern theatre changed in the sense that the creative activity of the director, the director as an auteur, became very much part of the system. What was interesting at that time was that when an artist wanted to create, he was able to use the actors as a group. The group too was able to respond to his needs and through a certain kind of collective activity the group's own initial response could be crystallized and merged into the creative vision of the director. This was possible only through the workshop system. The director, having his own dreams, visions, ideas about the production, his ways of experimenting with the theatre workers, developed a system in which other individual contributions—the music person's own vision and creative ability, the actor's own system of acting, his emotions and interpretation of the role—were gradually being converted into a collective creative process which was only possible in a workshop situation. Many of our young workers of that period felt that it was a good system and indeed it helped us a lot. For us residential workshop systems were becoming very, very meaningful. When Kanhailal did his tribal production *Thanghou leh Liandou*—that was the production with which I helped him in his conceptualization of the tribal theatre—he worked with the tribal group, he stayed there in the village, had the experience of that group responding to his work, and finally he successfully entered into certain ethnic communities which he had not touched before. Again, when he did another rural production, I was his colleague. We conceptualized his vision for rural theatre. He stayed in the village, gathered the local people together, and the entire village created their own pieces. There was a kind of creative transition that took place during the workshop.

When you create a workshop, interact with different sets of people, you are not simply giving something to the people. It is, rather, a creative auteur working in a new environment, with factors of the new environment entering him and him responding to the indigenous needs of that environment. People of that environment are also responding to his needs. This kind of

creativity is very positive and we made tremendous progress in terms of creativity in the seventies and eighties.

Around this time our young Manipuri actors started rediscovering the basic energy in their bodies, and physical theatre became a trend. In the eighties we invited (through the state Kala Academy) Prabir Guha to direct a workshop which I co-ordinated. Prabir made so many demands on the energy of the young theatre workers, that he himself was over-stressed physically and emotionally. There was a crisis and tremendous tension. But we managed to restore equilibrium and Prabir created a piece on Manipuri women which was very meaningful. So, in the centre of town with certain institutional support from the Academy, and with active collaboration and participation from our young workers, we made the workshop situation meaningful.

But we have come to realize over time that workshops have definitely become fads and nobody interacts the way they should any longer. The logistics, the management, the arrangements, the selection of the participants etc. are key factors and need to be considered carefully; yet, overemphasized, they lead to a neglect of the proper vision of the workshop.

Let me give a concrete experience of a workshop I organized in 1989 at Manipur University with the help of Ford Foundation. It was one of the largest of its kind. There were thirteen resource persons in a one-and-half-month long workshop. There were thirty-five students of theatre. Thirteen resource persons giving themselves to this group of students, collectively designing pieces and exercises and themes emerging from the artists themselves. The idea was: first, to undertake a gradual training of the boys in psycho-physical exercises and modern creative exercises designed to develop the mind and body of the artist into a single entity, and then to organize certain creative productions which showed the process and the work that had been put into the workshop. As the organizer of the workshop I had to plan what work to give the resource persons, to organize how they would interact, handle differences in opinion, attitude and behaviour,

the response to the environment itself. Then there was a strike in the university. All this created such a tense situation that I nearly broke down at the end of the workshop. But it was the first experience of a workshop on such a large scale. After thinking it over we came to realize that inviting so many resource people at the same time has its own demerits. We could not take much from the creative abilities of the resource persons, who were also not

able to get an uninterrupted period of time to interact with their own groups. But these were problems of management. I came to realize that the opportunity of gathering many people together, of being exposed to the different levels of creative work they are engaged in, to their different expressions of their personalities, their things are beneficial to the students. They were learning a lot.

As for the resource persons-there were a lot of tensions because they had their own differences of behaviour, eating habits, schedules, and here they were put into one environment whether they liked it or not. All this created tensions. Human problems always develop in situations like this.

But for me this became a very important human experience from which I learned a lot. I was able to use this knowledge in the body-motion-communication workshop I held more recently. Here, each of the resource persons helps a small group from another discipline, or from a different angle and thus contributes to the common vision of the workshop. I invited a physiologist, a sports medicine expert, and creative theatre workers like Kanhailal and Prabir who are working on body motion. We also had a female resource person interacting with the women. We divided the space, the areas of the workshop, divided the students-some 105 of them divided into groups of 30-into four or five different spaces with two or three resource people working with them the whole day. They interchanged later. We tried to converge the studies of body/motion/communication together, to approach it from different angles. We studied aspects of body motion, the physiology of motion and how that could help us reach an understanding of how our body works, how the lower extremities are coordinated, what kind of muscle tensions there are, how our nervous system works-all these were again related to creative exercises. In terms of interaction the resource people enjoyed themselves, and the students learned a lot. So did I, about what to keep in mind when organizing future workshops.

But I feel we are at a historical juncture when, from a regional mode of theatre, we must start questioning ourselves once again. How long will our own forms or our own identity be enough? What kind of contribution, in terms of new thoughts, new images, new cultures can we provide? If Manipur wishes to contribute to contemporary theatre in India, will it only be through the creation of forms? Facades of exotic pieces? Will it only be certain saleable material that we contribute? No, there must be something very,

very dynamic which Manipur can create out of her traditional potential, and out of the creative abilities of her own artists.

This new creativity can only be supported or generated by the opportunity for Manipuri artists to interact equally with other people, either inter-culturally or in terms of spontaneous relationships, by working together. We will not be able to create something new unless we have people coming in and staying with us for a certain period of time in a confined and controlled situation where we have all the infrastructure, certain organized activities, at the same time providing for maximum creativity for every participant. We organize the human problems of that confinement, we anticipate all the details of whatever problems there may be. We interact, search for new angles and approaches during a certain period of confinement. We need that kind of inter-personal nearness to create both positive and negative tensions. We need to create a kind of relationship where the artist is in immediate physical and mental contact with others like him. In other words, the creative interaction that you, as an artist, want with other artists, can only come out of a workshop or laboratory situation, which provides the opportunity for a collective exercise towards creativity. Bringing people together, so that they eat together; live together for a certain period though they come from different cultures, different family backgrounds, coming together in a controlled situation, obeying certain common rules, and interacting actively, is definitely the best way of approaching modern theatre.

However, there are certain considerations to keep in mind even while being optimistic about the potential of workshops in the evolution of modern theatre. One area to consider is how playwrights can be part of the workshop process. When I ask a playwright to interact with the group in a workshop he finds it very tough to do so. Perhaps this is because a playwright is normally very traditional, very individualistic, expressing things from a very subjective point of view. Why can't our plays emerge from the collective experiences of the people? From their behaviour? From their objective assessment of problems? From the dialectic of tensions-the kind of social and political tensions they are exposed to in their daily lives? A sensitive playwright working with the same group, looking into these problems, can definitely create new texts. But this has not been attempted in Manipur.

Many young writers are trying to do something new. But the basic problem lies in the intellectual conservatism of our educated people in negotiating the forces of modernization,

in their grasp of the realities of traditional society which is now breaking up, in their desire to retain aspects of tradition and help that tradition to grow. These conflicts are still there. Though we talk a lot about modern creativity and things like that the society is very conservative. The new forces of change, the dynamics of change that are working for better or for worse carry a lot of conflict and tension-we are witnessing this in the political crisis, insurgency and violence taking place in our society. But our intellectual, educated elite who perceive these changes are normally conservative. We say that our theatre is modern, but it is modern only in form, not in content, not in the statements they are making. Those remain conservative.

Unfortunately one of the contradictions of our modern theatre is the eternal complaint by the playwrights that the modern directors have trampled on their texts, destroyed the spirit of the text, ignored and neglected the playwrights. Persons like Ratan Thiyam and Kanhailal write their own plays. Ratan says that there are no playwrights in Manipur. This kind of thing demoralizes the playwrights. The relationship between the director and the emerging playwright is very delicate. The contradiction of modern Manipuri theatre is that the playwright is not actively interacting with the creative urges of the director, and the director thinks that the playwright is only a part of a whole performance that he is controlling.

Another important issue is the human factor. We are growing used to seeing certain images of theatre, images of exercises, images of productions. The media gives all the credit and recognition to the auteur/director who organizes the workshop, produces the play. Institutional support also goes to him. This has created a situation where the actors who are instrumental to the experimentations have become complete guinea-pigs. Their ideals, their aspirations, their desire for growth and development are being completely neglected. We impose exercises on them, expose them to physical strain, use them in order to achieve results. We organize workshops, but have we tried to understand the real needs of the people participating in them? Why do we need 35 or 45 people? What do they do? From where do they come? From what background? What are their basic needs? Are there any common needs? There are instances when people are strained so hard physically that it results in demoralization. Such things are happening. Unless we know the basic physiological processes, the status of the physiological, the individual, mental and emotional readiness of

the participants, their genuine needs, how can a resource person or a director be so demanding in his urge to create things?

At the same time, the management of the workshop is also important. We don't know much about the management of theatre. There has been tremendous creative activity taking place in theatre, a tremendous growth in terms of productions, academic works, publicity in newspapers and on television-but we haven't undertaken any kind of research in theatre administration, in theatre management, which has created so many human problems. We need to understand the human problem in a workshop situation, in a production situation and in the entire creative exercise. We have not emphasized enough the artist as an individual who would like to grow, participate in the process of creativity. We haven't spoken about their needs and they also do not speak about it. Most of them are very, very silent. In modern Indian theatre the people who are speaking are the directors, the playwrights, the art directors and the critics. You won't find many of the actors speaking. You won't find many of the young people working backstage, handling costumes, lights or makeup speaking about their problems. In the whole context of creation we haven't given enough opportunity, enough space for them to hear their own voice.

In order to identify the needs of an actor to create his own identity in the whole process of creativity in today's situation, we require an examination of the artist in a performance situation as well as in his own human, family and social situation. What differences are there? How does he himself see his needs and his sacrifices in the context of theatre? How does he relate that to his own problems in his family? With the society? There is definitely a sense of alienation in him. How do you co-relate these activities when his performance situation demands extreme sacrifice, extreme creativity, extreme emotional outbursts? How do you relate this to his own often feudal, rigid system in the family, his inability to speak up against that?

Side by side with the image-making exercise that the theatre director is doing at present, there should be artistic trust. We need to reverse the process, re-study the actor in this situation, his contribution to the director's growth. Many directors have become great because of their actors. So, for me, the human problem in contemporary theatre is now a historical question which we need to enquire into in order to regenerate the creative process.



It is important to keep the human element in mind, to consider the participant and not just the auteur/director while organizing a workshop.

## **Linking the Arts**

### **CHITRA PALEKAR reports on an unusual inter-disciplinary project-cum-workshop organized in Bombay by the NCPA**

It all began when Shakuntala Kulkarni, a Bombay artist who has a long association with theatre, called a few friends-theatre directors, actors, writers amongst them-to preview her latest works which she called 'Beyond Proscenium'. We knew her works were inspired by theatre but what met our eyes was totally unexpected! Not only did the huge canvases bring to life all the familiar theatre spaces, but they were combined with props like platforms, frames, blocks or steps to create three-dimensional structures. Were they paintings? Sculptures? Theatre sets? The artist called them constructions, but these were not mere installations to be viewed from a distance. They beckoned us to participate, to move on them, around them; they waited for performers to fill the spaces with words, sounds, movements, to make the experience a 'whole'. The painter had dared to challenge the tradition in theatre! Instead of following the dictates of the script and playing a supportive role, here the 'set-like-constructions' were hoping to 'trigger off' the creative processes.

We stood in the midst of the artist's works, each relating to them in his/her own individual manner, but with a thought in common-Would we be able to rise to this challenge, take our impulses from forms, colours, spaces and then go on to build a performance? Would playwrights, by way of experiment, be able to give up the role of being the 'original creator' and become a component in the whole process? It was worth trying!

It was also an excellent opportunity to start breaking barriers between the visual arts and the performing arts. Bombay hardly has any intermingling between different branches of the arts. People tend to be clannish, and barring a few exceptions, are indifferent to or highly prejudiced about the other disciplines. This was especially true about the theatre practitioners who shunned art galleries as a rule and vice versa.

Some of us who were closely associated with both the disciplines had long wanted to change this. At the NCPA Vijaya Mehta was thinking and planning along the same lines. We realized that an 'inter-disciplinary theatre workshop' around Shakuntala's works could be a good beginning to such an interaction. Vijaya Mehta and the NCPA offered full support, and we set the ball rolling.

The participants were to be practising professionals from disciplines directly or indirectly related to theatre. Along with playwrights and directors, the list included poets, composers and choreographers. The workshop was planned in two phases. The first phase was one of 'individual exploration'. The participants were requested to preview the constructions, based on which each was to explore creative possibilities in his/her own medium. Three months was thought a sufficiently long period to absorb the visual impressions and create one's own theatre piece. Each was to work in complete freedom.

The reactions of participants during this period were very encouraging. Three of them wrote original short plays in different styles and with totally different perspectives on the paintings. Zubin Driver's humorous play in English had actors tumbling out of the paintings to discuss the meaning of their existence. Bhupendra Deshmukh discussed creative blocks of artists through his realistic playlet in Marathi; while I took up the challenge to write my first play about 'realities and illusions'. All the three plays were rehearsed with a view to performing them amidst the constructions at the end of phase one. Uday Chandra the singer/actor composed music which Zubin used in his play. Nandu Bhende the composer was inspired to create an original piece of music and Bharat Sharma (who had not known Nandu before this) choreographed a modern dance to that music while relating to forms and spaces in Shakuntala's works. Amol Palekar collaborated with the poets Vasant Abaji Dahake and Prabha Ganorkar in the enactment of poetry. All these people worked in isolation and were unaware of the others' creations. We planned to bring everyone together only in the second phase, a three-day workshop at the NCPA.

The structuring of these three days proved to be difficult. The participants were all established professionals, used to following their own creative compulsions. One could only persuade them to interact and not force reactions.

On the first day of the workshop, the various encounters were to be presented to an invited audience. We wondered whether we should, in the subsequent sessions, merely hold discussions

on these performances? We decided against it. The encounters, however well presented, were still in the nature of exploration and the basic purpose of the workshop was not to argue about their merits or demerits. This workshop, in fact, was only a beginning of a long-term project involving various disciplines. Hence it was important to induce the willing but as yet passive participants to be more active, to break barriers, to overcome prejudices and to start a dialogue with people from other fields. So we decided on a flexible structure for the next two days. In each session, one of the participants had to initiate by interpreting the paintings through his/her medium and then others had to build on it through theirs. Thus, in one session, the starting point could be music; in another, a poem; and in yet another, pure movement



*'Beyond Proscenium' by Shakuntala Kulkarni*



Initially, only the actors and the directors volunteered for the exercises, while the writers preferred to observe from the sidelines and comment. But by the end of the two days, participants were changing roles. The writers were emoting physically, the actors were finding their own words; the exercises-were no longer chaotic-people had started relating to each other.

At the end of the workshop, there was no immediate, concrete result. It was not conceived that way. However, we had achieved a lot in breaking the ice and gaining a little understanding about each other. One hoped it would give rise to introspection, raise questions about the strengths and limitations of one's own medium vis-a-vis others and lead to more ambitious workshops as well as exciting collaborations in the near future.

**Playwright ZUBIN DRIVER participated in the inter-disciplinary workshop described above. This subjective first-person account relives that experience.**

One sun-filled morning I entered a room filled with strange figures, some bent beyond recognition across geometrical planes, some unconvincing afterthoughts, some just plain badly drawn figures in meaningless spaces. An artist trying to meditate. A self-conscious exercise? The room, however, had a mysterious angle to it. Like all rooms in the city it had its fixed surfaces and its population of human beings inhabiting it. What was unique was the fact that it kept moving subtly. Therefore at moments one would perceive a figure walking out of his designated space

and entering the limbo space between two installations. These were rare happenings. These figures were negative figures. They inhabited alternate spaces within the room. Once or twice I heard a sound in the room but my stay there was mainly silent. What was disturbing was a sense of protest, of anger that emanated from these alternate, negative figures, they were angry about what was happening to them. They did not want to reveal themselves to the world at large, they cringed at the thought of an Inter- disciplinary Workshop, of people spoiling the silence, unless ...

The play I've written-*The Body, I - is* about to begin. I've been thrown by the space. We'd been rehearsing the play assuming the audience would be in front of us. Last evening I found out that the audience would be on either side and we'd be in the middle. I've not been able to create my lights because a lightsman employed by the organizers has already decided how to light up the installations. In the day we rehearse desperately, blocking the whole play again. At the same time, lights are being set up, other groups standing and talking, organizers discussing problems, NCPA's infamous lighting men yacking away, and we're feeling guilty about rehearsing so much because the other groups have to rehearse as well. The play begins.

I reach the railway station. Sunday morning crowd heading god knows where! The train lurches to a halt outside Andheri station. It sits. I hang out on the margin. Parallel to mine is another train. It has a population of identical figures in it. But they're all dead. I reach out and die. The parallel train moves. It leaves my Churchgate fast behind. It climbs into the sky, it sprouts huge wings and floats. By the time I reach the Experimental Theatre I'm aboard a gigantic dream ship which deposits me inside an indifferent security guard. The dream ship becomes a white stork as it,touches water. The security man's ears are oily and I slide out easily. I run towards the congregation of artists.

As always little groups form, they disperse and new groups replace them. A strange interpretation of the concept of dialogue prevails. Exercises are performed which force artists to leave their own disciplines and prance around like naive members of other disciplines. An attempt to create happenings. Nandu's music is used as a base. A choreographed piece is created in response to it. I read a poem of Gieve Patel's. A narrative forms. Magical transmissions across different disciplines? No, just basic improvisation. The whole afternoon we grope around, replicating patterns we're already comfortable with. A new transmission of ideas across different discourses requires a common language. We don't have one. We don't

even have a common verbal language. By evening I'm angry. I don't want to come back here again. Bloody farce!

Second dawn. I leap out of bed. Into a train. A real one. No negative figures. I reach early. I walk towards the congregation of groping humans.

A poem of Vasant Dahake is being enacted. I don't understand a word. It's in Marathi. A translation is attempted. It gives me a narrative, not a poem. I think of the translations I've read of his poems in English. Again different versions of the poem are enacted. Nice. But where is the dialogue? A dance version of the poem's enactment is performed parallel to the actors' version. The audience is instructed to make sounds at appropriate moments. We do so faithfully. At a critical point in the enactment, Divya, an actor, and I step up and read from Ranjit Hoskote's poems. Meaningless. Voices in a void. The enactment is already complete without us. We are extraneous. A failure. Later a director wants to create a narrative in response to Nandu's music. He starts off with a few actors, real and naive. They discuss things with a conspiratorial air. They begin. At some point they rush feverishly towards us, the audience, the rest of the artists, and push us into the playing area. We prance around. Deep despair. Post lunch. Three of us read Ranjit's poems, aloud. A last-ditch effort on our part. The exercise entails that everybody intervenes from their own disciplines. A few do. The poems are complex. They are in English. The Marathi artists are not clear about them. A few get angry. Someone starts rambling. The real artists sit still. Nandu sets up a beat. The lights dim. For me, I understand something.

'Goodbye everybody! Come to my plays!' 'Give me your address.' Hope we don't meet again. Like this. The silence of the room is overpowering. The figures are angry. Their anger has made them perverse and sadistic. They stalk about in the empty spaces thinking their grotesque thoughts. I huddle in a corner, frightened. Suddenly they turn on me and interrogate me ... I open my mouth but no sound emanates. I have no excuse. I have not understood what time is for them. I have scarcely had a glimpse. I stutter that they too haven't entered my word spaces, they haven't understood why an actor acts. My accusations give me strength. As I gather energy the room fades. The figures evaporate. I am left alone, rambling. I know I am not alone. I have words. I have words and I return to their solace. Chastened.

## Nemai Ghosh

### Portfolio



*Nemai Ghosh, actor, in Utpal Dutt's production of Julius Caesar.*

Nemai Ghosh has been most widely known for his photographs of Satyajit Ray and his stills from Ray's films. But his work in theatre-initially as actor, and subsequently as photographer-has been less known. Ghosh was picked up by Utpal Dutt way back in 1955-6 from college theatricals to play Metellus Cimber in his production of *Julius Caesar* in Bengali. Ghosh could show off his impressive figure to greater advantage in Dutt's *Sirajuddowlah*, in which he acted one of those who betrayed the Nawaba businessman. In the historic production of *Angaar* (1959) by the Little Theatre Group at Minerva Theatre, Ghosh played Hafiz, the worker in a maroon shirt and black trousers, who from his position at actors' right down in the dark, challenges the overseer with his deep bass 'Don't touch our bodies,' sending tremors through the audience, and who slowly comes up through the dark to confront the blistering bully.



Ghosh recalls the 'demoralization' that the wonderful early LTG actors felt when the applause for Tapas Sen's spectacular 'framing' of the water rising in the pit ( to Ravi Shankar's powerful music ) wiped out the impression of the human drama of distinctly conceived individuals so carefully built up through the performance. A distrust about Dutt was growing among them, especially when the information leaked out that Dutt at one stage was planning to abandon the group and the theatre to take on the Directorship of the National School of Drama.

It was this distrust that gave Ghosh an uneasy feeling when Dutt cast him in a small, two-scene role as Father Flanagan in his next play, *Ferari Fouz*, and told him at the casting session, 'It will be you who'll save the play!' 'I even thought he was mocking me,' says Ghosh. Over the two hundred nights that the play ran, was impressive and authentic in his articulation of Bengali as it is spoken by foreigners settled in India, drawing compliments from the linguist Sunitikumar Chatterji.



*Nemai Ghosh as the worker who challenges the overseer, in Utpal Dutt's Angaar (1959)*

When dropouts and defectors from the Little Theatre Group set up a new-group, Chalachal, which had Rabi Ghosh and Bholu Dutt in the lead, Ghosh joined them and played his last big role in *Thog*, a takeoff from Sartre's *Nekrasov*.

His other career-as photographer began by chance, when he picked up a camera in a cab, and went over to shoot Satyajit Ray. But his attachment to theatre remained, and the first

two productions he 'shot' were Dutt's *Manusher Adhikarey* and Sombhu Mitra's *Pagla Ghora*, with a camera with fixed lens, and one which made very little noise.

Over the years he has changed cameras and acquired and used other lenses, and developed finer techniques and chemical ingredients for developing his shots. He resents one criticism that has often been levelled against him, that his theatre photographs do not capture the sets and the scenic designs, and tend to privilege the performer. Ghosh argues: 'The camera cannot be. It is the stage lighting that privileges the actor, and that is what I record. In other words, I show what the audience actually *sees*. When the stage is actually lit to show the set, my photograph captures it, as you can see in several of the photographs in this selection. When I like a play, the photographs convey my *liking*. The other thing, as a viewer and as a man who has loved and been in theatre, I 'compose' my shots to underscore the dramatic elements and thrusts.

'I don't quite believe in photo sessions, in the given conditions of our country. Our actors and actresses, mostly non-professionals who lack the requisite skills, are not capable of repeating the right expressions in artificial conditions. Maybe Sombhu Mitra and Utpal Dutt have been the only ones with those skills. But would they have cared to do a photo session with me, particularly as I do not have the means to pay and book them for such a session? I shoot for my pleasure, and not on commission.'

For some years now, Ghosh has been toying with the idea of producing an album of his theatre photographs, a selection from his large collection that contains rare glimpses of great theatre moments and performances by some of Bengal's finest actors and actresses. Most of these photographs have never been on display or appeared in print. The present portfolio is not a representative selection in any sense, for Ghosh is still too protective of his treasures to allow the best of them to appear in print before his own album comes to be published.

**Samik Bandyopadhyay**



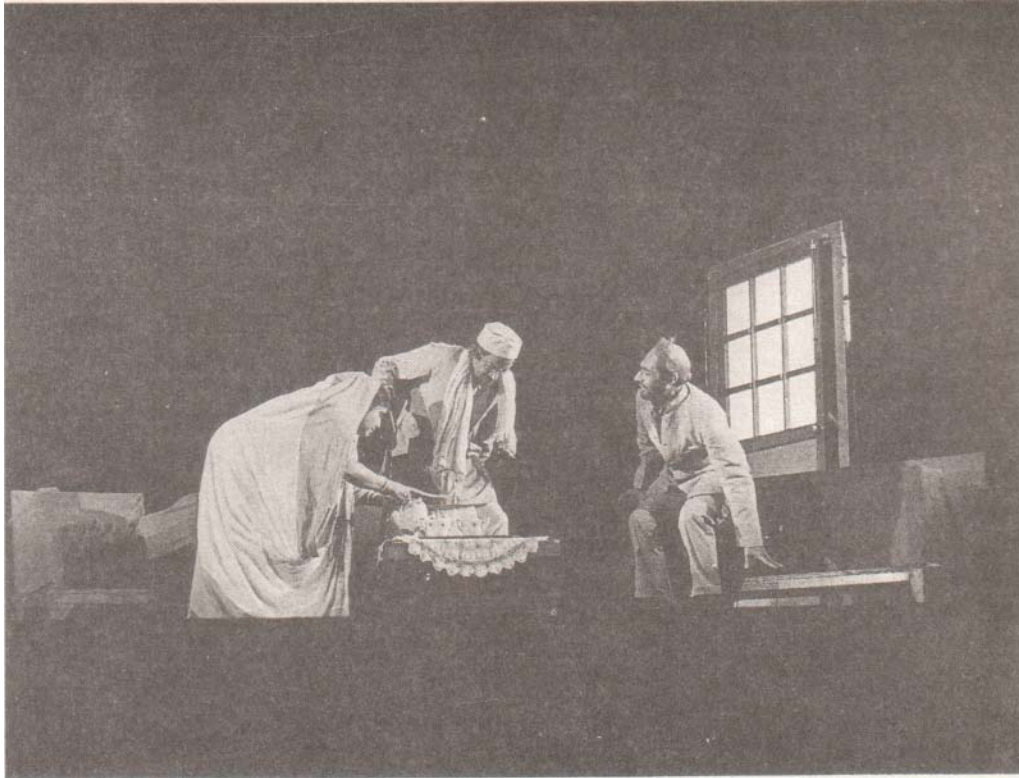
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*Raktakarabi*, directed by Tripti Mitra, late in her life (1984), for Aarabdhya, the theatre school she had started; with a scenic design by Khaled Chowdhury, who did a totally different 'scene' from his earlier design for Sombhu Mitra's historic production.



... of Beach's *The Good Person of*

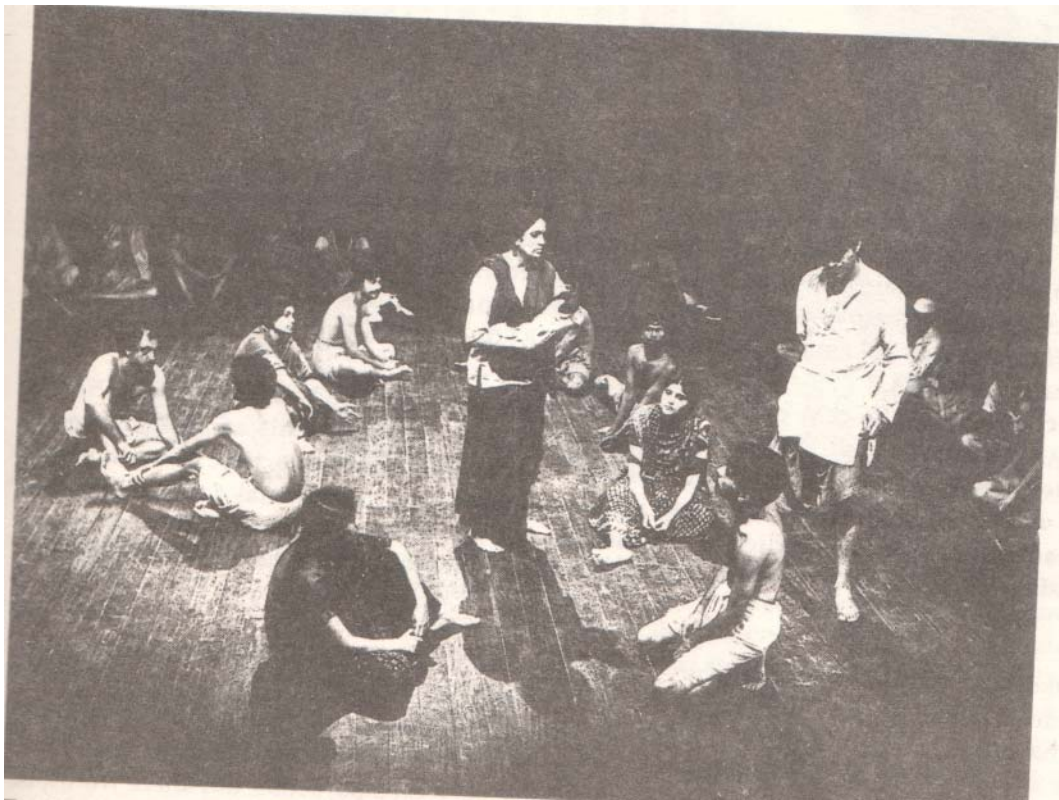
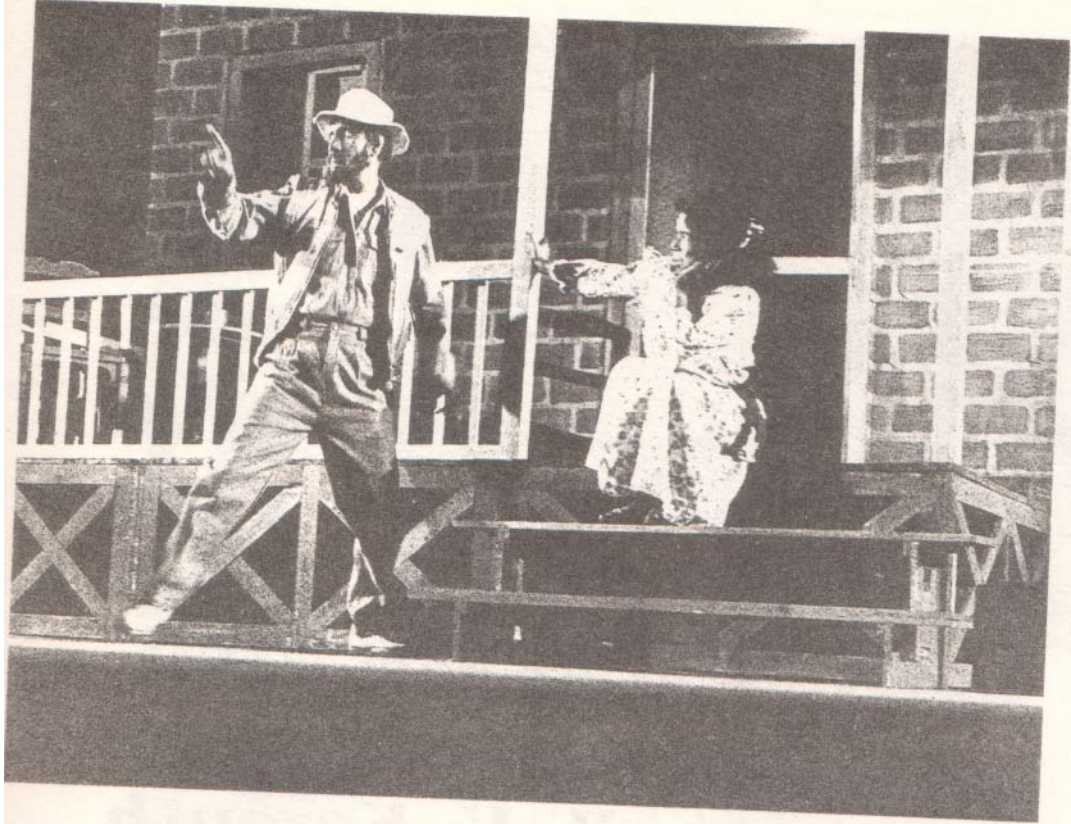
***On previous page:*** Swatilekha Sengupta and Gautam Haldar in Rudraprasad Sengupta's version of *The Good Person of Szechwan* for Nandikar (1991)



Sombhu Mitra with Latika Basu and Sunil Sarkar in *Dashachakra* (1962), the Bohurupee version of Ibseri's *An Enemy of the People*.



Scene from Utpal Dutt's *Duswapner Nagari* (Nightmare City), produced by People's Little Theatre in 1974.

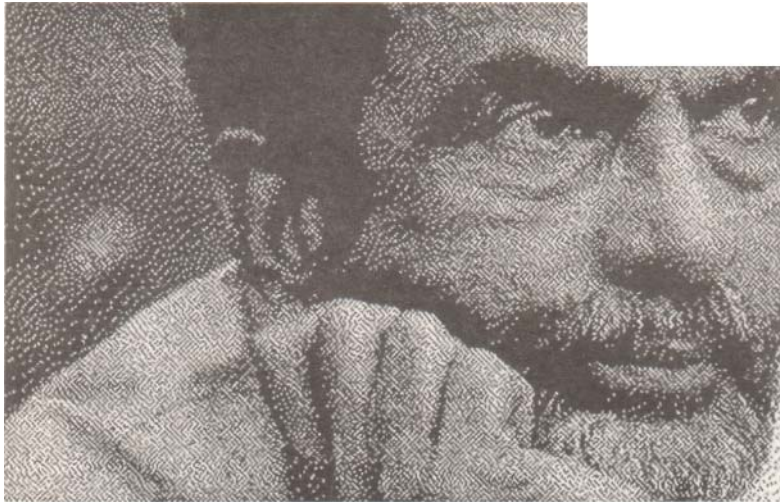




*On previous page:* Scene from *Beda* (Fences), an August Wilson play, in a Bengali version by Theatre Workshop, directed by Ashok Mukherjee in 1991. *Bottom:* A scene from *Lokkatha*, produced by *IPTA*, Bombay, directed by Ramesh Talwar, in a performance in Calcutta.

'Hey, sutradhara,  
wait let me give you the right note

*B. V. Karanth*



B. V. KARANTH (b. 1929) has had a long career in theatre, music, and cinema. The assignments he has filled have included administrative and directorial responsibilities for at least three repertory companies of national importance. He has travelled extensively and his greatest interest in life has remained music. In both his theatre and cinema he has been most original and creative in the use of music. His major theatre productions include *Tughlaq*, *Evam Indrajit*, *Hayavadana*, *Jokumaraswami*, *Ghashiram Kotwal* and *Barnam Vana*, his version of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Reproduced here is the text of a long conversation between B. V. Karanth and SAMIK BANDYOPADHYAY on 4 April 1994, in which Karanth reaches back into his early memories to retrace the growth of influences which continue to affect his theatre practice. Karanth spoke in a mix of English and Hindi, breaking into song more than once to make a point. Samik Bandyopadhyay transcribed, edited and translated the

conversation into the following piece, incorporating his own interpolations, interventions and annotations within square brackets.

What I liked most in my childhood were celebrations, and there were so many of them among the Brahmins, and even for the common villagers. One was the *rathotsava*. In south India, all the temples have the *rathotsava*. First, there was the *peetha* or the ground of the *ratha*, and then there came the decoration of the top. But the log that provided the base for the structure stays completely quiet, silent for one whole year in a garage. And then on a particular day there would be a thousand people pulling the whole *ratha* with a rope, and I still remember how the whole big *ratha* would come to life, moving this way and that, and the god sitting within it swaying with the movement. For me, it was fantasy. And then in the south Indian temples, there are two symbols of the god, viz. the *pratishthita murti*, an image that cannot be removed, and the *utsavamurti*, the image for the special festive or sacred occasion. In the elaborate *karmakanda* of a south Indian temple, there is a man who by his caste obligation is required to bear the burden of the god's



*Barnam Vana and (below) Hayavadana-milestone productions.*

shape, just like the kathakali crown. Slowly he starts at ten o'clock in the night, on his parikrama, first inside, in the *garbha-griha*, then outside, accompanied by three groups or

kinds of musicians; first, the singers, who perform and take rest; and then the players of the chenda, maddala, talam, etc.; and third, the band, that came with the Christian missionaries to the coastal areas of Karnataka, the trumpets etc. The god-bearer begins his movements in an empty square, with only the *pujari* in the space; starts with slow steps, diagonals, covering circular lanes, but at three o'clock in the morning starts running, and the whole assembled group joins him in the run, and the celebration grows and spreads.

My family is a poor family. Personally, I couldn't celebrate anything. But my village had its celebratory atmosphere. In a village, when a village celebrates, every villager is celebrating. That is why, as Subbanna [K. V. Subbanna, eminent theatre personality and social activist, widely known for Ninasam, the institution he has built up in Heggodu] once noticed, celebrations occupy such a substantial place in my productions. In the village, for the poor, celebrations are the only way by which they can save themselves: Otherwise, all the 365 days of the year would have been just sad, sad, sad. [*The celebrations, you would say, are a liberating experience.*] Right, the spirit gods, the ritual gods, the *theyyams*, the *bhutams*, were part of a liberating experience. In my own house, there was a *theyyam*, for whom there would be a celebration once a year, a kind of *manauti* [thanksgiving offerings or a ceremony for a god for favours asked for and granted]... At the time of my Bhopal *kand* [lit. happening or chapter. In this case, an episode in which Karanth faced legal proceedings for his involvement in a burning case involving a leading actress of the Bhopal Rangmandal repertory company], my mother made a *manauti* promise to Panjoli, a god in the shape of a wild boar that Shivarama Karanth also uses in his *Chomana Dudi*, a masked god ... There must have been a time when the wild boar would descend on the fields and eat up the crop, and the people, to save the crops, must have started worshipping the boar. My mother passed away before she could fulfil the *manauti*. I don't know what to do about it. If my brother tries to carry it through, that's another matter; of course. In a corner of a room in our house there is a strong old wooden cot, with a sword and a small boar mask placed on it, and a few little items arranged before it Once a year a man from one of the lower castes would come and as he went through the process of making up, putting on his ceremonial costume made of the tender leaves of the coconut (similar to what they have in Kerala), the singing would begin, a narrative song, the story of the particular *theyyam*, who

must have been a village hero once, turned to a legend; from the singing to shivering, then the strong rhythms; I still remember the story and the sound patterns.

In the coastal Mangalore region to which I belong, there are small hills all around, with the village communities settled in the valleys that are actually called *yonis*, for you get water there, water flowing from the hills to the valley below, irrigating the areca plantations there. The god bearer, possessed by the god, would recount, in a rich declamatory, how 'three hundred years ago one day' he 'stood on the top of one of the hills, and looked around wondering where' he could settle, till he spotted this village, 'liked it and chose to settle there.' Every year he would say the same thing, the 'three hundred years' stuff.

After independence, for a while the practice was in decline. But once the culture of the vote banks came into play, the practice revived, with every community reinstating its gods, as our toddy makers have done. One of the *bhootas* would say, 'For five hundred years I have lain here, unattended, in the heat, in the rain, no one has taken care of me. I haven't had a single chicken. Haven't had anything.' What surprised me at first was that all these gods were starving gods. As one of our Dalit poets put it: when the god himself begs of us, what can he give us? But then I could see an aspect of equality about it. If I gave him, he would give me in return—that was faith. If I offered him two chickens, he would give me crops in gratitude.

Because I came from this area, around the Kerala-Karnataka border, Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay asked me to make a film on these gods and their worshippers for the Sangeet Natak Akademi. Then the Bhopal *kand* happened, and it got delayed. Kamaladevi in her thin, reedy voice would tell people, 'Tell Karanth that if he doesn't complete his film on the *bhootas*, I'll become a *bhoota* myself and fall on him.' She spoke out of real affection for me. Then I completed the film and screened it. I told Kamaladevi, 'It was difficult to make this film, because the *bhootas* have now all joined the parties, are into politics.' Kamaladevi said, 'Why blame the *bhootas*? The gods in the temples are all into politics.' You can see the film at the Akademi. It was telecast on one occasion, and came up against objections at once, for in one of the scenes the *bhoota* eats a live chicken in the raw.

There was also the tradition of the *bhajan* that I sang myself from an early age. There were several in my family who sang the *bhajan*. The *bhajans* were sung throughout the night, beginning at midnight, continuing till the early hours of the morning. They were sung with movement, some of the movements forming into the shapes of the Kannada numerals that I

later came to use in the movements of the Bhagavata in my production of *Hayavadana*. The same movements made their way into the Yakshaganas, though few performers use these now. The rituals had grown to become a part of our life-there was a sense of awe about them, and at the same time they had to be observed, there was that force of obligation about them too.

The Yakshagana, the *bhajans*, and the celebrations that we called the *jatra*, i.e. the processional, constituted my universe. In the villages in our part of the country, there is a *devasthan* [lit. a place of the god] every two or three kilometres, Shiva temples, Vishnu temples-more Shiva temples than Vishnu temples. My uncles read the Ramayana and the Mahabharata aloud before I had completed the eighth class in school-for it was at that point, when I passed my examinations at the end of the eighth class, that my father said that I could not continue with my studies. I had finished the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, and the *Arabian Nights* too in Kannada, and the *Sukasaptakatha* in both variations, Vedanta and Shringara. Shivarama Karanth, in his thirties then, was the literary star of the period, and I would read all his novels. Otherwise I would read detective novels, and tell the stories.

In the Brahman community there were songs and singing from morning to night, especially by the women. In the early morning, taking the *mathani*, making curd, my mother would sing; she would sing when she was going to the cows; then there is the *lori*; songs for when she goes round the basil plant. All these songs I heard and loved. I was closer to my mother than to my father.

When I ran away from home and came to Mysore, my first thought was that I would learn music. I hadn't told anybody anything, of course. When leaving home, I had left a letter behind. I had hidden the letter on the shelf where all the pieces of all the glass objects that had broken in the house were kept for safety's sake. They'd find the letter the next time a glass object would break and the pieces gathered together to be stored on the shelf. The plan I had thought out in detail was based on the assumption that the Maharaja of Mysore must be coming out of the palace every morning for his daily walk. I would hide behind a tree till the Maharaja came close to it. And then I would cast myself at his feet and plead with him to provide me with the facilities to train as a musician ...

I reached Mysore in the evening. The next morning I discovered that the Gubbi Company was camping in Mysore. It had been there for two months already, and they were

rehearsing a new play, *Akkaina Devi*, by Puttaswamayya, novelist and playwright, who knew Bengali and had already translated D. L Roy's *Seeta*, *Shahjahan*, and *Durgadas*, and would later become editor of the influential Kannada paper, *Prajavani*. He was a Lingayat, a Virashaiva-ite. First, I became his *ahishya* in the Company. After a fortnight, one evening when there was no performance, I approached the music director who was always practising the violin. I fell at his feet and pleaded, 'Make me your *shishya*.'

Puttaswamayya was kind enough to release me. After all he would be with the Company only for ten to fifteen days, the time it took him to direct and rehearse the production--for it was his play-into shape. [*The scriptwriter, you mean to say, directed and shaped the production in a single, short spell, and then left the Company to its own devices.?*] Yes, this way I worked with seven or eight scriptwriters. For I was the best-read boy in the Company. I had read up to class eight, the others had barely made it to class three or four. I got my training in both scriptwriting and music at the Gubbi Company. The Gubbi Company had every type of music-Carnatik music, Hindustani classical music, ghazal, quawwali, folk music, Western music. That's where I acquired my *samskara* in music, that allows me to use any kind of music, there are no limits or rules for the use of *music*.

In the Gubbi Company the actor's test was in three 'P's'-Pipe, Pose, Figure [i.e. Figure]. My 'Pipe' was good that way. Without knowing classical music as such, my voice was good, so was my ear. My guruji at the Gubbi Company taught me to play the harmonium, how to use the harmonium for theatrical effects, the bass sound, the double sound, the three reeds. He really taught me everything.

To go back a little into the Company's story, it started in 1884, like one of those travelling *jatra* or folk theatre companies. Then Gubbi Veeranna, very, very imaginative (he had read up to class five in school), came under the influence of the Parsi Company, took over the leadership of the Company as the son-in-law of the proprietor, and introduced the front curtain, the side curtains, the orchestra in front, the dynamo for electricity, zinc sheets for the tent, all of them 'firsts' in our theatre. In 1932-4, he did *Kurukshetra*, by Puttaswamayya, his first play. Puttaswamayya had read a lot in Bengali, and he could draw on sources from outside the Kannada tradition, including several versions of the Mahabharata. It proved to be a very popular play. I hadn't seen it but had heard about it. The Gubbi Company travelled extensively, and came to the coastal Mangalore areas also. When I

was eight or nine years old, I travelled twenty miles with my uncle and father to see my first Gubbi Company play. The nearest small town was four miles away, and from there we went by bicycle. After seven o'clock and up to five or six in the morning the bicycle cost only three annas. The play would start at ten o'clock, and finish at three o'clock. Then two hours on the



*A scene from Ghashiram Kotwal*

bicycle to town, and the four mile walk. The event remains memorable for yet another reason. On the bicycle carrier, I fell asleep, and cut my leg badly on the spikes of the wheel. It took about a fortnight to heal. I never thought that some day I would be joining that same Company. That was just chance. I learned to play the harmonium in the Company, and also began to learn Hindi when, three years later, my voice cracked. Meanwhile, I had begun reading Gandhi's *Harijan*, in which there were exhortations to choose specific courses to serve the country. The courses suggested included going to jail, learning the *rashtrabhasita* [the national language], and several others that I no longer remember. I was not so keen on going to jail, so I began to learn Hindi. The proprietor of the Company encouraged and helped me.

- Then at one point the Company closed down, and disbanded after its last shows at Bangalore. While several members of the Company joined other companies, I resolved to give up theatre for the time being, and concentrate on learning Hindi. The proprietor of the Company helped



me study and appear for one of those examinations for Hindi *pracharaks* [teacher-campaigners]. G. V. Iyer and Balakrishna gave me a place to stay, when Iyer made his living painting shop signboards. He would roam the city through the night, identifying signboards that were peeling off. In the mornings he would visit the shopkeepers, offering to paint the signboards anew. That's the story of G. V. Iyer in those days. They took care of my board, till I became a full-fledged Hindi *pracharak*, and joined a Marwari school as a Hindi teacher. Marwaris wouldn't come into teaching, for they considered the profession a stupid one, committed as they were to 'business'. [*They have the money to pay to buy teachers....* ]Yes, of course.

I used to earn fifty-eight rupees a month as a teacher. The school headmaster told me that I could claim a raise of five rupees if I matriculated. One could appear for the matriculation examinations run by Madras University, where the medium was then English. The course featured Shakespeare's sonnets, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Treasure Island*. With my poor English, I didn't know how to cope with it. Then someone told me one could take the matriculation examinations run by Banaras University in Hindi, and 'in private' [i.e. without going through or attending any school]. I gave up my job and singing too, and passed the matriculation, intermediate and B.A. examinations, living and studying by myself in Bangalore, and going up to Banaras each time to sit for the examinations. Meanwhile I would occasionally help out in school theatricals and local amateur theatre. The one-eyed rules in the land of the blind, you know, and from my Gubbi Company training I had acquired the skills of setting up the curtains, make-up etc., and these now proved to be-helpful.

After my graduation I came to feel that if I had to learn Hindi, it had to be in a state where Hindi is spoken normally. My colleagues at school had expected that after graduation I would settle down as the headmaster of the school. But my life has taken new directions again and again, from change to change. So I found myself at Banaras-cut off from all the music and theatre that I had picked up-studying for my Masters in Hindi.

Hazariprasad Dwivedi was then the Head of Department of Hindi at the Banaras Hindu University. Namvar Singh was a teacher. Kedarnath Singh was a student then, working towards his Ph.D. So I came to know all the simhas [lit. lions]. I knew some of them as my hostel mates. I used to read a lot of Hindi newspapers and literary magazines-Kalpana, *Madhuri*, *Hams*, all well known in those days. Money came from Gubbi Veeranna and a few

other friends. It came to eighty or ninety rupees a month-a lot in those days. I stayed at the hostel.

I had a long beard then, like Golwalkar. That was a fallout of my Gubbi Company days, where I had to do female roles and had to have a clean shave all the time till I revolted and said that I'd never shave again. The RSS came after me at Banaras for my Golwalkar beard. I went to the *shakha* [the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh local unit which put a lot of emphasis on physical exercises, parades etc.] for ten or fifteen days, found it too boring, and sought for a way to run away from it.

The University session would begin on 15 July. The music college session would begin on 15 August. After admissions were completed at the University, the music college would open its register. There was provision for a double course-a general course and a course in music-till the B.A. level. At the M.A. level, of course, it was different. Pandit Omkarnath Thakur was in Banaras then. I learnt Hindustani classical music with him for four years. But then again there was the competitiveness for solo performances. And I moved away from the scene.

For my M.A. dissertation (a paper for 100 marks) I had chosen *Layatattva* and Hindi poetry. But when I was looking for a subject for my doctoral dissertation, it was Hazariprasad Dwivedi who suggested that I should go for something in theatre, for that, he thought, was my real field.

But then there was a strike at the University, which was closed for three months. I went away to Calcutta. Incidentally, I had got married soon after my M.A. It was not a love marriage, you could call it a 'thought marriage', for my friends were worried about how I could live by myself, and thought that I needed to be looked after. That's how it came about. Prema was a schoolteacher. The understanding was that since I would be getting a scholarship of a hundred rupees as I worked towards my Ph.D., her income would supplement the family budget. But immediately after we got married, her school principal called her up, gave her a month's salary, and said that since she was married, she was no longer required!

In Calcutta I stayed with a cousin of Prema's, on Rashbehari Avenue. From there I took the double-decker bus to Shyambazar and saw a lot of theatre in those three months. My friend, Krishnabehari Mishra, a former classmate of mine, now a professor, still lives in Calcutta.

I stayed in Banaras for two years working towards my Ph.D. I paid another visit to Calcutta within that span to interview Shyamanand Jalan, Pratibha Agrawal and other important figures of Calcutta's Hindi theatre. In Banaras Dr Premlata Sharma was always a great support. When I sought admission to the National School of Drama, I needed someone to provide a surety of nine thousand rupees. It was Premlata Sharma who came to my aid.

At the National School of Drama, where I enrolled as a student at the age of thirty-two, I did no singing, did nothing at first, in fact. In Alkazi's *Ashadh Ka Ek Din* I played the esraj, which I had learnt to play in Banaras. J. N. Kaushal still has a tape of the pieces that I played. When Alkazi got the Kalidas award, I was in prison-that was after the *kand*. He came to see me in prison, with Uma Anand, and later wrote to me, recalling the 'tender notes' I had played on the esraj for his performance. It was a beautiful letter.

In my first year at NSD, Satu Sen was the Director, who lectured us only once and said, 'This is going to be my first and last class with you.' In my second year at NSD Nemichandra Jain became very important in the administration. And Shanta-ji [Shanta Gandhi] came from London. I learnt the production process from Shanta-ji. Other things we learnt from Alkazi, Nemi-ji and Dhananjay Thakkar. Then it was only a two years' course. The best of the class-four of us, me, B. tii. Shah, H. V. Sharma (who later wrote a book on Buddhist theatre architecture in Nagarjunakonda), and one Jyoti Vyas, who is now with the TV in Bombay-qualified for the third year, for specialization. I did some translations also at the time, e.g. *Swapnavasavadatfam* from Sanskrit to Hindi. I did a *Rangakosha* also, a small theatre dictionary, for which I even coined a few new terms, e.g. *gaganika* for the cyclorama, following the more conventional *yavanika* used for the front curtain. Nemichandra Jain and Suresh Awasthi compiled a theatre dictionary for the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, and used ten or fifteen of my terms, and they gave me fifty rupees. For 'ground plan' I had used *rang-panchang*, i.e. wings, background, front stage, centre stage, upstage, downstage, flies.



B. V. Karanth in discussion with the artists on the set of *Alegalalli Rajahamsagalu*, the Kannada adaptation of Mohan Rakesh's *Leharon ke Rajhans*.

It's only in my third year, my year of specialization, that I worked with Alkazi. The first time it was as stage manager for his *Antigone*. In *Ashadh*, the music design was his, but I played and sang to it. Then I saw his *Oedipus*. He used to refer to me as the Pundit from Kashi. With my poor Hindi and poorer English, I had very little communication with Alkazi. But he knew that I knew about the *Natyashastra*, the *rasa* theory, and many students, even senior students, would come to me—all for my Kashi training. Samir Maitra, now retired, and married to a Kannada girl, was one of the seniors who came to me. But it was only when I translated *Tughlaq* from Kannada to Hindi that Alkazi took an interest in me.

Before that, when we met and he asked me what I was doing, and I said that I was teaching at Sardar Patel Vidyalaya in Delhi, he snorted contemptuously, 'So this is the result of our three year's graduation course!' But two years later, in his convocation speech, he had to mention Om Shivpuri and Sudha Shivpuri in Modern School, Meena Williams and me in Patel School, B. M. Shah in St. Columba's, and he proudly recalled our names.

In Delhi itself we started Kannada Bharati. Sathyu was there, he became Chairman and Ramamurty and I were members. For the Shakespeare quatercentenary in 1964, we published a volume, *Shakespeare Namaskara*, edited by S. Balu Rao. We had several good Kannada actors

in Delhi then, on transfer, who had made their mark in Bangalore and Mysore. With them we staged *Tughlaq* in Kannada. Nothing was then happening in Bangalore.

In Delhi, we staged Adya Rangacharya's *Suno Janamejaya*, translated by Nemichandra Jain and me, directed by Mohan Maharishi. Then Shivpuri told me, 'Give me a good play from Karnataka.' I gave him *Tughlaq*.

During my time at Patel School we started the group Dishantar. After two or three in the afternoon, we were completely free. We did Tendulkar's *Khamosh! Adalat Zari Hai*. Mohan Rakesh wrote *Adhey Adhurey* just for Dishantar. I did *Hayavadana* which I translated into Hindi.

Then I came to Karnataka to make the film *Vamshavruksha*: another new turn altogether. There would be yet another new turn, joining the National School of Drama as Director. As you can see, I have never been on a single, continuous track. It was G.V. Iyer again, whom I called *anna* [big brother] who wanted to make this film, based on S. L. Bhyrappa's novel. Bhyrappa used to see our plays in Delhi. Iyer had gone to Bhyrappa to ask him for the rights. Bhyrappa told him, 'I won't give you the rights, you are too commercial. If Karanth makes it.. .' [So he made the condition?] I told Bhyrappa, 'I'm new, I'm sure to make mistakes.' Bhyrappa said, 'I don't mind, at least they'll be original mistakes.' Girish [Kamad] had already done *Samskara*, and we had come to know each other closely during the production of *Tughlaq*. So we decided to team up as directors.

Sardar Patel School gave me a year's leave without pay. Meanwhile in 1968 I had toured five socialist countries, watching theatre in GDR, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Before that, I had wandered the whole of northern India, the Hindi belt, studying theatre and collecting material for my Ph.D. thesis. But once I had seen theatre in these five countries, I realized that I need not write the thesis.

In 1970 I came to Karnataka. But Iyer couldn't start the film at once. It would be an experimental film, and there was no money for it. As the start of the film got delayed, I started doing plays in Bangalore. I did many plays, including several by Adya Rangacharya. At one time, Adya had been a difficult person to deal with, in the matter of productions of his own plays. But when we did his plays in Delhi, he proved to be quite generous. When someone asked him why he was not being so insistent with Karanth and the lot, he said, 'When I wrote that play, there were no directors. Now there are trained directors.' With that trust, we could

acquire an all-India outlook, which led to the development that ended up with the highest number of graduates from the NSD coming from Karnataka. Back in Karnataka in 1970, I found that Adya had started this convention of inviting five or six NSD graduates every year to conduct a workshop for high school teachers. The teachers would get a special increment of twenty-five rupees once they had gone through one of these workshops. It was later discontinued. We are again putting emphasis on this scheme, but nobody is taking any interest.'

Another small turning point for me was my production of Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit* in Bangalore. The audience was not large, but the intellectual crowd was there, and they liked it. I had translated it into Kannada from Hindi. At that time I thought it was a great play. I composed a musical pattern for it. I took this play to many places in Karnataka, including Udupi and Sagara, and I made the acquaintance of Haridas Bhat in Udupi, and Subbanna in Heggodu: I consider them my godfathers. Subbanna then invited me to do a children's play in Heggodu *Panjarshale* from Tagore's *Totakahini*, which I had read in my Patel School days, when I had also done Tagore's *Tasher Desh*. I did *Panjarshale* with high school boys. Ninasam had just started.

When we had finished shooting *Vamshavruksha* and were busy editing it in Bangalore, Bangalore University organized a big seminar on drama and theatre. Girish and I were there, P. Lankesh was there too. He was just becoming part of the scene. And Ramamurty had just come back from the USA, after finishing a five-year course. Chandrasekhar Kambar had just come from Dharwar to Bangalore. It was a remarkable congregation. Lankesh, who was a professor of English at the time, suggested that we should do a new play. The Kalakshetra theatre in Bangalore was closed for repairs at the time. We took advantage of that, and used the back of the theatre for a production of *Oedipus*. Another side of the theatre we used for Lankesh's play *Sankranti*. The other play, similarly staged outside the theatre, was Kambar's *Jokumaraswami*.

I discovered *jokumaraswami* myself, with all its potential for the use of Yakshagana and other open-air theatre devices, like the informal chatting on the stage, like when Kambar would sing off note and I would intervene, 'Hey, sutradhara, wait, let me give you the right note. . .' I drew the courage to do something like that from my old *samskara*. Through *Jokumaraswami* I discovered that in the theatre I can move anywhere, through the audience, outside the audience, because my folk theatre allows it-the *rakshasa* always comes through the audience, and makes a whole *parikrama*. For *jokumaraswami*, which had Girish Karnad in the role of the Gowda

and both Kambar and I in the cast, we had two shows, one at 6.30, another at 9.30. For both we had long queues stretching right up to the Town Hall. At that time I was doing *Khamosh* in Delhi for Dishantar, so Lankesh paid for my airfare from Delhi. It was only three hundred rupees in those days.

Lankesh was quite a dare-devil, and made a big success of the festival of three plays. But his own play was not so popular. The other two were great successes. I did *Oedipus* after a gap of eleven years, and Girish played Oedipus.

Then came *Kadu*, Girish's first independent directorial work in cinema; I handled the art direction and music for it. Then I did my own film, *Chomana Dudi*. And *Hayavadana* in theatre, which again was very popular. Only Lankesh criticized it strongly in a full-page review, describing it as *gardltavaranjana*, i.e. entertainment for donkeys-though he had several good points to make too. I did Mario Fratti's *Che Guevara*. I did unusual plays.

For the festival of three plays, we had gathered together 150 people. For Lankesh's play we needed a big crowd of *Shivasharanas*, devotees of Shiva. Prasanna was there. But he left on ideological grounds. He was already strongly ideologically oriented. For me it is only theatre-to get audiences, to get audiences!

In *Mukta*, a new theatre periodical, Lankesh criticized me, saying that I had become the goose that laid the golden eggs for Kannada theatre. Then there were a few productions that were total disasters.

I went on to do more *films-Godhuli*, and a film for the Children's Film Society, *Chor Chor Chhip Chhip Ja* -and music for films by other directors, e.g. Girish Kasaravalli's *Ghatashraddha*, and V. K. Prasad's *Rishyashruna* for both of which I got the year's best film music awards. I did a two months' tour of Czechoslovakia and Poland.

In 1973 we formed a group, Benaka, in Bangalore. We didn't have any office-bearers, only the Director. We didn't want to have a banner initially. But when we started to receive invitations to perform, we needed a proper organizational status for bureaucratic requirements, to receive a cheque for example. With a repertoire of six *plays-Hayavadana*, Jokumaraswami, Sattavara Neralu (based on Purandaradasa's songs, of which I made an LP, which also became popular, but remain untranslatable, because it is so strongly rooted in Kamataka), Moliere's *The Bourgeois Gentleman*, and a few short plays, we toured

Karnataka, and stayed in Bombay for six days. But I was getting exhausted with the kind of work I was doing in theatre.

So when there was an offer asking me to join the National School of Drama as Director, I accepted. Once again I started to learn. When you teach, you have to learn. Right at the beginning, there was the problem of how one works with students. I chose *Andher Nagari* Chaupat Raja In my hands, it became a historical text; not a mere farce any longer, but a political satire-with the Janata Party's coming to power, and the fall of the Congress. I changed the ending. The king became a sadhu, the sadhu became king, but they behaved in their old manner, with the implication that you don't really change anything by changing roles.

Let me tell you one thing. I have never used any one particular form for any of my productions, except in *Barnam Vana*. There also it is a changed Yakshagana-there was no Bhagavata, I used gongs; the costumes were not from Yakshagana but a mix of designs from Cambodia, Indonesia, etc., because Karnataka Yakshagana costumes are too closely identified with particular characters. For example, Arjuna must wear a costume of a particular kind. I came to use Yakshagana only because I could sense a connection between the vigorous movements of Yakshagana and the wild ambition of Macbeth himself. That was the only reason. Otherwise, say in *Hayavadana*, it was not Yakshagana.

*[Up to your spell at NSD, you had been very much a roving character. That was the image associated with you. Karanth never stays anywhere for long... ]* But there was always a connection with Karnataka. *[But at NSD you get stuck in a way within a system, roles, codes, a fairly strict thing.]* And I was sad at the time. I couldn't cope with it temperamentally. *[You talk to Alkazi for fifteen minutes, and you know that he is the man to run a show like that.]* After Alkazi I was destined to fail. And everyone compares. After me again, there would be no problem. *[When you made the choice that you would take on this assignment, how could you think that you'd succeed?]* As I told you, I felt exhausted in Karnataka theatre. I felt I was not doing anything new. I felt the same thing more recently once again, and I have just come out of it and done three new productions in the last six months-Chandrasasa , Gokul-nirgaman for Ninasam, and Babuji -after a long time, a long gap.



Joining Bharat Bhavan, and taking on yet another repertory company came from the same kind of feeling. The one advantage I saw was that it was a new place, and I had to start from scratch. Starting something is always good. Alkazi had started something. Though I started the NSD Repertory Company, I started it only according to Alkazi's plan. My second repertory company was at Bhopal, where it was a real start, for it was a new place. Ashok Vajpeyi asked me to settle there and work with total dedication. I didn't have to get into the administrative tangles. It was just theatre. [But wasn't *there* a problem in Bhopal in *the sense that for theatre you need an audience with a culture of its own, and Bhopal had nothing of the sort? All the rich culture that Madhya Pradesh has is elsewhere, not in Bhopal. Bhopal had been created out of nothing.*] That is true. Nemi-ji used to say that the Bharat Bhavan itself was imposed on Bhopal. But we started in a big way, a charged starting. I did *Ghashiram Kotwal*, Peter Brook came for the opening, and it ran for twenty-five days continuously. We had started to get audiences. Now for any show at Bharat Bhavan, Bansi [Kaul] tells me, they have at least 200 people. In the BJP period, there was no activity, and it may have harmed the institution, we have to wait and see. It has harmed the group spirit, the team spirit, that I know.

It was the Bhopal *kand* that broke up my Bhopal experiment. I couldn't sing for one whole year. I couldn't even think. Something had fallen on me. And I could see Prema suffer so much. We have never had any land or house of our own. And as part of its scheme of offering land to award-winners from the state, the Karnataka government under Ramakrishna Hegde wrote to me thrice at that time, but Prema couldn't say yes. I had two spells in prison, the first time for a month, then I came out on bail, again in Jabbalpur someone made a writ petition, and the High Court cancelled my bail, and I was again in prison for four months. Once out of prison I came back to Rangmandal and did some plays, but I was not on salary. Then Ashok-ji said, 'I want you to disappear.' For two years after that I didn't do anything in Karnataka.

Then Kambar personally and the Directorate of Kannada Culture insisted on my coming back to work. Ramakrishna Hegde, the Chief Minister then, was very keen. In the Janata Government days, both Hegde and L. K. Advani were avid theatregoers, and saw all my productions. But governments kept on changing. The Karnataka Rangayana project could take off only in 1989, when Bommai was the Chief Minister. From 1986 to 1989, three years, was a

barren period for me. Even after this, my mind was not in the right state. I didn't have the necessary concentration for production work. After going to the States with the Rangayana *Hippolytus*, my children's plays, and several other factors, it is only in the last year that I have found my place again. Friends have helped me. I have had good friends. I have been lucky that way.

These last few years I have done a lot of research in music in theatre, and I have now come to the conclusion that music in theatre is not music, but a sound design, a sound plan, like the ground plan. In the small space and small duration of a theatre performance, the control of space and time offers a special problem. In *Natyashastra* terms, the *angika is* concerned with the management of space, and the *vachika is* concerned with the management of time. *Vachika is* not just speech, but whatever sound starts with the help of the tongue. That's how I would redefine *vacliika*. Definitions go on changing. We once thought that *vachika* only means reading. Now we know that it stands for the totality of sound, including linguistic sound, i.e. the *bhashika dhvani*, the primary vowel and consonant sounds, and the creative and reactive sounds, like the call sounds, the expressive-exclamatory sounds. With Rangayana, I made a *ragaswaraga*, using only sounds, voices, even noises. For theatre, music should be entirely independent of classical music, folk music, or any kind of music. It should be essentially theatre music-theatre should create its own music, its own instruments, its own sound patterns. It is applied music, and demands imagination in the application, in terms of its different functions, e.g. evocative music at the beginning, linking music, decorative music, punctuating music, mood music (we Indians are very rich in mood music), narrative music, and creative music. For creative music, I have always drawn my illustrations from Ritwik Ghatak's films, particularly *Meghe Dhaka Tara*, Alkazi's stage production of *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*, and Satyajit Ray's films, particularly *Nayak*, the train sounds. It is still growing in my mind, this concept of theatre music. It may still have several inner contradictions. The sound plan has to begin with the dialogue, its speech pattern, its accents, stresses, volumes, pitches, pauses. But then you may have to give some punctuating music, drawing sometimes on the playwright's suggestions, say a banging sound. Then some possibility sounds, say the ringing bell of a bicycle. Then environmental sounds. Then songs, etc. Or musical pieces-Brecht would call them 'idioms'. Then creative music, interpretive music. As for sources, we can draw from any source. In fact, rather than use the violin or any such established instrument, we should create

our own instruments, or use the more ordinary instruments like the manjeera, the ektara etc., the point being that they should be instruments that anyone can play. I made several of these anyone-can-play instruments at Rangayana. Noise can also become sound when we give it some meaning. We call it noise only when we can't make any sense of it. When children are quarrelling, we say: Why are you making such a noise? But for them it is not noise. They are quarrelling meaningfully. In theatre, any noise or sound, any *besura awaaz*, that conveys a meaning, is a musical sound.

*[When you came to make music for films, you became one of the first people in Indian cinema to make sound or what you describe as noise meaningful rather than using expected pieces of music which have their own associations elsewhere and can often become quite irritating in the different contexts in which they are relocated.]* In Mrinal Sen's *Parashuram* or my own *Chomana Dudi* it is entirely sounds. I would say that it is not *ragakari*, but *swarakari*, not *talakari* but *layakari*. Since realistic films need sound and not classical music, which is often quite alien to the setting being opened up, I started moving in this direction-in *Kadu*, which has many faults, as most of my earlier works seem to have whenever I look back at them. In *Hamsageethe*, I used only human sound. It is not a new thing in cinema. In *Neecha Nagar*, there had been an experiment with a sound pattern of human voices. But then it became instruments all the way. In *Hantsageetlte* it is either the main character singing, or the whole of nature singing. I used the *ragadari* also, but in human voices, e.g. sounds like 'hoh!', 'hah!' But in *Hamsageethe*, too, I see so many mistakes now. In *Chomana Dudi* my sound plan started with the shooting itself. Before that I had seen *Nayak*, with its rich use of train sound. *[I don't know whether you know that the whole recording was made by Subrata Mitra. He went on recording like mad... ]* Without being mad, how can one do something so brilliant? *[He didn't know how it would be used later on. For the fun of it. He did the entire thing. At one stage he even sent the recorder down the commode on a string.]* My namaste to him!

In *Chomana Dudi* I used jungle sounds for the sounds of crickets ... so many crickets inside the house and outside, daytime and at night, and sounds from bamboo stalks and the sound of drums. For some scenes I drew inspiration from Ritwik Ghatak, and I came to use the sounds of women pounding rice, music from the south Indian wedding routine, and a grave

*shruti* . In the play *Rishyashrunga*, for a scene with so many dead bodies under the hot sun, I used three or four tanpuras, de-noted.

My method of sound I drew from two points of reference, films and my own environment. I have heard so many sounds. In more than one Ray film, there is this bird sound-toto toto. I have used a similar *kiki kiki* sound in *Chomana Dudi*. On my short visit to Calcutta from Banaras, I saw *Shuva* with Sharmila Tagore as a dumb girl, where the director uses many sounds, including a rough note harmonium, a bellows harmonium, rippling water, birdsounds, to underscore the dumbness of the girl.

I used five types of speech levels in my *Sattavara Neralu* [The Shadows of the Dead]. The first level is storytelling in traditional style, from the *mutt* setting. The second level is choric. The third level is soliloquizing. The fourth level is civil speech in dialogue like Benimadhab in *Tiner Talwar* [The Tin Sword]. The fifth level is speech in a more Sanskritized manner. There were several variations in between the fourth and fifth levels, including abusive words, typically Brahmanical (that the critic Kirtinath Kurtkoti describes as 'extremely unproductive'), growling and bantering tones. When I used songs, they were not classical songs, but Purandaradasa songs, four centuries old, with their critiques of religious hypocrisy, which was one of the targets of my play. There were thirteen or fourteen of these songs-they were not just devotional, but rich with meanings at several levels simultaneously. One of the songs serves as a reaction to a particularly hypocritical commentary, beginning with the line 'It makes me laugh, ha ha ha . . .' Several of Purandaradasa's first lines are like newspaper headlines. When the Swami says that he does not know to which world he should belong, this world or another world, the song runs: 'I'm stuck between two women/ I sleep with one, the other's after me/ I sleep with the other, the first one's in a rage/ With the former, there's no happiness/With the latter, no fruit.' Obviously, the first one is the wife, the second the mistress. And then the song goes: 'In the tangle of relationships, aba-ba!' The *a-ba-ba* is obviously an exclamatory. Now I think I know how speech and sound and music can be interlinked to convey meaning.

## Theatrescapes

Terms like 'Professional', 'Commercial', 'Amateur', 'Experimental' have different meanings in the context of contemporary Indian theatre from what they have elsewhere. It is a problem that bintus ( defined by the OED supplement as 'a term used in Africa and Asia for a person who has been to England, USA for education') or the professional interpreters of Indian theatre have rarely tried to explain or confront. Once these terms are read in their Indian problematic, they no longer serve as the natural ducts through which the western codes and norms flow in and out, providing Indian theatre with models, either blatantly western or 'oriental/eastern' as conveniently defined by the West, and fixing Indian theatre within those comfortable parameters.

At a recent German-South Asian roundtable held at Lonavla ( 21-24 March,1994) on the initiative of the Goethe Institute, I tried to construct a grid distinguishing the following categories: Professional-Commercial, Traditional, Folk, Street and Protest, Subsidized /Sponsored, the Little Little Theatre, and the Big Little Theatre. The Professional-Commercial Theatre has been most visible and effective in Bombay and Calcutta for the longest span of time. As a theatre totally dependent on public support, on an audience that buys tickets and comes to see the performances from more of a natural attraction than anything else, it has, both in Bombay and Calcutta, catered more to suburban than to metropolitan audiences. While the Bombay companies-no longer serving the *company natakas*-still follow the old *company nataka* routes into the small towns of Maharashtra, and the Calcutta *jatra* companies travel deep into the countryside not only in West Bengal but also in parts of Bihar, Assam and Orissa, the permanent theatres with their repertory companies in Calcutta performing regularly four times a week and on holidays, 'draw two thirds of their audience from outside Calcutta - commuters on the suburban railway system. ' ( This last bit of statistical information was given to me recently by Soumitra Chatterjee, Ray's favourite actor, who has produced interesting plays in the commercial circuit from time to time, and performed too in his own productions.) As a matter of fact, in Calcutta, the theatre 'district', Shyambazar, with its four theatres, two flourishing and two drooping in the fifties, got a fresh lease of life in the seventies, as a direct consequence of the electrification.of the suburban railway system. Three new theatres came up. Abandoned halls

were hastily converted to theatres. The boom did not last for long. There were few directors or playwrights around to deliver the goods. The actors and the actresses who stepped in were not the hard-boiled professionals with the necessary skills to catch the audiences. But even as it slumped, it managed to survive. The scene in the early nineties is one in which about seven theatres in Calcutta have their regular four-shows-a-week schedule, with actors and actresses drawn mainly from films, putting in indifferent performances in productions which do not seem to have any directorial input, like the one I saw a week ago, featuring Supriya Chowdhury, Ritwik Ghatak's favourite actress, and Sabitri Chatterjee, another celebrity from the boom years, when she played the mute heroine, Shyamali, opposite the redoubtable Uttam Kumar for more than five hundred nights at the Star theatre. Directors or actors or actresses in the other theatres trying to make an entry into the Professional-Commercial theatre in Calcutta have rarely succeeded, with the exception of Soumitra Chatterjee.

Both the *jatra* in Calcutta and the professional Commercial theatre in Bombay have fared much better, primarily with their far better actorial inputs. The stronger sentiments, the music, the larger than life acting, the melodrama, the humour and the emotional peaks constitute a dramaturgy that has been rarely explored or exploited by any of our modern 'urban' playwrights, with the exception of Utpal Dutt in the *jatra*, doubling as director too. I have seen Vijay Mehta and Dr Sriram Lagoo in the Marathi Professional-Commercial theatre, in the former's *Barrister* (I am not sure if she directed) and in the latter's *Kirwant*, achieving a theatre of charged moments adding up to an emotional lift.

I make a distinction between the Traditional and the Folk, on the point that while the former tends to adhere more strictly to the tradition, and is sustained and smothered by institutional support in some form or another, as in the case of the Ramlila of Ramnagar, the latter has a freer, evolutionary life, in its direct dependence on and involvement with the folklife and folkways.

A lot of traditional theatre has gone the sponsored/subsidized way, and has naturally lost the capacity for growth, since the sponsors would like to 'preserve' it rather than let it live a natural growth pattern. The other kind of sponsored/subsidized theatre, the repertory companies maintained by the governments, central and state, is in a contradictory situation, which will become worse in the coming years, with the drift towards the market culture, and the government's insistence on economic self-sufficiency for all such organizations. The

'subsidized' repertory companies are supposed to have the freedom and support for really experimental work, but with the 'professional' role-/function thrust on them, they choose to carry as many petty comedies and pretentious literary exercises as they can on their repertoire, and cater to an audience that takes the official label too seriously and is not a really discriminating or demanding audience - not the jatra audience that has been known to physically beat up companies for a poor performance! Neither properly professional in the sense in which theatre professionals elsewhere have to fight for their living in a doggedly competitive market, and face the risk of being dropped by the trade if they fail to make the grade, nor experimental in the sense that they have the guts to fail by risk or choice, the sponsored/ subsidized crew are a pathetic lot, the best of them proving their worth only in occasional performances within, or more often outside the subsidized /sponsored circuit, as Uttara Baokar or Manohar Singh do in some of their excellent film appearances.

The Street and Protest theatre, free by commitment ( especially in the connotation that Badal Sircar gives to the word 'free' when he talks of 'the free theatre'), has literally shed blood under state violence and antisocial violence-Prabir Dutta, the first time in 1974, and Safdar Hashmi, its second martyr, in 1989-and sought to operate beyond and in defiance of the systems of state support, subsidy, and commerce. While several of these small theatre groups continue, in their mission of conscientizing the people and responding to political crisis ( as with the theatre groups now engaged in the battle of the workers in Fuleshwar, claiming their right to ownership of the Kanoria Jute Mills, abandoned by the proprietor, and fighting under grassroots leadership in defiance of the established trade unions), the media have managed to make them virtually invisible. One feels the power of the media and the cultural establishments when one comes across generally informed theatre buffs all over India asking casually: `So,Badal Sircar has retired?' Sircar still works like mad, the performances at Curzon Park (where Prabir Dutta was killed by the cops in the heady seventies) continue, and the several 'free theatre' groups move through villages and small towns, with their plays and workshops. But once they have refused to advertise, or ask the media for publicity and exposure, or ask for 'commercial' sponsorship, the media, the establishment and other theatres too choose to deny their presence and challenge altogether. At the same time, a part of the street and protest theatre shows signs of being appropriated, as groups or organizations seek publicity as 'radical' outfits and draw financial and other

modes of support from a state that clears itself of its guilt by such 'aid', or draw funds from other sources -and in the process, dilute their aggressive thrust. I would not like to sit on judgement right now on the group that was once committed to exploring and critiquing reality as it appeared to the small industrial suburb nineteen kilometres from Calcutta, and interacting with its own local audience, confronting the 'locality' itself, but has now given itself up to picking up traditional skills and martial arts, and playing with them in workshops, while the concerns and problems that would have provoked them earlier leave them cold or only 'formally' stirred.

The Street and Protest theatre needs a strong ideological base, or well thought-out understanding of its politics, its position and role vis-a-vis the state, the immediate community, and the society at large. (I bring in the concepts 'state', 'community' and 'society' deliberately, positing these against the more amorphous 'audience' which over the years has come too close to 'consumers'.) For it is a theatre that has to sustain itself by its politics, and not by the more facile strategies of communication for entertainment. A street theatre group, committed to an ideology of protest, can survive only if the group as a whole, all its members-like any radical/ activist political group-are convinced about the rightness of their choice, and not tempted into the strife for stardom or reputation: not an easy thing anyway.

While several street or protest groups have opted for high profile projection of their radicalism, often going into oversell, Badal Sircar's withdrawal into work and work alone has exposed him to charges of asceticism. As Prasanna writes in a piece he contributed to the special issue of *Angan*, the Bengali organ of the Third Theatre movement, commemorating twenty-five years of Badal Sircar's group, *Shatabdi*: 'Badal Sircar is a theatre person I respect but not agree with. I respect him because he reminds me of a religious ascetic. For him theatre is a passion. Badal Sircar is like the devotee, who, in certain religious practices, tortures himself, in order to communicate with god. Badal Sircar does that in theatre.'

I would not agree with Prasanna, when he says in the same piece; 'Badal Sircar refuses to "dialogue" with his audience. His words are a mere procession of angry anti-establishment outbursts, each going its own way. Badal Sircar mistrusts meaning. I mean, he mistrusts words, sentences, scenes and entire texts linking with each other and building themselves up into some sort of meaning. This would not have been such a big problem, if he had linked them up in some other way at least; for example, through narrative. He refuses narrative equally



vehemently. This creates a peculiar void: a gaping hole. While one is watching his performances one is so dazzled by the sheer energy of his performance that one does not become aware of this void. It is only when you are out of it and when you are reflecting on it that you become uneasy about this gaping hole.'

It is a pity that neither Prasanna nor Kanhailal, the two respectful and yet strongly critical voices in *Angnn*, has had a chance of watching Sircar's more recent productions, particularly the brilliant *Khat-Mat-Kring* (1983), in which Sircar goes into the roots, connections and hierarchies of violence, linking them through physical-compositional images, verbal references, and words into an elaborate and yet charged argument; or *Jammabhumi Aaj* (1986), his 'poetry montage' on poverty and hunger, using poems by Birendra Chattopadhyay, Monibhushan Bhattacharya, and Sircar himself; and *Bind Rasta* (1989), a one-man performance, narrating a modern fairytale. All of these productions are instances of warm and sensitive 'dialoguing', perhaps what Prasanna is really looking for.

But my problem lies elsewhere. I am still not entirely convinced that Sircar has succeeded in constructing and developing his ideology to its logical end, and located it in a larger political and historical nexus. There is little ideological development between his earlier theoretical texts and his latest, the Sri Ram Centre Lecture. I am afraid that this ideological lapse has affected the course of the movement that he has led with such uncompromising (though not necessarily unequivocal) dedication, and his followers remain a generally ideologically confused lot. It is this same lack of ideological clarity that inhibits the radical thrust of most street/protest theatre groups (including the Jana Natya Manch in its post-Hashmi history, the People's Little Theatre, and Prabir Guha's Alternative Living Theatre), once they step beyond the topical agit-prop.

Coming back to my original grid by the Little Little Theatre I mean those groups that would put up a show for four or five performances, to a lot of high profile publicity, and call it a day, from a philosophy of 'the performance's the thing'-usually expensive, and most often quite exhibitionist. It remains a theatre primarily self-indulgent and selfreferential, and not particularly concerned with a continuing, developing, interacting dialogue with a community, or, if you would like, audience. A lot of the Little Little Theatre overlaps with the sponsored/subsidized theatre, and tends to become quite irrelevant in a longer view.

The Big Little Theatre is the scene occupied by the groups that have survived for twenty to forty seven years (like Bohurupee in Calcutta, which completed its forty-seventh year last first of May, and celebrated it with a premiere), like Theatre Academy, Naya Theatre, Nandikar, the People's Little Theatre, Aawishkar, and so on, and have established definite images or identities. The best Indian plays and the best directorial ventures have been discovered, nurtured and presented by these groups. But somehow these groups, ageing and not attracting enough new people, have been showing signs of exhaustion, with rare exceptions here and there (Rangakarmee in Calcutta, and Theatre Academy, Pune, in its Grips Theatre project, are among these exceptions). This column, overburdened already, has no place for remedial suggestions. But surely, 'going professional' just like that, as several Bengali directors have been suggesting for the last few years, is no solution.

As a matter of fact, the more we come to terms with the plurality of theatre in India, and allow the different theatres their distinct spaces and possibilities, and desist from blurring the distinctions and letting one theatre attempt something that another theatre is better at, the more scope for development we would allow to our companies. I can assure Mrinal Sen, who recently in private conversation questioned my supposed advocacy of the street and protest theatre in preference to all the other theatres, that I am all for this plurality-and the tensions and healthy conflicts that it naturally generates. The cushy terms that we questioned right at the beginning of this column could very well be dispensed with, in this fresh reading proposed for Indian theatre today.

**Samik Bandyopadhyay**

## Theatre Log

### The Women Directors' Theatre Festival

The theatre audience of Chandigarh had the privilege of witnessing a four-day Women's Theatre Directors' Festival organized by the Department of Culture, Punjab, in the last week of March. The festival included productions from different parts of India-*Himmat Mai* directed by Amal Allana from Delhi, *Rudali* by Usha Ganguli from Calcutta, *Lakshapati Rajana Kathe* by B. Jayashree from Bangalore and *Yerma* by Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry from Chandigarh. The plays were performed in the interesting amphitheatre of Rock Garden.

*Himmat Mai* is an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage*. According to the director's note, '*Mother Courage* is not a story that depicts the process of transformation; rather she is the transformed person. She is a much older, wiser version of Shen-Te and Shui-Ta, one who has learnt to cope, learnt to live with the man and woman within her, has resolved the warring aspects of her nature, and is depicted as having successfully encapsulated the contradictions of human behaviour.' These contradictions find dramatic expression through the device of a male actor, Manohar Singh, playing the role of the Mother, Himmat Mai. The director feels that by a male playing a woman, 'they have begun to discover the sense and quality of what it means to be feminine.' The production closely follows Brecht's theory of alienation through this device, the scenes being formally introduced over the PA system, the lights changing as actors change their places as players in the scene, and the placing of the cart in various stage areas for different scenes. Manohar Singh, Mona as the daughter and Arjun Raina as the son put in strong performances.

Nissar Allana's silver-coloured set, rocks and stone pillars bronze in colour, and the dull glowing orange sun, combined to create a barren, cold and lifeless landscape which bespeaks dying emotion. The set design was effective, but its extension disturbed the audience entry points and one was continuously distracted by the audience entering the space the actors were inhabiting, thereby breaking the concentration of both the performers and the viewers. In the beginning the sound of the recorder and the voices of actors did not

match, perhaps it was the fault of the system. The lights went off during one scene and some people began walking off. An interval was quickly declared. However, through all these distractions and mishaps, the concentration of the actors was remarkably steady. It testified to years of training and experience. The show was a great success and culminated in a standing ovation.

The second day began with *Rudali*. The opening sequence with the sound of the *chakki* held the attention of the audience. The costumes and initial impact of the rudalis wailing made a strong impression. The use of actual materials like water, flour, flowers and smoke heightened the effect of the performance. Otherwise there was hardly any change in the emotional level of the play. By spreading the action too wide, we felt it lost focus and intensity. Moreover, at one point a dead body is brought onto stage-this, being a little too realistic, lost out in the transformation into artistic value. The play was well received by the audience, but a lingering disappointment remained-the pain of Sanichari or the life of the rudalis could have been explored more deeply.

Spandana, the group from Karnataka, performed *Lakshapati Rajana Kathe* in Kannada, a folk tale which deals in essence with the battle between the rich and the poor, ending in a victory for the good (Lakshapati, illegitimate son of the king by a maidservant) over evil (the four notorious sons borne by the queen). Jayashree's distinctive theatrical voice caught one's attention from the start. The large Kannada component in the audience laughed at the dialogue, sparking off laughter even among those who couldn't follow the language. Available space was creatively used, with performers climbing rocks and appearing from behind bushes. The graceful dance movements and striking choreography betray intense training. One felt that the music should have developed and changed along with the moods and twists in the story. The production is based on one of the traditional performance forms of northern Karnataka, Jogerata, in which narration is juxtaposed with music, dance and acting.

The festival ended with The Company's *Yerma*, a play by Federico Garcia Lorca. The Punjabi translation is by the well-known poet Surjit Patar. The director sees this play as the urge of the earth to renew and recreate itself, as a struggle between fertility and sterility, between life and death. B. V. Karanth's music has a haunting quality, and the colourful costumes turn the crowd scenes into vivid spectacle.

One wishes that such festivals could be followed by seminars to review and discuss the production, and to give the directors a chance to exchange and share experiences and views.

**Rajinder Kaur and Ramanjit**

### **A Seminar on Theatre**

People's Little Theatre, Calcutta, organized a seminar on 1st and 3rd April as part of a fortnight-long programme called Multifaceted Utpal Dutt in memory of the late theatre giant. The topic for the first day was 'The Need for an Ideology in Theatre.' The speakers were Prasanna, Mihir Bhattacharya, Azizul Haque and Mahesh Elkunchwar. Samik Bandyopadhyay was the moderator.

Theatre director Prasanna deliberated on the fact that owing to the difference in ideological and political positions from place to place, the nature of performance also varies—the kind of street theatre that one would chance to see in Bengal or, for that matter, Delhi, would differ from that in Karnataka. He pointed out that although ideology does play the key role in shaping or moulding a person, when it actually comes to creating something, the person rises above ideological parameters. In essence, his artistic expression accrues from an urge that comes from deep within. This kind of duality, however, entails the hazard of splitting one's personality into two selves, one self often confronting the other and thereby drawing the person into all kinds of moral predicaments, which very few could actually resolve. Utpal Dutt was one such person, for whom facing odds and combating them was a way of life.

Mihir Bhattacharya, who heads the School of Communication and also teaches-English literature at Jadavpur University, conceded that he was awed at Utpal Dutt's erudition: the way he had cogitated over Shakespeare or Brecht, the avid reader and thinker that he was. Although most people think that ideology can bind or circumscribe, in the case of a conscious and creative artist like Utpal Dutt, it does not represent a closure—it becomes a method, an approach to reality not just in terms of understanding it, but in terms of representing reality, in terms of his awareness of a reception community with which he tries to communicate his reading or interpretation of reality. Ideology operates throughout that circuit, beginning right from his understanding, his representation or his method of artistic production, and reaching out to the

reception community. For Utpal Dutt, ideology functioned as the potent factor behind his methods of production and stage rhythm, ceased to be mere theoretical jargon or a mechanical Marxist interpretation of reality and became a living encounter with the people, sustaining his means of communication.

Naxalite leader Azizul Haque stated that it is the lack of ideology which holds a person back from responding to even the most exigent situations, or from involvement in the changing process of life and the times. Haque suggested that one needs to redefine terms like *rajniti* and talk in terms of *lokniti* instead, which embraces the entire consciousness, involving culture, religion or ethics from the people's point of view and not that of the rajas or rulers. This has served as a coveted area of influence where powers and forces have tried to counter and control the sensibilities, reactions, responses and movements of the people. If a person acts at the level of *lokniti*, it is imperative that he maintain a firm ideological position, especially when there are powers that unceasingly endeavour to spread their area of influence. An artist should condition himself to abominate authorities and institutions that inhibit free expression and smother free movements. In essence, bereft of ideology, art and the artist both suffer-their very existence is at stake.

The reputed Marathi playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar differentiated between the kind of theatre he believed in and practised-the theatre of personal statement-and ideological theatre, which he saw most others around him practising. The polarity between the two increases as a result of the failure of one to understand the other, or to accept the other as equally meaningful and important. Each, however, sought different ends or objectives in theatre. Although there are some productions in which art and ideology are superbly harmonized, one complementing the other, there are also others where aesthetics are sacrificed, which deny the viability of human experience if it does not come in codified political idioms, which repudiate the notion that it is the human condition that directs social conditions and not vice versa, which end up in a cacaphony of cumbersome rhetoric and polemical jargon. Elkunchwar believes that art cannot be delimited to ideological considerations, as this will be to art's disadvantage.

The second session was to discuss 'Innovations and Spectacles in Production', although very few of the presentations actually addressed the topic of the day. Speakers included. B V. Karanth, Tapas Sen, M. K. Raina, Ramaprasad Banik and Ashok Mukhopadhyay, with Samik Bandyopadhyay moderating.

B. V. Karanth, theatre director, conceded his indebtedness to Bengali theatre in moulding his ideas and concepts, especially the contributions of Sombhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt and Tapas Sen; while Tapas Sen, the eminent lighting designer who was a close associate of Utpal Dutt, reminisced about Utpal Dutt's ability to create visual impact on the proscenium stage.

Proscenium theatre, according to the theatre director M. K. Raina, is a condemned space, a closed, oppressive 'black box' which constricts the scope of theatre. He lamented the fact that theatrical activity took place in such a frozen model, which sent out signals of superior, enlightened beings performing for those inferior to them. This model had been 'imported from the lands which exported colonialism'. He found it disquieting that over the years we had not broken away from it but on the contrary hailed its architectonics as if the model were flawless, as if no alternative model could be better. This was a result of the colonization of the intellect, which has affected playwrights as well. They can only think of ideas which fit this model. Indigenous cultural models have ceased to excite us, and even when folk forms are introduced in theatre, they are severed from their roots, taken out of context and placed in the proscenium. As a result we get an impoverished art form.

Prasanna disputed the idea that proscenium theatre was an import or result of colonization. Plays in Europe were often performed outdoors-as in Greek theatre. Whereas India had a tradition of in-house performance, and plays were written accordingly. A close reading of the *Natyashastra* or any classical Sanskrit play would testify to this. He praised Ebrahim Alkazi and Utpal Dutt as theatre prodigies. Their extensive exploration of theatre craft within the proscenium expanded the potential of the much condemned 'black box'. But any ideological grid, Prasanna fears, may indeed restrict us in our understanding of the theatre work of directors like Utpal Dutt in its totality.

Actor-director Ramaprasad Banik pointed out that Utpal Dutt had always been concerned with the objective of the play he was doing. There was nothing superfluous in his productions. The stylistic means he adopted were carefully chosen with the thrust of the play in mind. His crafty use of spectacle, even the deliberate lack of spectacle at times, had a purpose and a politics behind it, a message to be conveyed.

Ashok Mukhopadhyay, an actor-director who teaches Drama at Rabindra Bharati, added that apart from functioning as socio-political statements, Utpal Dutt's handling of a

play, his use of spectacle and innovation, were the result of an unceasing exploration of the craft, language and magic of theatre. Ingenuity lies in the ability to perform under inimical conditions which may be spatial or temporal. Utpal Dutt attached great importance to language, words, diction, cadence.

Samik Bandyopadhyay, theatre critic, ended off by elaborating on Utpal Dutt's use of language. He also made it clear that one should avoid the temptation to turn Utpal Dutt into an object of nostalgia.

On the whole, the seminar tended to veer too much towards references to Utpal Dutt and his works, rather than concentrating on addressing the topics of the seminar-ideology and theatre; and the use of spectacle and innovation in theatre. No doubt, on such an occasion, Utpal Dutt as a point of reference, even of nostalgia, could not be avoided. But too often the presentations degenerated into eulogies or reminiscences, lacking in critical analysis or theoretical soundness. It seemed a waste that participants should travel from all over India to share so little of their professional expertise, thoughts or experience with the interested audience.

**Neena Guha**

## **Notebook**

World Theatre Day: 27th March was the World Theatre Day. Every year on this day an international message by a reputed theatre person is circulated by the International Theatre Institute. This year the message is from the eminent playwright, Vaclav Havel, who is also the President of the Czech Republic.

'It is not true that because of television, film, video, and the other great achievements of this era, theatre is dwindling in importance.

'I would say that exactly the opposite is true, that theatre is better suited than any other medium to reveal, in genuinely compelling and challenging ways, not only all the dark forces that are dragging the world down, but also everything bright and luminous, in which its hopes are contained ...



'Yes, theatre is not just another genre, one among many. It is the only genre in which, today and every day, now and always, living human beings address and speak to other human beings. Because of that, theatre is more than just the performance of stories or tales. It is a place for human encounter, a space for authentic human existence, above all the kind of existence that transcends itself in order to give an account of the world and of itself. It is a place of living, specific, inimitable conversation about society and its tragedies, about man, his love and anger and hatred. Theatre is a point at which the intellectual and spiritual life of the human community crystallizes. It is a space in which it can exercise its freedom and come to understanding.

'In the global technical civilisation created by so many autonomous cultures and threatened by conflicts between them, theatre is-I firmly believe -a telescope into the future and a means of giving a concrete shape to our hope. Not because its purpose is to describe a world better than the one that exists, or to construct a vision of a better future, but because it embodies the main hope of humanity today, which is the rebirth of a living humanity. For, if theatre is free conversation, free dialogue among free people about the mysteries of the world, then it is precisely what will show humankind the way toward tolerance, mutual respect, respect for the miracle of Being.'

**Urdu Theatre-A Seminar:** The Urdu Academy and National School of Drama jointly organized a seminar in New Delhi to review the position of Urdu theatre in the contemporary cultural context. The seminar provided an indepth historical overview of the position Urdu theatre once held and underpinned its cultural signification. For decades the theatre that dominated the urban cultural scene in large parts of northern, western and even eastern India was predominantly a form of Urdu theatre. This influential and self-sustaining stage tradition, along with the Parsi theatre, provided one of the most popular forms of entertainment before the advent of the popular cinema, which interestingly developed on the formulaic structure of the Urdu theatre with writers like Aga Hasar Kashiri writing for both mediums. Unfortunately, in the decades that followed, Urdu theatre was reduced to a minority theatre with no language-specific audience of its own. The most thought-provoking questions raised at the seminar were around the very term 'Urdu theatre' as a separate category.

**Kamdeo Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna:** With his Chattisgarhi artist's troupe, Habib Tanvir presented his *Kamdeo Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*, an adaptation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Interestingly enough, the names, ambience and subtle nuances had all been retained. Tribal dance forms and chorus songs, integral aspects of Tanvir's art, interspersed the text.

**Katha Collage:** A third year NSD students' presentation, *Katlu Collage* was directed by Devendra Raj Ankur. Termed as a 'Theatre of Stories', the entire presentation was comprised of two sets, each set in turn having three different stories with neither any continuing links nor thematic resemblance. The first set of short stories were Bhisham Sahni's '*Leela Nand Lal Ki*', Rajindar Yadav's '*Ek Kamzor Ladki*' and '*Khel Khel Mein*', Nirmal Verma's translation of a Milan Kundera story. The second set consisted of '*Belpatra*' by Geetanjali Shri, '*Deputy Collectri*' by Amarkant and '*Ram Sanjeevan Ki Prem Katha*' by Uday Prakash. In this dramatic innovation, the stories were not scripted but presented as they were. The process involved a blending of the art of narration with acting-switching over of roles by the characters, narrating accounts to carry the storyline forward, providing other information, describing time and place, and commenting on situations.

**Caligula:** The Madras based group Koathu-p-Pattarai recently presented a Tamil adaptation of Camus' *Caligula*, at the Madras Museum compound, under the direction of Pravin. The play, which attempts a re-appraisal of the emperor Caligula, was translated into Tamil by the well-known author Indira Parthasarathy and Padmini Rajagopal. Instead of resorting to period Tamil, they have used instead simple, direct and at times colloquial Tamil which gives it a contemporary feel. Much of the communication bypassed language, being nonverbal in nature. For example, the use of stances from Thang-ta, a martial art of Manipur. Khilton, who choreographed the production, trained the actors in the use of Thang-ta movements. The adroit use of puppets and masks were other special features of the production.

**Nadi - Ek Katha:** Under the auspices of South Central Zone Cultural Centre, Nagpur, the Madhya Pradesh Government's Cultural Department and Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, a five-day

drama festival was held at Bharat Bhavan as part of the renowned Telugu writer Gurzada Appa Rao's centenary celebrations. The festival commenced with the performance of a Hindi play called *Nadi:-Ek Katha* written by Rajesh Joshi and Raj Kamal Nayak, which highlights the problems of environment and water pollution.

**Satya Shodak:** G. P. Deshpande's *Satya Shodak* is based on the life of Jyotiba Phule, the 19th century Dalit reformer-rebel of Mararashtra. Phule had uncompromisingly fought against the execrable practices that went on in the name of religion, and initiated a reform movement called Satya Sodhak against High Brahmanism, which denied dignity to those belonging to the lower castes. *Satya Sodhak* was produced by Pratyaya, a Kolhapur based group which recently produced a Marathi translation of *King Lear* by V. Karandikar, which has drawn a lot of attention in Marathi theatre circuits.

**Thambalnu:** *Thambalnu* a tragic Meitei love legend from Manipur, translated by A. Krishna Mohant Nishant and scripted by B. Jayantakumar, was presented by the second year students of NSD. The production, designed and directed by Ratan Thiyam, was the outcome of a students' workshop conducted by Thiyam at his Chorus Repertory Theatre complex in Imphal.

**Lachhma:** Mahadevi Verma's famous memoirs, *Ateet Ke Chalchitra*, have been turned into an 80minute Hindi play called *Lachhma*, presented by the Sahitya Akademi in collaboration with Arun Kuckreja's Ruchika Theatre Group at the Shri Ram Centre basement theatre. Under the direction of Kuckreja, Veena Mehta as Mahadevi Verma and Vijaya Razdan as Lachhma, the mountain girl whose miserably hard existence is portrayed in this work, put in performances which have drawn very favourable reviews.

**Umrao:** Based on Mirza Ruswa's famous novel, this production was scripted by Geetanjali Shri and directed by Anuradha Kapoor for Vivadi in Delhi. The production is the outcome of more than a year's research, workshops and rehearsals. The set, by the artists Nilima Sheikh and S. Badrinarayanan, are a particularly innovative feature of the production,

consisting of twelve mobile screens painted on both sides with motifs relevant to the different scenes, and mounted on door-size tubular structures on wheels. These are moved about to indicate different locales and acting space, as also 'interchangeability of identities'. Vidya Rao, who does the music, uses early film music as well as recordings of Begum Akhtar and Kamla Jharia along with Uttara Baokar's singing.

**Babuji:** B.V.Karant returned to the Delhi stage after fifteen years to direct *Babuji* with the Shri Ram Centre Repertory Company. Based on a story by Mithileswar, the production uses folk forms, particularly the Nautanki, to blend action, music and dance with the text of the play.

**Faust:** The NCPA presented *Faust*, directed by Fritz Bennewitz, with Naseeruddin Shah as Mephistopheles, Pankaj Kapoor as Faust and Sharvani Dhond as Margaret. The set, costumes and lights were by Kristian Panzer, and the western music compiled by Coniad Aust of National Theatre, Weimar. Dodo Bhujwalla choreographed the production.

**Final Solutions:** Mahesh Dattani's new play *Final Solutions*, directed by Alyque Padamsee, examines the nature of our prejudices over the communal issue. It explores two realities, one Hindu, the other Muslim. Bare stage settings, the use of ritual chanting in place of a background score, and the interesting use of a flexible chorus, which represents Muslims at one moment and Hindus at another, add to the impact of the harsh questions raised by the text.

**Jadoo Ka Kaleen:** This play, written by Mridula Garg, focuses on the plight of children in the carpet industry who are denied their fundamental rights as stated in the UN convention on the Rights of the Child. It was performed in Lucknow by Bal Natya Akademi with the support of UNICEF. The cast, comprising mostly children, was directed by Brijendra Kala.

**Living Theatre:** Ebrahim Alkazi's theatre school, Living Theatre, presented two plays, Peter Shaffer's *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, directed by Alkazi. The former uses the story of the Spanish conquest of Peru to explore complex ethical issues. The

Hindi translation was by Noor Zaheer, the set by Alkazi and lights by Nissar ALana. The latter was translated by Zahida Zaidi.

Trilogy by Mahesh Elkunchwar: To commemorate 150 years of Marathi theatre, the Marathi theatre group Awishkar is staging a trilogy of plays written by Marathi playwright Mahesh Elkunchwar. This trilogy traces the life of a family over four generations. The plays are *Wade Chirebandi* (Old Stone Mansion), *Magna Talyakathi* (The Pond), and *Yugaanta* (Apocalypse). The director Chandrakant Kulkarni comments: 'The last thirty years have seen tremendous transition in Indian thought, especially the clash between materialism and idealism. This is brought out in the relationship of the characters.' Veteran Marathi artistes like Sulabha Deshpande, Dilip Kulkarni, Vandana Gupte and Asavari Ghotikar will perform in the production.

## Letters

I have just finished reading the first issue of *Seagull Theatre Quarterly* and I am writing to congratulate you on an excellent start. The journal is beautifully produced and the contributions are uniformly of a high quality. My congratulations to you and your associates. Wish you all success with the Quarterly.

Yours etc.

Girish Karnad, Bangalore

Better than average as it is, *Rudali* merits detailed coverage. Alongside I would welcome a couple of pages on contemporary Bengali theatre.

With regard to the contents, the overview of the birth of *Rudali* generates mixed feelings in me. Beyond commonplaces, there is very little to make it either educative or informative. The questions chosen by your team of researchers do not appear to have been well-designed enough to evoke answers conveying the intricacies associated with the process of a production. While I personally feel that Usha Ganguli is distinctive in her approach to theatre I get very little support for the feeling from the interview. How is she different from the others? The only little difference that struck me is in the area of dramatization.

The rest exposes contradictions. We come to know that Usha Ganguli has visited Chandigarh and Sonagachhi in Calcutta. But I can hardly fathom the depth of the experience-for the discovery that prostitutes use lipstick to attract customers even during daytime and that there are lots of children in the redlight area does not appear worth inspecting.

Samik Bandyopadhyay, as usual, has been interesting and intriguing barring his derisive comments on Sombhu Mitra. I agree with his observation that Bengali theatre is suffering from short-sightedness; but the uncalled-for comparison between two greats, Dr Sriram Lagoo and Sombhu Mitra, with the rash conclusion that Sombhu Mitra is a much lesser actor on stage, will only contribute to spreading that disease to an epidemic. People parrot what they understand on the face value of the remarks made by respected opinion-makers like Samik Bandyopadhyay, embarrassing people like us who nurture a reverence for all three.

Momentarily ignoring that the voice plays a dominant role in verbal theatre to which both the above greats belong, let us look at what Dr Lagoo said of Sombhu Mitra. He has acknowledged his

debt to Sombhu Mitra and expressed unequivocally that Sombhu Mitra has been his idol for twenty years. The actress Sulabha Deshpande said she had never seen a Marathi actor comparable to Sombhu Mitra. Actor-director Kumar Roy's description of the sharp, poignant contemptuous look in Sombhu Mitra's eyes at his exit in the third scene of *Dashachakra*, if read in conjunction with SB's observation that Sombhu Mitra does not use his eyes, will simply confuse young theatre lovers who have never seen Sombhu Mitra on stage. If one takes a microscopic view of Dr Lagoo's physical gestures he might not appear too great pitted against Sombhu Mitra. Dr Lagoo standing with arms akimbo is a frequently used gesture. He would have escaped such repetition if he had earnestly been on the lookout for details-not on the surface level but on the philosophical level.

Lastly, there was a reference to fencing in my adaptation of *Neelam Neelam*. STQ observed 'We never play with swords'. I don't know who 'we' stands for. The Calcutta Racquets Club is now more than 200 years old. Indians started being accepted as members since 1936. Fencing was a sport there till 1970. Who were the persons practising fencing there ? Surely a handful of privileged Indians. The use of the fencing foil was retained not because a suitable alternative could not be thought of, as hinted, but because by using that as an 'icon' I wanted to underline which class the brothers in their young days had belonged to. I think this must have been the reason why Arthur Miller brought in the issue of fencing, since it was hardly a popular or common sport even in America.

Yours etc.

Asit Mukhopadhyay, Calcutta

Today we need a specific direction for our theatre activities. We need information, knowledge and coordination. In the first issue Samik Bandyopadhyay's article was very self critical and full of insight. The information about trends in Marathi theatre (Shanta Gokhale) and the work-shop on *vidusTaks* was interesting. I feel that *Rudali* was overemphasized.

You should invite articles from the 'thinkers' of Indian Theatre rather than performers.

I wish STQ a long life.

Yours etc.

Kailash Pandya, Ahmedabad

It was almost 30 years back that I brought out Natraj, a theatre quarterly. But being an individual effort, it only lasted for one year. I would have continued but then I joined Bharatiya Natya Sangh as its executive secretary. I fully understand the difficulties in bringing out such a magazine. My own fear is that many theatre magazines become prisoners of the circle that they themselves create. I sincerely hope that you will not fall prey to this. I offer my services to you and hope that you will avail of them.

Yours etc.

Ranbir Sinh, IPTA, Rajasthan

I have read the first issue of STQ with interest. For me, the most refreshing attitude of the magazine was its emphasis on the culture-language specific nature of theatre. Without this acute awareness, I think, discussing theatre across India, even on an informative level, is useless and misleading. I would also say that this is the most immediate need of the present times because if a theatre group in India today loses sight of its culture-language specificity, it soon slips into the trap of 'interculturalism' both on a national and international scale and eventually turns out to be useless in its own culture-language.

But this attitude should also not lead us to a total shutting off to people and ideas from 'other' cultures and we should not be tempted to reject all the theatre workers who come from outside. I will take the specific example of Fritz Bennewitz, who has also been cited by Samik Bandyopadhyay in his interview with Usha Ganguli. There Bennewitz's argument is represented



by these words- 'I know the text in German, and I teach you the blocking, the movement and the gestures, and I don't care much about your language.'

Having worked with Bennewitz several times, in Hindi at NSD and in Kannada with my group in Kamataka, first of all I would contest that this argument is a complete misrepresentation of Bennewitz. He is extremely sensitive to the nuances of the 'other' languages; he consciously explores the culture-specific gestures of an actor, and both as a person and as a director takes great pains to be an 'equal' with those he works with.

This sense of 'equality'-both on the mundane and the professional levels-can be a litmus test to determine the genuineness of any cross-cultural work. The problem with the Euro-American interculturalisms and the Akademi-NSD supported interculturalisms in India is that they lack a sense of 'equality'. In all these cases there is a teacher on the one hand and a learner on the other, a refiner on the one hand and raw material on the other. Therefore, this relationship has the weight of an invisible authority on the one hand and a meek submissiveness on the other. This unequal interculturalism must be vehemently fought against, but work 'with each other' must go on. For the last several years, my theatre group Ninasam has kept this as a conceptual basis to say yes or no to a project proposal involving us and an outsider.

However, I should be grateful to the various writings in STQ for raising and clarifying all these questions. For that reason, I will keep looking forward to the future issues of STQ.

With best wishes and wholehearted support to the cause of STQ

Yours etc

K. V. Akshara,

Ninasam, Heggodu, Kamataka.

The editorial was very encouraging, since many of us here have felt the need for documentation and interaction between the pockets of theatre activity all over India. I really appreciate your effort to stimulate the participation of the readers. The issues taken up in this issue are ones which have been of concern to theatre practitioners all over India.

I would suggest that you keep in mind that most of the theatre practitioners in India are more comfortable with the vernacular. I see in your journal an attempt to reach out to those marginalized and under-represented. Since we are compelled to relate to each other in English,

maybe we should try to make it as simple as possible, otherwise your target readership will be the few who are more comfortable in English.

Yours etc.

Usha R., Madras

The first copy of STQ is excellently produced. My hearty congratulations. We are working for the liberation of the Dalits in India. We also use the medium of art, culture, music and theatre. We would be happy to extend our cooperation to make your endeavours successful.

Yours etc Henry Thiagaraj Dalit Liberation Education Trust, Madras.

Thank you for the first issue of STQ. The production is excellent; so is the content. It has come out at a time when there is a crying need for it.

But then there is also little being published about serious cinema. Could you not at least keep one section devoted to serious writing on cinema?

Yours etc

Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Trivandrum