

Encounters with Cultures:

Contemporary Indian Theatre and Interculturalism

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Sumitra Mukerji currently working on her Ph.D in Performance Studies at New York University, raises some questions about the concept of interculturalism.

I propose to address the by now somewhat vexed issue of interculturalism with reference to a few specific trends in the development of contemporary theatre in India. By contemporary theatre I mean the kind of work that has been produced in the post-Independence era at government and state-sponsored institutions as well as through the 'independent' activities of contemporary playwrights, directors, performance artists and groups at both regional and national levels. This theatre is often treated as a monolithic construct by Indian as well as foreign scholars, who tend to either loosely classify it under a pan-Indian conception of 'modern Indian drama' or place it too specifically within a 'traditionalist' category, as Suresh Awasthi does when he labels it 'the theatre of the roots.' Such classifications can be misleading, given that contemporary Indian theatre-like most other contemporary art forms in the country-is extremely complex in its relations to modernity as well as tradition. It is also, needless to say, sprawling in extent, variety and multiplicity and manifests the modern Indian nation's cultural heterogeneity rather than homogeneity.

We see this complexity and variety quite clearly if we look at the work of Habib Tanvir, K. N. Panikkar, B. V. Karanth and Rattan Thiyam (the key figures Awasthi associates with a 'theatre of the roots'); or-to mention two other well-known examples from the contemporary theatre-if we look at Badal Sircar's street theatre work with Satabdi and at Girish Karnad's playwriting efforts to fuse traditional folk forms with modern, postcolonial influences. These practitioners provide us with rather distinct and -disparate developments, both in terms of performance aesthetics as well as the politics of representation and individual ideologies that shape their artistic concerns, choices of subject-matter, and dramaturgic/directorial practice. And, again, these developments have come about in the last two or three decades in a very complex relationship to the nation's colonized past as well as to modern western theatrical

traditions, the indigenous Natyasastra tradition, and the host of regional 'folk' or popular theatre practices in the country.

A detailed, comprehensive analysis of this relationship is naturally beyond the scope of this essay, but it seems to me that any critical or discursive attempt to engage with the phenomena of contemporary theatre in India needs to address it in contemporaneous terms which are closer to its actual dynamics of cultural representation and production-reception aesthetics than the binary classifications of 'modern' or 'traditional'. In other words, we need to find a way, in speaking about this theatre, which gives us a theoretical frame with which to grasp its dominant characteristics without losing or reducing its complexity and heterogeneity. I believe that 'interculturalism' is one of those contemporary terms which can help us in this regard.

Hence, this essay will explore the dynamics of interculturalism in Indian theatre with reference to the work of some contemporary directors and playwrights such as K. N. Panikkar, Habib Tanvir, Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar. I should point out that I will not be dealing with details of specific productions or with audience response or critical reception. The focus of this essay is on giving an *overview* of intercultural practice in contemporary Indian theatre, and so examples from these practitioners' work will be provided in the form of a survey rather than through singular textual /performance analyses. Further, instead of simply describing what makes this theatre 'intercultural', the thrust of the discussion will be to situate the larger, global discursive practice of interculturalism in relation to its specific implications, and relevance, for contemporary cultural and national politics in India. For, possible objections are bound to be raised at the usage of this term for Indian theatre practice today, unless one clarifies its meaning and applicability within the Indian socio-cultural and historical contexts.

It may appear questionable that the discourse and practice of interculturalism as it is emerging from certain sections of the western cultural and scholarly academy and gaining currency as a twin facet of EuroAmerican postmodernism,, might have anything to do with contemporary theatre in India. Especially, it may be argued further, when the particular directors and playwrights mentioned have expressly moved away from western modes of theatre and have emphasized instead the need to return to traditional modes of performance in regional culture that are specifically 'Indian'. It is precisely the presuppositions underlying these kinds of objections that need to be challenged.

The first is the assumption that 'interculturalism' is necessarily a western-centred concept and therefore a western-not Indian-prerogative. Now it is true that in the west, particularly in North America, interculturalism often becomes an euphemism for the unequal appropriation of cultural artefacts being passed off as an exchange of 'culture'. The interculturalism that has recently been promoted by American practitioners of 'avant-garde' theatre, especially, has been rightly criticized by Rustom Bharucha as a dangerous 'cultural tourism' which treats culture as a product to be bought and sold ('bartered'²), and decontextualizes the 'ritual actions', performances, customs and beliefs found in non-western theatres from their larger social and historical structures. As Bharucha writes in his essay 'The Collision of Cultures', such tourism posing as interculturalism amounts to an 'instance of the cultural exploitation of non-western peoples.'³

But do we have to play into this understanding of the term? It is my contention that the concept of interculturalism has a meaning and a value far beyond the limitations of its current interpretations and usage in the west. If 'culture' is understood in a broader sense, as history and ideology and the various traditions and collective practices that give different societies their sense of identity, then 'interculturalism' can apply to western as well as non-western societies as a more meaningful approach toward defining their relations with each other.

To be sure, the question of 'cultural identity' itself needs to be carefully positioned since it often becomes confused with and implicated in a rather reactionary kind of nationalism, which strives to attain a pristine state of absolute separateness from other societies, races, religions and cultures based upon the myth of a single, 'pure', national character. And the experience of fascistic nation-state formations in Europe as well as our own similar experience of Hindu nationalism in India in recent years should tell us how much a process of fundamentalist 'return to traditionalism' is implicated in the maintenance of a strict 'national identity'. This is a danger inherent in over-emphasizing differences between cultures on the basis of national 'markers'. However, an interculturalism that is sensitive to the historical specificity of, and differences between, cultures and yet works towards the exchange of knowledge, traditions, performances, philosophies and so on-without the exploitation of 'underprivileged' peoples-may be a way of overcoming this problem. It is from this perspective that the concept of interculturalism can, and 'should, apply to India.

But it is not just in this prescriptive sense but on actual historical grounds that the concept of interculturalism applies to India's contemporary cultural context. Despite the supra-political - or, if one prefers, macro-political-efforts to forge a single, pan-Indian 'national culture' based on a national identity, actual processes of cultural representation since Independence reflect an attempt to gain a sense of identity independent from that of the colonized 'British subject', without losing the multiplicity and distinctiveness of the various cultures that exist within the country. Thus both in the socio-political sense, and in the more narrow, aesthetic sense of 'culture', Indian culture has been truly intercultural. It seems to me that, in their disparate ways, the theatre practitioners I have mentioned illustrate this sense of interculturalism within India much better than the official 'representatives' of Indian culture abroad, such as our 'classical' and 'traditional' musicians and dancers.

This brings us to other problematic assumptions about Indian culture: that in order to be 'authentic' Indian culture must be 'traditional'; and that 'authentic' Indian traditions have nothing to do with modern (or postmodern) concepts like interculturalism. Which traditions are being invoked in such definitions of cultural authenticity? What is meant by 'traditional' in the first place? And who decides that interculturalism is a 'postmodern' phenomenon? But let me address this problematic specifically in terms of the 'return to tradition' ostensibly represented by Karnad, Tanvir, Thiyyam, Panikkar and Karanth. If their respective theatre activities are to be seen as a return in any sense, then it is certainly not a 'return' to a single, iconic image of a 'pure' Indian tradition. Rather it is an attempt to get back to the mass bases of India, to recover some of the suppressed performative methods as well as traditions from ancient, medieval and colonial times, to in fact bring back a sense of history that is wider~ deeper and more relevant to the majority of the people living in rural areas than the Anglicized, textbook versions. 'Tradition' in the case of these theatre practitioners is not a museum exhibit. It is something to be lived and grappled with, adapted, and even transformed, in order to create new forms of theatre which relate to Indian people. For each of them recognizes that tradition is something vital, an indigenous energy which comes from the lives of the ordinary people, their day-to-day practices of religion, family relations, social gathering, commonly observed customs, beliefs and rituals. It is in this sense that these theatre workers could be said to making connections with 'traditional India' or with cultural 'roots'.

It seems to me that the 'return' to indigenous elements of Indian culture and history made by contemporary Indian theatre artists can be seen as the practice of interculturalism in at least two ways. One, in that they attempt to cross cultural boundaries across time, going 'back to the past' in a metaphorical sense to retrieve ancient traditions by recreating them in their theatrical productions and playscripts: a 'transhistorical' interculturalism. ('Transhistorical' also in that the recreations of the past undergo further 'transformations' in contact with present-day cultural practices.) Two, in that these practitioners identify with different aspects of Indian culture simultaneously in their work, and consciously try to juxtapose its various strands. Further, this identification is not informed by an apolitical conception of 'culture' as purely aesthetic production. On the contrary, it is informed by strongly held ideological beliefs in each case, that the dissociation with indigenous values and traditional practices brought about by centuries of colonial rule should be addressed and, if possible, redressed. Their 'return' is therefore a definite political and social cultural movement, attempted in direct response to the immediate historical reality of 'westernization' in India. Indeed, one could see it as an attempt at 'decolonizing the mind' in the sense that N'gugi wa Thiongo might advocate:⁴ by decolonizing definitions of culture, aesthetics and representational forms and techniques; by combining rather than separating the various languages, idioms, forms and techniques, narratives and histories that make up popular and regional cultures in India. Such a process of decolonization involves the practice of interculturalism at the most essential level.

So far I have tried to present in general terms how and why the concept of interculturalism is very pertinent to the contexts of contemporary theatre in India. Before going on to a more concrete illustration of intercultural practice in the theatre and writings of the directors and playwrights referred to, I must clarify a couple of points vis-a-vis the political implications of this term and its significance in the context of India's recent historical conjuncture. For it is important to distinguish the process I am talking about from 'intraculturalism' and, especially, from 'nationalism' in Indian theatre.

I realize that by associating the concept of interculturalism with these movements in contemporary theatre I have to contend with not only western interculturalists who use this term primarily as a label for bringing over 'traditional' art forms and technical knowhow from non-western countries for use in their own productions in the name of 'cultural exchange', I

also have to contend with Indian scholars, producers and practitioners for whom the iconic notion of 'tradition' is an aspect of their 'Oriental truth', a 'spiritual' identity that must be zealously preserved in mummified form, and guarded from contamination by the rapacious, 'decadent' west.

Such an essentialist investment in India's spiritual and religious traditions is not only ironical, it is also dangerous unless very carefully contextualized. Much of what the purveyors of an 'authentic Indianness' are trying to preserve is in fact precisely what is tearing the country apart today. The BJP, RSS, Shiva Sena and Vishva Hindu Parishad are, after all, also waving the banner of 'Indian tradition', 'Indian identity, to further the communal divide and exclude Muslims and other minorities from what they see as the 'Indian nation'. The clear identification between Hindu culture and Indian culture that these fundamentalists are making today, an identification which is gaining for them an increasing mass appeal and following, must however be seen as part of a larger and older history. For this identification and alignment has not suddenly cropped up in postcolonial India; the British in India were making precisely such an identification in their efforts to 'divide and rule' and the measure of their success is provided not only by the partition of India but by the irony of contemporary Indian politics, where it is the 'nationalists', the 'anti-western' fundamentalists, who are taking recourse to those very British policies.

This irony cuts both ways, for those in officialdom who want to project an iconic image of 'Indian culture' in its Sanskritic, essentialized Hindu version, as well as for those interculturalists in the west who subscribe to this very image. It is compounded by another irony, for the official purveyors of 'culture' in India often simultaneously claim to be the champions of a 'secular Indian state'. And likewise, it is a kind of secular ideal which informs the discourse of interculturalism in the west; the belief that a variety of cultures can coexist, in harmony and mutual sharing, on the basis of certain 'universal' patterns of behaviour and practice that 'humanity' has in common. If this ideal, crucial to the survival of the human race, is really to be put into practice, maybe it is time that the ideologues of a pan-Indian Hindu tradition rethought their interpretation of 'Indian culture'; while those who believe in 'interculturalist' exchange in the west primarily in terms of a 'borrowing' from Oriental traditions and putting into Occidental practice, started thinking a little more about the implications of 'culture'. A first step toward this rethinking on the part of Indian 'tradition-

alists' would of course then have to be: to swallow yet another irony. That is, that their ways of looking at the world as well as at themselves, are after all not so very different from mainstream western perceptions! The drawing of boundaries doesn't work after all. There is always epistemology and *its* histories to contend with! -

These are the primary reasons why I will *not* use the term 'nationalism' to describe the work undertaken by Sircar, Kamad, Tanvir, Panikkar, Karanth and Thiyyam in creating theatre in the spirit of decolonization. It would be inaccurate to say that these theatre workers are not 'nationalistic' in the loose, general sense of patriotic; this element is always involved in any process of decolonization. But the particular sense in which the image of an 'Indian nation' synonymous with 'Hindu culture' has been constructed through the tenets of Orientalist, colonialist perceptions of India and then written in the 'text' of history as well as in the textbooks of scholarly research, by Indians as well as westerners, cannot be applied to any of them. On the contrary, they actually *resist* or at least confront this kind of nationalism. For even when they derive the subject-matter for their plays from epics like the *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata*, or from a Sanskrit drama by Kalidasa or Bhasa, or from the folk legends and popular narratives of regional states-all of which are either explicitly Hindu traditions of literature and drama or have predominantly Hindu characteristics they don't use this material to promote Hindu hegemony but, often, to critique it.

For instance, Panikkar's *Ottayan* and *Karimkuttys* satirize Hindu casteism by subverting the values of caste life, the oppressive 'master-slave' relationship amongst brahmans and lower castes in south India, and the hierarchy of priests and landlords over the working classes. His method is to 'work through' the dominant structure; he uses the parable form, incorporates the acting techniques and practices advocated in the *Natyasastra*, and borrows heavily from the *gestus* of Kathakali and Koodiyattam, utilizing their styles of movement, make-up, costumes, design, etc.-all the paraphernalia of a Hindu theatrical tradition still extant in Kerala, perhaps a more ancient traditional form than in most parts of northern India or even neighbouring Tamil Nadu. (The official imperialist policy of 'indoctrinating the "natives"' with English education and English culture concentrated more heavily on the latter regions, post 1858, might explain why Kerala, although generally influenced by colonialism like the rest of India under the East India Company, remained

relatively closer to its indigenous traditions.) But the purpose behind all this use of tradition in Panikkar's theatre is quite clearly not one of simple veneration: its purpose is to problematize the relationship between tradition and modernity in contemporary India.

Habib Tanvir, to take another example, is explicit in his confrontation of the official, reactionary versions of tradition and nationalism in postcolonial India. From his early productions of the mid-50s onwards, through his work with the villagers of Chhatisgarh, to his more recent visiting collaboration with the Jana Natya Manch (after the death of Safdar Hashmi), Tanvir's manifesto has clearly been to show that the real value of tradition lies in the lives of the villagers, workers and peasants. He has sometimes been criticized for his own position as a visiting middle-class urbanite amongst the rural people and working classes, the allegation of 'cultural overlordship' being cast at him. The charge is, however, unfair, itself springing from elitist preconceptions about the cultural conditions of workers and villages. Tanvir's work is not conducted in a spirit of 'overlordship'; and the effects of his presence and work amongst 'traditional' rural artisans and labourers does not result in the domination of the latter. It is *not* an individualistic, narcissistic 'search for personal roots' which falsely romanticizes the 'primitive' or the 'poor' and *otherizes* the 'natives' in order to glorify oneself. The rural artisans and villagers who perform in his productions are not simply 'being used' as exhibits of a 'traditional, bucolic India'. Nor is it a 'Missionary' cause whose prime objective is to 'work upon' the backward classes. His activities in these regions must be seen as an attempt to *work with* the peoples and cultures of these regions, to get the urban-dwellers and middle classes back in touch with the majority of Indians, and to give the huge, suppressed 'reality' of the latter's existence visibility and recognition in the public sphere. The rural Indians are not passive 'victims' in this process, they are active agents eager to contribute to the change in the status quo of an anachronistic class hierarchy and caste-system that is so badly needed in modern India.

Nor are his adaptations of ancient classics (for instance, Sudraka's *Mrichchakatikam* being redone as *Mitti Ki Gadi*, first in 1954, then in several re-productions) simple efforts to restore an outmoded 'golden age' tradition. In the former example, the villagers and artisans themselves get a chance to express *their* 'culture' as well as *their* ideological stance against the prevailing conditions of exploitation and oppression of the masses by those in governmental power. Tanvir's involvement gives these people a forum from which to make

their voice articulate and audible, and provides them with a platform (literally) for self-expression. Given the prevailing class/caste status quo in India it is at best naive, more often downright elitist, for scholars and 'liberal' bourgeois intellectuals to criticize this. For how else are rural Indians to gain access to the public sphere of cultural production when it is already, always, dominated by the elite?

Tanvir's active initiative toward change also gets reflected in an alternative approach to the interpretation and use of India's literary and performative heritage which now focuses on involving the people and integrating classic traditions with living ones, rather than excluding the latter. In the more recent re-productions of *Mitti Ki Gadi* for example, particularly one done by the SRC Repertory in New Delhi, rural performers acted and folk handicrafts and designs were used for sets and costumes. The play itself has been performed in a way which taps its allegorical potential for critical comment on the unstable, yet cumbersome, edifice of bureaucratic power used as a clay cart in the hands of unscrupulous politicians. We see in this, therefore, not only a use of tradition to critique the abuses of 'tradition', but representatives of Indians who have been oppressed and silenced by the weight of tradition for centuries, finally being able to participate in this critique. Which is not, of course, to imply that Habib Tanvir is a messiah without whom 'the people' would remain silenced. It is to say that there is a larger movement toward social and political *and* cultural change in process in postcolonial India, where the indigenous people, the millions living in the rural areas, are asserting their own regional specificity and their own cultural realities, and a theatre worker like Tanvir has to be seen in relation to this process.

Girish Karnad has also made major contributions to ongoing changes in the definitions and constituents of 'Indian Culture' through his theatre work, albeit in different ways. Karnad's position vis-a-vis 'tradition' is more ambivalent and cannot be divorced from a certain brand of nationalism in Karnataka which enthused artists and intellectuals in the 60s and 70s to work towards pan-Indian constructions of 'authentic Indian-ness' and 'Indian identity' very similar to the centrist model. This is especially evident in Karnad's journalistic writings on 'Indian Theatre'.⁶ His plays themselves, however, as also his actual practice as a director, both in films and in theatre, reveal a healthy tension between tradition and contemporaneity. In the uses he makes of Yakshagana forms, techniques and themes, and in his covert borrowings from the formal and technical experiments of the European avant-garde (especially Anouilh and Brecht,

whose influence on his dramaturgy Karnad always acknowledges), Karnad takes care to ensure that his plays will not be seen as models for Indian traditionalism, but as vehicles which straddle the multiple contradictions of India's postcolonial reality. Motivated to go back to local and folk practices of performances which were very much part of his personal childhood environment, Karnad makes clear that this 'return' to his roots for theatrical sources is more in reaction to the banality and social irrelevance of 'modern' Indian theatre which blindly adopted the 'culinary' practices of western naturalistic drama, than a complete repudiation of western theatre as a whole.

Hence we see that Karnad's early plays, *Yayati* (1961), *Tughlaq* (1964), *Hayavadana* (1970), show strong western influences and often blatant similarities. The first is a self-conscious retelling of the Hindu myth on the theme of responsibility, but presented as an existentialist drama very reminiscent of Sartre. The second deals specifically with a theme from Indian history, exploring one of its 'more spectacular failures'⁷ of decentralization through the paradox of Muhammad bin Tughlaq, a ruler of the Delhi Sultanate. But it bears a strong comparison with plays like *Becket*, *Murder in the Cathedral*, as well as with Shakespeare's *Henry IV* and *Coriolanus*. *Hayavadana* is an overt adaptation of the Thomas Mann short story, 'The Transposed Heads' written to be performed in the Yakshagana style in Karnad's version.

His recent play, *Naga-Mandala* (1988/9) is probably the only one which shows no traces of western cultural influences; but in its intertwining of the themes of the neglected, suffering wife, locked up by her husband, and the magical transformation of hatred to love, common to so many folk legends all over the world, by means of the magic root/herb/potion, this play too could bear comparison with the scores of Renaissance /Jacobean plays with similar elements written in Italy, France, and England (including Machiavelli's *La Mandragola!*). *Naga-Mandala* has a remarkably intercultural production and translation history: created and first performed at the University of Chicago in Illinois while Karnad was on sabbatical there in 1988, it has been performed in several countries and languages. Karnad himself prepared an English translation. Marathi and Hindi versions of it exist; and a German translation was made for a production in Leipzig directed by Indian director Vijaya Mehta. In 1993 a revised version with an international cast was produced by the Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis.

My point in foregrounding this is not to suggest that Karnad is as a result -a 'westernized' playwright. Nothing could be more inaccurate. What is remarkable about all these borrowings and influences or sheer coincidental similarities in Karnad's plays is that *in spite of* them his creations are amongst the first 'modern' Indian experiments to blend a completely indigenous folk tradition with themes and concerns that are also very specific to contemporary Indian history. And even in translation they retain this uniquely indigenous character. The reason I am pointing out the external elements and influences is because these also indicate Karnad's relevance to cross-cultural issues and practices. Hence in spite of the 'Indianness' of his plays (his films too share this quality), Karnad's work cannot be seen narrowly in terms of a pan-Indian 'identity' or in the sense of the 'traditional culture' of the past elaborated earlier.

In fact, Karnad himself has this to say of his use of techniques from the folk theatre:
The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that although it seems to uphold traditional values, it also has the means of questioning these values, of making them literally stand on their head . . . The various conventions-the chorus, the music, the seemingly unrelated comic interludes, the mixing of human and non-human worlds-permit a simultaneous presentation of alternative points of view, of alternative analyses of the central problem. They allow for, to borrow a phrase from Bertolt Brecht, 'complex seeing'.⁸

The reference to Brecht in the passage quoted should itself tell us something about 'intercultural' practice within India; more than any other playwright/director it is Brecht's name that gets cited as a major influence on contemporary Indian theatre practitioners who are trying to deal with issues with any sense of relatedness to history and culture. But even more pertinently, in so far as the conventions and modes of 'complex seeing' in artistic practice which Karnad refers to here are to be found in *any* kind of folk or popular theatre all over the world, at different stages of history, past and present, these could be indeed the 'universals of performance' which Richard Schechner talks about in making a case for a viable interculturalism.⁹

Amongst the developments in contemporary Indian theatre that I am dealing with in this paper, it is, however, the work of Badal Sircar which points to the main problem in approaching Indian culture through the constructs of 'nationalism' or a pan-Indian social identity. And this is the problem of class. Nearly all the issues I have raised so far-the issues of patronage, of distortion and misrepresentation of Indian traditions, of 'cultural tourism' not just

from west to 'East' but from the privileged urban centres of India to the rural regions, and, especially, of who has the power to construct and control the 'image' of India, both to the west, and to the Indian people-ultimately boil down to questions of class privilege and class authority. Sircar himself has had to deal with these inescapable questions, when, as a middle-class *bhadralok* Bengali, he first started writing and directing for the theatre. And his early plays reveal with depressing clarity how for an Indian intellectual, born before Independence but writing and creating in postcolonial India, the bondage to colonial culture would appear to be not only insuperable, it would seem to forever cut him/her off from the majority of his/her 'own' people. For, as a member and product of the middle-class, such an intellectual would always, in a sense, be a product of British rule in India, colonized in mind if not in body.

The middle class in India did not, could not, evolve on its own. At the time when what we think of as the middle class, the bourgeoisie and petit-bourgeoisie, were developing, as an offshoot of mercantile capitalism and then the Industrial Revolution, in Europe and in America, the British were in India. India did not have an 'industrial revolution' till the turn of this century, *after* the beginnings of the demand for autonomy and home-rule were raised. Thus the aggressive, independent, entrepreneurial attitude that is associated in the west (especially in America) with the middle classes is appearing in India only now, only after the gradual formation of *a* middle-class, in the proper economic sense, has taken place, post-Independence. This new class is conscious of its *independent* identity, and therefore also has a sense of power. It is this class which today is going to make its idea of 'nationalism' work. It is from this class that the BJP draws its ranks.

But, long before this, long before the dawn of any capitalist industrialization in India, the British had already been 'creating' a class of middle-men from the ranks of those who were already in a sense 'middlemen'-the landlords, feudal petty nobles, rich farmers, courtiers, hangers-on in the courts of the local princes and nawabs, and in the armies of the British East India Company. And it is from these that the British first created the zamindars and riotwars, the money-lenders and buffers, whose role in life was to play lackey and stooge to the white man, bringing him his revenues and his slaves, controlling any turbulent passions that might rise in revolt against foreign domination, keeping 'his' lands in order and the sources of raw material flowing for British factories 'back home'. These split up later, in the second half of the nineteenth century, into the rajas and the gentry (the *bhadralok* in Bengal),

mainly due to *British* decision, a change in the distribution of favours and patronage. For the new imperial regime, it was a wonderful way of keeping the mass of the 'natives' in check. Macaulay and his cohorts had, however, already ensured the 'spread of English education to teach civilized Indians the beauty of English virtues and English, manners.'¹ And this was working its own check, adding to the division between the Sanskritist and the reformers, the Muslim clergy and the Brahmanical clergy already existing prior to official westerrization of the Indian elite.

It is from these middle-men, increasingly fragmented along class/caste affiliations, increasingly alienated from the majority of rural and working class Indians, that the class of 'white-collar' professionals and bourgeois intellectuals of modern India would grow. The latter had more 'respectable' ancestors in the interim generations, of course-civil servants recruited to the ICS, barristers and doctors trained in England, teachers, occasional police and armed forces officers, those employed in British-run institutions; rarely artists and musicians, for these were either aristocratic or not respectable enough for the middle-class gentry; rarely businessmen and traders, for these were left to the lower castes or classes. Particularly in Bengal, where the effects of British rule were the longest, strongest and most direct, where prior to the East India Company's consolidation of control in Calcutta, the local social and political condition had already been one of near total disintegration-where were the modem *bhadralok* to find their sense of tradition? Or identity? More Anglicized than in any other part of the country (except perhaps the Bombay belt, another purely British creation) and influenced by western values, customs, lifestyles and mannerisms, where would the Bengali *babus* and their progeny fit in, especially in postcolonial India?

All this refers to a very small class, a virtual handful when counted against the millions in India. But it was mainly this class who would constitute the new urban intelligentsia in Calcutta after Independence, unlike the period before when the leaders and thinkers of the Indian National Congress (begun in Calcutta by W.C. Bonerjee in the 1880s) came from a wider cross-section of society, including the aristocracy, and the intellectuals and artistes from aristocratic families like the Tagores and the Mukherjees. What kind of culture would a product of this new, neither-here-nor-there class represent?

It is precisely this dilemma which gets reflected in Badal Sircar's first play, *Evam Indrajit* (1962), which was hailed by director Satyadev Dubey as 'a milestone in the history of modern Indian drama'.² This point initially seems inexplicable when one thinks of the play's cliché-ridden analyses of the plight of the ordinary man, its flat monotonous dialogues, with its lack of the dreariness characteristic of Indian naturalistic drama only replaced by the dreariness of western existentialist anguish. At a superficial level, *Evam Indrajit* appears to have nothing to do with a sense of tradition, or even history, unless one wants to see in it borrowed tones from a narrow western history.

However, if we situate the play and its author *in* history, and also in the Indian theatrical traditions of this century, and read more closely, Sircar's first play is indeed a milestone, though not necessarily as a playwriting effort. But for the reasons Satyadev Dubey pinpoints, this play gave theatre practitioners all over India 'a shock of recognition':

It was about the Indian reality as they knew it, it was a theatrically effective and crystallized projection of all the prevalent attitudes, vague feelings and undefined frustrations gnawing at the hearts of the educated urban middle class.

A milestone because a middle-class writer confronts the issue of class—one of the deeper ironies not only of colonization but of the bourgeois consciousness itself. Nonetheless, in my opinion, it is a measure of Sircar's sincerity and uncompromising integrity as a playwright/director that from his first play onwards, he has never tried to falsify or romanticize the notion of Indian 'culture' or *his* position in it as a writer/middle-class intellectual. Rather, he has been able to address the needs and concerns of another portion of Indian society, the urban middle class, who like the working classes and the rural people and the large masses of the uneducated poor, have also been excluded from the official versions of 'Indian Culture' and 'Classical Tradition' that are paraded mainly before rich audiences in the big cities or in the west. In marked contrast to these versions (and to the cultural exhibits that usually accompany them), Sircar's theatre isn't concerned with presenting any 'national truth' to its audience. On the contrary, most of his later, relatively political, street and environmental theatre work with the group Satabdi has concentrated on showing that the 'national truth' is a lie.

The play *Bhoma*, for instance, explicitly brings up-and satirizes-issues of nationalism, patriotism, India's modernization, the 'prosperity' of her upper classes, her 'scientific and

technological' progress, etc. His earlier plays used the technique of satire, presented unconventionally through brief visual collages made by the bodies of the actors and short, sardonic statements, but it is in *Bhoma* that the satire takes on a peculiar political force. Parodic references to members of the urban elite sending their children to posh, English-medium schools and then boasting about it, to Mrs. Gandhi proudly announcing the launching of India's first satellite, are juxtaposed throughout the play with sombre allusions to the hundreds of villagers who are dying of famine while the government does nothing adequate in response, or to the local people of Rangabelia in the Sunderbans (where this play was first performed) who get mauled by tigers and die of snake-bite while nothing is done to ensure them protection or medical aid. These examples may sound banal when paraphrased, but the full power of the play lies in its actual performance. Having seen it performed several times for different groups, in Hindi, English, and Bengali, on college campuses and in public parks, as well as in the middle of a crowded road, I can attest to its ability to reach across a wide cross-section of people and yet lose none of the strong class criticism it is making.

Badal Sircar's understanding of the meaning and relevance of 'culture' has been the most radical amongst contemporary practitioners in Indian theatre. This understanding also 'performs' at multiple levels. Not only does Sircar demystify the notion that 'culture' refers to high art or to artefacts that can be 'bartered'; he also clearly shows that such a reading of culture is an elitist privilege; for such culture is only available to those who have the money to buy it and the social power and comforts to enjoy it. For the majority of human beings all over the world this kind of 'culture' has hardly any meaning.

On the other hand, Sircar succeeds in bringing their real culture to ordinary middle, lower-middle class and poor people, again, in the most radical way possible. By doing street theatre. I call this 'real' culture, because it is the people's culture both in the sense of their art-form and popular entertainment-songs, dances, oration, gymnastics, all done naturally and spontaneously, the voices, bodies, and commitment of the actors being the only tools, sometimes rehearsed, sometimes not, but without any cumbersome props or the usual artificial paraphernalia of the proscenium theatre.

Which is not to say that a form like Kathakali is not real because it is ritualistic and, literally, larger than life. But there are two vital differences in the order of reality each type

of culture represents. The first is in its source of energy. In Kathakali, the performance counts as something removed from the audience. It gets its energy from the actors and, even more so, from their elaborate costumes, make-up, headgear, and the skill with which they perform, the years of rigorous training. And this energy too would not communicate what it might if it was not accompanied by drums and singing and chanting. In Sircar's kind of street theatre, on the other hand, the actors get their energy from the people watching and often performing along with them. It is an energy which takes from and gives back to the life and environment around it. Hence, in this kind of performance, the people are not removed from the tradition and ritual of theatre. They *make* it.

The other vital difference derives from this one. Sircar's theatre is egalitarian, social, and critical. It is designed to make people think, not through the imposition of ideas, but because its ideas come from the lives of the people immediately surrounding it. Kathakali, on the other hand, is designed to benumb the people. Its ritual purpose is one of awe, of mystery, of distanciation. Hence, though it may be called 'folk' the question needs to be asked, who is it 'folk' for?

I raise this point to get back to my main subject; that is, what kind of social-aesthetic representation makes 'culture' and what representation then is going to make for a genuine intercultural relation between societies and groups of people? And can cultures really be shared or even represented if the specific realities of class and history are not dealt with?

The work of these theatre practitioners is, therefore, more truly 'intercultural' in discursive practice as well as in effect than the taking of Kathakali productions abroad or the 'doing' of Kathakali or any other dance, drama, music, or art form by individuals and companies. While such forms are certainly expressions of the *aesthetics* of a culture, culture as a whole cannot be reducible to its material manifestations in art forms or works of art. For even though aesthetics is necessarily informed by the larger social, political, economic, and historical realities in which it develops, these can obtain only a partial representation in individual aesthetic productions. Rustom Bharucha is thus right in saying that 'culture' cannot be so facilely 'done'.

It may be useful, in conclusion, to foreground the complexity of interculturalism within India and locate the position of the contemporary theatre practitioners in the midst of this. There is a deeper sense in which the discourse of interculturalism presumes the

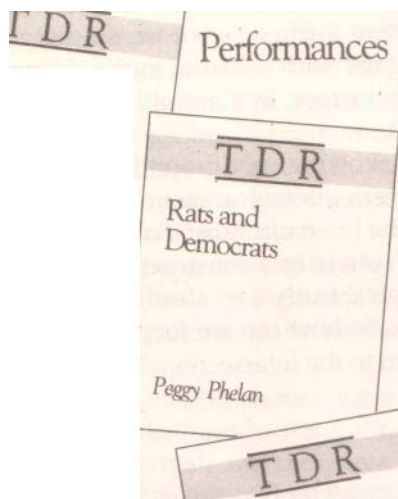
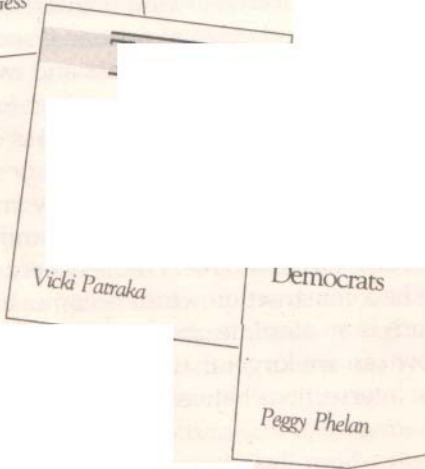
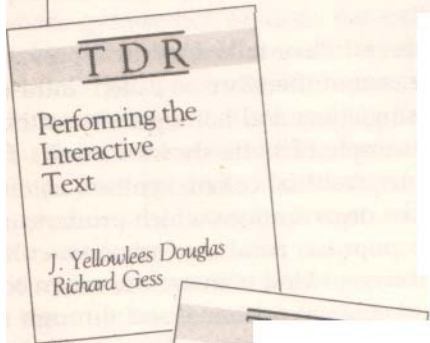
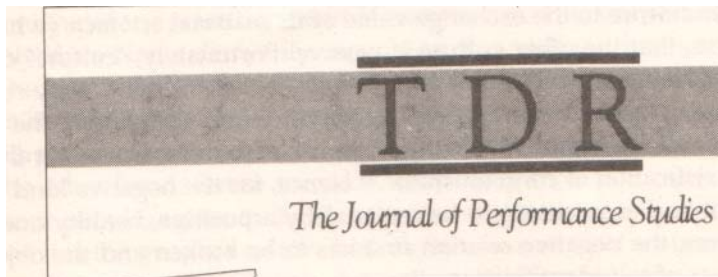
transcendence of cultural barriers which each of the theatre practitioners dealt with does achieve. But this can only be distinguished from the superficial 'lifting' of material elements or ritual forms from 'other' cultures and 'doing' or performing them, when the process of 'transcending' first lives through and thinks through the markers of class, nationality (with all its arbitrary constructions), language and ideology which make cultures different from each other. In India the colonial experience has made the process of transcending 'difference' particularly difficult even while a certain kind of 'intercultural' experience has been imposed upon Indians.

But 'interculturalism' also presumes a two-way street, emphasis on the *inter*. And the colonial experience also shows how, when one culture approaches another with the intention of 'taking', its *a priori clause* is that the culture which takes has assumed a position of dominance, power, and privilege. An 'interculturalism' of sorts follows because two cultures come into contact with each other. But it will always be an unequal contact, an unequal relation of cultures, because one has already put an 'exchange value' on the other, and the latter can then only relate to the former as a 'commodity', as that which is to be taken. In other words, the history of colonialism in our country necessarily colours contemporary responses to the discourse and practices of interculturalism. However, we have to recognize that its implications are double: negative and positive.

This reification of culture which is crucial to both colonialism and a certain kind of interculturalism which reduces the value of the other culture to the exchange value of its material artefacts (which can then be 'bartered'), presupposes of course, that the other culture is passive. Fortunately, 'culture' cannot be so reified for long, because it consists of human beings and human beings are not 'objects'. They react to being 'objectified'. But for this reaction to take place as a reaction of resistance and opposition; the 'objectified' culture has to be able to regain a consciousness of itself as human, it has to overcome what the Frankfurt school theorists so aptly called 'the reification of consciousness'.¹⁵ Hence, for the negative kind of 'interculturalism' (the relationship of control and acquisition) to be replaced by a positive, healthy one of mutual, *voluntary* interaction between cultures, the negative relation first has to be broken and the objectified culture has to go through its own process of self-identification.

The cultural practice of all the Indian theatre practitioners I have talked about represents precisely such a break and process of self-identification. Their practice cannot therefore be called 'intra-culturalism' (anyhow a pretty meaningless term since it pre-supposes a singleness and homogeneity within 'national' constructs which is a palpably false presupposition, as the example of India shows so well). For they are *reacting* to Capitalist cultures of the west and to the indigenous, residual colonial culture *within* India that lingers on in the government, the bourgeois urban elite, and the organizations which promote and sponsor 'official' versions of Indian culture-and they are *relating* to popular, rural, and regional cultures inside their own country. Badal Sircar especially demonstrates this different kind of interculturalism both through his own personal working-through of class consciousness and colonial relations, and through the work of his theatre. But it has come about in its present form, where it transcends class and caste and regional barriers, because Sircar has been able to engage with 'culture' in the deeper sense; for he has dealt with it there, where it is most deeply implicated in history, in the multiple realities of class consciousness and not just in visible, ritualized forms of 'tradition'.

Finally, for those who might object that on the very grounds of epistemology, my 'reading against the grain' of the discourse and practice of western interculturalism cannot apply, I would say that on the contrary, such a reading is very much part of the interculturalist dialogue. Precisely because epistemology is so important it must be addressed; it must be seen to be a construction which becomes a 'truth' only when put into practice, and even then no epistemological truth is an absolute one. It can be changed, transformed, reapplied. As I said, it intersects with history. So how can we forget that the meaning of 'interculturalism' as *discursive practice* is precisely the name given to the intersections between cultures and histories?



'One of the Few Handcrafts Left'

RICHARD SCHECHNER, director, theatre scholar and university professor, in a freewheeling discussion with ANJUM KATYAL, talks of theatre theory and practice.

AK: You were telling me about your theory of rasaesthetics ...

RS: In the sixth chapter of the Natyasastra, the author Bharatmuni develops the idea of rasa from its etymological roots, that is, talks about the combination of flavours that are mixed together. Just as foodstuffs and spices are mixed and cooked to make a taste, so the bhavas and stayibhavas are mixed together to make the rasa. And this is the underlying metaphor of rasa theory, which is that the different emotions can be so arranged that the feelings of the audience and feelings of the performers can be enjoyed. Aristotle said that you arouse pity and fear in tragedy and purge yourself of them. Rasa theory says that you arouse these emotions to enjoy them, even if they happen to be horrific emotions. Because there are nine rasas, and some of them, like disgust or fear, are not pleasant emotions, but the idea here is that disgust and fear might be looked at as pepper or a hot spice while sringara might be sugar or sweet, so that even though they would be unpleasant at a certain level, in a proper mix they give you a masala feeling. And I'm trying to develop a whole aesthetic theory which builds on that and is in contrast to the western aesthetic Aristotelian theory which is based on the eye.

The word theatre in Greek means 'seeing place', theatron. The eye is an organ of apprehension which needs distance, which because we have two eyes, sees things in perspective, and plays with differentiation and difference. The mouth, on the other hand, takes many things that are different, puts them together, and makes something new. It's an aesthetic that involves smell, the physical feeling of the food (a nut will taste different from a fruit etc.), and it enters deep into the body, and though it obviously affects the brain, it suffuses through the body, while the eye is directly connected to the brain.

So I'm thinking of working out a performance theory that carries this several steps further and talks about performances-such as certain experiments in performance art, some traditional performances, whether they happen to be temple performances or aesthetic, but where one has incense, one smells the performance, one watches it-where the experience is more important than the judgement, where it's not so narrative-centred, in other words, where it's not so important that the story be finished but that the story be entered into.

This is an abiding interest at present, to develop the theory of rasaesthetics, which is situated between Indian and western notions. I haven't got much further on it. I've been reading some interesting books. There's a book by Bharat Gupt, an Indian scholar who teaches at Delhi University, on rasa theory, which I think is the best book on rasa theory that I've read. It's a very intelligent reading of it. So these are interests that continue, not simply because of my interest in Indian theatre. I am, of course, interested in Indian theatre-but I think that these aesthetic theories, Aristotle's theories, rasa theory, can be of value to people in many different cultures.

Also, I'm working with rasa as training [with The East Coast Artistes, the company Schechner works with]. I'm developing an exercise called the rasa boxes, where on a large floor the nine rasas are written out first in Sanskrit, then they write out in English the words they feel are like those words. Like they write *sringara* and write love, but what's love? It could be love of a mother for a child, a brother for a brother, of lovers, of a person for their pet. And for each of these Sanskrit words we have about thirty or forty words in English on this floor, like a map. And first a person has to come out and stand in the *sringara* box, and experience those feelings. Then they move to another box, and take on those feelings. They can become very flexible with expressing their emotions, taking off from the theory of *rasa*. The actor has to be the athlete of the emotions, working in a very opposite way from Stanislavski, who said you have to begin with actions, and that emotions are what comes accidentally as it were-if you play the action, the emotion will be there. That may be true, but also if you play the emotion, maybe you'll find specific kinds of actions and gestures.

We've been doing a lot of training in that direction, as well as vocal training and body training based on Meyerhold's biomechanics, which [one of the women in the company] has been developing.

AK: Have you tried to use [rasaesthetics] in your recent directorial venture, *Faust Gastronomer*?

RS: Well, obviously *Faust* has got to do a lot with food, and tasting and flavours and both ends of the process, eating and defecating, and I was thinking of these things as I was constructing *Faust*, but I'm not the kind of director who takes a theory and applies it: It's just that what I'm

working with comes out in all aspects of what I'm dealing with, so since I'm working on a theory of performance that is dealing with taste and flavour, my *Faust* becomes gastronomie.

AK: Did you always design it as a proscenium production?

RS: No. But I didn't have the money that I had with *Mother Courage*, and it's cheaper to do a proscenium. If I had more money I might have done it with a lot more fire and with the audience more involved in it.

AK: Yes, we tend to forget how much the economics structure even the way you conceive a work

RS: Yes, it does. And it's hard to get money these days. And although I like the way it looks as a picture, I would still probably prefer the audience much closer into it.

AK: It's ironic that you should say that, because at home non-proscenium theatre is much cheaper to do. The whole business of hiring and doing something on stage is much more expensive than performing in an open space - but then, of course, they don't need to carry technology with them.

RS: Right. Well, here there're all sorts of problems of getting licenses, satisfying the fire department, of getting a space, and then you have to construct the seating. Because this would not go well as-I've seen Badal's [Badal Sircar] work-a street theatre piece or out in the open, because it needs all that control, so it would need some of the things Mnouchkine was able to have in her theatre or that Peter Brook was able to have, but I'm not complaining. I think it works pretty well. It accomplished a lot of what I wanted to accomplish.

AK: So there's no sense of disappointment ...

RS: You see, I went into it knowing that it was going to be endstage, not exactly proscenium but at the end of a room, and I accepted that and tried to use the visual techniques that are suitable for that and you see a lot of pictures. The stage is very pictorial, with action going on behind, in layers, and it was fun to do that. In environmental performance the action would be simultaneous, but you wouldn't have it lined up in that way, you'd know the spectator couldn't see it all at once. Now I'm working on a Chekhov, and I'm still not sure exactly where I'll be able to stage it. That will probably be endstaged also. But there it makes more sense, because

it's in a series of rooms. It's *Three Sisters*. It's going to be very visceral, with each of the acts set in a different time period, beginning with the time it was written, but ending in a radio studio right now as a play for the ear.

AK: It makes one wonder what it is about a text or script that lasts, that travels through history. I've seen a completely contemporary rendering of *Three Sisters* recently in Wooster Group's *Brace Up*. You're planning a totally different version-but why return to that play? What is it about Chekhov, for example, that makes you want to do him in today's context?

RS: For me, in so far as we still live-at least in the United States and in many other parts of the world - a middle-class life, with middle-class aspirations, no longer peasants and farmers who know they're never going to leave the plot of land they're born on, and certainly not aristocrats who can do whatever they wish, but people whose desires far exceed their ability to accomplish those desires, Chekhov speaks exactly to those kind of people. Namely, to me. Perhaps to you. Whatever we may think of Marxist/Capitalist, leaving that aside, the notion of the middle class as a class of people who are to a large degree educated, literate, who can see the life they would like to live but aren't living the life they would like to live, who are better off than people who just have to work from morning to night, there are hundreds of millions of people like that all over the world now. This is a large group of people, and Chekhov, though he's writing about Russia and the nineteenth century, he's talking about that kind of life. When Rashinin starts talking about what the world will be like in a hundred years, even if we laugh at him, that desire to in a certain sense construct a future, to live so that the future is better, is important. The things that Chekhov finds important, to have a love affair, to be successful in love, to accomplish your professional dreams, however limited they may seem, these are very important to people. The failures one has in human relations-these are important questions. So he takes the same themes that are done in soap operas, but through the sensitivity of the poetry of his writing, which is not so much in the words as in who speaks when-he's a poet not of the phrase, like Shakespeare, but a poet of the music of the living room-these three conversations and that word comes on top of that one, like no other person can do. If Ibsen can write a plot, Chekhov doesn't write a plot, he writes a great mood, and a great sense of desire. This is

extremely important and moving to people. This is why I think his work will last as long as there are people who are not so poor as to be totally poor and not so rich etc. Now Brecht is also interesting, but Brecht usually writes about people in a more false way, I mean I like Brecht very much, I've done *Mother Courage* and all, but I'm pretty sure that if there were a Mother Courage on a battlefield she wouldn't talk the way Brecht has her talk, but Chekhov's people actually do talk, it's the best of naturalism, you have the feeling when you read and hear Chekhov that my god, he had a great ear. And I think - part of it is that he wasn't overly ideological, he was a doctor, he had a sympathy for the way people aren't able to do what they desire, but he loved to hear them and he had a warmth towards their failures. You know Chekhov went, when he was quite ill, to Sakhalin island, he took a trip all the way across Russia, all the way to Sakhalin which is near Japan, and he spent months with the prisoners there, interviewing them, talking to them and writing about them. We're going to have a scene of our play done in the gulag, in the prison camp, because I think he had a great compassion for human life. Not the life of kings and queens, not the life of the proletariat, but this other life. And although we can make fun of the middle class at a certain level, it is the class I belong to, and our miseries and opportunities and struggles are as real as anybody else's.

AK: Tell me, what is your opinion on the current favourite term 'postmodern'-postmodernist theatre.

RS: A long time ago I wrote two essays on postmodernism. I think they're in *Performative Circumstances*, actually! [*Performative Circumstances and the Avant-Garde* was published by Seagull in 1983]. It's not a term I think of very much any more.

AK: Well, a lot of people seem to be thinking about it a lot.

RS (*laughing*): Well, they're behind me, or ahead of me. I wrote these essays about ten years ago, and I'd stay with those ideas, that it's eclectic and mixes historical periods

AK: How does it work with interculturalism? Are they just interchangeable terms?

RS: No, no, interculturalism is very different. It can be in a modern or postmodern context. To me interculturalism, which I've written about more recently, is the clash between cultures, the misunderstandings, as opposed to multiculturalism which is kind of organized, each culture in its own place. I would say that interculturalism is a postmodern situation, in that sense. We're no longer able, even if we wanted to, to live in cultural isolation. Especially as a person with a certain level of education or economic standing. But it doesn't take much education or economic standing. Because, first of all, the flow of goods is such that even if you don't understand why you're using a plastic implement which may have been manufactured or designed someplace else, or why you're wearing clothing or using a fabric, whatever, the world has become entirely mixed up or interdependent or hybridized in terms of material goods, in terms of systems of exchange and along with that in terms of ideas. It's not possible any more, nor advisable, to say this idea is this culture's idea. The ideas become accommodating, and also they change as they get more used. I'm extremely suspicious of cultural purity. I think that's the domain of the fundamentalists, whether it's religious purity or cultural purity or racial purity. Whenever I hear the word 'pure' I look to see where the knife's going to go, whose blood is going to flow. Because anyone who's concerned with purity then gets very concerned with impurity and tries to stop it. I've always been for mixing it up.

Now, I know a lot of the critiques in terms of neocolonialism and cultural imperialism and so on and so forth, and I think those critiques are also correct. It's not possible to live in a world of Utopianism in which there's no danger. But if I have to choose between the dangers of cultural purities and various forms of neocolonialism, I'd rather face the dangers of neocolonialism. Perhaps that's because I'm Jewish, and my people have suffered a lot in this century at the hands of those who felt they weren't pure enough to stay alive; perhaps because I live in a racist country where people of colour still get spit on and killed for reasons of racial purity, so that I've seen historically and with my own eyes what happens under those systems and I don't think you can have it both ways, I don't think you can be culturally pure and still progressive and liberal. And I do feel there are dangers of people dominating other people by virtue of their positions of privilege-gender or colour or first world/third world, and I think those things have to be systematically opposed, but I like the idea of what happens by mixing-it's *rasa* again.

AK: How about the belief in culture-specificity, that if you remove a form or technique from its cultural context it loses a significant meaning ...

RS: But I wonder if that's true? If you look at anything, it is very specific if you isolate it, but if you look at its historical process, it's not so specific. If you look at Bharatnatyam, for example. Where did contemporary Bharatnatyam come from? Is it the dance of the temple women, is it the theosophists in Madras who were really influenced- by the British and wanted to make a dance that respectable women could practise, is it the Tanjore quartet, who were all men after all, who instituted this particular kind of dancing and weren't-even from Madras, etc. etc. Or Kathakali. Is it Vallathal who took a form that was becoming a sloppy folk form, wanting to make it a class form and forming a school based on European methods of training rather than the traditional *guru-shishya* method? So if you look at any of these class forms, or at any cultural form, you find that if you look at it carefully enough, in itself is an admixture.

AK: It's always evolving ...

RS: It's always evolving, it's always changing, and it always has strands that come in from inside the place and from outside the place. Now, at a certain point, it's an ideological struggle, you want to ideologically freeze it and say this is Bharatnatyam. Or, this is a classical dance and this is a folk dance. This is adivasi and this is Sanskritized. But then you ask who're the Sanskritists, right? What part of Indian culture is Mughal, even if it's Hindu? Islam was for a long time a liberalizing force, and it was the pundits who were rigid. Now it's shifted, and it's fundamentalist Islam and Hinduism seems open to many interpretations. But if you study history you realize that these things are always evolving and changing. Cultures that seem to be 'pure' really are not. Bengali culture may appear to be unified, but then you realize that it is a very strong dialogue between Tantrism and Muslim influences, and then if you look at Calcutta culture, are you going to say the Marwaris are not a part of Calcutta? Especially if you look at the theatrical culture of Calcutta, are we going to talk about the Marwari Hindi-speaking theatre, the Bengali modern theatre, Satabdi and Badal, jatra and commercial theatre. As you learn more and more about anything in particular, you realize it's always made up of multiple strands.

AK: There are a lot of directors who are returning to traditional forms, and the feeling is that these forms are being artificially removed from a particular setting and being used in a certain way-

RS: That's probably true

AK: I've always wondered how aesthetic value judgements function when 'anything goes', when the accepted norms and categories are being broken or defied.

RS: Well, here's where my logical and visceral reactions are different. Viscerally I almost always dislike those kinds of experiments. I don't do them myself. I will use different things, but basically I don't bring in American folk dances or Indian or-people who've seen my work know that it's very local to American culture. The ideas of environmental theatre were confirmed by what I saw in other parts of the world, but basically I got them locally from Happenings and things of that sort. At the same time ideologically I think that those kinds of experiments should go on. So it's a contrast for me. I've seen a number of the works of the 'roots' movement in India and usually I don't like them. Actors who have studied Kathakali for a few weeks or months are no good at it. The importation of those kinds of gestures just seems strange. On the other hand where sometimes it's deeply learned, like in Tadashi Suzuki's work, where he has the culture of the foot and hasn't taken the precise movements of the Kabuki or Noh but certain underlying principles and has trained his actors in those underlying principles, it can be quite brilliant. So the idea is not to have some guru come and teach you seven talas or three steps or five rasas because you'll never be as good as the person who's spent his whole life or even five years at it, but if the underlying principles interest you, then to develop your own training methods based on those principles. For example, Karanth's music is brilliant. It is contemporary, but informed by the raga and folk music, and therefore it's very powerful. I saw his music at work when he and a Greek director did a Hippolytus and it was a very good Hippolytus, but it wasn't apparently either Indian or Greek. It had an understructure. If they'd tried to do Hippolytus in Kathakali make-up it would have probably been ludicrous. At the same time I'm about to go to Taiwan this summer and do an Oresteia, collaborating with a Chinese Beijing opera troupe. They've done a Macbeth which was very well received, and their speciality is to take performances that are not Chinese and to integrate them and use certain Chinese classical techniques, and I'm going to work with them and we'll see what happens. I'm

saying that because I don't have any absolutely rigid opinion about this, I just have the experience where usually I like virtuosity, and I like well trained performers and I haven't seen that in the 'roots' movement. On the other hand, I don't like traditional forms on the proscenium stage. I like to be much closer to them. I think their traditional scenography demands a court audience, if you will, a courtyard. On a proscenium stage it offends me because it puts me at the wrong distance and visual perspective. There are very culture-specific things about theatrical space, about training, about what you can hear, and I think forms demand to be in their own theatrical space. I think the Japanese are excellent at this. The Noh theatre is performed on a Noh stage, with the audience on three sides, in the space that it needs, the Kabuki in a Kabuki theatre, and they don't perform these in spaces that are inappropriate. We all have to be careful of this. There are particular forms that speak in a certain way and should be presented in those venues.

AK: Not, like the Festival of India, presenting folk forms on stages in auditoriums ...

RS: Well, that's about cultural appropriation, that's about ratification, that's the Republic Day parade. That's to demonstrate a certain kind of multiculturalism. At the same time multiculturalism always also has as its subject the hegemony of the superior power who can summon these people and have them perform. There's very little difference between Republic Day and a Durbar, in its underlying ideology. A Durbar was where the ruler appeared and the people gave their gifts. It draws on the Islamic Mughal tradition but also on the Hindu temple prasad tradition. In a certain sense the Maharaja becomes like the god who is honoured by being performed for. In the Natyasastra, the gods are always the spectators for the entertainers. The 'important' people who sit on the grandstands on Republic Day, it's a huge Durbar for them.

AK: You've written a lot about interculturalism and how it's different from multiculturalism. Would you like to explain that a bit?

RS: Well, as a theory I know multiculturalism mainly from the American perspective. The American dream was first the melting pot. People would come here from different parts of the world, different cultures, enter this American culture and the children would come out American. What that really meant was that the children would come out roughly northern

European, however they looked. They would speak English, they would basically be Christian, some Catholic but more Protestant, and even more important than that-because some could be Jewish, perhaps some could be Hindu or Muslim though not as easily-they would all accept liberal democratic values, etc. That was the melting pot idea and it never really worked because some groups melted more than others. Some groups were able to accommodate. The curse of America was always racism. Blacks were never able to melt. And the further curse of racism was that people became visually distinguished from one another. It conditioned almost everything else. So the melting pot did not succeed, especially when more and more immigrants were not coming from Europe. It was easy enough to melt the French, Italian, British, even the eastern Europeans. But when after World War II so many people came from Latin America, Hispanics, so many from Asia--Chinese, Indian, Malaysian-and of course the African Americans were already here, it was clear that the melting pot was not going to work. It would not work unless there was the practice of miscegenation or open inter-racial marriage, then it would probably work. But racism said that blacks don't marry whites and Jews don't marry Christians and so forth, so social practice didn't lead to a melting which it would have if there'd been large scale intermarriage.

Then multiculturalism came as the next wave. It was the exact opposite of the melting pot. It said-every culture will maintain itself, the Indians will be Indian, Chinese will be Chinese etc. Of course, from the American perspective they didn't realize that Marathis are not Bengalis etc., that other countries and locales have the same multicultural situation; but from here everyone who was from a particular place became one. These different cultures were given their particular places to strut their stuff. In New York, for instance, you'd have an Irish parade, Caribbean carnival, a street fair for this or that group, but again the basic power structure was not affected. We're two hundred and some years into the American republic and all the Presidents except one have been white Protestant males, and the other one was a white Catholic male. We're quite pleased that on our Supreme Court there has been one Black seat and occasionally one Jewish seat, and now two women, but certainly it isn't as diverse as the country itself. So the multicultural idea is like a gesture, saying that people can express their culture in their time off, in their religion and festival life but not in their work life. America is still fundamentally a Capitalist work-oriented country, so the official culture is basically white northern European Protestant.

Now interculturalism does not resolve the problem, it's not Utopian. Whatever problems multiculturalism and the melting pot had, they were both Utopian visions. One was the vision 'we'll all be the same', the other 'we'll all be different and respect our differences'. Interculturalism says that for now and a long time to come there are going to be a lot of problems around issues of race, gender, class and culture. These are not going to go away and there's no single ideological solution for them. So interculturalism, as I theorize it, explores failed communication, ruptures, wounds, difficulties that coalesce around questions of culture, gender, race, language. It says that if we're going to make any progress in this regard, we have to recognize the presence of structural racism and sexism-'structural' meaning, that even though I may think of myself as a nonracist, nonsexist person, the very fact that I exist in this country as a tenured professor and a white middle-aged man means that I am structurally participating in the fruits of those systems. That doesn't mean that I immediately give up my professorship, because that would be a kind of idealism that I don't have, but I have to as an intellectual and person of honour, recognize these difficulties, deal with you on the basis of them.

Interculturalism is therefore the relation inter, *between*, among, cultures, especially where it doesn't quite fit. It exposes the failures of multiculturalism and the melting pot and begins to apply the same questions to other cultures. In other words, for a long time there is going to be a conflict between accepted values. Let's take one that is powerful-that is, clitorectomies in western Africa. From a women's perspective, especially women who might not live there, this may seem to be a horrible, disfiguring operation. There's been much written about it. From the men inside the culture it may seem to be necessary. The women inside the culture may also support it. There's no easy answer.

AK: Well, what also happens is that a woman inside the culture speaking to another woman inside the culture may have a different response than when speaking to a white journalist outside the culture. So there are all kinds of positions depending on how you see yourself at that point...

RS: Interculturalism is the recognition that these differences exist. That your position will differ according to who you're talking to, what the arena is, the issue is-that's why it's a

performance theory. All of these things generates different people, and there's no universal easy solution to it. It astonishes me when people accuse me of being universalist. I don't think there's anything in my intellectual history that marks me that way. I do think there are certain problems that apply across cultures, but I don't think there are solutions. I do deeply believe in the historical process, which is that time, place etc. makes for different realities, and I'm a cultural relativist in that I believe that there're no universal values. At the same time I have my own positions and I'll argue those positions. I won't say I'm for clitorrectomy. I will say it's not an operation I'll allow to be performed on my daughter if I have control over it. That doesn't mean I don't understand its historical circumstances, but that doesn't mean, I won't oppose it even in its place.

AK: This theory of rupture and friction - don't you think that concentrating on differences could also exacerbate them?

RS: It could. But that's a choice I would like to make. I also believe, from I guess my experiences as a child of the 60s, that the expression of difference is one way to find common ground to exist. That the suppression is only the suppression of the expression. In other words, let's say you have two people who're structural racists, and they never discuss racial questions, that doesn't mean these are not operating in their relationship. It means they just never had the courage to confront and bring them out-even though if they brought them out they might discover terrible things about themselves, but-I think that's a chance we have to take. If you look at the world as it currently is, repression has not helped. You might argue, aren't fundamentalists expressing differences? Y-y-yes. I do draw the line-I would have a certain kind of universal value about-under very few circumstances would I condone violence, because violence is irrevocable and usually escalates, and doesn't solve the problem, just increases the grief. I can understand certain circumstances where I would probably be violent, but I would be acting at that point against what I believe is the right thing to do. But anyway, I do think you're right. What I'm saying is not an ideal position, but it's one that I think needs to be taken into account.

AK: What you're saying is, the other way is no solution either. It's no better, it's less honest.

RS: Less honest, right. Maybe equally bad, but less honest. At least this has the advantage of saying, let's start from where we're at. And I do think that interculturalism is based on some

agreement not to make a violent solution. So therefore I don't want to be under the sword of 'convert or die'. I don't want to die and I don't want to kill. I think one can die or kill in art, and that's one of the advantages of art, that our imagination will allow us to do things and in a certain sense enjoy them, which brings us back to rasa-taste what it may mean to murder without murdering. And that's what we must train our children to do, to kill in their dramas, but not on the streets.

AK: Do you think that theatre has a renewed or changing relevance nowadays, given that it's one more form of communication along with cinema, TV, electronic media?

RS: Well, I think that it's a limited form in terms of the number of people it will reach. I think that the basic appetite for drama is satisfied by films and television. And therefore I think that live performances offer something quite different-costlier in very many ways, because you can't replicate it, it can't be mechanically reproduced-but the immediacy of that contact in those rooms or spaces in which people put themselves on the line emotionally as well as physically. Sports is mostly physical with the emotion driving it along, theatre is mostly emotional with the physical supporting the ability to show your emotions. This is something that only a few people will go to watch, but they're not an elite determined by economics, they're an elite determined by something else. Five percent of the poor, five percent of the middle class, five percent of the rich will like that experience. Because there's something about sharing one's emotions face to face with another living human being, which is a little more possibly wounding but possibly celebratory than doing it into a room where there're only pictures and you're in the dark and those people aren't really there, or in a house where you're watching a tube and there's all sorts of things happening. There isn't the scope, you can't involve yourself. So it is touching a relatively few people but it's very powerful, and those people, I think, who do experience it, might have a great effect on their communities, because they're people who deeply feel things; and it's from people who deeply feel things that our leaders come.

AK: Do you feel then that the mass base of certain kinds of folk performance is gone forever? Because the appetite for narrative is being fulfilled through TV and cinema?

RS: Absolutely.

AK: So then how do you feel theatre should change

RS: Two ways. I think that theatre need not be only narrative based. There was a period when theatre was the chief storyteller-opening possibilities that were taken up by performance art, by mixed media, by all sorts of experiments, doing things that folk drama often did. I think that theatre and dance can find their niches. What those niches will be I don't know but I don't think we should deceive ourselves by thinking they can be made into mass entertainment. There'll be several niches. One will be as a sort of cultural jewel or item that governments will use to explain themselves to each other and tourists and 'important people'-what the Japanese call 'living national treasures'-and that's not a bad function. It's kind of like a museum function. I think on the other extreme because it doesn't take the same kind of technical facilities or money, it can be a place for experimentation of behaviour, of artistic means, where people who may later on move into film take chances they couldn't even with a cheap film. The theatre is a place where with relatively little money you can take some big steps. And also it is, as I said, a place where those who enjoy the display of emotions in conflict, emotions in celebration, a high mixture of intellect and emotions, will find it, more than in film, which provides us, because of the flexibility of focus of the camera, with a different kind of emotional experience. Not as easily moving back and forth between involvement and irony as the theatre can do.

AK: So the emotional bonding of theatre is what you want to emphasize?

RS: But also the dialectic between the emotion and the intellect-what Brecht was able to do. To bounce back and forth. I think film either moves into the highly narrative or into the emotional or into the intellectual but it doesn't bounce back and forth as easily as theatre does.

AK: And the space in which the participation takes place becomes all the more important

RS: Very. And the audience becomes very, very important. The immediate presence of the audience becomes as important as the presence of the performers. When there's a full hall, the whole thing changes its feeling. Now with a film that wouldn't be so. Or at home, watching a video by yourself - you can get involved with it. But it's very hard to go to the theatre by yourself and have nobody else in the theatre, and feel anything but uncomfortable. Theatre is a communal experience.

AK: So what do you see as the purpose of theatre?

RS: Obviously it's a way of sculpting a view of the world on the part of the artist or artists who are making it, so like any other art it's an expression of how you grasp the world. It's also self-expression, but it's often the self-expression of the performer, who may not be the principal person who's sculpted the vision of the world, so there's a kind of tension between the composer or the author who may also be the director, and the performer who's expressing himself, so there's multiple expressions. And there's the function of face-to-face communal sharing, of which, in a highly mediated world, there aren't that many places where people come together communally to share their emotional, intellectual and historical experiences, and theatre becomes one of those spaces. What used to happen at town meetings, in the fields when people had time off between what they were doing in pre-industrial times, the theatre can be a place where that kind of collective social celebration takes place.

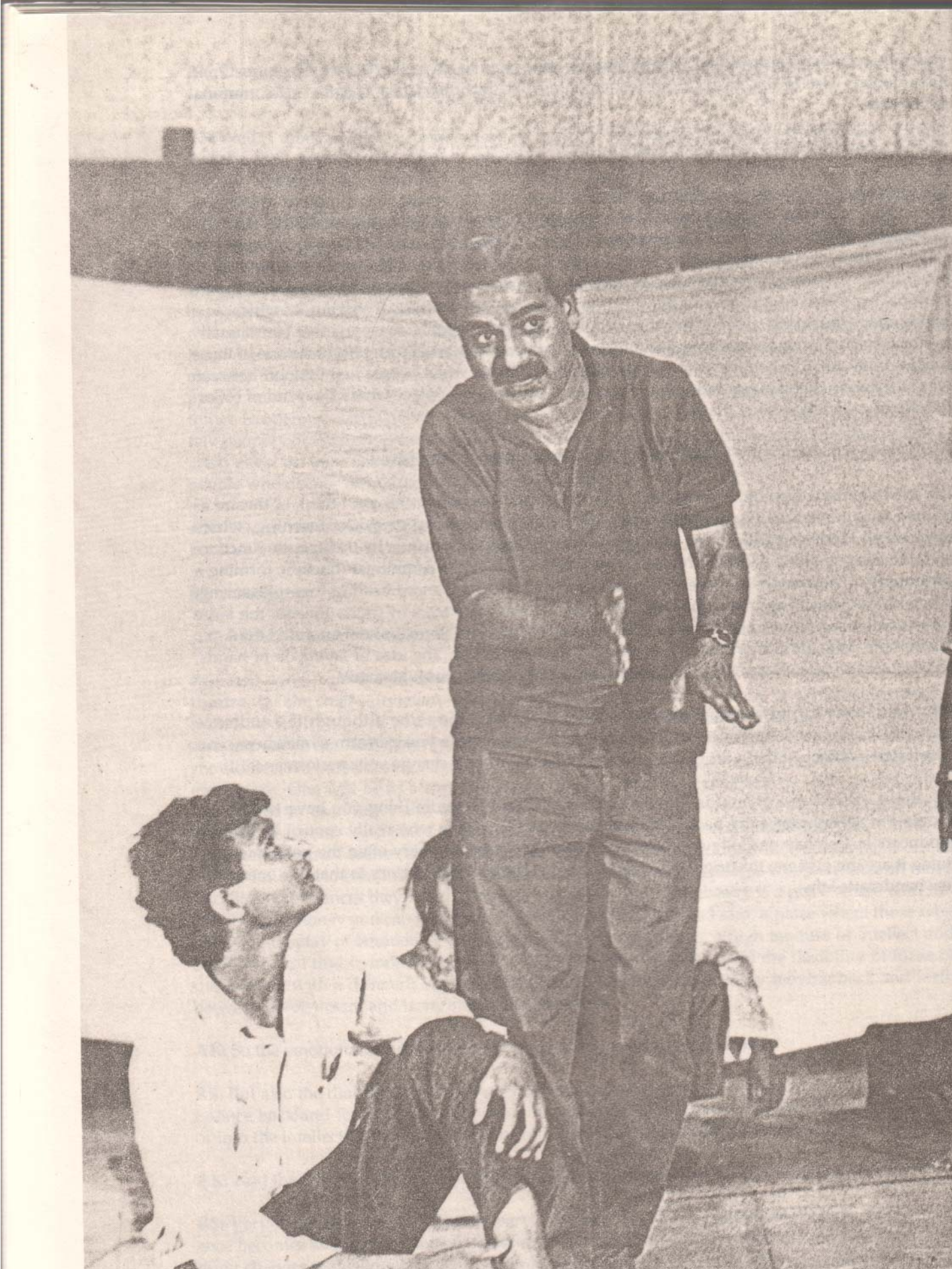
AK: People also use theatre techniques for self-development or therapy

RS: Well, therapy, healing, is an ancient, very important function of theatre. I think of theatre as having four main functions: entertaining, or making art, giving pleasure; teaching, which includes all kinds of political and ideological theatre; healing, which is its therapeutic function; and ritually, making a kind of repeated operation which is this communal function, forming a community. These functions overlap, certain performances are more healing than pleasuring, others more pleasuring than ritually, but these are the large scale of sports theatre, the large scale of what constitutes performance. Media also does some of them, but not as well. I think it's much more difficult to do ritually, or healing, through media. The idea of laying on of hands, of being face to face. Pleasuring and teaching can be done better through media.

AK: Also, once a film or programme is made, it remains the same although the audience - changes. It assumes a homogeneity of audience. But every time you perform somewhere, you take the immediacy of that particular audience into account, and change your performance.

RS: Right. Also, the economy is different. When you do the media thing you have to say, the people I'm seeing aren't the people who own this or the people who really control it. They're producers in Bombay or Hollywood or someplace. But in theatre, very often the people who're

doing it are the owners, the originators, and there is a certain kind of glory in that. It's one of the few handcrafts left.



Bansi Kaul: Points of View

In the course of a rambling, extended, informal series of conversations held over three days with BIREN DAS SHARMA, Bansi Kaul, one of our most active theatre directors and designers, discusses a whole interlocking chain of preoccupations, from art and design to his 'theatre of laughter'.

The Attraction of the Undefined

BDS: If I asked you to edit a special issue of STQ on set designing how would you go about it?

BK: I always wondered why should one do arts? Why? Why should one do it? Is it a necessity? I think that there must be some necessity. I suppose it is necessary because basically it gives a point of view. We just live in a certain time and space and one feels that ... You look at a tree from a window and then you get down and look at the same tree again, then maybe you walk around and look at it once again and keep on liking it. Every time you look at it you change your point of view: The tree is the same. I suppose this is what art does. Art ultimately survives. But why should it survive? Why does it deserve to survive? Because its job ultimately is to look at the tree from many points of view. And if you don't do that, then you have no right to do art. It is the point of view which must keep on changing and it should be a conscious effort. An artist should not decide that it will come to him naturally. Art is not a natural phenomenon. Art is a conscious phenomenon. When we say art, we are talking about art which is one segment of culture. Culture may be a natural phenomenon. But art is not.

BDS: But where and how do you create the dividing line?

BK: Culture means many more things. Culture means habits-for example, food habits. Culture means how you grow rice, how you talk to your friends, how you kill somebody, how you celebrate your festivals, how you enter a house. Anything that happens in the society in which you live is culture. The translation of sociology is culture. Then why do we need art? Art is only a segment, a small bit, of culture. We, all of us, are only small elements of this culture.

We are just molecules, there are hundreds and thousands and millions of molecules in culture and I am one of those molecules. Why do we do art? It is because it looks at the whole culture from different points of view. The day it ceases to look this tree-which symbolizes culture-from many points of view it ceases to be art. There is this first sloka in the Mahabharata which nobody translates. It says that I am a tree, if you look at me as you would. look at a tree ... what happens in a tree is that it has many branches, if you are looking at one branch then suddenly another branch appears. When you travel on one main branch suddenly you will find that your route is diverted. The moment you think that you have taken one route you discover another route. This multiplicity is very important. Some people want to take one particular route, forgetting the other routes and sub-routes, and that's probably why art suffers and that's where the linearity comes in to the arts. Because of this linearity art becomes very obvious. That is why I would like to suggest that we should look at the whole culture as a tree, with the architecture of a tree. Unfortunately we don't do that. Since we don't do it, we feel frustrated and when you feel frustrated you ultimately start attacking your own self, you destroy your own self. The artist has to ultimately learn to change every time, it does not actually take much time, you don't have to work hard to change your point of view. You only have to change the direction. Usually we tend to restrict ourselves to a definite angle and therefore nothing changes before us.

BDS: How do you explain this rigidity in creative thinking?

BK: It is because we do not try to look at the work more philosophically. By this I don't mean making it an academic exercise. A practitioner may not talk about written philosophies. There are unwritten philosophical attitudes which can be his property, which he does not use. Probably he depends more on what is written, therefore things get mixed up. The other good reason can be that he enjoys it also. What is needed is a shift from one enjoyment to another enjoyment. If you take a shift, the second stage is also an enjoyment, the third shift will also be an enjoyment at a different level. But the artist probably does not want to take the risk of shifting from one enjoyment to another.

BDS: So his work becomes a repetition.

BK: It does. If all of us learn to take this risk - which is not actually a risk-it is as if one says that after my death I will be sent to heaven. Then somebody says there is another place, would you like to go there? He thinks that if he says yes he might end up in hell itself. Actually it isn't hell. If somebody asks you, 'There is something else. Would you like to accept it?' you should. Because it is again going to be heaven. Therefore every bit of travel for an artist who lives in changing points of view is going to be a heaven for him.

BDS: The fear of repeating oneself is there in all art, including theatre. How can a theatre person break away from this?

BK: One should try. Let me explain it to you this way. When we say written and unwritten, we should go more for the unwritten. Written means obvious and the unwritten is exploring. Probably we are trying more and more to find the unwritten in the written. We want to explore everything in the obvious. Therefore we don't do anything interesting.

BDS: You use the artist's journey as a metaphor and you are emphasizing the pleasure of discovering the unwritten. How do you personally see these ideas at work in your own theatre activities?

BK: The *akhara* idea was one of those things. What affected me in a big way was human behaviour in sociological patterns. What are these sociological patterns? These sociological patterns are again unwritten. Which will ultimately make art, which will affect your work? When people look at what is already defined-it is like classicism, which is defined today-one wants to take refuge in some sort of classicism, while it is life which is flowing like a river, it has no classicism in it. Life is not defined, nor is it codified. Even if you wish to take refuge in it you can't. Therefore one has to go to safe places like the *akhara*. The *akhara* is not a refuge, it means a space which is empty. Anybody can enter into this space and transcend it. Anybody can come into this space and either have a *sastrarth* (annotated reading of the *sastras*), see an *akhara* fight, do wrestling, do lathi or perform or just look at each other. *Akhara* in that sense is not the *akhara* which does martial arts. It is a concept. I use this word *akhara* as a concept which means empty space, where anybody comes and does something; and then it gets cleared and someone else takes it over, does something and then again it gets cleared. It does not have a fixed or permanent value. It keeps on changing.

BDS: The way you have defined it has given it a philosophical dimension, it has become a mental space also.

BK: It is. It is also a mental space. But mental space is not ultimately a rigid thing, it also keeps on changing. I believe that the practitioner should ultimately treat theatre as *akhara*, which they don't. It should be free from any boundaries and therefore keep on changing. We do it as human beings. For example, a person goes to a *mela* and then returns to the same *mela*. Actually he is not coming back to the same *mela* which he has seen. It could be the same place, the same shops, but there would be some change in it. Why does he repeat it? People change, the space changes, and even the whole philosophical context changes. And because of this he loves to come back to it. Unfortunately, what we are trying to do is to change the *akhara* nature of the theatre into a modern market which never changes. You have the same shops of the same size, the same windows-nothing changes in it. They only change the products in the show windows. A modern market complex is a standardization, a form of regimentation, whereas *akhara* does not believe in regimentation. It is a lively thing. You go to the same *akhara* every day and get different things. I suppose that is what should happen to theatre also. You cannot live with something that repeats itself, do the same thing for ten years. Because of this it reminds me of a modern market with standardized products ... and it should change. Therefore one should go to the *akharas* where the space is not defined.

BDS: You started at The National School of Drama (NSD). You have gone through a very systematic education in theatre craft and all that. From that somehow you have, as I see it, gone through another process of unlearning. Somehow you are trying to keep yourself alive, you have moved from 'theatre' to *akhara*. I see it as a journey. There must be a whole history behind it. How do you see this journey?

BK: I think everything was accidental. When I came out of drama school I thought-now I know everything. I have mastered the art. Actually circumstances were such that we really had to travel, to go to different places, and all our pride in 'mastering the art' was shattered. I always say that circumstances are the best eye-openers. There was a time when a few of my productions became very popular, they were talked about. I suddenly became part of the mainstream theatre. It is like somebody writes one novel and he lives for bloody hundred years. It happened to three or four of my productions and I could have continued with it till today and lived like some of our friends who have done one production and have been living on it like bloody landlords. Sometimes you can use your success as a piece of land and be a landlord. Land gives you some yield or crops. In the arts also there are landlord directors,

landlord artists, where success yields crops and they live on it. I got out of it because of circumstances. I did not realize that my success was like *a* plot of land and I was becoming a landlord and it was indeed yielding crops. Out of habit I just went to some other area. And in my absence I was talked about. If I knew that I was talked about I would probably have stuck to it. I did not know, so I kept travelling, searching for another piece of land. That really helped me.

BDS: Has it something to do with the workshops you started conducting at different places during Karanth's time at NSD?

BK: No. It actually started earlier. I started travelling ten years before Mr. Karanth came to the Drama School. I was working with smaller groups at different places and I felt that they needed a drama school on wheels. NSD was in Delhi whereas there were people who could not leave their jobs and other responsibilities and join the drama school. So I gave them my idea, 'Look, you can develop another institute which will be on wheels. Instead of them coming to the Drama School the school will go to them.' Karanth said, 'Okay, you come and involve yourself in this work.' So they interviewed and appointed me a professor. It was really very stupid. I was very young then-only 29 years-and they put a small board outside my room: 'Professor Bansi Kaul'. My department was called Extension Programme, something that would travel and conduct workshops. But this was not something only they did. There must have been many people actually doing it. Even people working in different areas got institutionalized. I was in the Drama School for only one year and conducted workshops at different places-we did festivals and all kinds of things. Drama School was spending the money, not those students. We went to them. By the end of the year, I don't know, I must have felt that this was also becoming-as if walls were being built around the *akharas*, they were being defined. So I decided to let others work and left. My problem is that when something gets defined that's the time I feel very ...

BDS: Was this attitude always with you, even in your childhood?

BK: I suppose so. My father was a clerk in the AG's office. I think defining everything has been a problem since my childhood. I always loved snow. I never liked green, never

liked autumn in Kashmir. Because autumn is always defined-the trees, the flowers. But winter is never defined in Kashmir. Winter has a vastness, it turns everything white. Colors have many shades because it has a verticality about it. But snow turns everything into a horizontal landscape. I used to love it. There are so many white shades. Snowscapes are not defined. Snow clears out whatever is defined, edges, borders ...

SDS: It is also difficult to paint snowscapes.

BK: Because when you look at different landscapes you can see that they are very defined. But I think that snow re-defines everything. It is like a room with lots of furniture and you put a large white sheet over it-I suppose it must have been that. The moment something gets defined you should get out of it. Probably that will change your point of view. It is like the seasons. The summer will come and again define it. It is like a natural cycle.

BDS You refer to a very defined autumn, which is the standardized look of Kashmir.

SK. That's why tourism-it's always attracted to defined systems. Tourism never likes what is undefined.

BDS When you introduced the design course at NSD was there a similar frustration with the defined nature of the very look of Indian theatre?

BK It must have something to do with my habit of living in a certain landscape. This must have suddenly popped up and disturbed me. You have to change the landscape. When we came out of the Drama School most of us did not know where to go. I mean one was not sure of earning one's bread and butter. It was like running in the snow, not knowing what is beneath you. In autumn the roads are all defined, but when there is snow the roads get covered. Freelancing was like that. Then suddenly the autumn will come back and you know where you stand. Then again you run. It became a habit. So I kept on changing. Sometimes people say, 'Why don't you stop and do something here?' People want to define everything.

BDS How do you bring this into your design concepts? How do you not let your work get defined?

BK Sometimes you start defining your work because you start enjoying your limitations. Then the whole work becomes very limited. When you start designing exhibitions you start enjoying them so much.

BDS Give me an example from your theatre work.

BK Once I decided that, as a limitation, I must now bring painted scrolls into theatre and stop using solid three-dimensional objects. So I thought, in most of my designing I will use scrolls. There is a proscenium limitation in using any object. These are the only **things** you can change and sometimes you can use them in multiple planes. You know you have one layout plane, one horizontal plane or a vertical plane but you know you can split them, separate them. But actually you are only changing the layout every time to make it look different. And then you start enjoying it. It looks good and everybody likes it. But actually they were only looking at the same scrolls being readjusted. This went on for years. I was only readjusting them. The people who watched thought that each time I was actually redesigning, doing different kinds of designing. The only way I could get rid of it was to ultimately get rid of design as such - no designing. Do not introduce any object into your production as a design. So the idea came-why should not a design be more mobile through the performers? Therefore the element of design which I use now in productions-I don't use it as a separate element as I would have done as a designer: the scrolls, walls, a tree, a platform. Now I see design more as a part of actors' activity. Actually this is not something which I've thought of - it's in classical Indian theatre. They would always say that *vachika abhinaya* or speech is one of the elements of classical Indian theatre, another element is the *angika* or physical element. But there is another element which is *aharya* or design. Therefore design then was not a technical element but was always part of acting. It is the actor who carries the design. Wearing a headgear is actually carrying a design. A painted face is a design. Therefore you see design in actors, you see design becoming mobile. It was with the western influence on Indian theatre that design became an element in the foreground or in the background. But then

what I am talking about is not something that I have invented, it was there, though one was not aware of it. So, make-up becomes a very important element of design in my productions, so does headgear, so does the mask, the costume. The elements of design become a part of acting. That's why some of my friends today say that your design in a production is very good, but the acting is weak, or your production is weak. And most of the people who say this, who pretend that they know a lot about tradition, do not know that this is also part of the tradition, that design was always a part of an actor's craft. The critics and friends who keep on saying this, keep on attacking you ... I think their concept of history covers probably only two hundred years. To these people history only goes as far as they can see. But there is always eyesight beyond eyesight which they don't have. Their physical eyesight is very limited, it may go up to a hundred feet or so. But there is eyesight which goes beyond the hundred feet and to look beyond hundred feet you actually don't need eyes, you need something else. I want to avoid physical design. Nowadays I only use physical design in assignments because that's the only way they accept me as a designer. I design spaces, design inaugurations, Festival of India programmes. I have to design something one can see. Usually they don't want to see a platform which is two feet by three feet, they want to see a platform which is eight feet by ten feet. If I tell them, 'Look, you don't need a platform which is eight feet by ten feet, you need a platform which is eight thousand by two thousand feet. But you probably won't see it.' They will say, 'You are a fool.' They won't pay you. Therefore you can only do certain things in these assignments.

BDS How do you relate this concept of design with the dramatic texts which may need physical designing?

BK Any dramatic text has an inbuilt design in it, or at least elements of designing. For example, when you look at a dramatic text it is not something which is physical in that sense. A dramatic text does not work through words only-if it is a good dramatic text. Words are only explanations. But then one has to find the real expression in that explanations A dramatic text is made of words, but again the words have their childhood or origin What is the childhood of these words? Sound. Again, sounds have their own designs These designs are not definitive, they are multiple.

BDS But how do you make them visible?

3K: You make the words visible by giving them sounds, If you tried to define them then you would go back to the expression, and then to the explanation. So when one looks at a text one wants to play with sounds. One looks at a particular word and tries to find out how many points of view a sound can have. A word is like a physical tree: If you look at it from different angles you will suddenly find so many sounds to it. That is how words, sounds and texts have to be treated. If you treat a text just as mere linear vocabulary then you're probably being unfair to the text. Therefore, I want to design plays which aren't obvious and find design in the text which is not defined, which is not obvious.

DS: You want to look at design not as a craft but an approach ... designing a costume, a shirt, a room, furniture-it is actually a very broad term, beyond what is generally understood-as designing:

BDS: And it covers almost everything starting from the very look of the production to the way you organize elements in the production ...

BK: I once designed a huge wall for a big festival. A friend asked, 'What does it mean? Why this design?' These fellows wanted to give me a budget, and I had to create something big--a huge wall-which they could look at and say, 'He has spent some money.' They don't want to see what I can do. Incidentally, in my production I have created a much bigger wall. For me design is not something which is obvious, text is also not something which is obvious or what they call literal.

BDS: In other words, as I understand it, one actually cannot fix a design because it is dynamic, it keeps on changing.

BK: It has to, otherwise everything will go wrong. I will give you an example. You know that a river comes from a source and flows, and then disappears and again comes out somewhere else. A river has a source but often loses itself somewhere, it goes underground. Suddenly you see it coming out somewhere else. So when someone is asked to measure the length of the river

he will measure the distance from the source till where it is seen, then again he measures the distance where it is seen. But between these two points the river has an unseen connection. Why don't you measure that? I would like to see things like that. This measurement goes wrong with all of us. The disappearing act of the river from the source to the real is ultimately what art should cover. It is very difficult. But at least you can think about it. Doing it belongs to the second stage. Let us at least achieve the first stage of thinking about it. Most of us are thinking about the second stage. But though the first stage is so important nobody does it. None of us. There are many people who want to look at classical Indian plays ... There was a seminar in Ujjaini organized by the Kalidas Academy for which I did a Sanskrit play called *Benisangharam*. The seminar was on 'Reference to Exit and Entrance in *Natyasastra*'. Lot of pundits came from different parts of the country-all *sastrarths*, authorities on the *sastras*. Just for the fun of it I also talked on the subject. The *Natyasastra* says that when an actor takes an entry he should take one round and then go out and again take another round and again go out. In fact when you read Abhinavagupta's interpretation of this entry and exit he says when an actor takes an entry, takes a round, it is one evolution completed. Therefore, when he takes a second entry it is the second evolution. The third entry is the third evolution. He talks about these different evolutions. But there is another commentary which is the typical, standardized comment on the *Natyasastra*. It says that when the actor takes an entry, takes a round, he shares the transitory *rasa* with the audience. He goes out and comes back and establishes the *sanchari bhava* with the audience. But Abhinavagupta says this in terms of evolution. Now what is the difference? I did not know. But I had earlier read somewhere about how the *sebayets* (priests) in Kashmir felt. Abhinavagupta was himself a Kashmiri *sebayet*. So he looked at the whole entry and exit thing as a *sebayet* thinker. Most of the Kashmiri *sebayets* nowadays think, like most Hindus do, that you have to complete each evolution-the four evolutions in our philosophy (*banaprastha*, *brahmacharya*, *garhastha* and *sanyas*)-in order to complete a full evolution of life. But actually *sebayets* don't say that. They say that each evolution is complete in itself. Therefore you don't have to complete the whole evolution of life in a linear manner. If something goes wrong in one evolution, don't bother, the second evolution is a different story. The third evolution is a new story. Therefore something you have done wrong in the first evolution is not a sin. You don't have to correct it in another evolution, in *banaprastha*. At the seminar I just related it to that. I said that each entry of the actor is a

complete evolution in itself, it is a complete enactment. It has nothing to do with the second entry. So every time he enters he gives a completely new performance and when he enters a second time it has nothing to do with the first performance. There was this great scholar from Banaras, who was a musicologist also and a *sebayet*, an old man in his seventies or eighties, Thakur Jaydev Prasadji. He got up and hugged me. He said, 'You have said it.' I didn't really know anything about it. But he could instinctively relate it to the whole problem of exit and entry. I think he was right. The first entry, the second entry, third and fourth entry are complete in themselves. Therefore whatever a performer does, even if he just comes and rings the first bell, it is a complete performance. The second bell is also a complete performance. It is not first bell, second bell and third bell but each one of them is a complete performance. Therefore it is not linear. I would like to look at performance, even if the actor just comes in and meets another, as a complete performance in itself. In fact I always tell actors, 'Don't treat your entry as something which is not important. An entry onto the stage is a performance. Taking an exit is also a performance. If you think that performance is only something that takes place between entry and exit, you are wrong.'

BDS: Your interpretation of each entry and exit as a complete performance, each having a complete life, comes close to the idea of performance in the folk forms.

BK: Exactly. Every episode has to be a complete performance. It has to be a complete evolution. It can't be something unimportant. Therefore each performance has a *purbarang* (prelude) to it and we say that the *purbarang* is much more important than the real performance. You can't give a performance unless you have a *purbarang*. Therefore we must work more on it, and here lies the difference between the actor and the performer. What we are trying to do, all of us, is to enact; we're thus forgetting the performer. We are trying to show the 'technical' actor and forgetting the real one, who is the performer. It takes more time to achieve this. Today we want to be precise and finish in two minutes or five minutes. When I read a short story, to me, the important thing is not the story but the foreword. To me, when I read a book, the book starts from the first page, from the cover design. That is where the book actually starts. Whereas people try to skip the first few pages and go straight to the story. Then why do we need those first few pages?

BDS: When a performer becomes an actor he probably searches for moments in the text which he can enact, to show his skill.

BK: This also happens in music. That's why today the musicians tune their instruments backstage and they come on ready. I think that is the nastiest thing they can do to music. If I go to a concert, what I love is that they tune their instruments in front of the audience. This is the *purbarang*. Now they have become so westernized, all of them. They have been told by the westerners, that you are wasting the time of the audience, you should tune your instrument backstage and then come on the stage and start the real concert. These stupid fools don't understand . . . Because the whole joy, you know, in tuning the instruments. . .

BDS: ... and at the same time you prepare the audience, you tune *them* ...

BK: That was the idea. That's why in traditional theatre, in folk theatre, the *purbarang* was so important. Because that was the time when you allowed the people to come and get involved.

BDS: I remember, in my childhood I used to go to Jatra regularly. The music used to start at least an hour before the real performance. Once the music started you got ready, had your dinner, took your warm cloth and then went to the performance place for a whole night's performance.

BK: That is *purbarang*. The whole problem with modern theatre is that it has no *purbarang*.

BDS: But what can you do about it? Can one change it?

BK: It is possible, provided you stop looking at theatre in a linear manner, if you don't start reading the book from the fourth page. The cover is very important. Everything has become very precise. 'You start here.' It is like doing the play from the second act. That is why nowadays you have a time limitation, you have to finish it in so much time. But even in that fixed time you can create your own *purbarang*. It is important. For us the performance starts the moment the actor enters the acting area and rings the first bell. The performance starts the moment he enters the auditorium, gets into the mood of it. I think Indian theatre should be treated like marriages, you know. The first day, the second day and the third day ... I sometimes feel that the electorates are rigid but they have not lost their human sensibilities in

many ways. While a festival like Durga Puja still survives in West Bengal, if go back to UP- where the people are supposed to be rightist in their attitudes-you will find that they have lost all the joy in their great festivals. Durga Puja starts much before the first day of the *puja*. The preparation starts long before and that whole *purbarang* ultimately turns into a *pandal*. This does not happen-in UP today. In fact the rightist systems in India are much more fascist than the leftist systems. Much more fascist.

BDS: Coming back to *purbarang* and the importance of entry and exit in theatre, I think the moment the actor enters a space, he enters not only the performance space but a space which includes the audience and the surroundings as well as the stage.

BK: There is also something beyond that. This is something I have learnt from the acrobats. I actually don't want to learn techniques from most of them. I want to learn how they look at their work philosophically. For me the best thing to take from the past is the energy and not the physicality of it. I asked the acrobats, 'Where do you perform?' '*Karte hain,*' said one. The other fellow said, '*Hum zameen par karte hain, beech main karte hain aur upar karte hain.*' It means 'I do it on the ground, I do it in the centre and I do it on the top.' He is actually defining three spaces. The physical space is the land, then the middle and the air. Therefore, I see that theatre has to define these three spaces. An actor comes into the physical space and he has to stand somewhere. Then he transcends himself in to the middle and then he goes to the third space which is the imaginary space. He has to go out of the physical space and therefore he has to-not physically but mentally-take the audience out of that space to the imaginary space. One way is to open the door or the window and tell them, 'let us go out to the field,' which is a very physical attitude. The other way is to intellectually take them out. When today people talk in uneducated, journalistic jargon, 'I am against proscenium' what are they talking about? Even an arena stage or an open air space can sometimes become a proscenium or as physical as a real proscenium. You can perform in the open air without taking the audience into the imaginary space and this is as physical as in the proscenium. So what difference does it make? You have only changed the location of your performance from one physical space to another physical space. So don't tell me that by changing from one physical space to another you have reached a different level.

BDS: Will your approach be different when you design for a non-proscenium space?

BK: It will be different in terms of scale. Only in scale. Because the rest of the design lies with the performer.

BDS: In a non-proscenium space a design is viewed from every angle.

BK: It is also viewed from different ... senses. Like, say, after all how do you measure space in music? For example, when the villagers shout to each other, if someone is, say, one kilometre away, they say, 'Haay, come here.' Then they say, 'Haaaaay, come here.' It becomes two kilometres. He starts measuring space with his voice. So does music. Music has the capacity to measure space and music has the capacity ultimately to lead in to infinite space. That's why, probably, this quality should be brought into the theatre in terms of speech. In all of my productions I have tried to take people out of the logical and literal space in to the imaginary space. An imaginary space is not dictatorial and this space is ultimately meant for everybody who is in the auditorium to interpret in his or her way.

BDS: Do colours and light have a similar quality, similar function?

BK: They may have if it is designed well. When one does a production in the Drama School with heavy equipment-you know, they have technical facilities which you don't get anywhere else-you can achieve it through that also. There is another thing which also creates this imaginary space-the gesture. That is something great. It is superior to sound, because it defines space in silence.

BDS: It is the same in cinema. For example, when a character looks outside the frame he creates a sense of space outside the frame.

BK: Probably cinema has taken it from theatre. Unfortunately I don't know why theatre is not using it now.

BDS: Probably because it has somehow become fixed within the given space. There is no space outside that box.

BK: Suppose the actor does not use ... you know, an actor's body also has a frame. He actually has to emphasize the gesture with other parts of the body to define it. In cinema you define it in terms of an image, the visual image, you make it close up or long shot. How do you do it in theatre? You define it-for instance, if I keep my two hands like this and with this gesture say, 'Go!' it is the gesture that defines it. This is the language we are not learning to use. It is simple but this is what the actor has to learn ... What does the camera ultimately do? It follows the hand movement or just frames this much, just shows the hand. Therefore, the gestural image created in cinema in terms of space has a technical gimmick, or call it a technological facility. It is not a facility created by the human body. Therefore cinema sometimes can be anti-human also. It is anti-body. Antihuman does not mean shooting someone with a gun, it is also depriving the whole human body of its possibilities by making it into a technological language which is much more inhuman. Cinema sometimes tends to be more inhuman to the language of the body than the theatre does. Theatre becomes inhuman to its own language because practitioners don't know how to use it. I think this is where the sense of craft comes in. When people do it naturally it is the instinct which helps you.

BDS: The work of the artisans in the colonial era created a lot of curiosity because amid so much oppression they were engaged in creating repetitive and decorative designs. It took time to realize that their work was actually an expression of freedom-that they had total autonomy over the design space they had, that they were doing something where no one could interfere.

BK: Colonizers always took more pains to understand, because they wanted to exploit. A person who is not a colonizer takes less pains because he does not want to earn anything out of it, The Europeans have taken such pains over the Asians not out of genuine interest in their languages or arts but because they would not have been able to exploit them fully if they did not understand them. When you have to sell your goods you have to market survey. The Britisher were analysing, documenting, wanting to know the behaviour of the people they wanted to exploit-so it was like the market economy. In the 20th century the term has become market economy though the colonizer did it more seriously. Exploiters are more serious people than the exploited.

BDS: They understood a people's culture better than the people themselves.

BK: They have to. Otherwise they can't exploit. These are the things we should know. Theatre people tend to become very illiterate, musicians more so. That is why I always say that theatre

should be a sociological phenomenon. You must know these things. Probably it will be easier to create more forms of expression if you know, if you educate yourself. We tend to limit ourselves and then say that we are creative people. You can't be creative by keeping yourself away from reality, today's reality. For many, today's reality is only the slum, which is very obvious. Reality ultimately is what is not obvious. Many believe that what is written is art, in fact art always goes for the unwritten. What is not obvious is the job of art to find out. If there is a slum-everybody knows that it is a slum. But a slum can be beautiful-nobody knows about it. This is the unwritten which art has to go for. When I wanted to do 'theatre of laughter' one of the reasons probably was that there are unwritten conspiracies against laughter. Depriving human beings of house, food etc.-I am not saying that these are not important, on the contrary they are and one must fight for them-but depriving a human being of laughter, which is his basic right, is one of those unwritten conspiracies. All democracies have created unwritten conspiracies and all socialist systems have created written conspiracies, obvious conspiracies against human beings. Unwritten conspiracies have always been created by pretentious democracies. Therefore wanting to do theatre for laughter is a protest against this. One wants to talk about this unwritten conspiracy. By telling people that laughter is important you cannot bring food to a person who is starving. But the only thing the starving people have is laughter and therefore they can fight starvation with their sense of laughter, live with it for a few days. Even that is being taken away because of this unwritten conspiracy. This is where theatre can help. But unfortunately what our theatre is trying to do is to bring him food, which it actually can't.

BDS: This reminds me of Luis Bunuel who was known as a political filmmaker. But his films were not political in the obvious sense. What he did was to use laughter as a political weapon, the politics of laughter. On the other hand there were so many political jokes coming from the Stalinist USSR.

BK: To me the Stalinist USSR is not that dangerous because we know it will be like that. To me Indian democracy is much more dangerous, American democracy is much more dangerous. Because on the face of it you may think it is democracy. At least you can create jokes in Stalinist Russia. But in a democracy you are not capable of creating a joke. You are told that

you are a happy man, you have nothing to worry about. I am not basically interested in laughter as a reaction to oppression. One has to create laughter in the time of pretentious peace.

II. A Conspiracy Against Laughter

[This part of the conversation uses photographs from Bansi Kaul's productions to spark off discussions around his theatre work.]

BDS (*pointing out a particular photograph of one of Bansi's productions, pix 1*): How do you want to caption this photograph? 'Design in motion'?

BK: I would say 'laughter in motion' as opposed to laughter as a static image. The elements which get incorporated here are the elements of colours. The other thing we tried,



Pix 1. Soch ka Doosra Naam

I don't know whether we achieved it or not ... you know, when we look at an actor we think it is his face which is most important. Therefore, what he does is that he limits himself and only uses his face to express with. Now, how to divert the attention, say, from face to feet? So the idea came, to paint ... we purchased canvas shoes and each of the actors painted the shoes in different colours. When we performed in front of children the play was meant for children-most of the children started giggling as soon as they saw the shoes in different colours. Sometimes the clowns would hold each other, put their legs together, and it would create confusion. Because two greens will come together and the children would be confused trying to guess which leg belonged to whom. Basically this confusion was created by colours. In nature also, if you look at a green tree it will be difficult to find out which green leaf is from which branch. They get mixed up together.

BDS: What I see also is that there is very little make-up on the faces. The dresses are very colourful and as expressive as the faces themselves.

BK: In the beginning we used less make-up. But certain things happened accidentally. I think that accidents are ultimately the greatest creators.

When we do a forty minute play we will produce it for four and a half hours and then edit it to forty minutes. There is one danger. You fall in love with your own work. That makes editing very difficult. In cinema you have an editor who is a third person. But unfortunately in theatre you have to be your own editor.

BDS: I want to know how you took this experiment of making the feet much more attractive than the face and developed it further.

BK: In later plays we thought that we have to be more crazy, do more crazy but honest things which probably work more with children than with adults. When we did productions for adults we had to go back to the face to some extent. So you will find productions in which the face is painted more than any other part of the body. In the productions meant for the adults, the oneness of the group is important. So it is more like a tableau. If you freeze any one of these scenes you will see that each one of them is in itself a complete tableau. There are hundreds of tableaux travelling on the stage. I don't know from where I have picked it up, but definitely I must have picked it up from the street.

BDS: Many traditional and folk performances are presented in tableaux format, many of them are episodic in nature.

BK: I remember one thing from my childhood. In Kashmir we used to see this Amarnath Yatra. There is something called Chhadi. All the *sanyasis* from different cults would walk to the temple. There are so many variations-physical variations, variations in expression-among the sanyasi cults. So, suddenly you will find a group of Naga *sanyasis*, suddenly a group of *sadhus* walking on their heads, another group with long beards, a group wearing nothing. As children we used to love to watch these processions. I always felt it was a moving tableaux. For years I used to write signboards and write poetry on the trucks for a living and these four years of highway culture were very helpful to me. I owe a lot to that highway culture, living with the truck drivers, painting the windows for them, painting that typical landscape for them and writing those rhymes for them. Anyway, this whole Chhadi, the procession, always looked so comic to me. I looked at them as walking human tableaux. The Naga sect would walk together, followed by another group and they by another. Now, if you close your eyes and think of any of my productions; they are like the processions of these *sadhus*.

BDS: Now you have a sect of clowns.

BK: It is like having many sects as part of one procession. It is basically how I would explain the blocking of the plays-it is like a travelogue in the theatrical space. You can see lots of moments in this. The actors walk together-all of them. Then suddenly they split, come out as a sub-group and do their bit, then again come together. You can learn more from the processions as far as blocking is concerned than from any codified forms like dance. That is why I always say to my actors, you can do better theatre in this country-all you have to do is look out. It is there. Unfortunately most of us have started looking out into other art forms. Here, in this production (points to pix 1) even the script got worked out in a particular way. I am very fond of reading Mulla Nasiruddin, the little wisdom tales. Mulla Nasiruddin, Tenali Rama are all wisdom tales. Each wisdom tale cycle is like a complete set which gets transferred into another wisdom tale cycle and it travels. So the production is a collage of wisdom tales and we call it *Soch ka Doosra Naam* which is a *kissa* taken from these wisdom tales. Initially we used these wisdom tales as a training exercise. After all, when we do the improvisation sessions you have to give the actors some narrative or theme. In Drama School they would give a theme, like,

'You are sitting in a room and you get a telegram which says that your mother is dead. Now react.' I think it is a stupid improvisation. As children we used to play riddles. Two kids sit together and one recites a riddle and you have to answer it. It is actually an improvisation. I used the wisdom tales to improvise. I would tell them a tale and ask them to improvise on it. This went on for almost a year. We actually did a hundred and thirty or forty tales as improvisations. Then one day we decided that since we have so many improvisations, why not put them together as a collage and perform for kids? That is how the whole script came about. Then we added other elements like colour, we designed the costumes and you can see that even the cap has more character than the face has. I always felt that anything on stage, whether it is a chair or table, should be as lively a character as a human being. Therefore in my production each thing is a character on stage, even the cap is a character on stage. It is part of acting rather than part of a technical element.

BDS: If one can extend that will you go as far as saying that even a set, a design, can actually act?

BK: It acts, otherwise it is not a design. It is dead. For instance, a landscape consists of, maybe, a tree, a hill, a plain, a rock. Now if you are asked to explain which one is the actor in this landscape, it would be very difficult to answer. Because you can't isolate it. It is the totality of the elements that make it a landscape. Similarly you cannot isolate the design from the actor. In fact the problem is that actors have to start relating to the design, make it lively, as they do in real life. In real life if he is sitting on a chair he may change its position twenty times. Sometimes it is the chair who gets irritated because a human being is sitting on it. So the prop has to become more lively, it must become a character. If it does not become a character it is a dead rat in your hand.

BDS: Shall we move to the next photograph (pix 2)? They are from which production?



Pix 2. Sidi dar Sidi

BK: *Sidi dar Sidi* ... I went to the book fair and found a book of Chinese comic tales. There is this interesting comic tale about three promotions and Rajesh Joshi worked out a script based on that. We did it many years ago when we did not have a full-time group. We did a few shows and closed it down. When this group formed, we again decided to do it. What is happening to this production is that in each show things are changing. There is not a single show in which something has not been changed by the actors.

BDS: One of your actors was telling me about this production. He said that when they were performing this play four or five times in one venue the gatekeepers were amazed to see a different version of the same production every night.

BK: That is important. What is happening in theatre is that we are trying to turn theatre into film. You can make a good or bad film, but once it is made it is permanent, it is fixed. There is this one form left where you can change all the time. When I say theatre is much more human than film I mean this. Life itself is not a permanent, fixed thing and the daily routine is also not an unchanging thing. You don't eat in the same way every day. You might change the angle of your hand, for instance. You might sing the same song every day but then the posture, the tune, everything will be slightly different. That must reflect in theatre, it must change every day. In Marathi they do not say 16th show, they say 16th prayog. Prayog means experiment. It is a

new thing every day. This is probably why our middle-class urban audience has never developed the tendency to watch the same production more than once, five or ten times. They don't realize that they are not watching the same play but the same story set in ten different ways. It will depend really on the actors on that particular day, what they have gone through—their emotions may have changed on that day. Why is it that in this country people watch Ramlila in Banaras every day? You will find the same old man, who is now seventy, and who started watching it at the age of five or so, watching the same Ramlila every day. He doesn't get bored though he knows the story by heart. But why is there no one to see a modern play every day? Because a modern play tends to take the position of being permanent, which Ramlila does not. Ramlila changes every day. It is only the story which remains the same. At the Ramlila the spectator comes to see the changes and therefore he sees a relationship with himself.

BDS: The other day we saw the Terukoothu performance. It was a well known mythological story. Yet it created a lot of excitement among the audience. As I was watching it I realized that it has its moments of real contact, moments of reality in it. From a very formal, traditional performance it could easily come down to the audience, talk to them, interact. Is this the point of difference you want to underline?

BK: This is the *jugalbandi* that goes on between the person watching and the person who is performing Ramlila. Unfortunately when people say that we must derive our strength from folk and traditional arts they pick up the training system, they pick up the physicality of the folk forms rather than this energy of the forms. I don't think modern theatre should ultimately depend on traditional and folk arts in terms of make-up or dance movements or steps, or how it is sung—these are not important.

BDS: You mean the communication aspect ...

BK: The philosophy of it has to be picked up. That's why I say that Ramlila is seen every day because it changes every day. Why shouldn't a modern play? I don't mean that it should change completely, but why not be different every day? It is this that I should take from the folk rather than taking a dance form from them, taking music from them. Why does Kurosawa use his tradition? Probably he is the only filmmaker who does not pick up Kabuki or Noh as a physical

form, but what he picks up from these forms is the philosophy and the energy which he transfers into the films. In his film of *Macbeth (Throne of Blood)* he sees Lady Macbeth as an Asian mother rather than as an European mother and thus he justifies her killing of the king. Kurosawa shows that she was pregnant and probably whatever she was doing was exactly what an Asian mother would do, she would go to any extreme to get things for her child. Asian mothers have this capacity to transform into Kali-like figures if it benefits their child. If Kurosawa had made her dance like a Kabuki actor people would not have liked it. But her killing of the king was justified because she was doing it for her child. It is the social acceptance which Kurosawa connects with it. This is probably what we should pick up from the forms. You will hear people saying, 'my play is influenced by a form called Sopanam'. They will say that Sopanam music has a lilt, it has a lyrical range etc. etc. But nobody will say that Sopanam music also has a sociology. I am not interested in picking up the music as such but interested in its sociology. I must take that into my work. After all, how does a work become modern? Modern theatre and contemporary theatre are two different terms. Terukoothu is performed today, and so is my play, so is any other play. Then why should I call Terukoothu a traditional form and my play a modern play? They are all contemporary plays, being performed today. So what is traditional about it? Then you should say that we have contemporary Indian theatre and modern Indian theatre. Everything is contemporary here. When we say modern, we mean that from the contemporary practice you are trying to develop the modern idiom, new thinking. You are trying to create new myths. But this is what we are not doing. All of us ultimately are doing contemporary theatre and not modern theatre. I suppose this is what happened to Indian cinema also. When this new film movement came into being in the 70s-I was part of that gang, I was art director of five or six of *them-Chomanna Dudi, Hatnse Geete, Kadu*. Even there I felt that they were trying to portray the physicality of contemporary life rather than trying to find something beyond. That is where Ray scored above all of them. Because he did not go into the physicality but into the philosophy of contemporary life. He treated reality poetically. The rest of them treated reality as physical images. That's why they have created major problems-all of them together-with actors. Look at the actors picked up by these filmmakers. Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri and others. If they wanted to make a film on a tribe the first image in their mind was the tribal as an ugly fellow. They did not look at the actors as actors but as faces. So now if you look at all these Actors

who were part of this new cinema, why is it that they are not getting roles as protagonists? They are all doing the roles of villains in the commercial cinema. They are doing films in which they play the roles of characters who exploit.

BDS: Which is a further exploitation of the same image.

BK: Yes. Commercial cinema has given them the roles of exploiters. The new wave film makers could not make better films because the whole structure of these films are so linear. After all, what makes the commercial cinema so much more attractive to the Indian audience? Forget about its bad things for the moment. It is because commercial cinema is multi-linear. Suddenly the song comes in and she is one costume in one shot, in another in the next shot. The illogic does not affect the audience.

BDS: It is also presented in tableaux.

BK: ... and multiplicity. Show me one new wave film which has played with structure in terms of making it multiple. All films are linear. All films are structured like plays written by Ibsen and Strindberg. Except probably Ritwik Ghatak, who tried to break the whole structure. Even in his use of background music he has broken the linearity each time.

BDS: So far as the image of the tribal is concerned, I can only think of a film called *Kanchan Sita* by G. Aravindan. When I first saw it I thought that if anyone ever approaches an epic, this film should be the model.

BK: True. Most of them are like bloody tourism posters. Therefore, I will say that the new Indian cinema has killed these actors. When you talk to these actors today they are not able to explain, they are angry. Because they had the expectation of becoming heroes. Look at them- this is the image the new Indian cinema had created for these actors. After all, theatre actors are not very handsome people, you know. Today theatre actors have taken the roles of villains, servants, lumpen. Because the image developed ultimately is that they are ugly fellows. They can be beautiful people from the inside, which has not been explored at all and this is affecting theatre also. Fortunately one good thing about theatre is that it does not support the picking up of a goodlooking face. There are beautiful people, but they don't have handsome men or women in theatre in typical *Natyasastra* terms.

BDS: The other reason is that you probably cannot fragment the body the way you can in cinema. In cinema you can frame a face in close-up, the camera can come close to the face, you can exploit the beauty.

BK: In theatre you can come close to the face in a different way. To a great filmmaker a face becomes the reflection of inner beauty. But here a close-up looks like a bad photograph. There is one filmmaker who has influenced me a lot: Fellini. I saw his *La Strada* ten to fifteen years ago and since then I've seen it many times. I already had in mind this element of laughter, which I told you about. But this film gave me the structure actually, how to look at it. He also frames her face in close-ups-she is not a goodlooking girl but she has a very expressive face.



Pix 3. Nayan Nachaiya.

BDS: Which play is this (pix 3)?

BK: It is a Sanskrit *prahasana* which was directed by Farid. We did not get the original play but only the storyline. Radha Ballav Tripathi, a Sanskrit scholar from Sagar, runs a small magazine

called *Natyam*, in which he publishes unknown classical plays and some articles. Actually he is engaged in finding out about the plays which might have been running parallel to the major playwrights' in those days. The 'other' of the classical. He has come out with many plays, most of which do not follow the *Natyasastra* tradition. For example, you can never think of a dacoit as a hero of a classical play. But he has published a play in which the dacoit is a hero. From him came this story-the play was probably written by a Tamil Brahmin in the sixteenth or seventeenth century-and we made this play based on the story and called it *Nayan Nachaiya*. Anjana [Puri] did very interesting music for this play. She used sound patterns. This is what we try to do with our productions. People talk about text and subtext and all that but nobody actually talks about the playwright's text which has to be confronted with the text created by the performers. Now what is this performers' text? There are actually four or five texts running parallel to each other at the time of performance. One is the text created by the tableaux, which runs parallel to the text written by the playwright. Another is the text of gestures. Now we need something to weave it together and I think that music has the capacity to do that. You have to create a music text to hold it together like gravity, which is unseen. Music also creates space, as I have told you earlier. I gave you an example of how sound is used to measure distance. Sufi Inayat Ali Khan, who was also a musician, explained how the traditional societies measured physical distance. People measured distance by calling their animals. The animal would react to its master's call and by that one would measure the physical distance. So sound was used to measure distance. I suppose this is what the actor does, ultimately. He starts to measure space and music helps him. Some it works, sometimes it doesn't. This is the major problem Indian theatre is facing, which cinema has managed to solve to some extent. In cinema music became the parallel text and so you have a separate music track. Actually modern Indian theatre has to develop this music track. It is not only a question of composing songs. With modern plays the composer is not creating music as text, but, like a goldsmith or blacksmith he works as a tune-smith. He will come for ten days, compose a song, teach you and finish his work. But his real job is to elevate the whole thing, which is neglected. The music directors are good at composing good songs.



Pix.4. Waiting for Godot.

BDS: This photograph (pix 4) reminds me of *La Strada*. Which production is this?

BK: *Waiting for Godot*. A production depends a lot on who is acting in it. Often a form or a style gets developed according to the abilities of the actors you have. I depend a lot on that. It is very difficult for me to decide what style I should work in. When I direct plays for NSD as a

teaching assignment and I'm asked to teach realism, I have to select a well defined, realistic play. But when I work at Kanpur or Lucknow, or Sitapur, I have to think about the quality of the actors. What they can do. The quality of their acting and the quality of their life determines the style and form you develop. You cannot be rigid and strict. What I am researching, what I want to achieve, cannot be imposed on other groups of actors. It will look very crude. Here Bharat was playing as Estragon. Bharat plays with his body and the way he takes the whole written text into his body with gestures is amazing. It changes the whole acting style. He is basically a ballet dancer, but when he acts he brings in a different quality of acting. The conventional actors may not like it. This probably helped us a lot. Beckett has been done in this country-I myself did him in '74 in Kanpur and again in '92 - but probably this is the first time (in '92) that we realized what Beckett must have been wanting to do. In those days I read many books on *Waiting for Godot*. In fact, throughout the whole Absurd Theatre period he talks about nonsense, the nonsense-ness of life. Therefore, I think, only clowns can do Absurd Theatre. Serious and realist actors-it is not their cup of tea. The absurdity of words, of life, is at the core of this _play. If I have to make a film on this play I would like these roles to be performed by traditional *vidushaks*. Estragon can be done by the traditional *vidushaks* like Komalis. You also have Songaria in Tamasha. There are actors who have done nothing but Songaria throughout their life. Imagine them playing in *Godot*. They will bring a new life to the play. It was Bharat's first role. The other actor was Raj Kumar. It took us two years to realize what to do with this play. We want to produce it once again. We have decided now to spread a 20'x40' cloth on stage. The whole group will lie under it. It will look like an uneven surface. There will be holes in the cloth and suddenly one Vladimir will disappear under this cloth and another Vladimir will come out. There is that conversation, 'Who are you? What is your name?' etc. There can be many Estragons, many Vladimirs. The locale will actually be the bodies of many Vladimirs and Estragons.

B DS: In the '92 production did you have a set constructed?

BK: There is a shed outside where we rehearse. The pipe was lying there. We used all that, including the tree. It was a natural location. But it served the purpose.

BDS: What about this picture (pix 5)?



Pix.5 An adaptation from *He Who Gets Slapped*

BK: That's from a play called *He Who Gets Slapped*. It's a very good Russian play. There is a danger in doing theatre where everything is acrobatic, everything moves fast.

BDS: What danger?

BK: It is like being an infant who has no control over his body; who falls down easily. The moment he grows up he starts gaining control over his muscles, learns how to balance etc. Initially I had to work with actors to make their bodies like those of children. As adults they had bodies which were very rigid. So first I had to get rid of that. Then there's the stage when they should learn to control it in order not to make non-control a habit. The play is about circus clowns, as you can see from the photo. There was this period before the Second World War when the intellectuals-the writers, painters and others-thought that they were not understood by the people. 'Why aren't people reading our books, watching our paintings? Why does nobody talk about what we're doing?' There was this well-known writer who decided to join a circus company as a clown. He used to watch the circus and he told the circus manager that he

wanted to be a clown. The professional clowns laughed at him. For the license from the police he had to show his identity card to the manager. To the manager it was as if Tolstoy had come to join the company! The writer requested the manager not to reveal his identity. The whole play takes place backstage in the circus. The play revealed so many things. There was this scene when he wants to do an act in which two clowns will beat him. You don't see it, only hear the sound of beating and people laughing. The scene shows how violence can ultimately turn into laughter, that it can make people happy. The play basically tells us that clowns are not buffoons. What was happening in our productions was that the actors thought we wanted to do comedy. This is not what I wanted. We are not a group of comedians, not a group of buffoons. We are a group of laughter. Therefore all our plays in the future will have very few elements of comedy in them. But people should watch our plays and keep on smiling. We don't want people to giggle in the auditorium.

BDS: You mean that though you use clowns you are consciously trying to move away from slapstick, you don't want to use gags at all.

BK: My idea of clown theatre is basically not comic-this is very difficult to achieve, even more difficult to explain. I don't have the vocabulary to explain it. That is the reason I want to show them films like *La Strada*. What could the clown of the present be like?

BDS: Your idea of the clown comes close to the classical 'fool' whose function was not to generate laughter but to function as a social critic.

BK: That is exactly what I am not being able to achieve. If these actors stay with me, after ten years I may achieve this. Then, I also need plays. We don't have plays. Whenever I go to a playwright they ask, 'What are you doing?' I think my project has the wrong name. Theatre Laboratory of Clowns is the wrong name. Everybody misunderstands it. Whenever you talk to a playwright he says, 'I have a very good comedy in mind.' But I don't want to do comedies. Even if people want laughter I don't want to give them comedies. Because I don't want to make fun of people, that is inhuman. I would love to have the most handsome actor as a clown. I don't want to use the physically deformed or dwarfs as clowns, a tradition which is very much there in the circus. I think it is criminal to pick up these dwarfs and make people laugh at their disabilities. To use deformity to make people laugh is criminal and because of that I hate Hindi cinema. It makes you laugh at deformity. Therefore, for me Raj Kapoor is the most third-rate

filmmaker on earth. The commercial cinema creates violence through these things. Violence does not mean showing a woman without clothes, or fight scenes. I don't know why censors edit out the fight scenes. They are not violent, they are in most cases comic. What is truly violent in Hindi cinema nobody addresses.

BDS: And what is that?

BK: The deformity of various kinds that are being used in Hindi cinema. For example, the way they play with languages, Hindi with a bit of South Indian which is actually an act of violence done to both the languages. Fight scenes are not violent. Have you ever gone to a cinema and sat in the first row? You should listen to the ordinary people who see these films, you should listen to the discussion that goes on. The discussion is not whether Vinod Khanna is beaten or not. The man next to you says, 'Galat pao mara.' Wrong feet. They see their energy being performed by somebody else. They do not look at it as violence. Therefore, what is considered violence in Hindi cinema is not violence. There is more violence in non-violence. Gandhiji's concept of non-violence created a different kind of violence which is psychological violence, you know. This is the reason why I want to develop the fool-I don't know how to name him and I am not able to explain it properly and therefore it is difficult for others to comprehend this concept ...

BDS: Shall we move to the next photograph?

BK: Yes. The first production which I did in '76 was for a festival in Bhopal devoted to world classics adapted into Indian folk forms. At that time I was not in Bhopal but travelling in UP-1 picked up Gogol's *Inspector General*. We adapted it to Nautanki. The whole play was actually done through songs with very few dialogues. I had very interesting actors, all above forty, who were from local amateur groups, one from each group. In the play there are these Dobchin and Bobchin characters. I have seen in my childhood days the Bhands in Kashmir. Suppose Dobchin and Bobchin are two Bhands and they relate to the play ... It so happened that when we started doing it and it was taking shape, people thought that I had ruined Gogol. Then we performed for the first time in Lucknow-for the first time I saw a theatre audience clapping for forty-five minutes after the show and refusing to leave! I was very young and I was spoiled by this. I suddenly become one of India's top mainstream directors. The play was shown all over

the country. I came to Calcutta twice. Even Sombhu Mitra came to see the play and he came backstage. Just imagine! Sombhu Mitra was a hero to all of us and by that time he had stopped watching plays. I was suddenly put on the map and I think that was dangerous. Even now when the mainstream theatre critics write about me this is the one production they always refer to. Then came Ben Jonson's *Volpone*. I went to arrange a festival of Bhavai. I collected these Bhavai groups in Ahmedabad and I was with them for threefour months. When I came back to Drama School-I was heading the Extension Department then-I said, 'Why not to do this Volpone, make it a typical Indian play?' We turned the whole play upside down and presented it in Bhavai form. It again became a hit, you know. The same thing happened to about ten productions, one after the other. There was a time in Delhi when three of my productions were going on simultaneously. There were six plays of mine in three national festivals. One came from Tamil Nadu-I had done Tinnam Tinnam Sastrangal from Subramaniam Bharti's *Panchalisabdam*. You know the actor whom we watched yesterday doing Terukoothu? He was someone who had left Terukoothu and was driving a three-wheeler. I took him to the workshop which I was conducting at Gandhi Gram at that time, using the Terukoothu form. He went through the whole training process of a modern theatre workshop and because of that he has been able to change his Terukoothu now. What he does is modern plays in Terukoothu. Initially people thought, 'Who is this fellow who wants to do *Panchalisabdam* without knowing the language?' But when the production took place using Tamil folk forms, Muthuswamy called it the first modern Tamil play. Many Tamil books say the same thing now. It is stupid, really, because I'm sure many people must have been doing amazing work which we didn't know about earlier. Then I did a production in Malayalam of a play called *Black God* written by Shankara Pillai. I think he was an amazing, innovative and original playwright who should be translated and published. Then I did another production in Punjab on Dulla Patti. There is a *kissa* on Dulla Patti who was a fourteenth century rebel. According to the folk history of the song, the worst king India ever had was Akbar. This fellow Dulla was a Rajput. We took this folk tale called *Tamak Nagare De*. At that time Punjabi theatre people were doing English theatre. I used chorus songs between scenes where I brought in Gadka performers. I introduced the Punjabi theatre people to Gadka--Gadka, Naqaals. Now they don't want to acknowledge this. Nobody used them earlier. When it became a saleable item everybody started using them. Anyway, I don't know why I got dejected. I just disappeared

from theatre for some time. When I am travelling and searching for something I might suddenly decide one day that it is all rubbish, not worth doing. I keep going through these phases. I work on something and the moment it yields a result in terms of being recognized, that is when I get disgusted with it. Probably because I feel it is not what I want. Appreciation can actually kill your search, what you really want to do.

BDS: But isn't there a contradiction there?

BK: When you work towards something, when you want to achieve something, something else comes out. It is like you want to have a girl child and the woman gives birth to a boy. It is a disappointment. But people think that I am only working towards what I've achieved. For the audience and your friends this is enough. But nobody ever asked me what exactly I wanted. This is what dejects me.

BDS: What do you do when the work gets recognized and maybe picked up by others?

B K: I lose interest in it. I tell myself, 'Okay, it's only one phase.' I feel like a good *sebayet*, 'One evolution is complete. Let another evolution start.'

BDS: How many evolutions have you had so far?

BK: My god, you will be shocked to know. I have done one hundred and eight plays. I used to do nothing but travel and suddenly I would do a play. It was not that I wanted to do so many plays.

BDS: But many of them were, I think, results of your experimentation towards some thing specific.

BK: Yes, heading towards something. In the last twenty years, I have travelled around eighty towns where I also worked. UP, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Bihar, Manipur, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Jammu and Kashmir, some parts of Maharashtra, and Gujarat are the states where I have worked with local theatre people and directed plays in local languages. Travelling really helps you. I have another fascination and again I need a playwright to help me. I am collecting nowadays ... Have you realized that during elections there are these clown types who want to fight elections? These people never win. They print their manifestos, and if you go

through them you will find them amazing. They are like completely topsy-turvy scripts. Since this country has still got a sense of humour I wonder why our parliament is so dull? Because it is full of buffoons and not clowns. These clowns, when they stand for election, when they talk to the public, a lot of people gather around to listen to them but they don't vote for them. There is this one chap, the Ghorewala in Kanpur, who fights presidential elections. He is short, thin, has a beard, wears boots, goggles and a hat, and hires a horse and goes round the town like a Robin Hood. He sits on the horse and lectures people. Students collect money for him because the horse has to be fed. I asked the students, 'Why don't you help him win the election?' The answer was, 'We don't want to lose our clown to the parliament.' It is as if people have decided to create their own entertainer. He belongs to them. The moment you send him to the parliament the people will lose their laughter to the parliament. They will be losing their entertainer to the parliament. People need their own entertainers. So they have created these entertainers- , thinkers or fools, whatever you call them. I know fifteen or twenty of them. Another thing is that they are the only ones whom you can't catch, the government can't catch. It is in the constitution. But they are the only ones who are making fun of the Indian constitution. Even the court can't catch them. It is very difficult to catch them. Last year this fellow called Dharti Pakad was fighting for the presidential position. Now there is this election law which says that if a candidate gets killed the election will be countermanded, postponed. To elect Shankar Dayal Sharma as the president, this fellow was guarded by black cat commandos to keep him alive till the election was held. To countermand the election anyone could simply kill this fellow. So as he was travelling around, these commandos were guarding him, though he said, 'I don't want it.' But the commandos said, 'We want it.' He would wear a garland of *chappals* (slippers) and travel with black cats surrounding him. What was funny is that the black cat commandos are not allowed to smile. They have to be emotionless. This fellow, whenever he would do something funny, he would look at them very funnily. The black cats also wanted to laugh but they were not allowed to. It was a really funny situation. These clowns titillate humanity, remind you that you are a human being. I am imagining making a film on all of them. Since I don't have the money, for the time being I'll do a play on it. I am imagining a play in which one day, early morning, the election results are declared and all the political parties are looking at the papers to see who has got how many seats. What they find is that no political party has a single seat except people like Dharti Pakad and Ghorewala. All of

them go to the parliament. Their problem is to choose from between themselves the leader of the country. They take the decision to declare the government defunct. To me these crazy fellows remind me of Mulla Nasiruddin. Nasiruddin was not a single character, there must have been many Mulla Vasiruddins-and these people are the Nasiruddins of this country. They are the modern, contemporary Nasiruddins of this country.

BDS: This concept of contemporary clowns or fools ...

BK: I often face typical journalistic questions and sometimes out of anger you are forced to answer, 'Why do you want to do this? Is *se kya hoga ?*' Once I said, 'The greatest thinker of the twentieth century ultimately has to be a clown. Twentieth century's greatest thinker will only be a clown.' Some people said, 'Who is this person?' I said, 'Gandhi was the biggest clown on earth and therefore he was the greatest thinker in India.' Clown is not a derogatory term. To me a clown is somebody who is great.

BDS: If you really study the comedians like Chaplin, the Marx Brothers or even Laurel and Hardy, you see that they were all very subversive in their actions. The Marx brothers attacked institutions revered by the upper class, like the opera, the races, the hospital. Chaplin attacked, among other-things, modern technology, the police and the state. Laurel and Hardy are constantly destroying symbols of bourgeoisie prosperity, like pianos, cars, well-furnished houses.

BK: When Nehru went to England Chaplin refused to meet him, but he met Gandhi. I believe there was this conversation between them in which Chaplin said to Gandhi, 'You are the greatest clown on earth'. Chaplin understood Gandhi and he actually wanted to meet his political counterpart.

BDS: In the formal and highly systematized colonial setup, a person like Gandhi did not fit in at all. Following your argument one can say that as a political opponent Gandhi was as unpredictable and different from the rest of the crowd as the Chaplin clown. He was also misunderstood and ridiculed by the system, which couldn't ignore him either. There were so many cartoons in the British press which portrayed Gandhi as a clown.

BK: He was the head priest of the Mulla Nasiruddins of this country. Problems of poverty and hunger and unemployment can be solved but what is more frightening in this country is that people are deprived of laughter, people feel insecure. That is what puts me off. Art must deal with this. Somehow we have to keep this fellow alive.

Translating Music for Theatre

Bhaskar Chandavarkar

This is a modified version of a paper presented at a symposium in Berlin some years ago by the author, a well established music director who has worked in both theatre and cinema.

The play *Naga-Mandala* was originally written by Girish Karnad in Kannada. It was later translated by the author into English. When the play was chosen for presentation in Leipzig, a German translation was made from the English version by the playwright. However, in India we wanted a pilot production and the director Vijaya Mehta asked the ensemble in Bombay to go from that English text to Marathi because the actors spoke Marathi. (The script was evolved in a workshop, I must add. The need for the 'workshop' was felt because the already published translation was found to be inadequate for 'performance' though it was considered very readable.) The Marathi text was obtained in a couple of weeks. Then it was translated into Hindi, the language in which the play was to be presented. The Hindi version was then converted into English so that in Germany we could have a production text which would exactly match the pilot project text. To state it in a linear form, *Naga-Mandala* for the German production went like this: Kannada-English-Marathi-Hindi-English-German. I must also point out that the play has been produced in India by repertories in Hindi, Kannada, English, Marathi, Punjabi and some other dialects. Each of these texts is a 'different' translation. There are some translations that have appeared serialized in monthly magazines and are considered literal, 'non-performance' translations.

I shall only be stating the obvious when I say that translations are an important, unavoidable, inescapable aspect of theatre activity in our times. Theatre, like other things in life, is more intercultural than it was fifty years ago. It comes to us from many lands, many languages, many cultures.

To go back in time a little- during British rule, adequate knowledge of English was considered necessary for employment with the government. The language, therefore, proved advantageous to people and created a special class. However, the British did not teach European music in India. They did start a few art schools, along with our universities and colleges. People were taught agriculture, medicine, engineering, zoology but *no music*. The

Portuguese taught music in their colony in Goa. But the British, mercifully, let us have our own music. Indian music is based on an oral-aural tradition. Till recently some of the finest musicians in India were totally illiterate. They could not read even numbers and therefore there was no possibility of any western music being read or of anybody becoming a self-taught musician of European music.

But because the English language was taught, literature from England in particular and the western world in general came to India within a couple of decades of colonialism. Shakespeare was translated into Indian languages more than a hundred years ago. Clever adaptations of his plays continue to appear in all forms of theatre from commercial to folk. In the last five decades translations and adaptations of the works, novels, poetry and plays of authors who did not write in English have also appeared in Indian languages. Chekov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Brecht, Lorca, Pirandello, Ionesco, Anouilh ... the list could go on. The plays come to Hindi, or any other Indian language, via English. It is when the productions are staged in various towns or cities in India that problems begin. The audience at such shows may not be aware of the original. Many times the cultural context of such works written in European languages may even be unimaginable for the audience. Perhaps because of this, directors, producers, translators resort to *adaptations* and not literal translations for their productions. Names of the characters change. References to places change. The audience in a town in Maharashtra may find it extremely difficult to relate to the names of characters in Bertolt Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. The flora and fauna of Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* may be completely unimaginable to a Rajasthani village audience. Even when names and places are kept exactly as they are, certain things may turn out to be impossible to translate. One particular example comes to mind here. In *Chalk Circle* there is a sequence where Azdak and Simon in confrontation in the courtroom, hurl some proverbs at each other as if they were swearing at and insulting each other! The German proverbs lose their intensity in English translations, and are impossible in any other language. If the proverbs have to be constructed anew they are not proverbs at all! The existing ones in any language would not have the same meaning. This example is one of the more obvious ones. There can be many more subtle ones, e.g. phonetics and syntax in the original and the translation need to compare well.

Just as linguistic 'gestures' come from a specific cultural context, so do musical ones. We have many shades of our regional language-we speak Tamil-English, Marathi-English, Hindi-English and so on. The point that I wish to make is that when translations are meant not only to be *read* but *performed*, our requirements change. The norms that are applied to literary translations cannot apply to a text for a performance. Several other theatre based considerations become important.

It is hoped that when a play is translated from one language to another, utmost care is taken to preserve the 'meaning' of the original. Every single phrase, every sentence, indeed, every word, is chosen after careful consideration. Every language has synonyms, a possible thesaurus. Options and possibilities exist at every point. The options are exercised and choices made by the translators. No two translators would translate alike. Despite the availability of many versions, a director or a producer may seek a new version of the text, which may not differ semantically but in some other aspects of language.

There are many theatre directors who work internationally. Such people might have to work in a language that is not their first language. In any case directors and other creative people in theatre treat 'theatre' itself as their first language. Sometimes an internationally known director may be invited to work in a language that he or she does not understand or speak. Of course some may think that this is not the best way to work in theatre; on the other hand, if we take the example of Fritz Bennewitz or Vijaya Mehta we would have to admit that their international work has proved beneficial to theatre in places where they worked without knowing the language. In the space of five years Bennewitz may have been invited to work in New York, Bombay, Manila, Colombo, Bhopal, Heggodu, Weimar, Delhi-it would be unfair to expect him to know sixteen languages!

So when a director works in language that s/he does not speak, the translators may be required to be very particular about things other than the meaning. In the translation the same number of sentences as in the original may be needed. Similar syntax may be necessary in many sentences. Some sentences may need to have the same word (i.e. synonym) at the beginning or end as in the original, questions have to have a certain tonal structure in most spoken language -sighs, emphatic negations etc. will also have to match the original. What I wish to indicate here is that the translations for performance will have to be selected not only

on the basis of 'literary' qualities but on the basis of 'musical' qualities. The performance of a play is 'temporal'. The spoken language-dialogue-is organized sound. Words are uttered with definite, relative intonation, a certain tonal colour, there is shifting emphasis or accentuation in dialogues, inflexions of pitch, there is a certain rhythm to the speech patterns. All these are musical attributes. When playwrights write, they not only write words that have a meaning available to the *reader* of a play, they write words that are to be performed, spoken so that the *listener* gets the meaning. I am sure these problems of capturing the *music* of the language in one's translation are not unknown to the people in theatre. I am also sure that translators worry about them and try and find solutions to the problems that arise from these considerations. My main worry, and what I think has not yet been given attention, is something else. It is translation of music itself.

During a recent stay in Leipzig I had a radio receiver in my room which put me in touch with several broadcasting stations in Europe. It was a fascinating experience to hear many different languages being spoken on the AM band. Most of them were only sound patterns to me. On the hour there were always news broadcasts on all the frequencies. In five minutes, if I went across the AM band I could hear almost fifteen different languages with distinctly varied voice production techniques, nasal, guttural, aspirated and so on. And then the music programme would start. The curious thing was that all these twenty odd stations would play the music of only one culture. Evening or night most of them had similar sounding rock or pop. Mornings and afternoons there were symphonies, chamber pieces, arias. If I was looking for an English speaking station or Flemish, French, Russians it would be impossible to make it out from the music that I heard. Music was European, speech national. Scarlatti, Bach, Tchaikovsky, Bemstein, Weill all belong to different nations and various periods of music but they belong to one tradition: the European music culture which we call the Western music culture. It is possible for the French audience to understand Italian music, though they may not understand the Italian language. In this musical culture the script used is independent of the spoken or read language, a fact that is taken for granted by Westerners. In oral-aural music cultures there is no music script or notation. A Tamilian uses the Tamil alphabet to write music (if at all it is to be written). And a Gujarati musician may not be able to read it at all. Because the Europeans use one script and have one tradition of music despite many national languages, they have developed a notion that music is universal. And if one believes it to be a universal

language, one cannot imagine its needing translation. A Weill-Brecht play is translated from German to Italian-the language changes but the music does not. Kurt Weill's music in *Three Penny Opera* would make sense for any European, but have we ever thought about non-European languages? Does a Marathi-speaking audience get a similar meaning out of *Mac the Kntfe* when the words are Marathi but the instruments, harmony, melody and rhythm are retained as Weill wrote it? I know that it does not.

Musical cultures cover much larger geo-social areas than linguistic ones. I need not go into musicological reasons for this. It is also true that structures in language show variations on social levels, spatially from one city to another or even from one part of a city to another (remember Henry Higgins). Language in speech also changes with time. In twenty or thirty years there is a perceptible change in the vocabulary of any language. If we compare this with music, the variations on social levels are few. The geographical factor is almost inoperative as we have seen in the case of Europe or South Asia, and time is a very slow-moving thing. We still listen to musical forms that were created two centuries ago. This stability and spread over large geographical areas tends to give us a feeling that our traditional music (no matter to which tradition we belong) is universal and eternal. The relative stability also gives a false feeling that music does not carry any socially relevant or significant message. In other words the illusion is that there is no 'meaning' in music that can be separated from 'music' itself. If we want to tell anybody what certain music means the only way of doing it is to play that music, and *that* music only. But this cannot be true. Like many other symbol systems, music uses symbols to convey meaning. The symbols have to be socially accepted. Why else would there be many different scales? Why would a tuneful sad song from one culture provoke uncontrollable laughter when played to the audience from another culture? Why do we feel that people from another music tradition are so often out of tune? Each music culture has to have a socially accepted system. What is right in rhythm and intonation is to be decided not by one person but by common consent of the *members of a society*. Tradition and social sharing create a musical system. Artists and creative minds add to the tradition or rebel against it but cannot hope to be heard unless there is social acceptance (support). The music of one culture therefore carries meaning for *that* culture. For an Indian folk musician of very great talent and virtuosity the revolutionary style of Stravinsky's ballets would mean nothing. A great *khayal* singer of the classical style in India

would not know why serialism is considered different from Debussy's music. And of course neither would Stravinsky and Debussy have ever understood what the great Indian masters were saying through their music.

Let me go back to the Weill-Brecht *Three Penny Opera*. Weill's music has some definite relationship with the words. When the piece is translated into a non-European language, the words have a strange sound (perhaps!). Can we hope to maintain the same relationship of words and music-this is the first question. Would it create the 'meaning' of the original is the second question. In my experience the answer to both questions is negative. To begin with, it is not at all easy for non-Europeans to reproduce the sounds that the original has used. Practical difficulties of engaging personnel capable of reading and playing the music may make it impossible for theatre groups. But even if a Kannada-speaking troupe from Kamataka manages to surmount these two difficulties, the song with its melodic contour, harmony, texture, rhythm would be so alien to the audience that it would not generate any meaning at all. Would it then be right to retain Weill's music? If by doing so we take away a significant aspect of the songs, is it work-Weill /while?

I feel that the only way one can work out these problems is by seriously considering translation of music as a legitimate necessity. The first thing that comes to mind when we talk about translation is, of course, conveying the meaning. In case of language the responsibility of translation is given to a person who knows the meaning of the 'expressed' in one language and tries to convey it in another. I am sure we will all agree that it cannot be done with 100 per cent success. Girish Kamad who translated his own Kannada *Naga Mundala* into English says in his preface that his translation must be seen 'only as an approximation to the original'. Often a writer may write things that 'mean' much more than he meant them to mean. It is certainly true of music. Composers may not invest their works with all the meanings that the listeners may hear in these words. A translation can, therefore, be more than what was to be found in the original. A translation can also generate new meanings in another culture. In other words, both the original and translated musical works will have many common and some independent sets of meanings.

The main difficulty in accepting the idea of music translation is the fear of not being able to convey the meaning of one music to another exactly. Once we realize that communication with our audience in theatre is the goal, this may not be such a priority. It is pointless to think of

translating *ragas* to African music or symphonies to *kirtans*. In theatre we have different goals. Music that accompanies and creates drama is there to communicate something to the audience. If the words are translated from Hindi to German, should not the music that accompanies them also be translated? The answer is an emphatic yes.

To think that one music culture alone is capable of expressing complex ideas and that other musical cultures are primitive is a chauvinistic idea. Music everywhere will find a way of conveying the message that it needs to convey. Musical vocabulary everywhere changes and accommodates new symbols. In our own times, music in theatre, all over the world, has widened its scope. New sounds, new scales, innovative styles have kept the musical theatre moving. When plays with musical scores originating in one culture have to be performed in another we must think of translation because it will enrich both cultures.

During my own work I have experienced several challenging situations. One of the first two Brecht translations /adaptations was produced in Bombay almost twenty years ago. C. T. Khanolkar alias Arti Prabhu, an extraordinarily intense playwright/poet made an adaptation of *Caucasian Chalk Circle*. Khanolkar did not have much English. He was helped (to understand the play and Brechtian theatre) by some close friends. His adaptation of *Chalk Circle* has, for many of us, remained an outstanding one. Brecht's songs were most beautifully translated by him. But one just could not have used Paul Dessau's or Hans Eisler's music for it. By using the original we would have not only destroyed Khanolkar's work, but completely missed Brecht. One year before this production I had worked on Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*. The Marathi production from Pune has been acclaimed as one of the most important musical productions in India. Thirteen years later the play was staged in New York in English. The translators, Eleanor Zelliot and Jayant Karve, had not only seen this production but also used the taped musical score during their translation. I was to make music for the English language production also, and found it impossible to use the original music in its completeness. It had to be adapted. The production had another design, completely new choreography and another set of actors who were Americans of Asian origin. This made the production very different. It could not have the original musicians either. It was to be performed for a New York audience, not a Bombay or Calcutta audience.

The plays which have their roots in another theatre culture can also present another kind of challenge. *Hayavadana* was staged in Bombay in Marathi. Originally written for the traditional

Kannada form of Yakshagana, the playwright has a singer/presenter, Bhagawata, commenting upon and presenting the play with music typical of the form. In Marathi, we could not have used the Kannada folk form for various reasons. A year later the play was to be produced in Weimar, Germany. The Germans pointed out the Thomas Mann connection. It interested them. So here we had a play which used a story from the Sanskrit *Kathasaritsagar* as told by Thomas Mann in *Transposed Heads-an* English translation of which had inspired (however weakly) Girish Kamad to write a folk play based on the Yakshagana form-what could be the 'original' music style for such a production? And what style could have been used for the German language? *Shakuntala* was also staged in German in Leipzig twelve years ago. Kalidasa probably wrote it in the 4th or 5th century. We do not have any idea of the music of that period. The play is staged in many Indian languages and always the music picks up the colour of the form in which it is being produced e.g. a Manipuri production has Manipuri music, and so on. When Shantaram made a film of the play the music was typical film music. A Tamil film based on the play even has the famous singer M. S. Subbalaxmi acting and singing the main role. So can the Leipzig production in the German language insist on 'authentic original' Indian music?

In *The Great Peace* Volker Braun uses material from Chinese history as its base. The play is set in the China of 200 B.C. The 'original' is in German. A Hindi version of this play was produced in Delhi by the NSD Repertory, directed by Fritz Bennewitz. The theme of the play was considered very relevant to our times because the rehearsals started exactly one month after the Berlin wall came down! How can the music for this play become relevant, meaningful? By using authentic Chinese music? Or the original German music which was used in the Berliner Ensemble production? The purpose of using music and the desired result of that music should determine this. As more and more plays get produced in cross-cultural situations insistence on the 'authentic original' has to give way to 'effectively communicative' translations.

Translations, language and music both, are important because they reiterate our faith in human kinship. We are living in this, 'one' world and though our world views or world sense differs because of our culture, there is a chance to learn from each other's experience. It also reiterates the faith in our freedom to think and confront a situation, face life, as it were, with our own, very own, culture-for that is what our own language and music gives us. We can look at the world through two viewpoints at the same time. And the multiple viewpoints (of another culture's view of our own language and music) can only enrich our experiences, bring us closer

to other humans. After all, stereoscopic vision is essential for experiencing a real three-dimensional world.

THE POWER OF DETAIL:

Manohar Singh in Performance

Amal Allana

Theatre director Amal Allana, who trained at the National School of Drama, has directed about twenty-three plays in the course of a career spanning more than twenty years. Several of these have featured the veteran actor Manohar Singh in lead roles. Here she analyses the key aspects of his acting method.

Manohar Singh is one of the finest actors of our generation, whose performances are of a class comparable to the best anywhere in the world. Many of them can be considered landmarks, punctuating the development of his own career at different stages, but seen in a larger context they mark also the coming of age of contemporary Indian theatre, so that his achievements run parallel to those of our contemporary playwrights, directors and designers.

In his recreation of contemporary roles Manohar has been able to capture vigour, aggression, schizophrenia and restlessness, qualities which define the temper of our times, as we try to sift and sort out contradictions in our search for a contemporary yet Indian idiom. Manohar's search is located essentially in the area of discovering a new performance language, yet he never lets go of that fundamental knowledge which all great actors must have—the reaffirmation and reassertion of the very physical, tactile experience of the stage, a quality which constitutes its definitive strength.

I shall take this opportunity then to stand apart from the emotional appeal of his work and describe instead his process of work, which also suggests the technique he employs in role building. Side by side I shall try to relate Manohar's process to the training he received at NSD and then briefly compare his approach to that of his colleague and contemporary, Surekha Sikri. What is interesting is that though Surekha and Manohar belong to the same school and adopted practically the same treatment to role building, we find that they branched out in different directions, achieving qualities which were distinctly their own.

Lastly, I shall talk about the development, refinement and further exploration by Manohar of his own specific technique, which continues as an ongoing process. To my mind, he has never ceased exploring the limits of his medium nor has he fully exploited the range of his own, very substantial, creative potential.

Manohar is essentially an instinctive actor and in all my association with him over the last 18 odd years, we have never actually discussed his approach to his work, although on many occasions I have been tempted to do so, in order to gain a deeper insight into the art of the performer. I have restrained myself for the very simple reason that the creative process is mysterious and in some senses unfathomable, and once articulated in analytical terms, one's work, particularly in the case of an actor like Manohar, might become a self-conscious exercise, rather than remaining as it is, a wonderfully spontaneous interaction. Many actors enjoy talking about their work, the process, their characters in great detail. Manohar is not one of them.

Manohar rarely arrives at rehearsal with any pre-meditated or pre-conceived ideas which he would like to try out. It is an exhilarating experience, therefore, to see Manohar construct his role, there and then, in front of you in the rehearsal room. At these moments he is totally absorbed, both mentally and physically, and one watches the act of creation simply pouring out, devoid of any intellectual filter. There is no doubt that I have been privileged to observe the act of creation of such a major talent at such close quarters, observing its process and then formulating my own methods of working with him. What I have now written are purely my personal observations, which I have not cross checked with him. His view might be totally different



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On previous page: Manohar Singh and Surekha Sikri in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*, presented by the NSD Repertory Company in 1974 and directed by E. Alkazi. *Bottom left.* Manohar Singh in Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure* presented by the NSD Repertory Company in 1976 and directed by Amal Allana.



On top:. Manohar Singh in Girish Kamad's *Tughlaq* presented by the NSD Repertory Company in 1981 and directed by E. Alkazi. Pictures courtesy NSD. *Centrespread.* Manohar Singh in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, presented by Theatre and T. V. Associates in 1989, and directed by Amal Allana. Picture courtesy Gopi Gajwani.

. Today, at the age of fifty-seven, Manohar Singh stands at the peak of his creative abilities as an actor, having left behind him a trail of outstanding performances over the past twenty-five or so years, which we in Delhi have been privileged to witness. As one pauses to reflect back, moments of his various performances are resurrected in the mind's eye, moments where he was able to capture with intense power yet lyricism, some elemental truth about the human condition- Manohar standing in a worn-out *kurta pyjama*, *thaila* in hand, his neck jutting out, his shoulders stooped, as Mahendranath, in *Aadhe Adhure*, acknowledging that he is a cipher, a rubber stamp and at the same moment, as an utter contradiction, attempting to make *that* a scoring point over Savitri's domination, expressed through Surekha's scorn, as she stands there impassive, sneering.

Manohar as Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*, pipe in hand, newspaper in front of him, in a pair of grubby socks, pouring out vituperatives against Alison's whole class, persona and sex. Here Surekha renders Alison as immensely feminine, fragile, vulnerable, constantly on the verge of being shattered by Jimmy's abusive, abrasive barrage, his incessant tirade giving vent to what appears to be generations of suppression.

Manohar as Tughlaq as he stands on the ramparts of Daulatabad and converses with a young attendant. Here Manohar registers Tughlaq's need for a moment of solitude and introspection in an otherwise tumultuous, action-filled portrayal. This sequence stands in sharp contrast to an earlier one where his entire frame, wracked by physical exertion, quivers as he raises his hands with the dagger which he thrusts into Shahabuddin's bowels, whose body he has pinned in a vice-like grip between his knees. The gesture of stabbing is repeated several times, long after Shahabuddin has died. With each thrust, accompanied by the sound of panting in short staccato bursts, we see Tughlaq not just killing Shahabuddin, but also trying to obliterate from his mind the memory of those others whom he had murdered and whose ghosts perhaps still haunt him. The power of this moment lies not only in his masterly rendering of the theatrical gesture, but in the fact that through Manohar's exposition of this action he leads us from the external gesture towards a darker, more subliminal area, where the tortured psyche of Tughlaq resides.

Whereas Shahabuddin's murder is reflective of Tughlaq's myopia, the scene on the ramparts with Tughlaq alone is suggestive of his need for perspective. He looks out into the distance, into the surrounding void that perhaps encompasses his past and present, as well as an undefined future. As he shifts his gaze from the distance to the young boy beside him, the pensiveness is momentarily disturbed and overtaken by an attitude of defensive aggression. A while later, as he listens to the young boy, Manohar subtly transforms his attitude into one of empathy. We sense the man opening up, listening, responding to the boy, thus establishing a bond between them. Likewise, Manohar's body responds to this change: So from initial exhaustion, it changes to the tension of confrontation, and yet again to a kind of relaxation and repose.

I have gone into some detail in describing this scene because it provides us with some basic clues to the type of training Manohar received at the National School of Drama in the 60s.

One of the first things he was taught was that a role cannot be approached at random. Rather, it is to be built up step by step, on the framework of a strong structure.

For example, we see that the above scene has 'contemplation' as its central theme. Manohar has to portray contemplation. But he cannot play it as a general attitude or mood. So he gives himself specific tasks. He first contemplates the bedraggled refugee camps which surround the fort, like so much debris caused by his insistence on shifting the Capital from Delhi to Daulatabad. He then contemplates the boy's physiognomy. The boy becomes a reflection of himself and so he turns his eyes inwards, suggesting inner contemplation; and finally he contemplates the vast universe. Thus, as an actor he has learnt to locate and identify, in palpable terms, four objects to contemplate, and to allow those to act as a stimulus to his emotional response, which he expresses through his body, voice, gestures and eyes.

Another element of Manohar's training which becomes apparent in this sequence is the control and release of physical energy through the training of body and voice. This knowledge allows him to either release his energy very slowly, or in bursts, according to the requirements of a particular scene. What is significant is that at no point does he expend *all* his energy, it is always only *partially* spent, always *contained*. This results in the maintenance of an inner tension, giving us a sense of him being always charged, alert, intense, and alive on the stage.

I have identified some important aspects of Manohar's training at the NSD as reflected in his creation of the role of Tughlaq. This I would like to identify as Manohar's first phase-the learning phase-which ran approximately from the mid 60s to the mid 70s. In this phase he was being trained in the classroom, as well as applying those techniques in public performances. So although he had finished his three-year course at the NSD, his training continued upto his early years with the Repertory Company. Here, for the first time in India, was an institution attempting to methodologize training for modern actors into a self-consciously acquired technique for use on the contemporary stage. As in other fields, Indian theatre workers were looking towards the west for some kind of guidance in creating infrastructures as well as formulating educational methods. However, these years during the 60s were characterized by a more discerning, analytical approach in assessing the viability of western techniques of training, to be assimilated into what was evolving into a modern Indian theatre movement.

As far as the training of the actor was concerned, the methods adopted at that time by the NSD ran closely parallel to Stanislavski's approach. Manohar Singh, Surekha Sikri and Uttara Baokar were the products of this methodology. The second phase of Manohar's growth involved perfecting and mastering the predominantly Stanislavskian techniques which he had acquired during the training.

What came through strongly in Manohar, Surekha and Uttara's performances at this time was that there was a much greater emphasis on the surface *detailing* of the role. This was later to evolve into a predominant treatment of role building. I remember that during the rehearsal process of *Aadhe Adhure* (1976), for example, a great deal of time was spent by Surekha as Savitri, in perfecting how to spread a tablecloth, deciding on the cups and saucers which would be on the tray, practising how she would remove them, at which point, how she would hold a pause, with, perhaps, the knife in her hand, and how she would put it down. Similarly Uttara as Bini, pondering the tinkling of a spoon in a cup as she stirred her tea, how she would relate her text to its sound, the circular movement of her hand, what sentence or thought it would punctuate, the crackle of the newspaper, the sound of the tin opener etc. For me, as the director, they were objects with sounds and shapes which I wished to incorporate into the acoustic and visual texture of the play, but what the actors were attempting to do through the use of these props, was to find a physical equivalent to an inner feeling. The outer realistic business became the expression of an emotion.

In this context the relationship of an actor to his environment became a new area to explore. Now *all* the props became significant-their shape, weight, style, scale; how they had to be used, held, swung, pushed, in short, worked with; the shape of chairs, their size, their creak. Tables had to have workable drawers. Every bit of stage space and property had to be workable; as it began to be increasingly used by the actor. It was no longer apart from him, but integrated very carefully into the fabric of his performance.

A lot of rehearsal time was thus spent on discussing, arguing, complaining about the non-availability of the actual props for rehearsal, or the actors' objection to using a particular prop because it was not suitably workable. Here the set designer and actor interfaced and dialogued for the first time. The props and set did not just hang around or simply decorate the environment of the actor, the actor was making the space and the objects his own and in the process investing them with life.

In a similar manner there was a growing dialogue between the costume designer and the actor. The actor wanted the bagginess, shabbiness, colour, weight, texture, fit of the costume to be right. They became essential to him, a second skin. The costume told a story, revealed a past, was part and parcel of the actor's movement, decisively affecting his gait, his gesture-no longer decorative attire, but playing an integrated part, becoming an expressive element in a new idiom of revealing character and emotion.

Surekha, Uttara and Manohar became the prime exponents of this school of acting. They spent hours painstakingly selecting and then perfecting the handling of props and costumes till it became an involuntary action, invested with rhythm and poetry and raised to the level of art by being transformed into an aesthetic statement. Their roles were then constructed out of a series of such details, making their performances richly textured, shimmering, and transitory. The flux of life was sought to be captured in the surface details of everyday reality, which, invested with drama, became expressions of inner turmoil.

I shall now digress for a moment to discuss the different schools of acting in order to establish Manohar's specific approach in some context.

Whereas on the one hand the Stanislavskian approach proposes a selfconscious building up of the role through a series of actions, like I have just described, on the other hand Stanislavski calls for a strong measure of personal involvement on the actors' part to fill these actions with an emotional content. Stanislavski demands from the actor a great investment of personal emotions in depicting a role. This brings us face to face with the key concern or any methodology of acting, whether it is proposed by Stanislavski, Brecht, Grotowski or those methodologies that go into the preparation of a Kathakali, Kabuki or Noh actor. The chief concern of all these approaches is how to resolve the basic contradiction of the existence of two selves within the body and mind of the single actor. The one self is the personal self, the other, the transformed self or the character being played. The performing artist, unlike the painter or the writer, does not translate his art into another medium of words, images etc. but uses his very body as the medium. He thus very tangibly is the medium. Therefore, in order for his work to become art, he is required to transform himself through whatever means, so that he might 'show' someone other than himself.

As an answer to this central problem Stanislavski proposes that the two selves be reconciled so completely, superimposed on one another, so carefully, that they merge into one seamless

identity where neither is distinguishable from the other. The Indian, Japanese or Chinese methodologies propose just the opposite, that is, to entirely separate the two persons, drain the personal self of its identity and then allow the character to enter this emptied-out vessel or *patra*. This approach does not call for the actor to be personally involved in the depiction of the role at all. The methodology proposed by Grotowski follows the eastern tradition closely in that he too proposes a renunciation of the ego, allowing the shining presence of 'the other' to 'illuminate' the body of the actor. It is no wonder that Grotowski included yoga, meditation, extreme asceticism and celibacy as an integral part of the actor's preparation. Thus his school of acting too required the distancing of the actor from his role. Another approach, which the postmodernists have put forth and which also draws substantially from Indian and eastern performance traditions, proposes to allow *all* the identities to be shown. In effect, besides the two identities which include the actor himself and the character he plays, is a third, which is the 'actor as performer'. These identities can be shown openly and frankly as existing parallel to each other. This approach can be seen in the work of Peter Brook, Ariane Mnouchkine, Heiner Muller, Robert Wilson, Elizabeth Le Compte, Richard Schechner, Eugenio Barba and Pina Bausch. But it is perhaps Brecht who can be considered one of the earliest theorists to propose a postmodernist approach, not only to acting, but to all aspects of performance language.

Brecht wanted the theatre to be seen as theatre, a performance, not reality; the performer to be seen as a performer, not mistaken for the character. Brecht therefore conceived of an approach to acting as a totally objective, cool, detached process with a view to revealing contradictions. He called upon the actor to discover the 'social' gesture, not the 'psychological' one. He asked the actor to 'show' not to 'become', and thus to an extent began to de-individualize, de-personalize and de-construct the entire 'act of showing'.

The Stanislavskian actor builds his role essentially from the *inside* to the *outside*, finding an emotional chord of congruence between himself and the role. The emotional stimulus for the role then arises from within the emotional experience of the actor himself. On the other hand the traditional Kathakali and Brechtian actor detaches himself from the role and begins to construct the role from the *outside*. Now this is exactly the point of divergence between, for example, Surekha's approach and Manohar's approach, although they have both received similar training. Surekha invests her personal feelings in her role to a substantial degree, so the process of work is tortuous to her in many ways. She is filled with anxiety and tension throughout the rehearsal process. Her

interfacing with the role is so close that she sometimes breaks down during performances, and it becomes difficult for her to take curtain calls. But it is precisely for this reason that her performances are unforgettable—we share her agony which is so transparently visible. In this sense, Surekha is a truly Stanislavskian actress.

Manohar, on the other hand, proceeded, in what I shall call his third phase, to adopt an attitude of detachment from his roles, but continued to use the Stanislavskian technique of detailing which he had by now mastered. He began to lay greater emphasis on the constructional aspects of role building, relying on the physical and external aspects of depiction. He thus began constructing the role from *outside*, as *form*.

This could and still can be seen very clearly in the rehearsal process, where he proceeds in a slow and measured manner, working out and trying out details of actions, postures, gestures, seated positions, stance, gait for his role; how he looks, his costumes, properties, the use of them; how to locate himself spatially on the set, his visual relationship to other characters on the stage, the tempo and rhythm of his movements, tone and pitch, volume of his voice. All calculated, studied and worked out to evoke a certain emotional response. During rehearsals he constantly asks, 'How do my hands look in my lap? Like this?' or 'Do you think I should use this gesture here? Does my head look better to the side like this?' He uses the director as his eye, external eye, to help him LOOK at himself from the outside. He is extremely conscious of the picture he makes on stage, as he is acutely aware that it is essentially the image which is expressive of emotional content, not his personal feelings. This leaves him free to play the situation. He does not need to play the character, because the character has already been constructed through a series of images and actions. In this sense his approach is purely external, detached, and, if you like, more intrinsically Indian.

It is quite amusing when I hear his co-actors say that he is always talking on the stage, in asides to them, to move, to adjust a prop. He is never lost in his role, though he may appear so to the spectator. He constantly adjusts his position to, be in the light, he comes backstage and names all the people who are in the audience! He is thus extremely conscious while performing, can register that a scene is flagging and pick it up. At the end of a show he is never exhausted or depleted—rather he is liberated, excited, rejuvenated. All this points to the attitude of detachment he maintains from his role.

This attitude of detachment was enhanced considerably by the fact that from the early 80s onwards-in other words since the time of *Mahabhoj* - we have increasingly been altering, restructuring and prolonging the rehearsal time, shifting away from the conventional approach to rehearsals which was one week spent on readings and casting, one week on discussions, three weeks on blocking and perfecting, and one final week of technical and dress rehearsals, the total duration being six weeks. Because we did not have a readymade text of *Mahabhoj*, several months were spent in transforming the novel into a play text. Although the initial structuring was done between Manu Bhandari and myself, there was a significant input by Manohar and the other actors in the whole process. Thus the -actors were literally giving shape from the outside to their roles, with the freedom to add details, alter, change their dialects, work out their significance in particular scenes, always having to keep in mind the roles of the others in the overall structure of the play, which itself kept altering with the new inputs: This not only called for the active participation of the whole ensemble, but allowed the actor to distance himself from his role. This process remains with us even today, so that even when we confront a readymade text like *Mother Courage*, the actors participate immensely in shaping the translation /adaptation.

Another addition we made and which Manohar resisted then, but now considers significant to the rehearsal process for the actor, is that, in *Mahabhoj* we worked on the play to a significant degree, and then suspended rehearsals for about a month, resuming after that to give final shape to all aspects. This was a fallow period where the actors, the director, designer, all had the time to sit back and digest what they had done and thus gain an overall perspective. The total time spent from scripting to staging in *Mahabhoj* was nine months, but we found this so productive that we followed the same process in both *Lear* and *Himmat Mai*.

From 1989-when we did *Lear*-onwards, we incorporated yet another approach towards working on a play, that is, allowing the initial period to be spent on free improvisations. This has begun to have a significant bearing on Manohar's development as an actor. For a student actor, work through improvisations helps him to discover the basics, but for Manohar, who has gone far beyond the basics, improvisations allow him time to explore in greater depth the creative possibilities of his technique, giving him the opportunity to raise his role onto another plane. Thus improvisations provide him with the scope to come to terms with conceptual and treatment ideas and the time to navigate a path towards the character, without necessarily any reference to the text at all. One finds that once one gets involved with the text one automatically falls into the

trap of immediately trying to play it, so that the exploration towards it is cut short. So we try to keep away from the text for as long as possible, allowing that to be only one of the stimuli for discovering the play.

So it is from this point that Manohar moved into yet another phase, his fourth phase, in which he has begun adapting, altering, developing and making new discoveries of his most significant technique-the technique of detailing-but now with detachment. -I will briefly give a few examples.

The overall treatment of the role of Himmat Mai is basically constructed by Manohar out of two types of treatment of details. In some sequences in scene six, for example, Manohar physically creates the character of Himmat Mai as an agglomeration of several minute details. Thus in a major portion of this scene we see how she keeps accounts, writes them down, how she tucks away her notebook in the side of the cart, returns the pencil to her purse. Manohar adds details of dialogue like '25 shirts, 13 belts, 16 pairs of boots', interspersed with Brecht's dialogues. Later he fills a sack with boots one by one, lifts the heavy thaila on his back, plants it down, takes out a cigar, plays with it, sticks it in his mouth, lights it in a specific way, rolls it around his mouth, etc. The manner in which he delivers his dialogues in such a scene is casual, not drawing attention to itself; rather, as an actor, he allows these details of physical actions to dominate our consciousness, he directs our attention towards them, because at this moment he wants us to see all the work Himmat Mai has to do in order to survive. So he foregrounds these actions, forcing us to form an emotional response to the character through them.

Now what is different is that the detail is used at its face value and not as an external manifestation of an inner emotion, as in *Tughlaq* or *Aadhe Adhure*. It is devoid of an emotional subtext. The 'meaning' of it, or the emotional content of it, is derived from the associative potential of the spectator to read meanings into things. Manohar merely 'shows' it or places it as an image before you. This then has become his detached attitude or attitude of 'showing' not 'becoming'.

In total contrast to this treatment of massing physical details together, is, for example, the manner in which he constructs his performance at the end of scene three. Here he eschews and discards shading, grading, or a variety of details and selects only three gestures to render the import of Himmat Mai's youngest son's death. He has to play the refusal on the part of Himmat Mai to identify her dead son. He sits on a stool downstage, slightly off

centre. Behind him stands Rammo/Kaffrin who has a hand on her mother's shoulder, in a gesture of commiseration. Two soldiers enter with a stretcher with the dead body of Sohan/Swiss Cheese covered with a bloody cloth. They place the stretcher directly in front of her and then uncover the face of the boy. Rammo turns away, unable to see the face of her dead brother. Himmat Mai rises slowly, adjusting the hands which lay in her lap and clasps them in front of her, and Manohar sets his face in a single expression which he will maintain for very long. The expression is steely, as if turned to stone, the lips are held tightly shut, but raised with their ends dropping down. The eyes are open, looking ahead blankly into oblivion and yet appear to be turned inwards. The body is held erect. The total expression of the face, hands, body, eyes suggests resignation, despair, defiance, but loaded with a quality of withholding or suppressing. This is essentially expressed through the clasped hands, because one feels that were they to unclasp, there would be a tremendous outpouring of some emotion.

Similar to the manner in which he treats actions, Manohar here through his static stance and fixed expression 'presents' us with or 'shows' us an image. He remains still, immobile, masklike, so that if any emotion at all is conveyed, it is not he that expresses it, but we, the spectators, that read meanings into or impart feelings to his image. He presents the form, we add in the emotional content. In this manner he allows us to participate in the creative act. Our involvement in the performance does not arise from what he is feeling but from the image he is presenting.

Then Himmat Mai is asked by the soldiers whether she recognizes the boy. She does not look down at the body, but still looking ahead, merely shakes her head from side to side. She does not change the expression on her face nor shift her body. She is asked again, and again she repeats the gesture of denial in exactly the same way. The expression is fixed, mask-like, unaltered.

The soldier has his eyes glued to her, not believing her. He says 'Okay, since no one knows the bugger, throw him into a ditch.' Having uttered these devastating words, the soldier holds a beat, his eyes still fixed on Himmat Mai, waiting for her to twitch, react. She doesn't. They cover the face of the boy and depart slowly, making their way up the ramp, at the measured pace of a dead march.

As they move away from in front of him, Manohar makes only two more gestures. He unclasps his hands slowly, but his reaction is directly the reverse from what he had suggested may happen-the torrential outpouring of emotions. Instead he plays just the opposite. There is no physical breakdown. Now he allows his left hand to travel up to his mouth, keeping it close to his body as he does so. The fixed mouth opens slightly, the fingers hover around the lips. The head, which had been erect, now slumps slightly to the right and tilts forward. Simultaneously he releases the tension from his body a fraction.

This sequence is comprised of only four sentences spoken by the soldier, and is enacted at a slow pace taking seven to eight minutes of stage time. It is a drawn out and prolonged moment in the play and Manohar leaves it unsentimentally stark and sparse, relying on no dialogue, a basically immobile face, no physical movement and three gestures, but those three are suffused with a withheld, contained energy. Manohar's performance here gains an immense classical monumentality, its contours heavily defined, bold, simple and elemental.

What he achieves then through such contrasting treatments of the technique of detailing of his role, is to create an *archetype*, in this case The Mother, which has both mythic and historical dimensions. He creates on the one hand a specific, and on the other a universal, character. The timespecific or contemporary is created by describing the real, temporal fleshiness of the character, seen in the myriad details with which some sequences are developed. On the other hand, by eschewing detail and leaving it stark and essential, he makes it non-specific and de-contextualized. Thus he allows his character to float between two worlds, the here and now, and the world of myth. Thus he liberates his character from the narrow confines of the present, and allows it to find resonances in other times, both past and future.

But Manohar goes yet a step further in his quest to explore further dimensions of his technique of detailing. In the process he entirely reverses our understanding of this term. A detail, as we understand it, is a small portion or part of the whole; it is not the whole. But Manohar now proceeds to make it just that.

For example, Manohar constructs the last scene of *Himmat Mai*, which takes approximately ten minutes, out of just five details: singing a lullaby to the dead daughter in her lap; covering her with a piece of tarpaulin; taking out a coin and giving it to the old peasant couple for funeral expenses; crying on the shoulder of the peasant woman; and lifting up and dragging the cart off the stage.

Manohar approaches the enactment of these five details in an entirely new fashion. He does each of them very, very slowly at exactly the same tempo, giving the impression of them being done with great effort. Each action is stretched out and extended to such an agonizing degree, that we lose our sense of time, lose our bearings. We get the sensation of watching each and every muscle move as if in extreme close-up. This effort is enhanced because of the slow pace. The actions that we see thus appear massive and overpowering but without him using large gestures or a powerful voice. In fact the voice is very feeble and low. The details thus lose their essential definition of being small, and intricate as filigree. Instead they now appear just the reverse, huge and monumental.

The character of Himmat Mai, at this critical juncture of the play's conclusion, is thus played out simultaneously at *both* the contemporary as well as the universal level. The mundane choice of details locates her very specifically in our sense of the here and now, while the extreme slowness and the close perspective from which we view this old woman turn each step she takes away from her dead daughter and towards the bandwagon of an army led by bloody marauders into an immense universal statement on human insensitivity, blindness, stubbornness and folly. Finally Manohar calls out in a feeble tone '*Ruk jao sipahiyo, mujhe bhi apne saath lete chalo*' (Hold on, *sipahis*, take me along with you). He stretches and prolongs each syllable, creating the effect of an echo, allowing this howl to spread over the vast, war-torn landscape, reaching out into infinity.

Since the 60s there has been a major attempt on the part of all theatre people, whether writers, directors, actors, or designers, to turn to our traditional forms of theatre and draw on them to create indigenous forms which can be more expressive of our own ethos. Throughout this period a polarity between east and west has developed, with them being perceived as two irreconcilable traditions. However, in the work of Manohar Singh there has been no conflict. He has taken from the west a technique and from the east an attitude and has merged both with a masterly ease which neither detracts from his Indianness nor from his contemporaneity. In this achievement of Manohar Singh's, there is perhaps a message for all of us to reflect upon.

Matter and Energy: Some Notes

RANJABATI SIRCAR, a member of Dancers' Guild, is involved in contemporary dance explorations including the intersection between dance and theatre.

N. Muthuswamy invited me to lead a one-week workshop with his theatre group, Koothu-pattarai, in Madras in July. I asked him what he expected. He answered, 'Nothing. It is exploratory.' I was relieved: I had planned nothing.

Having watched the actors, I found them full of a strong, restless energy. I instinctively began with basic centering exercises. There is a balance required in a training situation, between technique and expression. A thorough understanding of physical techniques does not ensure a good performer. Neither does a high capacity for emotive expression. A balanced process combines a method of 'from the outside inward' (or, from the skin to the bone) with a method of 'from the inside outward' (or, from the bone to the skin.)

The differences between the two are many. The first, related to learning through imitation or direct manipulation by a teacher, is a hallmark of forms that have evolved in closed patriarchal structures, with the relationship between teacher and disciple moulded by the archetype of dominant male (guru) and submissive-female (*shishya*). It is effective when a student is, in essence, submitting his/her body to be the recipient/vehicle of a particular form. In the second method, the relationship is almost reversed: the teacher becomes a vehicle for the student's self-discovery, 'the finger pointing at the moon'. Being more indirect, it can be more demanding of the student; a 'way of seeing' that points to a 'way of being'.

On the first day, an intense improvisation was presented by two actors, which left them rather unsettled. Muthuswamy had a psychological explanation: that the improvisation had touched upon personal feelings which had erupted. A conscious body (not the same as a trained body) will by nature also be psycho- logically responsive: the strict divisions between mind and body have been worn down; therefore, spillovers are likely to occur in the process period, in emotional upset or physical ill-being.

When this 'wearing down' happens within a given frame of values and beliefs, as with the ideal traditional training situation, there is no problem. God or *dharma* is there, a safety net for the soul. But when these frames are gone, the spill overs can lead to confusion, even psychic or physical damage.

The individualistic view of the universe has so far dominated contemporary performance. A little rummaging in the history of knowledge will reveal that this view, with its existence in and justification by, at one end, the individual, and at the other, the collective, has its roots in the mind-split represented by Newtonian physics and Cartesian philosophy. The two extremes of this viewpoint are merely a reflection or the basic question of the self and its relation to the world/universe.

There is a parallel between this duality and the performance situations I have touched upon. The performer of a ritual form may believe him/herself-anc be believed-to be possessed by some 'other' force. The classical performer too can feel that s/he is submitting the ego to a greater power-or, as, Kalanidhi Narayanan says; being the 'vehicle of god'. The 'other' is this god, a supernatural force, a higher intelligence, the subconscious mind, the unconscious self; in some instances the 'other' outside of 'I' or ego, beyond the self and infinite; in other instances, another part of 'I' within the finite self.

Quantum physics at its most advanced (most basic!) level reveals the phenomena of the material universe as intrinsically the same as the phenomena of consciousness. In the relationship between wave and particle - matter and energy - lies also the inter-relationship of mind and body. And in this sameness of reality lies the basic truth of interconnectedness. Thus, consciousness may be seen as total psycho-physical existence; necessarily in tune with (because itself a reflection of) the nature of reality.

Thus the quantum definition of consciousness also, necessarily, bursts the boundaries of the finite self imposed by psychology and materialism, and meets the eastern definitions of existence.

The divisions between self and world, perception and perceived, reason/the rational and intuition/the irrational, the mind as understanding and the body as feeling-all are challenged into a continuous *relationship*, an interconnecting. Each alters the other at every moment, creating new realities in every moment, in a way that belies the 'intact' linearity of dialectics.

Chaos!! Is this the emotion erupting? The self dissolving?

What do we *do* when we have no gods to take care of it all, no dharma to hold it in?

I asked a question on the last day of the workshop: 'The body of a baby is totally flexible and relaxed, yet responsive. We were all like that. What happened?' One answer came immediately: 'the bones get hardened.' Another, 'When a different consciousness develops. . .' (and there it stopped).

Before my performance at Sittrangam the following evening, one of the actors said, 'About the baby ... it's because the baby exists only in the present time.'

Theatre Log

Tapas Sen's Workshop

I have watched many plays at the Experimental Theatre and seen great actors and actresses perform on the simple platforms that make up the stage. But never before has a barren theatre, a mere 'black box' devoid of any actors, music or sets been able to communicate to me as vividly as Mr. Tapas Sen caused it to by the simple operation of lights and the creation of shadows, during the three-day workshop organized by the NCPA, held at the Experimental Theatre from 22-24 August.

Stage lighting is an area of creativity which draws on both art and technology and which has become a specialized field, an art in itself.

There are many well-known lighting designers in Bombay-Sam Kerawalla, Pralad Upadhyay, Cyrus Bharucha. All of them, over the years, have evolved their own style of lighting with their favourite blend of colours, use of different fixtures and lighting plots. But there is only one lighting designer in India-Tapas Sen, unmatched in his talent and perception. A designer who regards shadows as his passion.

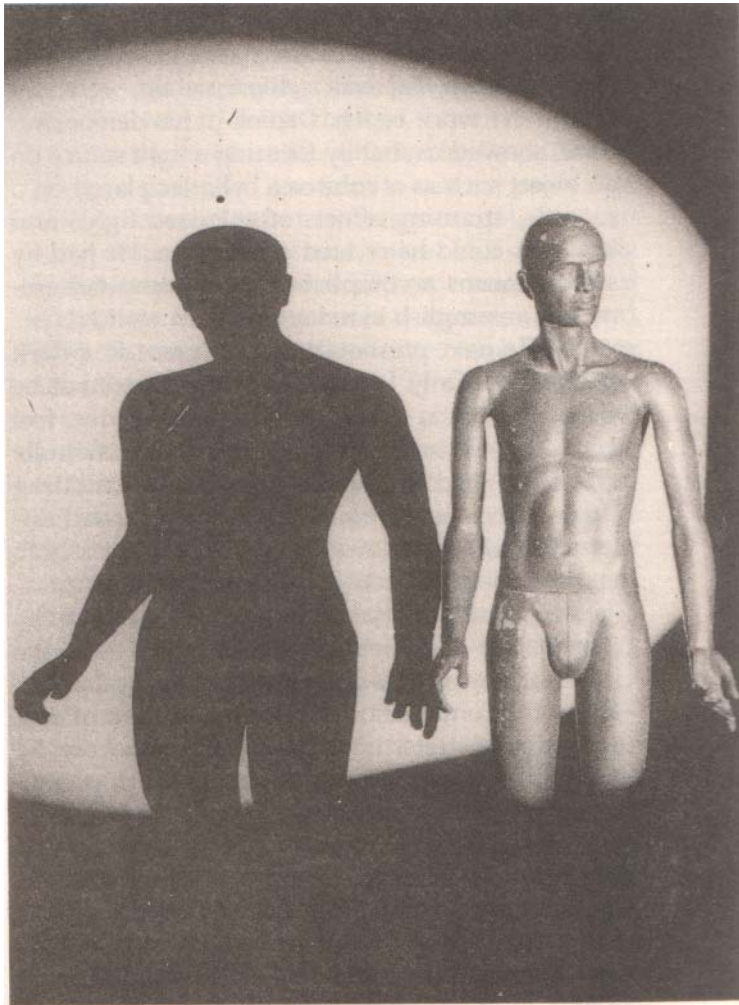
Any object placed in front of a light source, natural or artificial, will create a shadow. Many directors regard shadows as ugly and keep telling you to give them shadowless light. Shadows in certain cases can be ugly, but Tapas Sen has created wonders with these 'ugly ducklings'. With shadows he has been able to interpret and accentuate emotional impact in stage productions.

Tapasda is revered and held in high esteem in Bombay's theatre and film world. All of us young designers still continue to hear about his magnificent image of Zarathustra walking over sea waves in Gool Savaksha's production in 1968. His breathtaking 'flooding of the mines' in *Angar* and the train sequence in *Setu*. Many of us have experienced his imaginative design for the India Festival at Paris in 1985 and the India Festival in Moscow in 1987 and 1988. Some still remember vividly the 'exodus' in *Tughlaq* and the lighting design in Roshan Kalapesi's *Myth Maker*, *Death Trap* and more recently *Royal Hunt of the Sun*.

We also know that Tapasda was nominated Honorary Member of the Association of Lighting Designers, UK. He is currently working in pursuit of visual perception in the context of findings in

Quantum Reality, New Physics, Time, Space and other related phenomena.

We all wondered how the three days with such a formidable presence working amongst us would eventually evolve. Would there be a communication gap? Would we feel intimidated? At the end of the three days all our anxieties were over and we left the NCPA charged with new ideas.



The workshop-not a 'talk shop' as Tapasda put it-comprised three days of setting up and three days of the actual workshop. The workshop commenced on 22 August. The house lights dimmed, the teleclimber with three faint glows resembling three luminaires started to descend. Three more lights were faded in, creating symmetric shadows on a screen, various other spotlights were faded in and faded out on cue, creating multiple shadows on the screen, ceiling and backdrop of the theatre. Slowly the lights started fading out one by one, making the atmosphere more

erie, leaving a solitary red light on the telescope descending slowly, falling on the statue placed on stage.

This little exercise in light, shadow and symmetry was followed by a talk on the history of lighting, with special emphasis on the Indian scene and Tapasda's experience: his association with directors, actors and designers, his humble beginnings, his work experiments and passions, frustrations, failures and successes.

During the afternoon session, a video on some of Tapasda's experiments with projection on cycloramas was viewed. The next day the models of the objects projected (or 'Tapasda's toys' as they were referred to), painstakingly crafted by Mr. Daniel Karkee, Tapasda's able assistant, were laid out on the work bench. Daniel, in his demonstrations, showed us that by focusing a light source on an object such as a cube or a cylinder placed on a revolve, stunning effects of coloured lights and shadows could be created on a screen. He had by simple means accomplished what computer animators accomplish in today's modern world.

The next presentation took place in a dark auditorium. Only Tapasda's voice was heard as he walked about in the dark, 'You can hear me, feel and locate me in the darkness.' He then lit a candle and used it to illuminate his own face, casting shadows on the screen. He later demonstrated different types of shadows created by an electric bulb and the ghostly effects of tubelight shadows.

Tapasda's remarkable lighting effects in the play *Angar*-the flooding of a coal mine-and the illusion of an approaching train in *Setu*, both created by the combination of sound and light effects, were demonstrated. In yet another production he used an old valve radio with an amber glow radiating from the inside to create the impact of a plane crash. He also discussed and demonstrated his lighting concepts in important productions such as *Char Adhyay*, *Rakta Karabi* and *Raja*.

On the last day of the workshop Tapasda showed us a video and spoke to us on his paper 'Light, Mind and Lighting' which he had presented at 'Showlight 93' held at Bradford, UK.

The workshop was attended by renowned theatre personalities and lighting designers from all over Maharashtra.

Kaivan Mistry

Masks-An Integral Part of Theatre Training

Recently there was a workshop on 'The Role of Masks in Theatre' organized by Alliance Francaise of Madras and Koothu-p-Pattarai, the well known Madras based repertory group. Nirupama Nityanandan and Marie Paul Romo, members of Ariane Mnouchkine's Theatre du Soleil, Paris, were the guest instructors.

What is the function of masks in Indian theatre or, for that matter, any theatre? Nirupama commented on the use of masks in theatre:

The concept of masks have their origin in sacred art or ritualistic art, the worship of deities or ancestors. The idea of incarnation is the guiding principle. The actor is expected to take on the role of a deity or a revered ancestor. He transforms himself into the deity during the dance recital. Preparations are made forty-one days ahead, fasting, celibacy and other kinds of discipline. On the day of the dance also there are rituals to appease the deity, and songs requesting their permission and support in the taking on of their roles. Then the masks are drawn or worn on the face. Even this act is preceded by invocation songs and rituals. At every stage it is impressed upon the actor that he is doing the difficult task of transforming himself into a deity and it has to be done with seriousness and commitment, or he will invite the displeasure of the deity. Once the headgear is worn the actor transforms himself into the role-deity or ancestor-and in many cases becomes possessed. After the dance, only when the headgear is removed does the actor once again become his own self. So the idea is that in order to take on the role of a deity or an ancestor one has to be more than oneself, literally transform himself or transpose the qualities of the role to oneself. In a way the mask helps to 'mask' oneself, blot out one's identity, the existing earthly self, and pave the way to taking on another self, another role or character. The commitment to the characters and to emotions is essential-an actor will not be able to play under the mask unless the emotions are genuine, and the commitment strong. In Bali, the actor even goes to sleep with the mask on so that he can feel the character the mask represents. The identification with the role is so true that the spectator also implicitly believes in this transformation. For the duration of the act/dance the actor ceases to exist, the character alone is alive.

Theatre director Pravin, trained under Ariane Mnouchkine, explained that masks are an essential part of the Theatre of Transformation.

The mask literally 'transforms' an actor into another person and this transformation extends to his/her physical body, voice, behaviour, thinking pattern, in short, his/her whole self and spirit. He continued to elaborate on the function of masks in theatre. 'When you wear a mask, it feels as though you are looking at your face through a magnifying glass. All your actions, gestures, movements have this heightened (magnified) effect.' As masks have this magnifying effect on the person's theatrical movements, one has to be careful to avoid false movements, for the mask will magnify them. An actor who wears a mask has to feel within himself this heightened or magnifying effect. The gestures, voice, walk and movements of realistic theatre have to be heightened when masks are worn. 'As a part of theatre training it helps you to go to a heightened level of acting and once you reach this level it is easier to go on to whichever level you actually need in acting. With a mask one can never be casual, because the mask tells you what to do and you have to take your instructions from the mask.' The body should have a definite tension. There is no place for loose movements. Every movement or tone has to be sharp, definite and clear. With the mask on, the rhythm in movement, voice, and gesture is also important. The rhythm has to be sharper and clearer than usual. Another principal of the mask is that when it is worn it should have a finished effect, with matching skin tones, colour of hair etc.

Nirupama and Marie insisted on total commitment from the participants in the workshop. They emphasized punctuality. All actors had to assemble at exactly 9.30 a.m. and continue to work till 1 p.m. with just a ten minute break for coffee and relaxation. They did not allow too many spectators, journalists, or photographers for fear of making the actors selfconscious and constrained in their exercises/ performances. They encouraged spontaneity and wholehearted enjoyment of the workshop exercises. Instruction was informal and friendly and I could see that the group was having fun while seriously participating.

The workshop was conducted through exercises. Nirupama and Marie explained that the purpose of the exercises was to allow the participants to come together-to get into the habit of playing (acting) together. The exercises were designed to help the actors cultivate concentration, dissociation, coordination and game playing. The first set of exercises was to teach rhythm, explore different kinds of walks, different bodies, different poses and emotions to suit the poses. The second set of exercises taught dissociation of body and voice. This was done with two people acting together, complementing each other. In these exercises voice

was separated from the movement. The voice came before or after the action or vice versa. Two people do the act, one representing the voice and the other the action. These exercises were intended to give clarity to action and persuade the actor to train in nonverbal action. The third set of exercises emphasized finding voices. There were other types of exercises for trust building and confidence giving-trust between actors and confidence in themselves-and to find the true emotion of the character, exploring and changing from emotion to emotion.

I asked Nirupama and Marie about the group of actors who had participated in this workshop-about their capacity to absorb the lessons taught and their responses to the idea of acting with the mask on. Both responded that they were quite happy with the commitment, and their willingness to learn, to repeat the exercises and build up their talents. As many of them belonged to the theatre group Koothu-p-Pattrai, which emphasizes body/voice training, they found it easy to understand the principles of the workshop and benefit from it.

Vasanthi Sankaranarayanan

Theatre Workshop, Maheswar: A Social Act

Maheswar is a small town on the banks of the river Narmada within the Nimad region of Madhya Pradesh. It is an important centre for pilgrimage, famous for its handloom sarees. Historically, it was a bastion of the Holkars. The fort of Rani Ahalyabai at the highest point in Maheswar dominates the landscape: Though Maheswar is within the socio-cultural belt of Malwa, it is virtually devoid of any performance culture. The traditional forms are either extinct or are peripheral to the life of the people.

Thus, a theatre workshop with clear modernist inputs in such a barren landscape is an intervention which has to tread a difficult path of continuity and change. Care had to be taken to cut across cultural and socio-cultural patterns to initiate an understanding of theatre, the dynamics of performance and its broader impact on the community.

A forty-day, workshop (July to mid-August '94) was held under the overall direction of Bansi Kaul and was marked by intensive hyper-activity geared towards immediate, tangible results on the one hand and the initiation of processes which had long-term perspectives. Thirty students of theatre had collected after a simple advertisement in the vernacular press of Madhya Pradesh. Most of them were young and were involved in varied performance activities in their own towns. Their presence also brought into perspective the level and range of theatre activity in their respective areas.

The format of the workshop was shaped around the needs of these young theatre workers. Theatre being voluntary in nature, the activity took place either by instinct, enthusiasm or by an attachment to political ideology. In many cases, the lure and image of popular films is an impetus to 'act' and this image is a force that draws young people to theatre in remote areas.

At one level, inputs had to deal with providing basic skills within the ambit of the basic needs of these theatre activists. At another level, there was a clear separation of all the elements which makes theatre. Each element was studied as a separate entity, in a specialized way, only to be reassembled and integrated towards the end of the workshop. At a third level, a deeper understanding of the role of theatre was undertaken within a holistic overview of arts and life. At a fourth level, activities were generated to relate the workshop with the immediate community in Maheswar. At a fifth level, patterns of culture and arts of the local

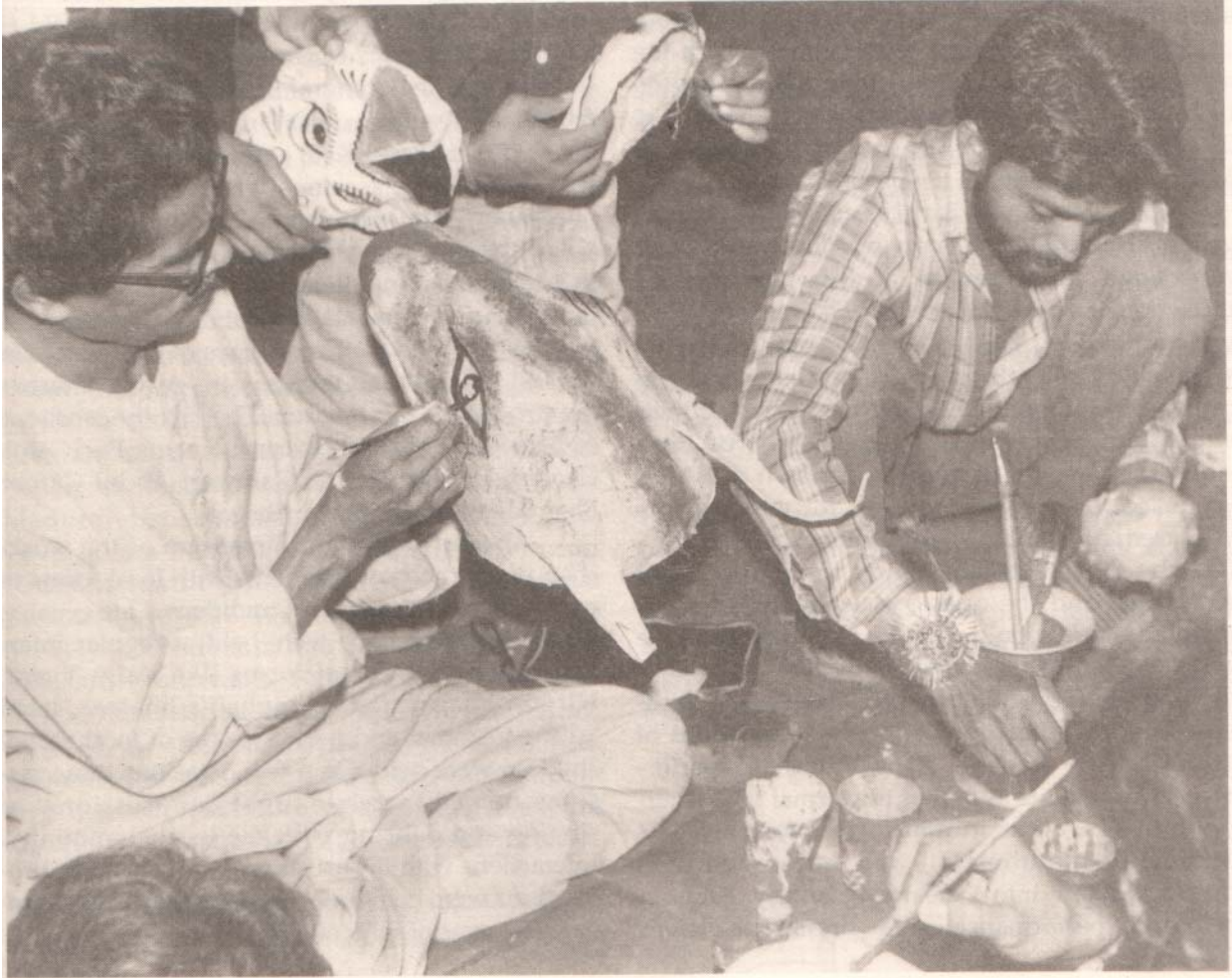
community were absorbed as essential material for training. At a sixth level, peripheral activities were initiated to generate a local economy, audiences, theatre for children etc. At a seventh level, the local administration was involved to facilitate activities of the workshop which would make the administration responsive towards arts and culture.

Bansi Kaul's approach to the workshop was to make it participative in all its aspects. Students were asked to rotate their leadership and also to plan and execute details of activities. Human labour and sweat was integral to the learning process. The group was socially and culturally heterogeneous. Individuals from varied religions, languages, castes, economic backgrounds and habits collected to sleep, work and live together. Psychologically the individualistic outlook comes to the fore and creates tensions within an already heterogeneous group. Most of them came from middle- or lower-middle-class homes and for a few it was their first sojourn outside the security of their family. A great amount of effort was made to keep the inner tensions of the group at a manageable level. One simple method, in a lighter vein, was to make the actors work to exhaustion so that at the end of the day they had no energy left to quarrel amongst themselves. The dynamics of group activity itself were used to diffuse individual problems. This was reflected in the training methodology and informal interactions. In one case, there was a young man suffering from schizophrenia. A clear decision was taken that he was an essential element of the group, and the group was to provide him the security for him to treat himself, while the group itself learnt how to deal with a clinical case. The group also suffered from gender problems. The number of girls in the group was unusually high within the social context of Madhya Pradesh. A sustained educative process was undertaken to correct behavioural patterns between sexes. At that level, theatre became an act of social therapy and development.

Bansi Kaul firmly believes that given the nature of Indian life and society, theatre has to be an extension of the collective, the family. An individual should discover his/her personality within this collective. The very fact that people collect to do theatre is a social phenomenon, and an assertion of family; and it is this energy within the collective consciousness which should determine the dynamics of theatre. In another sense, theatre is an integrative process—a culmination of a will to express one's inner feelings, its existence and concern for life. It's a mode of reflection, it stimulates new thought patterns and acts as a harbinger of change

The forty-day workshop was supported by the National School of Drama (a national agency), MP Kala Parishad (a state agency) and Rang Vidushak (a voluntary group). The economics of the workshop was that it remained a 'spender'. That is, it was supported by grants: But within this format, an effort was made to generate a local economy. This also threw up ideas on how to generate an economy which was dependent on the activities of theatre. For the production *Muktadhara* and the workshop, local tailors, craftsmen, handloom workers, carpenters, unskilled labour, musicians, cooks and transport agencies were employed. Tailors were given training in stitching costumes; skilled and unskilled labour was employed to construct the performance space; carpenters were employed to construct makeshift rehearsal spaces, sets and wooden panels; lights and sound equipment was acquired from neighbouring areas and some brought from Bhopal; all the materials like handloom cloth, bamboo, mats, wood etc. were bought from Maheswar and neighbouring areas. Local boys were hired to handle lighting and sound equipment, and cooks were employed to cook meals for the staff, students and others. So employment was generated within the local community and skills were acquired by them which were related to theatre activity, leaving behind the beginnings of an infrastructure for further theatre work in the area.

Maheswar had no conventional space for performances. Kalidas Manch had become a gettogether spot for truck drivers, and the audience area had been converted into a cinema hall. By persuading the local administration, all possible large spaces were 'acquired', like the Badminton Hall of Madhya Pradesh State Electricity Board (MPSEB) and the godowns of the State Agricultural Development Agency (SADA). A newly built guesthouse with large open spaces on top of a hill was taken to conduct the main workshop. It housed rehearsal spaces, residence for students, the kitchen, the store, etc. There was a pondlike depression in one of the open spaces outside the guest house and the District Collectorate was finding ways of filling it up. Bansi Kaul persuaded the authorities to keep the empty pond intact. The floor of the pond was converted into a triangular performance stage. Some landscaping, relocation of mud, fillings and a bit of brickwork new thought patterns and acts as a harbinger of change converted it into an open air theatre space converted it into an open air theatre space with seating for approximately 2000 people. The play *Muktadhara*, produced



as an outcome of the workshop, was presented here and later the open-air theatre was dedicated and given as a `gift' by the participants to the people of Maheswar.

Bansi Kaul strongly believes in co-opting the local administration into the theatre activities of a regional workshop. This works in two ways. Firstly, it educates and makes administration responsive to the arts, and secondly, it provides the necessary infrastructure for a broader impact on the community. Bansi Kaul himself has unique qualities of persuasion and in this case he was able to convert the District Collector into a great friend of the arts. The unprecedented response of the District Collector went a long way toward spreading the activities of the workshop to different towns of district Khargon. Dilapidated theatre spaces in Khargon, Maheswar, Mandaleswar and Sendwa were redesigned and performances by Rang Vidushak and also the students' *Muktadhara* were held. All these spaces were later dedicated to the local people. Historical sites, guesthouses on the banks of the Narmada and spaces within temples were used, as working weekend picnics and informal theatre exercise sessions were held. This attempt to co-opt the administration grew into a

co-option of the political establishment, with the state Minister for Culture visiting the site for the final presentation of *Muktadhara* which culminated in a community dinner hosted by the people of Maheswar in honour of the participants.

Rang Vidushak, Bansi Kaul's Bhopal-based group, also decided to camp in Maheswar to share experiences, learn from the faculty which came for the workshop and add to the 'theatre-fever'. This was part of Rang Vidushak's philosophy of having a travelling school for actors-of having actors respond to different environments as part of their evolution. A house next to the fort of Rani Ahalyabai was hired and the godown of SADA was used for the daily routine, for which actors also used all possible spaces within the township, like the largest *akhara* inside the fort of Rani Ahalyabai and the open spaces in the adjacent temple. Actors soon got into a performance mode and travelled to remote areas to perform to children and family audiences. This became an audience-building effort for the final presentations of *Muktadhara* by students. Rang Vidushak's performances were done as part of the formal school curriculum as well as in non-formal formats. The MPSEC Badminton Hall was redesigned with cloth to make it into a theatre of fantasy. An hour before the performance, actors dressed as clowns with musical instruments announced the performance in the streets. Within minutes, hordes of children would collect to witness the performances. Rang Vidushak presented *Gadhon ka Mela*, *Soch ka Doosra Naam* and *Sidi dar Sidi urf Tukke par Tukka*. Towards the end of the workshop a performance-circuit of Rang Vidushak's performances and the students' *Muktadhara* went through Sendwa, Khargaon, Mandaleswar, Maheswar, Indore and Bhopal.

The training schedule at the main workshop had certain broad categories. Physical training involved modern dance, movement, *akhara* techniques and martial art traditions of Madhya Pradesh. For voice and speech, classes were held in the basics of Hindustani classical singing, chanting, voice exercises and gibberish. At another level exercises were held on concentration, observation and relaxation. Aspects of human psychology in relation to sociology were probed. In areas of design and allied subjects classes were held on the basics of costume design, scenic design, property-making, make-up, construction of tents and informal indoor spaces. Exercises were also undertaken in evolving narratives from stories, poetry, visual material and daily experiences. Similarly, architectural spaces and story-telling sessions were also used to build up narratives. Sessions were held to introduce the basics of various theories on acting. In the evenings, general sessions were held on modes of free improvisation and methodology developed by Bansi

Kaul at Rang Vidushak, scene work etc. These sessions were spontaneous in nature and the idea was to bring together in a holistic way all the elements which were studied in isolation. During the permutation and combination of varied elements students were encouraged to think and find their own ways of expression. In the last ten days, all inputs were geared towards the production *Muktadhara*. The faculty consisted of Bansi Kaul, Bharat Sharma, Anjana Puri, Alok Chatterjee, Bhagwandas Raikwar, Abdul Gafoor Bhai, Sagarika and Ashok Bhagat.

Another important dimension of the workshop was to acquaint students with local forms of performing arts, crafts and traditions. Late evening performance sessions were held at regular intervals whereupon local forms like Kalgi Turra, Nirgun bhajans, Sant Singhaji's bhajans, local Swang Gammat and performances of local school children were held. On a few occasions these sessions turned into late night 'jam sessions' of singing and dancing with the local community. Interactions with the artists took place, and improvisations were held based on these forms to assimilate elements of folk tradition.

Muktadhara is one of the least-performed plays of Rabindranath Tagore. The play is significant because it takes an empirical view of the struggle between Man and Nature and the complex form this takes in our daily life. *Muktadhara* brought together all the processes which were set in motion at the beginning of the workshop, and also made the entire effort relevant to the very environment of the workshop. It became a tribute to the river Narmada.

Bharat Sharma

Notebook

This section is compiled from factual reports, brochures and announcements sent in to STQ from theatre groups and individuals for inclusion in the Notebook. We look forward to receiving regular updates from theatre workers all over the country.

***Electra* by Masquerade:** Masquerade is a group of theatre and dance talent based in Madras. On 4, 5 and 6 August 1994 they presented Hugo von Hofmannsthal's *Electra* at Sittrarangam. The production was directed by Krishna Kumar S., who says, 'The reason behind the choice of *Electra* is not because I felt a fascination towards Greek tragedy; nor have I a penchant for classics. It is purely the scope for experiment the play offers.'

The Folklore Resources Centre at Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu, has designed a year-long programme from August 1994 to undertake the systematic documentation of folklore, which provides scope for student involvement and training in documentation. The categories to be covered include: oral performance (Villupattu-Kanyakumari dist., and Kaniyankutthu-Nellai dist.); dance (Kummi with Mulaipari-Nellai dist., Kuravan KurathiyattamMadurai dist., Poikkal Kuthirari-Salem dist., Cevaiyattam-Dindigul Anna dist.); enactments (Uttukkuppattu-Coimbatore dist., Annanmar Kathai historical documentary); and drama (Ramayana Natakam and Manuneethi Cholan Natakam-Tanjavoor). Temple rituals, tribal rituals and ritualistic village festivals will also be covered. M. A. students participating in the programme will be sent on field trips and submit reports which will be analysed and discussed, this material forming the basis of their dissertations.

Aroopam Theatre Group, Madras, recently staged a Tamil play *Giri Kizbhavan Nimmadhi Perumoochu Vidugiran* (Giri, the Old Man, Heaves a Sigh of Relief), written and directed by Nijanthan. This play was first staged at Narada Gana Sabha, Madras, on 6 May 1994. It expresses the breakdown of dialogue amongst human beings, especially between man and woman, at the psychosocial level.

The Artistes' Repertory Theatre, Bangalore, is an English language theatre group formed in 1982 by Arundhati and Jagdish Raja. They have recently formed a troupe of about thirty young people between the ages of 13-25 years called ART-Youth, committed to sustained and structured youth theatre. They will inaugurate this move with an original play *Restless-The Spirit of Youth*, which has grown out of a workshop and is scripted by two of the participants, Gautam Raja and Minakshi Menon.

An International Seminar on Twentieth Century European Drama was held at Santiniketan between 25-29 November 1994. It was organized by the Department of English and Other, Modern European Languages in collaboration with the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Calcutta. Participants were from different parts of the country and abroad.

Sombhu Mitra, the veteran and renowned master actor of the Bengali stage, was conferred the degree of Doctor of Literature (honoris causa) by Jadavpur University at a special convocation held on 31 December. The Governor of West Bengal, who is the Acharya of the University, handed over the honorary degree scroll to Sombhu Mitra after a citation mentioning the milestones of his career, and all the books he had authored, was read out aloud by the Registrar. The Guest-in-Chief, U. R. Anantamurthy specially mentioned Sombhu Mitra's towering influence on Kannada theatre.

Footpath Theatre Festival: A street theatre festival organized by the theatre group Satabdi is being held outside the Academy of Fine Arts, Calcutta, from 21-29 January 1994. The plays include *Michhil* and *Chodouibhati* by Satabdi, *Sada Kalo* and *Hattamalar Oparey* by Jatak, *Mahagyani* and *Kissa Dhanua Ka* by Pathasena, and *Gandi* by Ayana.

Letters

I HAVE READ the second and the third issues of STQ. It's really different and nice to have a theatre journal that's our own and yet of the class of ones from across the seas-honestly. I am talking about the content. I really hope the journal grows to a stage where you can offer 'lifetime subscriptions' to patrons and readers. I would like to offer my help for anything I can do for you from Madras: You can count on me.

Krishna Kumar S, Madras

THIS LETTER, I fear, is going to be a bit scrappy as I am leaving for the US this evening. You will be glad to know that the Guthrie theatre of Minneapolis, which presented my *Naga-Mandala* successfully last year, is holding a workshop to discuss my new play. The play is based on a myth from the Mahabharata and is called (provisionally), *Fire and Rain*. The workshop will be with a group of professional actors to work out the viability of presenting the play in USA. Incidentally, the play was commissioned by Guthrie.

On the subject of tradition in Indian theatre, this certainly was a topic which obsessed my generation, but that was thirty years ago and our formulation of the problem is by now surely outdated in the sense of being a product of the politics of its time, as well as the critical perceptions of the time. I think it would be much more interesting to know how the problem of tradition is viewed by the younger writers. I never consciously think of tradition any more and do not wish to restate what may seem like a hackneyed view of the matter. I feel my generation of playwrights-Rakesh, Sircar, Tendulkar, Bharati et al-have by now become a part of the tradition itself and must prepare to be rejected or dissected by the succeeding generations.

Girish Karnad, Bangalore

I WAS INDEED HAPPY to see the smart production of STQ nos. 1 and 2, but I had some reservations about the contents of both numbers. Now the third issue has succeeded in provoking me.

Being a special number on children's theatre, I was sadly disappointed to note that there is no mention of the Children's Little Theatre founded by the illustrious Samar Chatterjee.

CLT's first show was staged in New Empire, Calcutta on 11 May 1952. The CLT organized magnificent annual festivals starting in the Indian Museum-Tata compound on Chowringhee road, before moving to Aban Mahal in south Calcutta, aptly named after the great Abanindranath Tagore. Some of CLT's productions include *Sat Bhai Champa*, *Aban Patua*, *Mithua*, *jijo* (adapted from Japanese folklore) and *Kanak Bansi*.

Samarbabu was able to gather around him a very able team-Sir N. N. Bhose, A. N. Kerr, Dr. Vivek Sengupta, Mr and Mrs Mary Sur, Nirmal Sengupta, Sukumar Chakraborty, and A. B. Gupta, Prahlad Das, and Bal Krishna Menon, who joined the CLT as choreographers and Priolal Chowdhury as music composer, creative painter Phani Bhushan who designed the excellent backdrops and decorations suited to the child mind. Sadhan (an electrical engineer) and Suresh Dutt, a fresh young boy from the Rabindra Bharati dance department, were inducted at an early stage. Satyajit Ray and Bansi Chandragupta were quite closely connected with this organization.

CLT toured and performed outside Calcutta in many district towns as well as in Delhi, Bombay, Ahmedabad and Bangalore. It had successful programmes in London, Copenhagen and many other foreign cities: During these shows CLT had earned warm congratulations from Julian Huxley, and from *Manchester Guardian* etc.

The beautiful lyrics and tunes of the golden CLT evenings still make me nostalgic and sentimental about Samar Chatterjee's talent for unique original compositions-just a refrain from his Darjeeling toy train song *Tung Sonada Ghum* is enough.

I remember that STQ mentioned *Rudali* and Utpal Dutt with great admiration. I am reminded of a strange evening during the Tagore Centenary functions held in 1961. Samar Chatterjee was in charge of the function in the Eden Gardens stadium. One evening was scheduled for a performance of a Tagore play by LTG under Utpal Dutt's direction. About an hour before the show a young boy scout who did not recognize Utpal asked for his identity or pass. This small incident snowballed and the entire group of artists walked out without performing, and all the Utpal lovers in the auditorium had to leave in disappointment after a short apologetic announcement from Samar Chatterjee.

Concerning the IPTA-now a somewhat elitist organization based in Bombay--Golden Jubilee Celebrations, reported in your Notebook. A list of the old guard curiously starts with my friend Ritwick Ghatak, who came in to the IPTA fold much later. But what about Anna Bhao Sathe, Gavankar, Omar Shekh, Bijan Bhattacharya, Chittaprasad, Indu Ghosh, Inder Razdan (of the Delhi IPTA), and what about the indomitable Niranjana Sen who later became the All India General Secretary of IPTA? It was Niranjana who inducted me as one of the founder members of the Delhi IPTA way back in 1944. To add some more not mentioned in the list-Binoy Roy, Hemango Biswas, Dasrathlal, Surinder Kaur, Reddy, Santi Bardhan, Debabrata Biswas, Sova Sen, Khaled Chowdhury, Sudhi Pradhan and Jyotirindra Mitra:

Are these omissions just a slip, due to lack of space, or motivated suppressions? Both causes are highly objectionable and suspect. Such published reports are misleading and damaging to genuine researchers. Or is it because the history of IPTA is by the present-day elitists who depend by, and large on government support, material or otherwise?

Except for mention of *Rudali* and Utpal Dutt I find the Calcutta theatre scene conspicuously out of the STQ frame. There is active theatre action here-good, bad, right or wrong. Why is no attention given to it in the first three numbers? I fail to appreciate the editorial policy of STQ.

Tapas Sen, Calcutta

[In the third issue, STQ's focus--a focus, merely, with no claim to being definitive or exhaustive coverage--was on current children's theatre activity. As a result several historically important developments and moments in children's theatre were not included. Children's Little Theatre is one of these. And, although STQ editorial policy does not aim to cover the Calcutta theatre scene any more or less intensively than thriving theatre scenes in other parts of India, for the record STQ does have more Calcutta theatre in its pages than the two examples mentioned above: for example, Khaled Chowdhury (STQ 1), Jana Sanskriti and Augusto Boal (STQ 2), Nema Ghosh (STQ 2), Jayoti Bose (STQ 3), Nandikar (STQ 3).. In fact, ironically, we often face a reverse criticism--that there is too much space given to Bengal. in the pages of STQ. Editor]

I READ THE THIRD ISSUE of STQ with great interest, especially as I have been working with children for many years. I have included some background material on our group, The Artists Repertory Theatre, and our newly founded ART-Youth. Young though the group may be in terms of years, I am sorry that Chandra Jain, whom I know very well, does not mention the work that we have been doing over the years. Is this, I wonder, because we are not of NSD origin and an English-language group to boot-or am I being paranoid?

As a Bengali who grew up in England, then married a Tamilian and ended up living in Bangalore, my true mother tongue is ... English! I work hard for English language theatre. We cannot ignore it and we should not dismiss it in the condescending manner it so often is dismissed. It does not consist only of plastic copies of Broadway farces!

The future of English language theatre lies in the genesis of new indigenous material. Translations very often do not work simply because the original story line is not about people who speak English anyway. As for children's theatre, the kind of scripts that they are made to enact are totally unsuitable for their age. They perform like stiff marionettes, hampered by 'imaginative' costumes and masks, elocuting their lines.

ART-Youth works in English but there is nothing 'British' about it. We focus on drawing out the natural ability of the children. This means that we work, as much as is possible, with original material based on improvisation and scripting workshops. The children come from varied ethnic backgrounds but are all from well-to-do urban families. In our quest for 'relevant' theatre (a term I hate!) we focus on the problems of the poor, the socially deprived etc., and forget our own children! The ones whose parents complain that they only watch Channel V, but forget that they go for dance classes or Hindustani or Carnatic music classes. The ones who allow their daughters to go to discos with a group of friends and then are horrified if they see her talking alone to a boy! These are just a couple of the problems that came up in the scripting sessions. What becomes apparent is that our modern, urban youth have much to say concerning themselves and the changing environment they find themselves in. That they need an outlet is obvious: what better outlet than the stage?

Keep up the good work. We need a magazine like this to know what's happening: around the country.

Arundhati Raja, Bangalore

MANY HEARTFELT THANKS for my copy of the Seagull Theatre Quarterly 3/94. I only wish such a magazine could be published in Germany; even more so as one whole issue is dedicated entirely to children's and young people's theatre. In this country it took more than a decade before the theatre establishment deigned to acquaint itself with the Grips theatre, and even then with only half as much dedication as you have done.

It gave me immense joy and pleasure to read the inspirational and intelligent reports and analyses of my Indian colleagues, many of whom I am proud to number amongst my personal friends. Above that, many articles have helped broaden my knowledge of the depth and wealth of Indian children's theatre.

We are currently working on a brochure covering the seminar which we held in Berlin in the summer to celebrate our 25th anniversary and which was attended by Jayoti Bose, Mohan Agashe and Shrirang Godbole. In fact, some of your articles would fit very nicely into our brochure ('we could not have said it better ourselves') and therefore I would like to ask your permission to include original material from your quarterly in our brochure. If you could possibly acquiesce, I would be eternally indebted to you and you would, of course, be one of the first people to receive a copy.

Volker Ludwig, Berlin