

Is There, or Should There Be, a National Theatre in India?

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I have been given a subject which is both tricky and complex, if I may say so. In the last twenty odd years, during my career as a teacher, and in the course of my travels, I have come across some discussion on this subject; and I have always felt - what is this India? Which India are people talking about? There was, for example, in 1989, a seminar in Delhi organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi to mark the Nehru Centenary Theatre Festival, at which *Kallol* [by Utpal Dutt] was performed. There were three plays from Bengal, three from Maharashtra, three from Karnataka, a couple of plays in Urdu, one in Sanskrit and so on. That variety itself should have made the participants a little more modest in their claims of understanding India.

However, at that particular discussion, there was an American theatre critic present, I think from the *New York Times*. He looked around the hall where we were seated. On the walls of Azad Bhavan were three paintings by Indian artists - one was a Tantric-style painting, the second was a Madhubani style work and the third was in the modern abstract style. He looked at them and asked-'What kind of paintings should Indians do?' He said, 'I can understand Indians doing Tantric painting, Madhubani painting, but what is this modern abstract painting doing here?' His argument applies to theatre. 'Why are Indians doing modern theatre?' was his question. I come from a part of the country which is not renowned for its politeness. So I said, I'm really surprised at what you're saying. Because the first modern play in this country was performed in Calcutta, in English, under a Russian director, in about 1795. This means that the modern, naturalistic, realistic theatre in this country has a history as long as, if not longer than, some of these countries whose citizens, with histories

shorter than that of our modern theatre tradition, are telling us that this is not the kind of theatre we should be doing!

There was a six-member Pakistani delegation there. During the lunch break, a big Pathan came up to me. He hugged me, actually lifted me off my feet, and said, 'Aapki baat badi meethi lagi or, 'I liked what you said.' When I asked him why, he said, 'Us kafir ko aapne thik kiya' ('You fixed that kafir'). This is very interesting because, in a sense, theatre is a *mazhab* (or faith) and those who take liberties with *mazhab* are *kafirs*. I said, it is good that you introduced this concept of *kufir* and *kafir* into a discussion of theatre. It is justified because this *maulana* from New York has no right to tell me what kind of theatre I should be doing.

I cite this story to help us restate the problem of this discussion more precisely. Nobody can have any objection to national theatre per se. I am also aware that we live in times when people are believing less and less in the idea of India, or more and more in the wrong idea of India. Under the circumstances, therefore, one should have very little objection to trying to arrive at a correct idea of what the term 'national' consists of, especially in Indian theatres. The point is not that the people are wanting a national theatre, but rather that they begin by defining it in advance. This is the real problem. There is an epistemological problem involved. I will quote someone who has been branded a nihilist-Nietzsche. In his *Genealogy of Morals* he says that all concepts in which an entire process is semiotically concentrated, elude definition. Only that which has no history is definable. The difficulty is precisely that the moment you start defining national theatre, you are, in a sense, throwing history out of the window. Because the manner in which the theatre has grown in Bengal or Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu or any other part of the country is really different. Let me illustrate this point with an example of Kerala. It may appear to be an accident that Bhasa's *Natak Chakram* was preserved in Kerala and was discovered there. But if it was discovered in Kerala there must be something specific to the Kerala theatre tradition which helped in its preservation. So what looks like an accident was perhaps not an accident. But there are trends which are much more modern and live in Delhi, but I don't belong to Delhi. I try to bring it to everyone's notice that I don't belong to Delhi. I belong to Maharashtra.) Now you must have heard any number of Maharashtrian vocalists. In fact, it is vocal music that has dominated the Maharashtrian music scene, unlike Bengal, where there are far more

instrumentalists. But, prior to British rule, there was no significant tradition of classical vocal music in Maharashtra. In other words, it is barely a hundred and forty years or so old. Now if the American critic's logic is to be applied, Maharashtrians should give up singing.

What I am trying to drive at is the problem of how one defines national theatre, and if it is at all necessary to define national theatre? My response would be-no. Because most of the people who are trying to 'create' a national theatre or advocate national theatre begin with definitions. They seem to say, this, my dear chap, is what Indian theatre is. Do it. Or if you don't do it, we aren't interested in you. Fortunately the people of this country have been far more sensible-there is an audience which cares. But the pundits of pop national theatre or whatever theatre they have in mind which they call national theatre, have insisted upon defining something which is actually a semiotic concentration of an entire process, to borrow the phraseology of Nietzsche.

The second problem is that if we look closely at these definitions, another picture emerges. There is a very famous book by T. J. Clark, on the Painting of Modern Life, which was published in New York in 1984. It deals with Paris in the art of Manet and his followers. In this book Clark says something which is of direct relevance to you, to me and everyone else interested in this subject. Clark says that modernism prefers the unfinished and savours discrepancy, in what it shows and how it shows it, and the highest wisdom consists in knowing that things and pictures don't add up. Simply replace the word 'pictures' with 'plays' and you will get an idea of why national theatre will not be possible. Of course, an arithmetical exercise of determining what is Indian national theatre is always possible. But a bit of Bengal, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, plus folk plus ancient Indian tradition plus *Natyashastra* all wrapped up into an enormous package tied with saffron ribbon-doesn't work. They don't add up. The beauty of Indian theatre lies in the fact that we are all Indians because we don't add up to being Indian.

Let me now turn to our interaction with the West. Mardhekar, a Marathi poet, once made a very valid statement, probably out of disgust with Marathi writers and poets. He said that Marathi literature is so parasitical that it is not parasitical enough. It sums up the modernity problem. I would say this of theatre. If there is an Indian theatre which is national enough, it is so parasitical that it is not parasitical enough. This basically means that our acquaintance with western traditions is superficial, perfunctory, not deep enough even to reject it. A good

example of this is our response to Ibsen, Shaw and Brecht. We have played a bit with Ibsen and Brecht but kept a safe distance from Shaw. There have been scattered attempts to do Shaw, but not compared to the way in which Ibsen and Brecht have been done all over the country. My point is that it is interesting that in spite of the long intellectual traditions of this country and specially the modern period, Shavian clarity and drama of ideas has not attracted our theatre people.

This brings me to the question of the so-called Renaissance - we use the word wrongly in our history. There was no Renaissance in this country. I think this word is like a boast. Renaissance of what? The problem with this word is that it had a specific connotation in European history, we have borrowed this word. Ernst Bloch, the famous German Marxist, once said of secularism, that the word was accepted by the progressives from the bourgeoisie philistines. A word taken from its socio-historical context and planted in another without bothering to bridge the gap, acquires a philistine character. And this is precisely what happened to the word Renaissance. What goes by the name of Renaissance in this country should be described as an Enlightenment project. By this I mean a belief in the primacy of Reason and the rational. In short, we have to go on working out the contours of our modernity. It is important to realize that this Enlightenment project is not over either here or even in Europe. We have to defend the Enlightenment project against the pre-modernists just as in Europe philosophers like Habermas are defending it against post-modernists

It was this Enlightenment project, this modernity, that started off our theatre movement. How far back can one go in history? I am not saying the *Natyashastra* should not be read. Of course it should be read, there are certain aspects of the *Natyashastra* which are still relevant. For example, the actor is described as a *shudrachar* - an assertion of the low-caste status of the actor made with a sense of pride. Yes, we are *shudrachars*. There is no harm in asserting this as our counterpart of 'Black is beautiful.' In fact it might provide us with the necessary contrasting framework to define what is modern and what is national. In other words, all attempts at defining things national or Indian will have to keep the basic reality in mind, which is that a lot of people are thinking of the national (whether theatre or otherwise) without reference to the unfinished Enlightenment project. In my opinion this cannot be done. Going back to Nietzsche something which is historical cannot be defined and by defining it one cannot package it and tie it up neatly with a saffron ribbon. '

The second problem is that of the particular socio-historical time and conjuncture at which this particular question of a national theatre is being raised. In post-colonial times a distorted cultural nationalism dominates. We see this tendency in almost all developing states. Even religious fundamentalism is a version of this. In such a situation one must tread the path of cultural nationalism cautiously and with discrimination. There are discontinuities of time. Walter Benjamin says that basically what the artist does is come to terms with the discontinuities of time. Even a second-rate actor will tell you that his performance was better today than it was yesterday or vice versa. There are always discontinuities. But Benjamin takes the point to a philosophical level. He is saying that you cannot really have a philosophy of history because you cannot really wish the problem of discontinuities away. It is possible to talk of an Indian national theatre only when we take into account these discontinuities in time. For example, when I am writing something in Marathi, then there are connections with the first proscenium Marathi play that was performed on 4 November 1843. The point is that somewhere I am carrying those 150 years in my head, and also rejecting them. It is this discontinuity that makes theatre so potent and powerful that it appears as a continuity. If a director were to say tomorrow that he is in a continuous tradition, chances are that he is probably not a good director. A good director will say that he is a part of a continuous tradition and is also discontinuous from it. There is a certain dialectics of time, historical time, involved in theatre. But the idea behind this national business is to reject the discontinuities of time, to borrow from Benjamin. I am, of course, partially simplifying Benjamin. I am also partially appropriating Benjamin.

There are two trends concerning this national business. Somewhere there is a view of history which is trying to say that from Bhasa, Kalidasa, Ashvaghosha to *Natyashastra* to XYZ is a long, continuous story of success and progress. In this context it is useful to remember what Benjamin said that for the dramatist history itself is a mourning play. If I am looking at history, i.e. if I am looking at a certain conflict, a certain tension in history, what is it that makes me write about it? What makes me do a play about it? What makes me act in it? It is because I am mourning it. That this society was capable of achieving what was right, but at some point it ceased to. And there was a time when people could say this quite categorically and without embarrassment. Tilak's contemporary, Agarkar, who died in 1895, says in an essay that with the rise of Chandragupta Maurya the *rashtrachandra* of our people set-there is no history after the Mauryas. He had not read Marx or Hegel. These major European thinkers said that India and

China have no history. This thesis of 'no history' or mourning for history is already there in an Agarkar essay. This is also part of my history, but the new nationalist will deny me this history of self-doubt and questioning. There is this attitude towards historical time, towards historical development which is making this business of 'national' take over. And the other aspect of this takeover is the certain assertion that history shall not be a mourning playfield. History will be one great upsurge, a great chapter of glory, and thou shalt celebrate that glory if thou art a worthwhile theatre activist.

Alternately, you have this other thing that happens in quite a few seminars I could mention. Whenever the problems of theatre are discussed, either we go to the Sanskrit texts and the *Natyashastra*, or to Europe. Two hundred years of modern Indian theatre are completely lost sight of, never written of, as if no one has done any experimentation, no one has documented it. You will be explained the sheer energy of Mayurbhanj Chhau or the glory of this or that folk form. They are glorious, sure. But if I have to write a play about living in Pune, in Bombay or Calcutta, I cannot do a Tamasha. My life, my predicament cannot be Tamashaist or Nautankist or Pandvanist. Modern actors should, of course, learn the techniques and styles involved in these traditional forms. I certainly have great respect for them and little doubt about their utility. The trouble in our country is that on the one hand they are being sought to be imitated, and on the other a genuine traditional Tamasha (or any other form) is dying of starvation. In fact, the Sangeet Natak Akademi had a scheme by which they would provide money to produce a play provided it used a folk form. And a director was selected, who had used Pandvani. He was very honest about it. He said, 'Look, I had a story. I put some Pandvani into it.' I admire him for his honesty. He has to survive and he has to do theatre. This is the kind of nationalist theatre we are creating. Instead of this, give the money to the Pandvani artists themselves.

So how do you establish your identity? If you are doing theatre, how do you establish that you are doing Indian theatre? Don't we need an Indian identity if we are doing theatre? This is a question that is raised on several levels. I sometimes wonder if the European is ever worried about this question. And yet we discover the European identity in their work, don't we? It is not my business to discover my identity, it is my business to discover my theatre. And this theatre will give you some view of my identity. Then there is the debate over the nationalist question. My business is to define theatre, not to define national theatre. What do I know of 'nation'? I hardly speak the fourteen or fifteen languages recognized by the Eighth

Schedule of the Indian Constitution. I barely speak two and I genuinely know only one. How dare I say that I understand this country? I think I know what theatre is, but I will never be asked to define it; and on top of it, those who do not know what nation is will force a definition of it on me. I refer to this because I wonder if by national theatre we mean theatre with 'Indian' characteristics. In that case we're back to square one, because the question will still remain as to what are these Indian characteristics? So if there is a post-structuralist, post-modernist attack on modernity in Europe, there is a pre-modern attack on modernity here.

And this is hardly surprising. People who do not live in conditions of late capitalism can't really relate to the French pundits of post-modernism like Foucault, Derrida or Lyotard. The result is that post-modernism will continue to be discussed vehemently in our academia and the rest of the people will continue their march to the pre-modern. So we can go to the limits of anti-modernity but we cannot become post-modern. And it is on the level of the anti-modern which is a pale reflection of the post-modern, that this debate of the national occurs. It is not merely the question of standing up and saying that we want to do national theatre. Of course you can do national theatre, state theatre, district theatre, city theatre, muhalla theatre, it is almost like the Chinese saying that they want to bring in socialism with Chinese characteristics. Naturally this business of defining nation extends to defining what is and should be national theatre. I seriously believe that its purpose is to deny modernity; and in theatre terms to deny modern theatre. We seem to think there can be modernity with Indian characteristics and this is very dangerous because it will prevent theatre from coming to terms with modernity.

Then does it mean that there is no scope for national theatre? Of course there is, but the terms within which we can talk of that national theatre must differ from area to area and time to time. There was a major novelist, Ketkar, who is more known for what he wrote on the caste-system largely ignored in his own times: only recently there has been some interest in him. In fact, Dr Ambedkar said he started studying caste because of Ketkar, who said once that as far as he was concerned, the only way of becoming an Indian was to become a Maharashtrian. No Bengali can become an Indian without becoming a Bengali. In fact, precisely because he is a Bengali, he becomes an Indian—there is no other way, or else you will become a pale, colourless, tasteless, odourless kind of a personality and then whatever else you might be able to do, you won't be able to do theatre. Because theatre

requires colour, odour and some boiling blood which can only be linguistic. It is important to recognize the importance of language, because it has a colonial context. Lyotard has an apt description of this in his political writings, about Algeria-of how the French Republic contrived to turn a few young Algerians towards a borrowed culture, away from that of their people. language, faith. Something of that kind has happened to our own languages. The decline of our languages in recent times is simply shocking. If you compare the editorial of a local daily today with that of one written twenty-five years ago, you can see that the language is being bastardized, brutalized. Even a post-modernist, post-structuralist like Lyotard understood the totality of a culture and that is precisely why we must remember that we are discussing theatre in a post-colonial situation. It has to be a language theatre. Somewhere it has to be a retriever of language. We have no idea how we are letting our languages be systematically ruined. There was a time when people were bilingual in culture. They knew their own language very well, their literary tradition very well and they also knew their Europe reasonably well. They had heard of Kant, Hegel, Shaw, Shakespeare. For example, if a newspaper misquoted Shakespeare there would be people who wrote in citing folio numbers and the correct quotation. It was this tradition which gave us a certain strength. Now what is happening is, we are getting into a monolingual situation, but monolingual in a negative sense of the term. In the sense that they don't know their own language. No attempt is being made to relate oneself to that literary tradition, to absorb and appreciate it and *then* take a critical view of it. The earlier generation used to do that, they gave a lease of life to our languages in the colonial times. How they compare with European writers is besides the point. This retrieval of languages that was taking place has now virtually come to a grinding halt. And only theatre can save it because it is only in the theatre that the word is supreme. The great French playwright Artaud once said-if nothing works out, I shall read Seneca's tragedies from cover to cover; that should come as a bit of a surprise considering how anti-text I am. This is Artaud writing to a friend, towards the end of his life. Literally, that is the situation. In our country the text is being denied, the word is being denied. And once you deny the word, you deny ideas, and once you deny ideas you deny material change. And once you deny change, you ask only for consolidation and that leads to dependence on the powerful, paradoxically, on the West. It is then that we ourselves become a mourning play. In theatre and in poetry, you can get the purity of the word, its phonetics,

semantics, history, because word is sound, word is meaning and word is also history. And part of the reason why one is worried about the nationalization of the Indian languages, this makeshift kind of writing, is because it is happening everywhere. It is a certain attitude towards the word which our eyes don't see, our ears don't hear. Blindness cannot create any theatre. And the national has now become the prerogative of the blind. And part of the reason why this is happening to our languages is because the blind have taken over. It is only the theatre which can save it. In other words, it is a paradoxical situation, and that is where I will conclude: that national theatre is not possible because the provincial theatre has become impossible. And the day provincial theatre will become possible and prosper and retrieve the languages you will see the great glory of Indian theatre. It will be a Vishwaroop *darshan*, as in the Bhagavad Gita. It will be a theatre of a thousand faces, a Bengali face, a Maharashtrian face, a Tamil face etc. It is only then that we can come close to a National Theatre.

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How Apolitical is Cultural Policy? The NSD Example

Biren Das Sharma

The cultural policies of any government are bound to broadly reflect the cultural ambitions of the power group, with a tendency not only to define national culture but also to reorganize it, give it direction and eventually end up streamlining creative forces at every possible level. Government patronage in culture has a long history of domination in this country, but no genuine attempts have been made to formulate cultural policies, or even to study, in concrete terms, how they function for the benefit of the people whom the government represents. In the absence of any definitive official document on cultural policy, most government sponsored cultural activities appear to be more a matter of goodwill than policy, though a look into the history of various government initiatives informs us otherwise.

For example, the Colonial Government took a strong interest — a political interest — in culture. In its hands cultural policies had become a regulating force, and various initiatives were taken in the form of laws, decrees, ordinances and even unofficial guidelines, to dictate or discourage the cultural actions of the colonized people. Even after Independence, vestiges of earlier policies lingered on—the Dramatic Performance Act, imposed in 1876 and used against IPTA as late as the 1950s, is one major instance of this. Such policies had a significant and lasting impact on the cultural and political scene of the nation.

1947 witnessed a major shift for India from colonialism to democracy under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, and the rise of a new India, a welfare state. In the difficult post-partition years, the Nehruvian dream of reconstructing the nation needed a powerful and unitary concept of 'nationalism' to reorganize all productive forces in the country. Among other things, India witnessed a massive move towards industrialization, urbanization and social reform. Culture being very much a part of the same reconstructive dream, it was felt that creative forces also needed to be reorganized, systematized and brought under one umbrella. Three national academies—the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the Lalit Kala Akademi and the Sahitya Akademi—were set up in the early fifties to systematize, initiate, fund and reward creative work in all three major fields of culture—the fine arts, literature and the performing arts. The desire to modernize

Indian theatre by introducing professional training within the confines of a national school was part of the same reconstructive cultural policy designed and initiated by the Nehru government.

A resolution was taken by the Sangeet Natak Akademi - Nehru himself was the president of SNA-first in 1954 and again in 1956 to establish a theatre training school which would serve both as a laboratory for theatre research and as a school for professional training. In the mean time a draft scheme for the proposed school was prepared in 1955 by Syed Ashiaque Hussain, joint secretary, Ministry of Education. Independent of the government initiative, a scheme to found an Asian Theatre Institute was developed by Bharatiya Natya Sangh and finally executed in 1958 with UNESCO assistance, under the chairmanship of Dr Nihar Ranjan Roy. ATI offered training only in children's theatre and rural theatre under the guidance of two UNESCO experts. In 1959 Asian Theatre Institute was merged with the proposed drama school under the auspices of Sangeet Natak Akademi and became National School of Drama and Asian Theatre Institute. The school remained attached to SNA till 1975 when it finally became an autonomous institution under the Ministry of Culture, known as the National School of Drama. A two year course was offered by the school in 1959 when Mr Satu Sen, a theatre practitioner who had studied under and later worked with Richard Boleslavsky, a close associate of Stanislavski in the USA in the thirties, became the director for a brief period. It was under the directorship of Ebrahim Alkazi in 1962 that a three year diploma course, modelled after the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, was introduced: This was the beginning of State-level modern, institutional theatre training in India.

For Alkazi the task of modernization of theatre education in India was addressed in the same terms as the project of reorganizing the nation, including the incorporation of new technologies of culture. In almost Nehruvian fashion, Alkazi evaluated the state of theatre in India and its single most crucial problem:

'We have a plethora of groups, amateur, professional, semi-professional, in all major cities. But the work they do is sporadic, uneven and without purpose. It is this lack of purpose and of a sense of direction that leads to all their efforts into the wasteland of our chaotic theatre scene. Before Independence, the major movement was of the IPTA, a politically geared patriotic theatre of ardent enthusiasts. After Independence no basic purpose has held a group together' ('Theatre: Shreds and Patches', *Link*, 15 August 1968).

According to Alkazi, Indian theatre needed a 'purpose' and 'a sense of direction' - and in order to do meaningful theatre a group had to be committed either politically (like the Berliner Ensemble), aesthetically (like the Royal Shakespeare Company) or spiritually (like the Living Theatre). In a sense, for Alkazi theatre work epitomized the nation itself. He constantly talked about 'the Indian situation', about people, caste and class, social changes, urbanization, literacy and about the 'conspicuous transformation of the world' in the post World War decades which theatre should reflect. The very desire to challenge and eventually change the existing notions of theatre practice in India, to intervene in a planned and systematic way, was part of the same Nehruvian dream of social change. The so-called Alkazi model was designed to give young theatre workers a strong social base in their theatre work. Alkazi took the school out of the classroom to initiate a process of learning through experiencing theatre as a living process-he wanted to emphasize the sociology of theatre practice. In an article on theatre education he expressed this very clearly:

'Since the purpose is to study man in society, the student needs to get away from predominantly emotional, subjective and aesthetic considerations. His study will be of man in relation to the factors that shape him: sociology, economics, politics, social philosophy, psychology, history, science, technology, medicine.

'In presenting a play such as *Hori* (Premchand's *Godan*), the students erect a village. They shape an environment and see how environment shapes homes, shapes minds: how the huts huddle under the protective shoulder of a hill, the sheltering shade of trees; how the well becomes the focal centre of village life; how class and caste barriers affect topography; how the poor herd together in wretched closeness and the rich keep their distance; how the very dust of a landscape coats the language of a people. Broken backs, chapped palms, bodies wrung out of sweat, hands caked with cowdung: the huts take shape, till they and the fields, the buckets, the utensils begin to resemble their owners. Is this a mere stage set, scenically arranged, to create superficially a realistic effect?

'Surely more than that: these homes, fields, trees, lanes, well, shop, together inscribe the shape of human relations: establish the contours of village society. How social institutions are formed, how they serve or suppress the individual; the zamindari, caste, panchayat, joint-family, moneylending and dowry systems; the treatment of widows; the problems of illiteracy and urbanisation; the conflict between the generations; agricultural methods, animal husbandry-all

these need to be studied even more than the ... paraphernalia associated with the stage' ('Theatre Education').

The idea of learning through productions, an essential part of the so-called Alkazi model- was meant to take the students back to the sociology of theatre practice and the rediscovery of theatre through a process of 'living' it and not merely 'performing' it. Clearly, this particular concept of theatre education had its base in the Nehruvian idealism of the fifties and sixties.

Alkazi productions are remembered as gigantic spectacles. The 'theatre of spectacle' which kept Alkazi's work so much in the public eye had an interesting parallel in Indian politics. The Nehruvian project of modernization was already infused with spectacles-gigantic factories and dams (remember *Mother India?*), gorgeous republic day parades, son et lumieres at Red Fort and other national monuments, some of them conceived and executed by Alkazi, Tapas Sen and Kamad-all nationalist spectacles which signalled progress, prosperity, self-confidence and growth. There was an ideological need for larger-than-life spectacle to make the Nehruvian vision of progress visible to the public. Cultural activities in various fields were also gaining much needed visibility through the institutionalization of the widely publicized Akademi awards in all fields of art and literature. Alkazi's productions were retained and remembered as 'spectacular' in the popular psyche because they were seen as an expression of the same ideals of the 'modern' in Indian theatre.

Alkazi was criticized later for ignoring the reality of the Indian situation, which consisted of struggling groups and inadequate theatre facilities in small cities, rendering such big productions an impossible dream. This led to the belief that NSD graduates would be unable to cope with this reality. But in a 1992 report on NSD, Gayatri Sinha observed,

. . . (a) significant aspect of the Alkazi style was to work with the inexpensive and commonplace without looking cheap or tacky even though in public memory he is widely identified with the theatre of spectacle ... It is important to note here that Alkazi's intentions for building the Meghdoot theatre (the open air theatre) — of encouraging students to do theatre on shoe string budgets, preferably in the regions that they come from-has not fired the imagination of school graduates' ('The Effect of the Electronic Media on the National School of Drama: A Report': unpublished paper).

In 1977 B. V. Karanth succeeded Alkazi and introduced a major change in the course curriculum. He dropped the specialization programme, an important part of the Alkazi model,

and introduced a three year integrated course instead. Karanth felt that NSD should decentralize and reach the regions where training was much needed. For a country of about 90 million people the twenty-odd seats offered each year by NSD is an absurdly inadequate number. Moreover, training is given in Hindi-the 'national' language which is not spoken by a vast number of Indians-while applications are accepted from all over India. Karanth himself had a non-Hindi background and was aware of the needs and frustrations of theatre people outside the Hindi belt. In 1978 a new department was created by him for an extension programme and for the first time NSD staff and students moved out of New Delhi and interacted with theatre workers, groups, and traditional, folk performers of different regions.

NSD has repeatedly been accused of a bias towards Hindi-speaking students. This has created a lot of tension within and outside the campus. This language problem-the dominance of Hindi over other 'regional' languages-has its roots in the role played by language in Indian politics in the sixties and later. By the time Karanth took over from Alkazi the collapse of the Nehruvian dream was near total. The 'language question' had already become central to Indian politics and the anxieties voiced by Karanth were in consonance with the language politics of the time. The dichotomy between the 'national' and the 'regional', the clash of identity and self-image and their politicization ran counter to the Nehruvian project. In the hands of the post-Nehru generation of Indian politicians, the cultural identities of non-Hindi speaking people were constantly assaulted, both directly and indirectly, by the imposition of Hindi through government controlled media like radio and television, and through various policies. There still is a strong north/south, centre/state divide over the issue of language, and every attempt to impose Hindi as *the* national language on an unwilling section of the population is still countered and eventually politicized for the benefit of power/pressure groups.

At the NSD level the language policy had a de-stabilizing effect on the non-Hindi speaking students. The case of H. Kanhailal exemplifies this. Kanhailal, who later became one of Manipur's most important directors, had to leave the NSD. Talking about his frustration he explained,

'I am really a product of the semi-tribal, semi-feudal, semi-urban society of a depressed state ... an enthusiast who dropped out of the National School of Drama due to the lack of knowledge of Hindi particularly, and [the] unsuitability of the system in general. No doubt all these frustrations deeply moved me in the late sixties and early seventies, leading to the search

for a new theatrical 'idiom' which could provide an outlet to channelize the silent feelings of a depressed and neglected people. As I strongly felt for my 'ethnicity', in order to identify my cultural roots, I began to steep [myself] in 'tradition' ('The Progress of a Creative Journey Towards the Theatre of Transcendence'-an unpublished paper presented at the 'Actor at Work' seminar organized by NCPA, Bombay, in end 1991).

Clearly when Kanhailal talked about 'ethnicity' or rediscovering his 'cultural roots' he was desperately eager to create a new language of theatre, distinctly different from the so-called NSD model, to decolonize himself in a very specific way. Kanhailal was talented enough to transform his frustration into creativity and was able to create his own form of dramatic expression. But he remains an exception. There was, and still is, a belief that NSD serves only the so-called Hindi belt and not the nation as a whole.

Since Karanth's time the decentralization of NSD has been discussed and debated at different forums, and the need for such a move very strongly recommended by many. Though the Report of the Haksar Committee, which undertook a careful study of the functioning of the Akademis and the NSD, was shelved by the central government, interestingly enough one of its proposals—the decentralization of NSD—was later sanctioned by the same government. In March 1987 P. V. Narasimha Rao, then Minister of Human Resource and Development and himself a man from the south, officially announced the government's decision to open regional centres in different cities. Seven years later, in 1994, with the formation of the very first Regional Research & Resource Centre at Bangalore, the NSD finally took the decisive step to 'decentralize', to reach out to the regions and to cater to the specific and immediate need of the theatre workers in the region. Coincidence or not, this happened only after Rao became the Prime Minister of India.

The decentralization programme has immediately triggered off a discussion in the media on NSD and its various problems. One of the neglected aspects of the decentralization programme is the problem of unemployment of trained theatre workers which will increase significantly when more regional centres are opened and full-time courses offered. Already many NSD graduates have found it almost impossible to take up theatre as a profession since the very concept of professional theatre has now ceased to exist in most parts of the country. As a direct result of the present decentralization programme the unemployment problem will become even more crucial.

One obvious option is the electronic media, although it cannot and should not replace theatre; but even there the Hindi-speaking graduates have a better chance. The NSD Alumni Association has already appealed to Doordarshan 'to think in terms of utilising creative personnel from institutions such as NSD (*National Herald*, 4 Jan.'94). The *Business Standard*, on the other hand, commented that the NSD was 'serving more as a training ground for celluloid than for theatre' (*Business Standard*, 19 Dec.'94). The question is whether NSD will become a prime 'career institute' serving the electronic media, or whether it will be able to continue to serve the cause of theatre. Amongst various comments on the Approach Paper on Culture Policy received by the Department of Culture is one drawing the attention of the policy makers to the core of this problem: 'No policy on culture will be able to contain the forms unleashed by economic change, particularly with the spread of consumer ethos, in isolation from economic policies.'

However, the Approach Paper on a National Culture Policy prepared in 1992 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development's Department of Culture was one of the rare occasions when the government showed an interest in formulating its policies towards culture. But it has never become an official document. It has never reached the public. One might argue that this signifies the government's unwillingness to debate its cultural policies in concrete terms in a public forum. The Paper showed that despite various efforts, government funding in culture remained much lower than expected: around 0.11 per cent till 1992. Yet, the Approach Paper attempted to delineate 'a blueprint for areas which need urgent attention and public support'. The NSD decentralization programme is apparently in line with the Approach Paper, which stated: 'The old notion of patronage should be replaced by that of public support and there should be an effective coordination between the activities of various agencies in the states and the Centre with a clear recognition that more than anything else decentralization is a key factor in cultural promotion.'

The regional centre at Bangalore is at present working on a 'pilot project' with an annual budget of rupees 251akhs, and according to Mr D. Ankur, director of the centre, in the first two years it would like 'to study the requirements of the southern region and also potential talents in the area, through short term training courses in Drama of six to ten weeks. Such a study would help decide what type of training could be introduced for a two-year foundation course' (*The Hindu*, 27 Dec. '93). This sounds like a very simplistic method of assessment and as we can see,

a very legitimate fear has already been triggered off by the establishment of the first regional centre. After all, NSD intends to found regional centres only in cities like Calcutta, Bombay, Bangalore and Varanasi or Patna, where regional theatre has a significant presence, and not in places where modern theatre hardly exists. The decentralization programme now being implemented by NSD has been understandably criticized by many theatre activists, specially by those who are doing theatre mainly in regional languages. They see the decentralization as a threat, as an 'invasion' of a region's language based theatre. According to them a national institution like NSD with its resources, technology and power is bound to de-stabilize and dominate the regional theatres. The old fear of the imposition of Hindi has been replaced by the fear of the imposition of an administrative system from above. In an article published in the Bangalore edition of the *Indian Express* (29 May '94). K. V. Subanna wrote, the decisions will be taken at Delhi. The people at Delhi may graciously hear our suggestions. But they are not bound by them. But we are bound by their decisions and programmes. Those decisions and programmes are authoritatively imposed upon us, on our soil. Thus, in the long run NSD's decentralization move is bound to encroach on cultural territories of the other. The decentralized programme is bound to become anti-democratic.'

Citing the example of Kannada Sahitya Parishat's decentralization programme Subanna feared that, 'This kind of decentralisation becomes a strong administrative system which binds the component units together and controls them. This is in fact not decentralization, nor is it democracy.' The Approach Paper on Culture Policy has actually cautioned the policy makers against giving 'any single direction or ideological orientation or prescrib(ing) any standards in culture...' The Haksar Committee has also observed:

'In several states the chairpersons of the Akademis are political personalities, and there are also other factors which tend to encroach upon the freedom of the institutions. Though constituted as autonomous bodies, many of them seem ... to be functioning as limbs of the state governments.'

This politicization of autonomous bodies, along with the bureaucratization of culture, will eventually subvert the most liberal of institutionalized initiatives. This confirms what art policy expert John Pick has observed: that 'art policy constantly alludes to arts management practices as if they are an entire substitute for art' (*The Arts in a State*, Bristol, 1988). One of the options suggested in the Comments on the Approach Paper is not to build 'gigantic edifices'

(NSD has 175 non-teaching staff plus faculty plus guest lecturers for 60 students) but to 'encourage non-governmental agencies to work in the field of culture'. Subanna, along with some other theatre activists, had actually suggested to the Haksar Committee that

'[NSD] should not create a 'school of theatre' of its own and try to impose it as a model on regional theatres. For this reason the NSD should not engage itself in imparting basic theatre education. Instead it should leave the basic theatre education to regional institutes and provide opportunities for special or advanced training and research to the theatre workers trained by regional or state institutions ... Thus NSD should only be the centre of special or advanced study and research' (*Indian Express*, Bangalore, 29 May '94). The present debate on the so-called decentralization of NSD has drawn our attention to a very fundamental but much neglected argument: that cultural policies should not forget for a moment that any form of culture has a major, complex role to play in the lives of people who actually create and nurture the arts. An art like theatre serves something greater than the objectives defined by a power group and standardized by managerial practice. Any form of standardized training can only serve standardized needs and goals. Central to the present debate on the real objectives behind the cultural policies of the government, and how a national institution like NSD has become instrumental in implementing them, is the predominant frustration and sense of loss of identity in the regions. From an apparently apolitical debate concerning theatre education we have moved into more crucial territory—the making and unmaking of cultural policies in India. Institutionalized theatre education is just one of its manifestations.

Perspectives on the National School of Drama

Kirti Jain, Director, National School of Drama, talks to STQ.

STQ We know that the course curriculum at the NSD has gone through some major changes in the pass. Why and how did NSD's course curriculum change?

KJ: Briefly, in Mr. Alkazi's time I think the primary model being used was the British model. Also in the way the institution was organized, and since Mr. Alkazi was a very good teacher, I think that the entire training tended to be much more focussed on him, through him, as an individual. And also most of the exposure of the students or the learning of the students tended to take place through the production that he did with the students. At that point very few people used to get invited as guest directors. When I was a student only one or two guest directors came during that entire period of three years. Therefore it was very focused on his methodology and in the training also the emphasis was taken away from classroom teaching to productions. That is one way of giving training which I feel is much more of a repertory company's way of training. It largely falls into the guru-sishya mode where training happens through watching the guru at work, or working in his crew. Classes were there-but they were made superfluous. It is not that [this approach] did not add an input, but as a result of it naturally there was one mode in which people acted, there was one method to which they got exposed. The wide variety that is India, you know, was really not brought to the students. Also what happened was that-Alkazi had a double task and we must appreciate that-he had also to give some kind of respectability to theatre, establish some kind of prestige for NSD. Therefore he had to give a lot of attention to very prestigious productions. Now the moment a theatre training programme is linked to very professional production it certainly does give the discipline of working towards perfection, finesse and detail. But it also does another thing: it gives opportunities only to those students who are good actors and open enough anyway. The possibility of non-Hindi actors getting a major opportunity or the possibility of an inhibited actor being allowed to explore were very slight. I could understand this because it was a kind of double compulsion under which the institution was running at that point. But it was also to do with mode—the guru-sishya mode. When Mr. Karanth came [as Director], I think that there was a major shift in terms of actually

institutionalizing, seeing to it that every student got an opportunity, seeing to it that various other kinds of expression found their way to the drama school.

STQ: Is it because he himself came from a non-Hindi speaking region?

KJ: No, I think because of folk and so many other things which formed his kind of theatre ... I think it was just to do with greater openness and because he had worked in the field, involving larger numbers of people in the whole process, and the shift was in the way the institution would run. I feel that was a major step and if only it could have been well consolidated at that time we would have been in a different position today. But while all that vision was—to my mind—in the right direction, I feel that the consolidation did not really take place. As I said, some of the important things which did happen at that time are: every student would get an opportunity to explore, much more emphasis started going into individual classrooms, the responsibilities of the teachers increased and guest teachers and directors would come in from different parts of the country and work and finally the whole idea of a theatre which includes music, movement—it was a different kind of theatre than what Alkazi had done. The kind of theatre Mr. Karanth does—that vision of 'Indian' theatre came into the picture. Plus also reaching out ... the extension idea began with him and Bansi Kaul at that point ... the need to reach out to the regions and give them some training. So the opening out in terms of vision started there.

Subsequently I think nobody really got time to consolidate that because people were there for a very short time, each Director for not more than two years.

Now I have also seen the unrest, the frustrations of the students, and since my involvement with the institution has been since I was a child I really felt very concerned. If something could be done even within our own framework, where we give more options to the students after they leave the institution, the frustration would be much less. You can imagine that an intensive three-year course where they are working from morning to night without any holiday, without any vacation, is something at the end of which they would expect some kind of opportunities outside opportunities to express and experiment with what they have learnt. There are none, as you know. There are no professional opportunities in theatre outside NSD. That frustration has to be understood.

The other thing I felt was that the teaching process has got diluted over a period of time. That needed to be intensified. There is a more open language of theatre needed. No

conscious thinking had gone into it. What kind of acting, the direction in which we have to move ... there was frequent 'looking in to' the syllabus. But every time, I think, there were only cosmetic changes. The input remained by and large the same in terms of theory; the difference is brought by the person who does it. There might be a heading called improvisation. Now it depends on who is coming in to do the improvisation—that might make a difference in the nature of that input; . . . it is very individual specific. Another thing is that because the entire training process in Mr. Alkazi's time was centred around the production, none of us were really aware of any teaching methodology in relation to any of these practical subjects, whether it was voice training or acting training, movement training. Whatever was happening was happening in terms of productions. The rest was so unrelated, made so inconsequential that somehow it never registered. It did not make any impact. There was no methodology linked with the mainstream work of the drama school at that point, the productions. So no training methodology evolved, no teachers were created.

When I took over, these were the gaps which I could see very clearly. I realized that unless a next line of teachers is created, unless there is a body of people who share a similar methodology, how would this training process take place? It can't be so individual-centric, where everything collapses when the Director goes away. How do we go about doing that? We needed a teachers' training programme, we needed to evolve methodology in all areas of theatre training and find a method which would intensify the training process and really bring the focus back to the classroom rather than production because it is only in the classroom that more risks can be taken, it is only in the classroom that opportunities can be given and more explorations happen. A production is ultimately geared to a public performance and the moment you have to be geared to a public performance (even though the emphasis changed in Karanth's time, so that even if a student is not good enough he had to be given an opportunity at least once, even then) there are limitations. If a person's language just cannot be understood at all by the audience you cannot give him the main role. Yes, he would get a role which he had not been getting earlier. But even then you could not give him the central role. These were the risks one was playing with. So this focus on classroom work was very significant and keeping this in mind once again we went through this whole exercise of looking at the syllabus, where do we need to change focus, where do we need to identify what is going to be specific to drama school.

The systematic looking at indigenous training methods has not really happened because we have a very small staff. For that staff to really take it on as a research project would mean a lot of involvement in terms of time, to look at it in depth and then cull out what can be of use to the modern actor. Because the whole methodology can't be used as it is. For example, the Koodiyattam voice training system has great value to a certain extent in the modern theatre context. Now to know what those elements are needs somebody to really work on it.

The idea of the regional centre was also this. Once these centres start, the kind of people who are brought in to the training system can maybe themselves take on the task of exploring the regional forms and some training methodologies can be taken, or some of the traditional people can be taken into the training programme and from there some other person may be able, to watch and take what might be of value. So the idea actually was, specially to me, that regional centres will actually enrich us at NSD in giving us this naturally.

I would like to explain what I mean by 'naturally'. As a national school we are under attack on both fronts. If we are sort of neutral and not aligned with any region we are seen as redundant almost, or elitist, or westernized. If we do align we are immediately seen as aligning with a particular region. Also, the students feel insecure. 'Oh, the tradition of this region is very strong and my region has nothing to offer.' I think that such psychological problems are always there. We really have to tread very carefully. We have to incorporate it into our own teaching pattern once the essence is culled out. So that it is not 'a form' that is being brought into the mainstream teaching methodology but that elements of the teaching methodology are coming from different regions. That is the real problem, I think. Even in the politics of it we feel sort of cornered on every front.

STQ Do you have a very well defined methodology?

KJ The course is a kind of eclectic mixture—there are elements which we take from sometimes the British model, sometimes the East European model, sometimes the Indian model and it is a mixture of all this which is coming into the training process. But what was bothering us for quite some time before I took over was this strange kind of homogenization of the actor once he came into the institute. We were conscious of that and we worried about why this is happening and is there a way of preventing it. But you know that all institutes tend to homogenize to a particular

extent. For instance, there was an actor from Karnataka, belonging to a traditional family, who had tremendous spontaneity, energy and a different kind of expression, his whole body language was different. We were worried about what would happen when we studied texts like Chekhov or Shakespeare, how he would deal with it and what would happen to him vis-a-vis the whole class? Everybody is very fascinated with realism and there is a real pressure from the students to work on the realistic mode. When he came, in the first year it was all right, but by the time he reached the second year, when more text-based work begins, you could already see that his whole personality was kind of evaporating. It was a very disturbing experience to watch that boy's energy completely dissipate, partly out of confusion, partly out of a lack of ability to cope with what was happening, and partly to do with a completely different system. The training at NSD does not handle a traditional mode, it cannot handle a traditional actor. In the second year we had to tell him, 'Please go back. Relax for one year and then think about whether you really want to come back. Because this is harming you. And we do not want your confidence to go, because you are very good. Whatever you were doing, you were very good. What you cannot do is the NSD training. But then this is not meant for you, it won't really help you very much.' But he felt that it was a defeat. He agreed and went back for a year and came back slightly more composed. But all the same there was a transformation in the kind of energy that he gave off. Now this is only one example, there are several. Subsequently I try to see to it that we do not take any traditional actor, because I feel that it will be very harmful. What we did was that whenever there was a promising actor from a traditional family I insisted. . . 'I feel that you are good, you can be taken into drama school, but we will not do it because it is harmful and after the training, you will want to do something else. What happens to your form? It needs to be developed. Secondly, it might also harm you as a person, as an actor.' He said that he wanted to develop technically etc. I said, 'Whatever you need we will come and give it to you in your region, we will do a workshop in relation to your form, so that whatever inputs your form needs to evolve to develop, we will come and do it there. But please do not insist on coming to drama school because it is harmful at this point of time.' Therefore we did not take him. But the desire to come to the drama school remained and he kept on applying. What I am trying to say is that it is not that one is insensitive to these problems of what this training can do to an actor. This does not apply to an urban actor, but to the traditional mode.

We also felt that since people are coming from very small towns, from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds, a homogenization at a personal level was taking place. They wanted to follow the modes of what they thought Delhi was all about. That was modernization and what young people respond to. Then we introduced a very significant chunk in the first year of focus on the self-in the entire training process in the first year, whether in acting work, body work, or theory. In the theoretical classes we deal with the mode of diary and autobiography and how it related to theatre and theatre history. And the value of being oneself, the value of retaining the essential self. This was emphasized through acting classes, through direction classes, production classes, design classes and voice classes. You have to first recognize your own body language, which is specific to you and your work and your region and culture. Don't try to change that because it is that which gives you your specific character. I must say that it worked, it really worked. From day one we were kind of hammering it in that don't change yourself because what you see around you looks very sophisticated, or modern. If you will have any value as a director, an actor, as a designer it will be to do with your culture-specificity. Therefore I think in the last five years you can see the results—the specificity remained in seventy per cent cases. The individual expressions remained, we have been able to instill the confidence in being oneself. That started showing in their work. While they work very well as a collective, at the same time they are very strong as individual performers or individual directors. I really value this input and I am glad that we have put it in that manner. In terms of acting, voice and body I think it is a reshuffling of the emphasis. Ultimately everything works if you know your body. The essential body language, the essential voice qualities which relate to the culture specificity have to be retained. That was one crucial thing which I think made a change.

The other thing we tried to do was to bring a lot of younger people into teaching, to bring in not only fresh ideas but also freshness of approach and also greater energy, idealism, commitment. I think this also changed the atmosphere in which one works. You do not follow the same routine every year. The younger people did bring in new energy and infused new life in the institution. I think the large number of visiting faculty of primarily the younger generation has been an extremely valuable input. It automatically responds to the changing theatre scenario. I believe everything we are bringing in now automatically deals with looking at acting, direction, design in a different manner. The whole emphasis at NSD from day one is to make them shake off the lethargy the education system generates in them not to think, just to accept—and we

really have to shake it off. It takes a solid six months at least just to tell them that it will not do to just repeat what I am saying. You have to have your ideas, your views and your assessments. And that is very tough. The whole education system completely kills the thinking process.

STQ: Did all this influence the basic course structure in a significant way?

KJ: As I said, we decided on a different design. The primary inputs remained the same—Indian theatre history, world theatre history, classical Indian theatre, scenic design, lighting etc. The subjects and actual inputs also remained the same because you have to deal with essentials of scenic design, essentials of lighting—all those things remained the same. But the approach changed. Along with that I think the energy also changed. The whole first year is designed to emphasize the self through various kinds of work in whatever area we are dealing with. It is primarily foundation work in all areas. It is a consolidated course and they are dealing with fifteen-sixteen subjects. Everyone has to go through all the basic subjects. This basic orientation has always remained part of the school curriculum. Keeping the Indian situation in mind we cannot afford to have students entering into a specialization straight away because when they go out they might have to deal with everything, or something other than their own specialization. It is only from the second year onward that they get into specialization. In fact the Indian situation is kept in the mind to the extent that even when they go into a specialization we keep on giving them inputs on other specializations so that they have these various options for survival. The second year is designed primarily as a kind of looking back. So we have our classical Indian tradition, we have the Greek classical tradition, we go back to medieval Indian drama, to the Shakespeare age and various forms that existed. Both at the theoretical and practical level all the classes are geared to looking at the classical in the first term and in the second term looking at the medieval, both Indian and the world.

Here the only change I did make was to make sure that every actor should have performed in at least one Sanskrit play. Earlier we used to have one Sanskrit play in ten to twelve years. But now we made it essential. The focus is not on doing it the way *Natyashastra* describes, but to look at the text and see where it leads you. Therefore the focus is to get the kind of director who will be able to relate these texts to modern experience. That has also helped their own perception of what the Sanskrit theatre was all about. The question is, how do we define the Indian character of ... let us say the character of this institution which is training modern Indian actors? What is so

specific about this training which will characterize it as 'Indian'? This has nothing to do with any worry over identity, but I thought that there has to be something which really defines it in terms of focus—and I felt that the focus is at least on knowing our tradition well. So the entire tradition part of it is that students go to one region in the second year, any region, and work with traditional forms and artists of that region, live with them, learn some of the skills from them, all under the supervision of a modern director who then finally does a production with them incorporating ideas and concepts or some elements of these traditional forms. Once again, to make the students sensitive first to the living conditions and the working conditions of the traditional artists, and second how and in what way a modern artist can relate or should relate to or has related to the traditional forms, and to see if there is any continuity in our own experience of life with what is shown in the traditional form. For certain students that experience becomes a very valuable input in the sense that they see it from a different perspective. The normal perspective is that when you relate to a traditional form you usually use the narration, the *sutradhara*, or tune of a particular folk form. But the basic concepts, say, as a performer the kind of energy that a Chhau performer brings in—how does a modern actor use that energy in his own performance? Can he really learn anything from a Chhau performer at that level rather than just learning his way of standing, or his way of fighting?

STQ: In a case like this, how do you deal with the problem of the body? Students from different regions have very, very different bodies and it is difficult for a person from Manipur to learn *kalari*, a martial art of Kerala. How do you handle this at the workshop level?

KJ: As I said, at a traditional theatre workshop where the students go for a month and a half and stay there, it is primarily to do with interaction with the particular form of the region. Learning the skill is only a very small part of it. Even that is to actually get them involved, it is more participatory. The idea is to work under a particular guru for a month to forty days and to see the intricacy, to get a feel of that form, but ultimately what is important is how the director who goes there to supervise incorporates it, what understanding of this traditional performance he gives them as modern theatre persons. Once the actor relates to one traditional form in whatever way, I think he gets an essence of all traditional forms. For

specific training in the skills of a traditional form he must go outside. It is not possible for the institute to provide such training.

STQ: You have talked about the need of an awareness in the Indian theatre situation. One common criticism against NSD is that its training is to a large degree impractical. The NSD training is given under 'ideal' situations where they get everything they need to study and practise, you provide the best possible facilities to the students. But NSD has failed to understand the regional situation where one is forced to work with minimum facilities and this has not been highlighted in the training programme. Senior theatre people of different regions find that NSD graduates fail to cope with the lack of facilities and start complaining and thus usually face rejection at the regional theatre level.

KJ: I do not agree with that. I personally believe that in a training situation a student really should be given the opportunity to explore to the fullest. Because otherwise it can also become a refuge for a student to feel that if I had the means I could have done this, this, this. I think the facilities have to be provided. You have no option. This is debated *ad nauseum* even at our own meetings as well as in the faculty meetings. It is not that we are unaware of the actual situation at the ground level. But what is really advisable at the training stage? And we operate at that level. At one level the students would see and work in situations where all the facilities—not really all—are provided so that they can really experiment and explore. But then there are levels at which the students work where the budget given to them is only two hundred rupees and they have to do a production. It is done with this view that when you go outside you won't get the money or the resources and therefore you have to find a way of working within this amount. Well, the amount has been increased from two hundred to three and finally five hundred this year. But there are these limitations. I am also quite aware of the fact that when they go to the regions they come up with the notion of, say, a set for 20,000 rupees. But I think that this is in the initial phase where they have seen the possibilities and desire to explore further. There are also limitations of how much opportunity they can get and how much work they can do even within the system. So at the regional level they probably want to try it out, maybe even show that this is what we have done. I think it is very natural for a young person to feel that. Now to be hostile to it is not very justified. One must also recognize the fact that the

theatre people who are working in the normal day-to-day situation and grappling with it are already in a system where they know that nothing else can happen and there is no point even in thinking about it and they won't think about it. But here this graduate after three years of intensive training comes back with all these possibilities; and it is not that they were not taught how to do it just as effectively without means. They were also taught that, and made to do it also. They also know that it has its own value. But I feel that out of excitement they feel like doing it big in the initial phase. If only there were people who could explain to them that look this is not possible here, it might just be all right. But I think they face a tremendous amount of hostility. 'Oh, he is from NSD, he needs a big set.' I think it has to do with this relationship, that they appear to be more privileged because they had this training, and so the local people have this resentment. It is a psychological thing on both sides. I can only see it as the impracticality and excitement of young minds who have learnt and seen and been exposed to so much and naturally want to try it out.

All our students have proved that ultimately they learn to live with the ground reality and do it quite well when they are allowed to work. It is the hostility that makes them aggressive. It is not that I am defending the NSD graduates when they are arrogant, and often they are unduly arrogant, in the sense that they feel they know everything. But they are much less aggressive in situations where there is receptivity. I have been requesting people at the regional level to help and give moral support to a graduate who comes back. As it is he feels that he is cut off and finds it very difficult to get rooted again and we want them to go back to the regions they belong to. Sometimes with a great deal of difficulty we get them to go back to the regions and they get frightened of the response and run back. Reversely, to give you an example, in Punjab people were very helpful to a pupil who passed out of NSD and he was given some workshop and directorial work initially. Subsequently he is not only supporting himself, he is helping other groups whenever he is required. Now he has become a part of the community because at the initial stage he was helped and therefore he feels a commitment. Wherever this has happened, I feel that our students become much more natural in their expression, they find it easier to adjust to the circumstances. The problem arises because of insecurity on both sides.

STQ: Do you think that NSD trains its students for a specific kind of theatre or are they flexible enough to do anything?

KJ: We prepare them for any kind of theatre. Of course there will be individual choices. But as far as preparations go a wide variety of inputs come into the training. It is done primarily with the idea that different students might choose different things because the Indian theatre scene is so varied, unlike the theatre scene in other parts of the world. We have completely realistic and naturalistic plays in the proscenium, we have plays in the absurd mode, we have folk theatre coming in, we have take offs from that, we have extremely modern kind of work and also regional stylizations. Our task becomes more difficult than any other drama school in the world. There is no specific linear training that we can give. What we want to achieve in three years from the basic training of theatre, basic awareness of theatre and the basic unlearning of the education system is to equip them to deal with any of these kind of theatres. Each one might choose something different, each one might require to do something different. So the training is really diversified and it kind of equips them to handle different approaches, different methods, different styles, different kinds of texts

STQ: Does NSD privilege a particular kind of theatre over others? You have mentioned the pressure to do the realistic kind of acting which is probably related to the fact that most media work is done in the more realistic form of acting. Probably they want to go into television later.

KJ: It might be partly that and partly it has to do with the fact that a methodical training process in acting has not been evolved in any other method; not really the Stanislavski method but the take off from the Stanislavski mode. I think it is to do with the fact that as modern actors they do not feel equipped to deal with modern plays till they have the training to deal with realistic plays. I think it is to do partly with this notion and partly what they have done beforehand, what they have perceived as theatre. Also there is no other methodology evolved so far that deals with a modern theatre actor. What we do is also a kind of basic variation on the method acting. The nature of exercises changes in our culture and the approach to work also changes. But the basic areas of training for the actor remain the same. The essential thing is the wide variety of inputs. We select a director from the point of view of the different inputs he will bring. Suppose in a particular phase they have to do a Sanskrit play and we feel that this director is equipped to handle a Sanskrit play with a modern sensibility then we don't decide the text for him, he should

choose the text because ultimately the director has to feel charged about the text before he starts working. So the freedom of selecting the text is given and it is only the broad framework that is provided. Only in the third year do we actually leave them free to do any kind of modern production. Once again the guideline to the director is that the focus has to be on teaching, on the process, and any modern play which will be challenging for the director can be chosen. We try to provide a wide variety.

Because we do not have enough faculty we have to depend on visiting faculty. We have developed a core group in some areas of teaching through this process of sharing and workshops and things like that. But as freelancers they may or may not be free when we want them and therefore the training gets lopsided from year to year depending on the availability of the kind of people we may want at a given time. That is the major loophole in the present training pattern. But other than that I personally feel quite satisfied with the kind of development one notices in the students, the kind of drive we are able to maintain, that largely, in my view, has to do with bringing in younger, fresher blood.

STQ: If there was no NSD at all, no such concept of a national institution, how do you see the difference it would make to contemporary theatre? I am asking you to evaluate the importance or relevance of the entire concept. We already have strong regional theatres and people working at different levels. Do you still feel it is important to have something like the NSD?

KJ: I feel it is important in the modern context. It is important because things are getting more and more professionalized. People no longer have the time to learn through experience only. Training plays a very important role in ... sort of ... honing the skills of the actor, whether it is imagination or concentration or application of imagination and the skill that is used, the various tools of an actor. Unless they have control over that and unless they are trained in using their imagination-I think very often these things take a very long time and they may not get an opportunity. So I do not agree with the school of thought that says training in theatre is not essential. Why is it not said of music, or dance? Why is it only said of theatre? This is something I have not really been able to figure out. Earlier, training was also training, but it was over a longer period of time by watching, participating, doing. But where is the time today to go through that?

I also think there is a limitation in that method. Once again you only get to know one kind of theatre, one way of working, which was the problem in the earlier training mode at NSD. But in today's world there is so much diversity and so many things happening at the same time, I think people need to be exposed to a larger number of approaches and methods and styles and ways of working. I think it's only in the institutional mode that that can happen in a systematic manner. Apart from giving him the basic skills and competence to handle the task of acting or designing. Otherwise it will take 30-40 years for a person to train with three different people and learn their ways of working.

STQ: There is a feeling that NSD's contribution is more visible in film and television than in theatre. In the recent past the students also demanded that the NSD should stress film and television acting.

KJ: They are always keen on getting some exposure to these media, which we have been doing in any case in terms of a film appreciation course and a video orientation course. We had to accept the reality that there is no option open to many actors but to go into film and television.

Though we equip them, there is no scope to be a professional actor in theatre and survive. Unless there are professional repertories in every region—what I have been insisting on—I feel that the most important thing is to have one regional repertory at least to begin with so that those people in the regional theatre and those of the NSD graduates who want to continue serious theatre work should be able to get that opportunity. Till that comes up it will remain depressing for us. We give very intensive training and the students work really hard, knowing full well that theatre is not where they are going. The commitment to learn is important and I feel that a large number of people would want to continue in theatre had there been scope for it.

STQ: Reports in various newspapers seem to suggest that NSD's recent move to form regional centres is an act of intervention in a region's own theatre culture. It is, in fact, seen as a threat to a region's language-based theatre and its cultural specificities and felt that NSD-sponsored regional centres would ultimately impose on and destroy regional theatre. Why did NSD accept the recommendations of the Haksar Committee report which has not been accepted by the government?

KJ: Just to put the record straight, if you were to read the objectives of the National School of Drama when it was formed as an autonomous body you will find that it is mentioned that over a period of time regional drama schools will be opened so that theatre training can be given in its own environment. From then onward, because the NSD has to cope with the problem of getting students from all the regions for the twenty seats that we have, and has to deal with different language groups, different cultural groups and academic and social groups at the same time, this objective has been in our mind all the time. I think that it has been a very live issue, that it is necessary, that if not full theatre training, certainly the acting training has to happen at the regional level for it to become more culture-specific and for it to be able to happen in its own linguistic context. So this is an area which has been debated again and again in drama school, and I think that about ten years back this idea started getting consolidated and a whole scheme was prepared to open regional schools. Why it did not start at that time was probably to do with the fact that every director who came to the school did not have enough time to really implement what he or she had visualized. Also at that point it was felt—I remember being part of one of those meetings—that it was not very clear what the relationship of these regional drama schools would be to NSD. It was visualized at that point of time that there would be one or two years' training at the regional schools and then the students could get into NSD. But again the focus was not really clear. It was meant to be a general theatre training. I strongly felt that if we were starting in the region it should be more acting-specific because that's where more inputs are required.

STQ: ... and this training should be given in the regional language...

KJ: Yes. Therefore just to have a general training for one year and then let the students get into NSD wouldn't solve the problem of them doing their specialization in another language. Plus, how would you accommodate so many people when, say, ten regional schools are open? How would it operate, what would the logistics be? Due to several problems of this kind and lack of clarity I think the idea could not materialise. Subsequently, we picked it up again after the Haksar Committee recommendations. The report only reminded us that this was the only item on the agenda about which we had done nothing. At that point we discussed it in our academic council and a subcommittee consisting of regional representatives from all states was constituted and it met twice. Everybody kept on saying that there was a need for theatre training institutions

in all the regions and that seemed to be a primary focus. I, of course, felt that repertories are more required than regional training schools. Because what will happen to so many unemployed graduates? We have twenty graduates of NSD, who generally remain unemployed. There will be so many more and we know that at this moment theatre cannot absorb so many professionals.

But the regional experts were in favour of opening regional drama schools to give systematic training in theatre. At that point I also felt that we are at a point where we cannot cope with the demand for opening regional centres. Number one: there was not enough available by way of infrastructure and funds. The second problem was that we don't have enough teaching personnel for the NSD itself. I thought, how would these schools be manned? Who will run them? How? What will be the mode in which it will be run? Because I personally feel that each region has its own specific nature and requirement. Unless that is studied in detail by each region, or at each region, it is not really proper to start these regional schools. Therefore I proposed that in the first phase we should open centres which are called not drama schools, but Regional Resource Centres. To begin with, they would be situated in one part of the region so that they could interact better with theatre people and theatre workers, with experts in allied fields, and be able to assess, being closer to the ground reality of the region, the specific training needs of that region and organize short or long term training courses so that a better interaction with regional experts can take place. This is, in a way, a kind of decentralization of our present extension programme. So far we have been running theatre workshops which we started about three-four years back and we are conducting about thirty to forty workshops a year in different parts of the country. But sitting in Delhi, it becomes very difficult to monitor each workshop precisely. Secondly, it is very difficult to really assess what kind of workshop is necessary and thirdly, to involve the local theatre people and harness them to actually give the training. It becomes very difficult, very ad hoc—when you are able to locate somebody you bring him or her into the training process and if you are not then our own people do the training. So I felt that if somebody is situated closer to wherever the work is happening this interaction and involvement of local experts in the teaching process could actually happen. So I said that the first phase can be seen as a preparatory phase. The primary task of the regional centres will be to conduct the short and long term training programmes on the basis of some research done as to what the training needs are, who the people are who can be brought in to teach and so on.

STQ: Another criticism is that the director of the first regional centre in Bangalore does not know the local language—how can interaction and understanding of the cultural specificities of an entire region be possible without such knowledge?

KJ: Interestingly, most of the regional people insisted, 'Please do not keep a regional person as the director at least in the first phase because he will face too much pressure from the people around.' For example, the south zone centre is placed in Bangalore. It is supposed to cater to Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Andaman-Nicobar. They felt ... suppose there is a person from Karnataka heading the centre—the pressure from the Karnataka theatre community will be so great that he will not be able to really work in the region as a whole. Secondly, there are local politics everywhere and the theatre person taking the responsibility will be seen as part of this or that group. So it was a conscious decision taken at the meeting and on the advice of the theatre experts of that region, that the centre should not align itself with any given organization of that region. It should remain independent so that it can take independent decisions and so that other groups and other theatre people do not feel that it is part of a particular setup and that its access is limited to certain people.

STQ: But it has been pointed out by the Haksar committee that a practising theatre person will not be desirable as director.

KJ: Normally it would be a practising theatre person who would be able to not only design the training programmes but also conduct them at times, monitor them, give feedback to teaching personnel on teaching inputs and requirements. So it has to be a person who is sensitive to theatre requirements—either a theatre practitioner or a theatre academician sensitive to theatre practice, because our area is primarily theatre practice and we do not give academic training. So this was the demand from concerned people. For us it would be simpler if somebody from the region took over because he'd know the requirements much better. But it was decided that at least in the beginning we should have somebody from NSD. For instance, when it was discussed that Mr Karanth should head the Bangalore centre they said, 'No, send Mr Karanth to Calcutta but don't put him in Bangalore.' We do not have the personnel to head different centres.

The other thing they felt was that the linkages with NSD would be useful for the kind of pattern that has to be set, and since NSD is opening the centre, it has to have some kind of a

link. Also, NSD has the experience of handling training over a period of time and it might be better to be able to use that expertise as a starting point and then gradually evolve a design for the specific region. But you need a starting point and what would that be?

Now, about 'imperialism'—in a field like theatre in India, where we get students from all over the country, from the non-Hindi speaking states, if the approach of NSD was to impose Hindi on people, then I think that it would not have worked. People from other regions would not have really come here over a period of time. I think that it is the openness with which NSD operates, where the understanding of the commonalities is very important to preserve the individualities of the students in terms of their regional, natural, linguistic identities—I think it is the sensitivity to that which has really made NSD work. I keep saying in all forums that some of our brighter, I can even say brightest, acting students are from the non-Hindi-speaking regions. We used to wonder how come these people always emerge as better actors? I now understand that probably they do not have the facility of language and therefore they really harness the tools of body, emotions, voice, everything that they have at their disposal, to try and express a performance. So I feel that they develop much better. While they perform in Hindi, the emphasis, even when we are judging them or seeing their work, is really not on how well they speak Hindi. We see how well they perform, how imaginative they are, how well they use their skills, how well they apply these, what kind of richness is their own and how they bring it into the role they play.

STQ: So is language a secondary thing in your training process at NSD, compared to other skills?

KJ: Yes. You see, there is a whole area of training where language is important. But we know that it is difficult for a non-Hindi speaking student. It is a challenge to him. We are concerned. We tell the students, don't get tense about language. All we insist on is a working knowledge of Hindi when you get in. So that by hearing people, by seeing performances, by trying to read more, and some extra lessons, they will be able to pick it up. So that they should not feel frustrated when roles are given. In the first year they are able to pick up enough Hindi to handle performance.

As far as our own workshop programmes go, whenever we have held a workshop in a region, it is held in the language of that region. Most of the teaching experts garnered for that

workshop are local experts. It is only when we do not find local experts that we send somebody from Delhi or some other part of the country. Because we have a body of students from all over the country, and because through the students and through our work we have contacts all over the country, we are able to identify the specific need and the right person to help us conduct workshops. So, as far as our own approach is concerned, it really is not either Hindi-centric or any region-centric. But in the training itself, we give a lot of value to what is region-specific.

D. R. Ankur, Director of the first Regional Resource-cum-Research Centre of the NSD at Bangalore, talks to Jose George

JG: What is the relevance of the Regional Resource-cum-Research centre of NSD in Bangalore, when all the states of south India have their own Drama and Theatre departments?

DRA: [At NSD] we have only 20 seats. The students who speak regional languages have a disadvantage in trying to learn in Hindi and compete with Hindi students. A demand to decentralize the school was on for a long time and a committee was formed and it proposed four centres. Bangalore is the first. We will have the second centre in the East (Calcutta), the third in the West (Bombay/Pune), and the fourth in the North (Varanasi/Lucknow).

The idea of setting up these resource centres is to train people in their own regions. Each state should come forward to open repertory companies in collaboration with NSD, so that the students can be employed in these companies. Eventually the three year Diploma course of NSD will be abolished and the institution will be reshaped to give advanced training in specialized subjects.

Now, all over India, around 20 universities have theatre departments. But the irony of the situation is, even after getting a post-graduate degree from these universities, students are coming to NSD for a Diploma course. Recently a graduate of Calicut University School of Drama, joined our institution for a Diploma course. What does it mean? It means that nothing is happening in these universities! Theatre departments are working like any other department, whereas theatre is a field that

requires a different type of approach. It is a good sign that there are already institutions working in this area. NSD can provide experts to them. If you require our help, we are here to help. Now, in Andhra Pradesh, two universities have come forward to collaborate with us. In Kerala Calicut University came forward for this one-month-long workshop. Next month, we are going to Kollam (a southern district of Kerala) for a technical workshop. It is a positive sign that universities have started to rethink, to reorient themselves towards a more practical approach to theatre training. I welcome this step.

JG: You are basically a Delhi based theatre person. Why did NSD appoint you as Regional Director instead of appointing a south Indian theatre person who knows the theatre culture of the south? What is your special mission here?

DRA: There was a committee to look into this whole matter. In NSD we have an Extension Programme, and I was in charge of that. Since the regional centre is new and has to be established, NSD wanted a person who is familiar with this sort of programme to be the Director. In NSD I am a faculty member, and the Dean of academics. As a theatre director, I have exposure to the theatre of all states and I have worked in different languages. Keeping all these things in mind, the committee wanted me to take charge of this programme. The school entrusted the responsibility to me. I accepted it, though there was criticism. My tenure is for two years and one year is almost over.

Tell me, who could have headed this institution in the south? We considered a lot of names. They were not interested because they do not want to be tied to one place. The second generation is too young to take up this kind of challenging task.

JG.: There is an argument that the de-centralization programme of the NSD is an attempt to exercise its power over other regions and cultures. How do you react to this argument?

DRA: I don't agree. We know more about what is happening in Kerala than Kerala people know themselves. The young theatre persons have very little knowledge about their tradition, and about what is happening all over India—let alone the world. They have very abstract notions, but I am sorry to say that nothing concrete is emerging. We have IIT's, we have IIM's—there is no criticism against these institutions.

I think this venture of NSD's should be received wholeheartedly. Why did this institution come to Bangalore? Because of the zeal of our graduates in Karnataka. Karnataka has produced the maximum number of NSD graduates, about 40. They wanted this institution to be in Bangalore. This centre is for mutual interaction

B.V. Karanth talks to Biren Das Sharma

I joined NSD as Director in December 1977, and held the post for four years. At that time the school was already eighteen years old. I noticed that the graduates were not in touch with the school. On one hand I was thinking of building up a relationship with the ex-students, to make use of whatever they had learned, to keep alive in them what they had learnt, to refresh them. The other purpose was to reach those who wanted to study theatre in different corners of the country. After all, we have only one drama school in a vast country like India and the university theatre departments were not functioning properly. Yet I feared that though we have enough theatre enthusiasts we may not have enough full-timers who would really come to the school and give four years. I also had this occasional fear of supplying more than what is in demand, giving more training than we really needed. But training is very important. I knew this because I was in Gubbi Company, where there was no training at all. In the village I came from we only had natural training, environmental training. The kind of professional and systematic training one gets at NSD, I and some of my friends realized, was necessary for modern theatre.

But though we recognized its importance it was very difficult to get good teachers. This was the problem at the NSD. Who would be a teacher? The old teachers could not teach systematically. The teaching/ training systems of Meyerhold or Stanislavski had been developed further and are still being developed in other countries. This was not the case in India. So I thought that at least workshops could make people curious, interested in this. Today when we talk about workshop culture people often mock it, and they are partially right. Because an NSD graduate who has studied for three years and a participant who has attended a one-month NSD workshop are both NSD certificate holders. Both can claim that they were trained by NSD. But this is only natural. In the beginning actors refused to avail of training and learn systematically. Actors used to believe in their natural talent, the actor as a born artist. I don't believe this. One cannot be a born artist. There can be many problems, of attitude, of *sanskara*. To create the talent and the artist, you need training. Nowadays training has become faulty because it has become centralized. To solve this problem, I thought NSD should try to decentralize training, should move out, reach faraway places. The idea of workshops came from this thought. People come to NSD from different states. The biggest tragedy at NSD is that it severs the student's link with his own culture, his mother tongue. This is the most serious tragedy. Ideally the students should go

back and work in their own milieu, their own culture. After graduation their position will also be different from those who come from a Hindi background. A Hindi-speaking NSD graduate may easily get an opening in TV or film.

The question that was coming up again and again was, what did a NSD graduate do after s/he received a three-year training? For example, after this three-year training at the NSD I went to Sardar Patel School as a teacher. The reason was that with my training in theatre there was no question of getting a job. I got my job at the school because I am an MA in Hindi from Banaras. I also never thought of becoming a salaried theatre worker. At that time I thought that was a sin, a wrong thing to do. Of course I don't think like that now. Unlike now, there was no post of drama teacher in school at that time. But the principal of the school was himself trained in Germany. He gave me a chance to teach drama, use drama in the school. I used to teach Hindi, but at the same time I started experimenting, teaching language through drama. So I started using drama even in teaching idioms, words, synonyms. Then I started using drama proper in textbook lessons. Alkazi was very upset when he learnt that I had joined the school as a teacher. So I told him about my experimentation. I am giving this example to show that at that time NSD training could not help you earn a living. At Patel school I also had the freedom to give assignments to other NSD graduates because the principal was interested in my work. This was the first step. Otherwise it was really impossible for a trained graduate to get a chance to use his talent.

So, when I joined NSD as Director, I was lucky to study the whole thing once again. As the Director I hardly talked to the students. I was not comfortable with my Hindi while talking. Lecturing was really a problem for me. So, frankly speaking, at the drama school I learnt much more than the students. Earlier I was also learning from my experience at the Patel school. While working with students I learned to minimize the use of stagecraft, not using too many sceneries, using fewer properties, working more with human resource because you have so many students. I used to talk to the students for half an hour before starting production work: give them the basics of production, the ABC of acting, talk to them about the importance of several readings of the play before casting, how to read the play, and all this. Because of this, the whole idea of workshops, though it was production oriented at that time, started developing.

It was also to utilize our training. I know many graduates who have completely forgotten their training. We, the graduates of NSD, should utilize our training. Conducting workshops was a small first step towards that. When I became the director of NSD I really started conducting

intensive theatre workshops. The first workshop was held in Madurai. In Tamil Nadu the common belief was that the NSD was not for the Tamilians, not for those who speak Dravidian languages. So after joining NSD as Director I organized the first NSD workshop at Madurai University and Mr. Ramchandran, the Vice-chancellor at that time, helped us a lot. Bansi Kaul conducted this intensive workshop outside Delhi and that was the start in the Hindi belt. This was in my time. Later I took him as a professor of the extension programme, which was a new post I created. Then I thought, what else can be done outside the school? The second and the third workshops, if I remember correctly, were held at Rabindra Bharati University.

The Madurai workshop was the first of its kind out of Delhi and the Hindi belt. It was in 1978. The whole workshop was for ten weeks and we gave ten days for each subject. It was a fulltime workshop, like a course. The participants only had to bear their own expenses, the rest was taken care of by NSD. We took two-three hundred books, lots of slides, photographs. What I used to do was to take a technical instructor from outside, from a different language. For him interaction was necessary. But for everything else, I used to take local people, local teachers.

A theatre worker must know and learn some basic things and all we wanted to do was to speak about these. One cannot learn make-up or stage craft in ten days. The idea was not to teach, but to make the participants aware that these are the things one must study. One cannot design a set just like that, one must learn how to do it. The Madurai workshop really did help in that sense. Out of the thirty-odd participants two or three later joined the drama school. Even for that, to bring the right students to the drama school, such workshops proved fruitful. We even went to Sri Lanka. There were nine members in the core group. We went to Gauhati, Manipur, Vishakapatnam. Some of the workshops were disasters due to the non-cooperation of the local people. Out of ten such workshops even if two become successful I would take that as a positive sign.

[Such workshops] can contribute in terms of skill and techniques. But, even then, one can only be aware of the existence of certain skills and techniques, that these are useful. But only that. To get a comprehensive idea of make-up, stage design or costume you need experts. I think for technical subjects you can invite people from outside. When an outsider comes in and conducts a workshop the workshop itself gets some dignity, prestige. We conducted a workshop in Allahabad with Tapas Sen. People still remember this. It left an impression. The most

important of all is that it makes one aware of things one should learn. It makes one interested in the subject itself.

This experience of conducting workshops all over India influenced the structure of the NSD course in a limited way. For example, we insisted that the NSD student should work for at least three months with any local form of his or her choice. Before my time people like Dr Sivaram Karanth came to NSD and taught Yakshagana, Rohini Hattangadi came to teach Theyyam. Incidentally, for your information, Rohini was the first lady to play a female role in Yakshagana, though traditionally the male actor does the female role. All this really helped. But this was not regularized in a proper manner. After all, India is a vast country and there are so many forms.

In Alkazi's time there was a play called *Jasma Odan*, produced by the NSD Repertory Company which used to produce modern contemporary plays. *Jasma Odan* was a play in the Gujarati Bhavai tradition. But it was not in Bhavai style proper, it had been given a new meaning. Like Vijaydan Detha's stories. What he writes are Rajasthani tales, but they are, nevertheless, his own creations in a sense. But that does not mean that it should end there. It often tends to become a fashion once the critics start liking it. At the same time, there were things that went wrong, there were disasters. But in most cases they were mainly organizational problems, not related to theatre. What kind of problems am I talking about? Say, for example, Naseeruddin Shah. Many people, after becoming famous, do not keep up contact. But Naseer would come and spend time with the NSD students and work with them. This was very important for the students. But the risk is that it can be delayed or deferred because of his shooting schedules. He is a star. What happens then? In such a case, all the effort and money put into the workshop gets wasted. And mind you, we do spend money on the workshop. If you stage a play in a village you may not need to spend any money at all. You borrow furniture from the neighbours' houses, borrow *dhotis* and *sarees*. But once you try to regularize it, systematize it, it becomes expensive. This is bound to happen. Later, we actually stopped conducting workshops at the drama school. But now it has been reintroduced again. The other important point that comes to my mind is that the NSD has become a school for the Hindi speaking people. We have to take care of that. Unless you have theatre schools in every language ... because theatre training is basically connected with language. You cannot have a theatre without language. This is what I feel very strongly. What is acting? It is total human behaviour which includes gestures, postures,

expressions, speech, tonality-everything. This is not possible without language. When a Kannada-speaking person is made to speak Hindi it is bound to affect his own language and expression. The Delhi audience are kind enough to ignore/overlook this because they are now used to it. They know that students come from different language backgrounds and this will be visible in any NSD production. Students are bound to come from different states, you cannot stop that. The very idea that the drama school as a centralized body would take only twenty students from a big country like India sounds so strange. [When Alkazi left and I took over from him] first I wanted to make the school a bit more open to others. At times it created problems. But I was there only for four years and then I went to Bhopal, which was a completely new centre. They had to start from scratch. They had no trained actors. I insisted that there should at least be one year's training before we did any production. I am very lucky to be in touch with all major repertories in this country. The NSD repertory was actually designed by Alkazi-but he left halfway through. I had to apply all his schemes for the repertory. Earlier, repertory meant that the school students and the senior students or ex-students would work jointly. Alkazi also noticed that this had major drawbacks. It interfered with the school's regular work. There was even an instance of students submitting blank papers in the exam because they were not taught certain subjects. Then Alkazi thought that the repertory should be separated from the school (actually he wanted that from the beginning but the government didn't encourage it because they could not understand its usefulness). At Bhopal I started a new repertory not with students but with new people. Students were selected through vigorous interviewing. First we invited about 90 people out of 120 odd applicants. From this we shortlisted 30-32 people and then finally selected 20. It was a three-year workshop. Even at Rangayan, Karnataka, we have a four-stage selection process. First we try to understand what the applicant knows. If s/he has done anything in theatre s/he must show it. Secondly, try to make them aware of language-storytelling, improvisation etc. We try this at the group level first with, say, 50 people, then reduce the number to 25, then to 10-12 people, then to 6, 5, 3, 2 and finally 1. In Karnataka we had 200 applicants out of which we could only take 25 people. The first stage would take only five minutes. You have to answer five questions only. Then you have to act your own character for one minute. The second stage is recitation of poetry. Third, dancing and singing. This we need to judge the applicant's sense of rhythm and music. Fourth is improvisation. Fifth is speech and you have to utilize properties in an imaginative way. Let me give you an example. We call all the

participants on stage and there are two or three tables with some properties like a file, a pencil, a handkerchief, a box etc. on them. The students were told to make use of any of these in three different and creative ways. Even we do not know who is going to use which prop in which way. Mind you, they had to do it within one minute only. But we explained and demonstrated the concept beforehand.

I believe that there shouldn't be any test as far as training is concerned. Because the performance itself is the test. So for the first stage we give a five minute limit, but for the second stage we give 25 minutes. We also make a note of how one handles certain things, like how one enters and exits from stage. For this kind of observation five minutes are enough. Still, the whole process for a group of 90 may take seven days to finish.

I told you about the one year course I introduced in Bhopal. Later I felt that it was inadequate. In Rangayan, Mysore, I made it a three year course-actually six years, where the first three years are totally devoted to learning and the next three years to actor's training, learning to build characters. In the first three years we prepare the actors (Stanislavski's works are really important here), teach yoga and other physical training. There is no emphasis put on production. It's only training. Even when we take a play, we try to study how to use words. It is a form of training itself. After three years we take plays and work on characters, casting. This we do for two years, and in the last year we organize camps of one month each at different places. Here the actors learn to confront an audience. I won't claim that this is the only model or perfect model, because we are in the middle of it.

Even while the students are being given basic training they interact with the community, they go to the villages. There was physical exercise like yoga, dance etc. every morning which is a must. We needed something more. Every Monday we used to walk eight kilometres to observe. We would start early, at seven o'clock. Often we would walk four kilometres and meet a friend who would treat us to breakfast. We continued this for about eight months. Mysore is a very small town and early in the morning we would watch shopkeepers opening their shops, someone milking a cow etc. I would like to give an example. One morning we witnessed a cremation procession. The *lingayatas* have an unique death ritual in which they hang an image of Shiva around the neck of the dead, dressed in colourful local costume, and the body is placed in a sitting position on a *ratha* which is carried by people. People play music as they follow the procession. Mysore being a tourist centre, some foreigners noticed this and started following the

group. My group was also following. One of the foreigners took out his camera and started taking photos. As he tried to focus, the procession stopped and gave him a chance to take the photo properly. The foreigners said 'thank you' and left. My boys made a note of this. I had told them to observe but not use whatever they observed literally-that would be a very dull theatrical translation of reality. It has to be changed into something new. [They] enacted a piece in which one of the members became the dead person and the rest took him up. Another became the photographer and the procession stopped and posed for the photographer. As he was taking the photo the dead person smiled for the camera. This whole mockery was transferred into a creative piece.

We would often go to the railway station (at the railway station people would not notice you, and in that sense it is the best place-a station is a good place to study sound), the vegetable market, the university canteen and at least once in a month, definitely to a village. We would really sing, perform short sketches, not complete street plays but brief improvisations. In a village we observe them and they observe us. There is a line of divide between us. There is alienation. We could not change our costumes, be one of them. So in the beginning we started visiting one family for some time and only after that the whole village.

We never used such experiences directly. It is only part of the workshop process. It helps form one's sensibility. The experience is stored in one's memory. In my own life, whatever I have seen, experienced, in my Company natak days, the Yakshagana I had seen in my childhood, my Patel school experience with the children, keeps on informing my works.

G.V Shivanand, one of the very first batch of NSD students, talks to B. Jayashree.

BJ: When did you join NSD?

GVS: Asian Theatre Institute, which later became National School of Drama, started in January 1958. It had a certificate course in children's theatre and rural theatre. I opted for children's theatre. Two UNESCO experts were the faculty members. There were 26 students, 13 in each group. It was in the exhibition grounds, now Pragati Maidan. That year it became National School of Drama and Asian Theatre Institute. Later it was named National School of Drama. I learned mime, puppet-making and script-writing for children. Once NSD came into existence all

the drama subjects were taught there. NSD started on 15 July 1959. It started first at Nizamuddin West, shifted to Nizamuddin East near Humayan's tomb and later to Kailash colony. The course was for two years. Hence my total duration of study became three years.

BJ: Who was Director at that time?

GVS: Satu Sen was Director. He was the man who introduced the revolving stage in Calcutta. N. C. Jain was the administrative officer in NSD. After Satu Sen's retirement he became the Acting Director. Satu Sen was above 70 years old.

It was an accident that I went to Asian Theatre Institute. I was exposed to my father's professional theatre, the Gubbi Company. Casually Mr Srinivasa Murthy, who was the manager of the Gubbi Company, brought the advertisement and told me to apply for it. I was very hesitant, because my father was not keen on me becoming an actor.

BJ: Could you tell us the curriculum of the Asian Theatre Institute at your time?

GVS: Everyday we had physical exercise. Voice and diction were compulsory. Puppet making and manipulation, story formation and mime classes. Theoretically there was not much to study but improvisations gave us practical experience. The course mainly concentrated on the practical aspect of children's and puppet theatre.

When I came to NSD after this it was totally different. We had to study a lot of subjects under different teachers: for *Natyashastra*, D.N. Thakkar; for History of theatre, N.C. Jain; for Acting, Sheela Bhatia; for Theatre Architecture and Scene Design, Govardhan Panchal; for Lighting, G.N. Dasgupta; for Direction, Satu Sen; for Music, Panchanan Pathak; for Dance, Kokila Mavani; for Makeup, Indu Bhushan Ghosh; for Carpentry, Tasreemlal. Apart from the above we had physical exercise, voice and diction every day.

In NSD we were 19 in all, four of us from Karnataka. Two of us were from The Asian Theatre Institute and the other 17 were new. All of us had to produce a play for the first year. In two years we had 22 productions, out of this 19 were students' productions and three or four were school productions. I acted in sixteen productions. I directed only one. In those days it was more flexible and different plays in different languages were encouraged in NSD, which you cannot think of now.

BJ: Did NSD education help you?

GVS: Well, after NSD I was associated with the training of teachers in dramatics conducted by Natya Sangh with a grant from the Akademi. It helped me to write plays and act and direct confidently. I wrote about four children's plays and four full-length plays, started a theatre group called Kalakunja and produced many plays. I used to direct plays for other groups who invited me, and I conducted mime workshops for groups like Abhinaya Ranga, Amarakala Sangha, Suruchi, Benaka and Spandana. Apart from this I have produced many plays for AIR, acted in movies and TV serials, and directed TV serials.

Jayadev Hattangady, theatre professional and NSD graduate, talks to Anjum Katyal.

AK: I'd like you to talk about NSD as a theatre training institute

JH: I had done some theatre work in Bombay with IPTA as an actor and as a ticket booking clerk and then worked with Satyadev Dubey as a general handyman—running about like a Man Friday. Actually Dubey suggested I go to NSD. I was interested in theatre. I got a scholarship—a government scholarship—and joined NSD in 1970-71 and graduated in what is known as the class of '74. *The Ebrahim Alkazi*, [was the Director]. I graduated with Direction as my specialization. For some years there were just three specializations: Direction, Stagecraft and Acting.

In the first year there were the 'Acting' subjects and 'Dramatic Literature' subjects and the 'Stagecrafts' subjects. Under 'acting' were basically dance, movement, music. In dramatic literature there was Western Drama, in which a play was selected and read in the class and pondered upon and analysed. There was modern Indian drama, classical Indian drama—a Sanskrit play—and 'Oriental' drama which was sometimes a Kabuki play or a Noh play. These were the literary subjects. Then the 'Stagecraft' subjects were basically lighting, make-up, set-designing, carpentry, on a very basic level. Everybody had to do this integrated course in the first year. And after you passed the first year, if you wanted to specialize in a particular field—the three main ones were Acting, Direction and Stagecraft—you had to have at least 60% marks in some subject to take it as your specialization. For acting you had to have good marks in dance, music and acting, of course, literature also. But you needn't be a good set designer or good painter. For stagecraft you had to be good in light designing, painting and all the fine art kind of things, plus you had to know how to use the carpentry workshop and so on. Direction to a certain extent was

the toughest because you had to have literature, know how to use a wood leveller, the instruments carpenters use, plus make-up, lighting. You had to climb and hinge the lighting equipment ...

As a third year student they used to give you a project. One day Mr Alkazi told me- 'Hattangady, do a project on Amrita Sher Gill. So I said, 'Sorry sir, excuse me, I have not read her.' Alkazi saheb said, 'What the hell do you mean by that? What do you mean that you have not read her?' He realized I had made a mistake. So he said, 'Hattangady, she is not a writer, she is a painter. What do you know about painting?' I said, 'Sir, I go and see paintings but I don't know much about it.' He said, 'Go, see her work.' That is how I came to know about painting, at least I know now what is what, how to appreciate them. The only thing about painting that I knew at that time was what was red and what was green! I knew nothing about it. So I went to exhibitions. He sort of pushed me into it, inspired me. I did the project on Amrita Sher Gill as a painter-not only as a painter but also from the point of view of theatre design. Her contours, textures, use of colours. That was the interesting thing about Mr Alkazi-he made us aware of everything that was happening around us.

We had regular classes from 9 a.m. to 3.30 in the afternoon, with a one hour lunch break and 45 minutes for each lecture. From 3.30 to 3.45 there was a tea break and from 3.45 till 5 or 5.30 there was a rehearsal of a play, which usually Mr Alkazi directed.

Sometimes there were outside directors also. One of the experiences we had was working on a Japanese play by a Japanese Kabuki actor-director called Professor Sozo Sato. He did a Kabuki play, which was scripted only in 12 pages but which went on for one and a half hours because there are lots of movements in Kabuki. I was the percussionist in that play plus I was one of the, you know in Kabuki plays they have people who help the actors to sit down, to catch the ropes, they are called *kogen*. Plus I was doing the make-up of the main character (who later on happened to become my wife, Rohini). Rohini was playing the main character. Professor Sato taught us to do make-up, especially as I was a student of direction and it was one of my examination projects also. I was supposed to do her make-up. He did it for 2/3 days. I used to assist him. Then he said, 'You go on'. That was part of the training. The Kabuki make-up is fantastic, very, very stylized. It is not ritualized in the Yakshagana or Kathakali style, but it has its own stylization, like the Demon has a particular way of making-up. The Samurai has a particular way of making-up. All colours are classified, even the designing and all that.

Then the other experience was a Yakshagana play in Hindi directed by Dr Sivaram Karanth. He used to come to teach and I used to be very thrilled because he was in his sixties at that time. He used to come and remove his silk kurta and start dancing with us. Though I was in the third year and it was not one of my subjects I had taken special permission to attend the acting classes. Because I was the percussionist, Mr. Alkazi had given me permission to learn this also. You know, to sit with those *chandas-big* drums like the Kathakali players have, they have them in Yakshagana also. I had the privilege of working under a British designer called Brian Currah who designed the sets for *Danton's Death* by Georg Buchner. Very beautiful. We were all third year students. We were allotted work-you know, 'you look after this and you look after that'. He had brought the design from there, he made the model here and then he erected the set with the help of carpenters. That was very interesting. Then we did Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* in Kabuki style-because Mr Alkazi had gone on a three month visit to Japan and he was probably influenced-all productions of Mr Alkazi were part of the training. One of the things that both Rohini and I did during our NSD days was inspired by my first guru, Satyadev Dubey. He was my adi-guru, you know, my first teacher. Anything that was done [at NSD] we used to accept it, absorb it like a sponge. Therefore when we came out into the field and started working, we could incorporate many things, following Mr Alkazi's footsteps-not that I was imitating or copying him, but a lot of influence was there, the discipline part of it is still there. Each and every thing is noted down, each and every move is written down. Even now I have that habit.

To be very frank, I had a fantastic experience in NSD. Now I know, if I have to do a classical play, I can get [my actors] a dance teacher who knows Bharatanatyam, but at least I know the significance of the *hasta mudras*. I know the importance of costuming, texture, miniature painting, colours-which colour goes with what set and so on. Otherwise, what is the use of doing a project on Amrita Sher Gill? I am not going to be a painter, but the motivation was basically to expose the students to various aspects of any performing art or fine art or any plastic art. So for me it was very good, very positive.

AK: What about exposure to contemporary drama?

JH: Yes, of course, there was a lot of contemporary drama. We did Bhavai, the folk forms. The Sangeet Natak Akademi used to bring plays from all over India. Alkazi saheb did not make it compulsory but he always used to say, 'There is a performance of the Tamasha from

Maharashtra'. Most of the plays by Utpal-da, Sombhu-da and Habib Tanvir saheb I have seen in Delhi. I used to go to any performance, anywhere. You know, we did not have money during that time to buy tickets. There was a group called Dishantar—Om Shivpuri and others—who had a very good idea. We used to be ushers. We used to do the ushering and then sit down and see the play. It was a very beautiful idea because we couldn't afford to pay for the tickets. The exposure that we got there, whatever it was, was very good and that helped us a lot and is still helping us.

AK: Were there students from all over India?

JH: Yes, from all over India. That is one thing about NSD.

AK: Was there a language problem?

JH: There was no language problem. I think as a theatre person that theatre didn't have and should not and will not have a language problem, ever, because it is basically *Drishya Sharavya Kavya* visual, audio, poetry. What has happened with Bengali and Marathi theatre is that we are too wordy, what we can say in one sentence we tend to say in paragraphs. We have a rhetorical style, because ours is an oral tradition. We are used to *pathan* (reading of narratives) and *kathan* (storytelling). Because of this, theatre had become very wordy. Even Tendulkar was criticized in the beginning, because his dialogues were very crisp, one or two sentences. Theatre, according to me, is more visual, audio, poetry. When I say poetry it means suggestivity. So language was no problem. Basically, all the plays were done either in Hindi or in Urdu. There was a voice and speech class. All the sounds and pronunciations were taken care of. Of course, there was a certain amount of local accent—Ratan Thiyam played main roles with his Manipur accent but he tried to speak clearly so that was not a problem. We did *Sultan Raziya* and *Andha Yug* with him. We did *Andha Yug* in the Indian context, using Indian costumes and design and also in the Kabuki style because he felt it was a universal play, a reaction against World War II.

So, the school of drama experience for me, personally, was great. For some years, in the beginning of my career in theatre I used to think if Alkazi saheb was in my position, what would he do? If I had a problem with a movement or dress or a costume or lighting or anything to do with the production, I would try to think how Mr Alkazi would do it. Then I would put together my idea and his idea—as I imagined it—and try to solve it.

AK: Do you think NSD imposes too much of a formula?

JH: See, when you are learning there has to be some kind of a framework, right? Now the framework is not at all rigid. It is very flexible, but you can't teach anything, any art for that matter, without a framework. Now when you go out into the field you mould the framework according to your capacity and requirements. You can be as flexible as you want. But you don't have to break it. Even if you have to break it, break it and see whether it gets broken or not. There is a formula and one comes out of that and then to a certain extent-like in music or for that matter any performing art the influence of that institution or that school or a particular *gharana* goes away and the person finds his own way within a given framework, tries to use his own method, creativity, innovations. That always happens. But definitely all training is to a certain extent regimented. We cannot escape that.

AK: One other thing you hear about NSD is that it trains the students in a very unreal world-that everything is available to them. It is so different from reality.

JH: Yes, this is true to a certain extent. You are given everything you need. But the students are also taught that, 'Look when you go out you might not get everything you want.' I will give you a classic example. I tell people that I am not going to teach you acting. I am going to teach you how not to act. I will give you an example I got from Grotowski-I am a sculptor. I take a huge slab of marble or stone and then I chip off what isn't wanted. The form is there in my mind. The form is there in the stone. What I don't need I chip off. Then the form takes shape. So you have it in you as an actress but you are exposed to certain things like reading and other subjects and whatever you have seen. Some of them may be good and some of them may be wrong or bad or biased or prejudiced etc. That is my job: to remove what is not needed. Otherwise it will be like that scene you see in Hindi films, 'Ma agar tum zinda hoti' (Ma, if only you were alive). I love that scene. It is such a rotten scene

Yes—the availability (of any facility) is there at NSD. So when the students go out to work at least they know how to do it. If there are four spots and you have worked with ten spots, you know how to reduce it. You can't make a big statue out of a small stone. But out of a big stone you can make a small statue. At least you know how to go about it. Whatever the available material, you think in those terms-I have this space for rehearsal. The hall, auditorium that is

available is not big. The problem is acoustics. At least you are made aware of all these things. When you come out into the field there is no problem.

AK: One often hears the comment that you can always recognize NSD productions because they are so elaborate ...

JH: I don't think so; that's wrong. It must have been said by a person who does not know anything about NSD. This is one of the criticisms which has been going on for many years. One about regimentation, one about rigidity and one about.. . 'you get too much of everything during training but will you get that much when you come out?' Grotowski has put it beautifully-he put it as an actor but I am putting it in general theatre terms-If you get more you can do with less. If you don't have the means, and if by chance you do get the opportunity, what would you do? If you get the opportunity to handle so many things and you don't have the capacity because you have not been exposed to it then you stunt the growth. I hope this answers your question.

AK: After NSD you yourself got involved in theatre training, didn't you?

JH: After I passed out from the NSD I came back to Bombay because I was from Bombay. My parents were here. At that time there was this movement, popularly called the 'Chhabildas Movement', run by our organization Avishkar with Sulbha Deshpande, Arvind Deshpande and many others who were doing what is called experimental or avant-garde or parallel theatre. This kind of theatre didn't need big auditoriums. It would not have been viable box office-wise and also cost-wise. So they wanted a small place. Chhabildas High School had a biggish hall with squatting and sitting space in front, chairs at the back. It was a very flexible big hall where we had theatre in the round. I mean a director could use his imagination, use the space as he wanted. The proscenium arch, which was absolutely flexible, was hinged at 6 p.m. in the evening for the 8.30 performance. After the performance it was unhinged and the hall was given to the school for the next days' PT classes or music classes. The hall was given because at that time Sulbha Deshpande happened to be a teacher at the girls' high school there. So the hall was given to these people who were young at that time-about 22 years ago-by the culturally oriented council and leaders of the school.

It was very centrally situated at Dadar, that was one of the reasons why it was chosen. When I came back I used to go to see plays there and I knew Sulbha-tai (*tai* means elder sister).

She requested me, Jayadev, you have trained at NSD. We have a lot of young people here who are enthusiastic about theatre. Why don't you do something with them?' The first idea was to direct a play for them. In the mean time she said, 'Why don't you recreate whatever training you did at NSD?' Actually, I didn't want to be a teacher, but as I got hold of the people working there and some of them were my old college-mates-you know I had left Khalsa College and gone to NSD-who used to participate in the college competitions. They all came. We were the same age and some of them were very good directors. With these people I started theatre games and improvisation and so on: things learnt at NSD. One thing I learnt about training was that we are all very talented, but in the beginning we have this stage fright and inhibitions, the mental block, the physical block and so on. To get rid of these we played games and did improvisations. It didn't start as a workshop. It started like-if you want to do something in the evening why not do it with Jayadev? It started like that. After office they used to come at 6.30 pm and by 9 or 10 or 10.30 they were all home. It was pure love for theatre and this kind of activity.

It culminated in the performance of an improvisation, a subject given by the Gujarati playwright, Madhu Rai, who unfortunately in 1994 is not writing much. He is now settled in America. He had written very interesting plays during that time. He was asked to give a subject - he was an upcoming playwright. His subject was 'Substitute the handkerchief in *Othello* with a Gandhi cap.' We were given about two days and the whole group improvised. Shafaat Khan, a very good playwright writing now, wrote a poem-it was a recitation-cum-movement and dialogues. No sets, no nothing. It was an improvisation so there was no set. Humans were used as doors. I had done that 20 years ago, mind you. All sorts of improvisations were done. This was one and then with the same group we used P. L. Deshpande's short story called *Bhaisa* (Buffalo). That was a short story. We dramatized. I directed. It actually takes place in a State Transport bus. A buffalo dashes against the bus and then the villagers make a big hullabaloo about it. 'Oh, my source of earning has gone, my buffalo is hurt (actually nothing had happened to it, the bus was stationary) and unless the *daroga* comes we won't allow the bus to move.' There were a lot of humorous characters. This was a part of the training. (Incidentally, Nana Patekar played the Narrator's role in that. That was Qne of his debuts in Avishkar.) The improvisation didn't have a regular showing like ten or twenty performances, but it was done in front of an audience and the audience was asked to comment on it. It was a kind of training programme. That sums up the beginning.

AK: Did you by this time have some kind of an outline of what a training process should be?

JH: Exactly. During this period I had to chalk out an outline. I sat down and thought, 'What do people need here?' I was exposed to a wide range of things-Grotowski, Stanislavski and this 'wski' and that 'wski'. But the point is that subjects should depend on the capacity and capability of the participants. The place is also very important. I can't go to a small village in Maharashtra and start talking about Stanislavski's methods and systems of acting. One should be aware of who needs what. Therefore, slowly, a kind of format got built up over the years. I used to conduct two or three workshops each year and I was also directing plays during that time. Many of the students from these workshops were taken into the productions.

By word of mouth news spread and it became a regular feature. It was basically a weekend workshop-Saturday afternoon 3.30 to 6.30, Sunday morning 10 to 1, spillover half an hour. It became a regular theatre training workshop of two months—16 sessions. We started charging Rs 30/first, then it became 50, then 75 and later it became 100 rupees. It was a non-profit making organization so we didn't charge exorbitant rates. 20 years ago a fee of Rs. 20 or 30 was all right. Most of these people were working in banks-bank clerks, waiters, dentists, doctors etc.-culturally this place is very rich. Some of them didn't become actors but they write to say that the feedback made them a good audience. 'At least I can see how to appreciate a play, what to appreciate.' There were discussions and critical appreciation of their own work done by them, not by me. I used to make one go against the other. I used to ask only: why was it not good. This is the only question I used to explain why it was not good. This kind of process was theory-cum-practical, but more practical than theory. From Avishkar's Theatre Training Workshops, through word of mouth news spread to various groups all over Maharashtra. I got invited all over Maharashtra by clubs like Rotary and Lions, and by the little *natya mandalis* who paid me money. It became a regular profession. Up to now I have not taken up a job and I have been living on free lancing-inter-mill competitions, inter-bank, inter-collegiate, inter bus depot, inter-municipal ward-in Maharashtra there are quite a lot of these competitions. I got invited to these, especially by mill workers. I worked with them a lot. I conducted workshops for them.

And it didn't just remain a theatre activity only. When some of the people who participated in the workshops went back to their jobs, and went into middle management positions, they noticed that people in their offices were talented, they had the expertise, but couldn't communicate, couldn't express themselves. They were shy. So some of them came with an idea-

why don't we hold some games and exercises where the office staff learn to interact with other people, with each other, how to take criticism in the right spirit and so on. I call these workshops 'opening-up' sessions. I had opening-up sessions with Rashtriya Chemical Fertilizers, I had one with the tax people, customs people. With RCF I had an interesting experience. They invited me to do a Personality Development Course. In Personality Development their purpose is to show how to sell ideas etc. Mine was not that kind of a thing. Mine was just to open them up, bring them together, share their ideas, story making, play making and basically try their imagination, their concentration, how to hold the attention of someone who is not interested. The basic idea was the training of the actor's paraphernalia which is his body, which consists of mental attributes—imagination, concentration, observation and of course common sense which everybody has to some extent—and physical faculty where the body has to be expressive, mobile and flexible. The games and exercises were done from that point of view, not from the point of view of building the body but relaxing the body, knowing how to use your body as an instrument. That is the basic start. I did it all through theatre. The only aspect was that they were not going to be actors, they were not interested in theatre, but they wanted to interact with others like an actor or actress has to do.

Then it evolved into theatre as therapy; also social workers trained at Nirmala Niketan in Bombay and SNDT College in Pune invited me to help them. They were working with drug addicts. So they wanted to use theatre as a tool for communication, education and propaganda-family planning, education for girls, etc. The social workers go and meet a lot of people, families, children.

I had to-do a lot of homework. This was not taught at NSD! Of course, a lot of reading went into it. That was the take-off point. I made my own notes and then worked out a formula. You have theatre as therapy, theatre for education and communication-how to work with children, how to work with posters, how to make a street play, how to use theatre in the round, where the audience is also standing behind you and you have to know how to throw your voice over your shoulders. Street theatre is very loud and there is a lot of music and action because of the audience all around you. Then theatre for specific ideas like bonded labour or family planning etc. where improvisation has to be based on that. Then there is theatre for children. Children's theatre actually should not be performed for audiences. Children's theatre is the developing of the child's imagination, concentration.

These are the things that one came across using the same method for amateurs and to a certain extent professionals and children and NGOs for social work-the method is the same but the emphasis is different in each case.

AK: It is need based.

JH: Correct, it is need based. You need to open up the person rather than tell him how to emote or act. He has to be himself. An actor is taught to do different roles. The aim is to train theatre enthusiasts and make them aware that theatre is something serious and sincere.

AK: Do you think there is any intrinsic advantage or strength in the flexibility of the workshop method which could make it more valuable as a training process than the more rigid institutions?

JH: What happens in these workshops is that they are very short term courses. There is lack of space, some people just come to see what a theatre training workshop is, some think that through Rohini they may get a chance in films. They come with various ideas. At NSD on an all-India level, people are chosen who make it a point in an uncertain profession like theatre to go and give an interview and say 'This is what I want to do.' You need institutions like that instead of these little workshops which are really some kind of a nursery rather than full-fledged training programmes. These are initiation courses.

M. K. Raina and Prasanna, professional theatre persons and NSD graduates, talk to STQ

STQ: What was the Alkazi model-and when you look back, what did it represent?

Raina: See, when I entered Drama School [under Alkazi] it was very strict ... like highly professional disciplined soldiers of theatre had to be created. Every second was important. Even if you had to draw a line, it had to be done in a very professional way. I think it was a western kind of an education-though we did have yoga, and folk theatre was a subject ... I don't agree that [Alkazi] was not aware of the Indian folk theatre. I think it was more that he

didn't practise it, did not know it well. So he left it to the teachers who knew the subject. There was Shanta Gandhi, there was Nemichandra Jain, we did a Bhavai. It was an instant success and it travelled everywhere. But I think there was not enough debate, only sentiment and a feeling that we have to do some ... Indian theatre; and I don't think that those teachers were professionally trained in how to deal with this project of theatre from our own forms. This experiment was kept alive for the fourteen years [that Alkazi was head]. I don't know how many actors changed over and over again. Because [Alkazi] was professional, and he was trained in the western theatre, that component always used to be stronger in us. There was not enough written material, hardly any studies being done on folk theatre as such. *Wretched of the Earth* came out and everybody started thinking we have to get back to our roots. We had Suresh Awasthi talking about it. Years later I went to Nemichandra Jain, Alkazi had already resigned by that time, and I said, look I want a grant and there was no grant for us. There was no possibility of getting anything like that ... then we had *Ghashiram..* We had Habib Tanvir, he did *Agra Bazar* and *Charandas Chor*. And then everybody sort of started understanding this model, the very technicalities of this model, what it means, its open space, improvisation, movement, dance, music and dialogue together. The actor started getting little defined. He is not a western actor who can only deliver good dialogues. He has to be a dancer, he has to be a singer, he has to be a musician. He has to be everything. He has to be a stagecraft man also. And that was not what we learned at NSD. Our heaviest component was western theatre and we were pretty good at it. Brecht, Shakespeare, Greeks. Fat-a-fat! We know it. Lorca, fat-a-fat! Now we did not know [indigenous theatre]... except for playwrights. When we came out of the Drama School we had to unlearn a lot, forget a lot, and really work, learn, make blunders, make mistakes, interact with the groups that we are working with.

STQ: Could you use anything that you'd learnt at NSD?

Raina: The discipline to take your job very, very seriously. That it is not just a leisure activity. You are in a profession and you have to be the best and that's all. Second, the time factor. You can't go on endlessly. There was no possibility of that. Also a methodology-how should we work it out. But even the traditional experiments that we had done were done in an European way. Take Habib or me, we have not explored space at all. We are in a black box.

This black box has a language which is forced, a strange language that we are trying to develop-basically we are using our folk model, traditional model, but what are we doing with that model? We are fitting it into that colonial black box which I think is too oppressive. We are so secure in that black box that we don't want to get out of it. The street theatre's moved out of it. You see *Ghashiram Kotwal*. It's never gone out of proscenium. It is a form which has been taken from a traditional form, perform it that way also and see what happens. Or say Ratan's work, it is decorative. It is in a confined space and you see pictures.

STQ: What about Badal Sircar?

Raina: Yes, he did it. I saw his *Bhoma* once in Shri Ram Centre, upstairs. I think it worked perfectly there ... Alkazi took a production to the Haryana villages, *Mitti ki Gadi*, and he was a completely different man. He was a changed man. I think he was never happier. Then he started experimenting with space from village to village.

STQ: A lot of potentially good directors who went to NSD never came back to their own regions. They hung around song and drama divisions, or hung around cinema, became smalltime directors there, but never came back to work in theatre seriously. Does it have to do with the kind of facilities, resources which were made available to you at the NSD while you were students there? So that you get pampered and when you go back those resources, those facilities are not available, so you don't work there? So you need a rich patron or that kind of thing before you can work?

Raina: You talk about NSD, why don't you talk about other professional institutions? A man who went to IIT may not go into electrical engineering, he may become a salesman simply because there is money there. Theatre is a very individual decision. It is also a very political decision, I think. I always say that it is a political decision. And some don't take it and some do take it. There are problems too. Some take it as a job, they go for a job, a television job, a drama job ... then you are in a different world. And your links with theatre are completely cut. I don't think it's pampering or anything.

STQ: Do you think that something like NSD, a big set-up like that, is really worth everything that is being put into it?

Raina: I don't think it's very big. They don't bloody have a theatre of their own. It's still ... the hostel is in a stable. NSD is not enough. Look at the size and diversity of the country. What will one NSD do? Twenty students they pick up. I mean it's not what it seems to be.

Prasanna: I think academic training is necessary because if you go through that conservative, academic training, at least you know what you are rejecting and how you are rejecting and there is a certain design behind that. I would like to illustrate by giving an example-like, say, Utpal Dutt, who has learnt through the process of theatre, he may actually know stagecraft and make-up much better than any NSD trained person. But I find a certain over-emphasis in Utpal Dutt, he's using a little too much of it and Badal-da's [Badal Sircar's] completely rejecting it. But in the best of NSD, you see a certain control over technology concerning theatre. You can see it in the best of Raina's productions, Ranjeet's productions. And it has not only happened in theatre, it has happened with painters. So, I think it is necessary. And to that extent with all its loopholes, I think NSD has played a tremendous role in shaping that.

You know what Alkazi had done to NSD? I think Raina has said it precisely and beautifully. He created this academic training set-up which is very necessary for training of individuals. But in a country like this, such a vast population, so many languages with various cultural backgrounds, this was not enough. Nor was there any way we could have more theatre institutions of a national character. It had to be the only one but it had to go beyond and that going beyond was the step taken during Karanth's time. That step was a revolutionary step. I am a little unhappy with Karanth because he did not make enough effort to actually implement it. Somewhere he buckled under the pressure, For example, he did not really bring in the right sort of people who could take on this enormous revolutionary task. That was the time when we thought of extension programmes. That was the time when we actually thought of going into the field, and specially those marked areas of under-development, you can call it that, and go there and conduct workshops. And that was the time when they really used the capacities of people like Raina, Bansi, all of us, we really went into these areas. I was the project-director of such a workshop in Bihar; Raina went to Andhra Pradesh; Bansi went to Tamilnadu. But I think it needed people with foresight. I think he chose a lot of mediocrity and that is where I think it is hypocrisy. He stocked the whole school with people who could not carry this forward. And he himself was swallowed up by the same people.

STQ: What were you trying to achieve by these workshops? What was the purpose of these workshops?

Prasanna: You see, the Nehruvian concept of Indian culture was very idealistic and romantic. It thought of this country as one and thought of these institutions as catalysts in making this oneness. But very quickly you realize that that was a dream and that unless you strengthen the regional diversities and actually build national culture in terms of regional languages, this country will not stay together but break into pieces. Now, this new understanding needs each institution to make adjustments, structural adjustments and this structural adjustment was what we first tried during that time. It is being tried once again now through these regional centres, the centres that the school is trying to form. But I am still not sure if the people at the head understand the enormity of the task.

STQ: You said that you had conducted a workshop, could you talk a little about it?

Raina: There were two components to it; one is the integrity of the training ... I get very upset and I believe Prasanna does too-when I see a man who wants to do theatre come on the stage without any bloody training. He does not know how to stand or move. You can't do that in music, you can't do that in dance, you can't do that in any other profession, why theatre? So we have to spread this awareness in various parts of the country. Right from the beginning, from the first exercise of breathing, sound, yoga, rhythmic exercises, speech, we are preparing an instrument, which is the body of an actor. Another component is really serious intellectual work. It is not enough that I like a play because it is a good play. Why is it a good play? So you have to seriously understand, analyse the play, how you select a play, why do you make a choice of this play?

When I went to Andhra Pradesh, there were professors, teachers, students, art-students, youngsters, some Sanskrit teachers almost my father's age. It was an ensemble of almost the whole state. We devised certain little things right there. I said let's go out from Visakhapatnam to a tribal valley and watch our own culture with a different vision today. So they would not just watch a performance in the evening. There were the tribal performers, there were the local theatre people who took them into their village theatre. So the documentation would go on the whole day. It was like a camp together. In the evenings watch performances and in the morning talk about them. I was also getting educated, don't

forget! I used to take notes and discuss with the companies that came there. It was a tremendous attempt in that direction. But there was no follow up. I thought we should do it again after six months. I think that is the biggest tragedy of NSD-that we are motivated by the sentiment of it, the emotion of it and that is misleading. In Karanth's case, he had these sparks of brilliance, tremendous brilliance, but at one point he had to give it a structure and that he never had time to do. And we didn't get together to talk about it.

STQ: Another specific question regarding NSD. This is also one of the hassles in the academic institutionalized theatre training system-one still emphasizes training, concentrates on training, which is essential. As you mentioned, one component is the bare body of the actor and the other is the head of the actor, they have to be combined. This somehow never gets worked into the institution. I think this has been there in the NSD right from the beginning, also most of these university drama departments: you have all the inputs but there is really no effort to conceptualize, to codify, to allow the students to think independently. Whatever you learn you relate. And they grow into other experiences with the whole of Indian history and they combine to form a whole elaborate thinking process which need not be on the surface, but is there. Now that kind of thing has to be institutionalized even in a training system. Train, learn, go out, for theatre or for any of these institutions, there is a terrible inadequacy at that level.

Raina: Now this is the first time I'm opening my mouth. There was this anger against Alkazi, there was hatred against Alkazi. But you know, I will give Alkazi credit-when he took up a theatre form, say Yakshagana, he got Sivaram Karanth to do it. For 3/4 months, Sivaram Karanth was there teaching. He was the best person in that field, a scholarly person. At that time these great masters were working with the students, they were enjoying it, the students were enjoying. But when B. V. Karanth became the director of NSD he thought that he would do everything alone. He was good but it's not enough. You don't run an institution like that. He had an historical opportunity. When Alkazi left, the entire staff retired, this was a historical opportunity to turn over a new leaf, get a new chapter started. But then the teachers he got, I am sorry, they have been teaching for 15/20 years-they don't have any experience of theatre as such. They were young, they were just picked up ... See, at that time you had to be very careful whom to pick up, what you are trying to get at. This change from the 'Alkazi

model', working towards an 'Indian model', one person doing it alone-I don't think it's possible.

Prasanna: Actually you know, in terms of policy they don't depend any more on the permanent staff. So it is excellent because you are drawing the best of talent from outside for short terms, like a month or 4 weeks or 6 weeks, to conduct workshops, take classes, direct plays. But it is done in a very slipshod way. They have followed this for two or three years and now I have noticed that they have started taking very young people as visiting faculty. I think the visiting faculty should be the top people and there should be no compromises. And then these young people who are interested in teaching, people who can become trainers, people teaching theatre, architecture-you know they should be drawn into the staff. So I find a confusion there.

Some of us have taken a conscious decision. We don't want to get into this but we realize that-well, for me, for example, going and teaching occasionally at the School is not only for money. I also know that this is the only way I can sustain myself. I don't have a performative space. For example, there is no audience for me. In my city, if I do a production, hardly two thousand would see it. I don't want to waste my energy. I really want to filter all my ideas through these students at NSD-if I cannot be known for my work, at least let me be known through these ideas that get transferred to these students; but unfortunately even that does not happen often because suddenly they feel insecure and a funny situation occurs and they say, 'Why him, why not a student from last year's batch'. . . But otherwise the School is fine. I don't agree with all the criticism about why the School should be there.

Raina: I don't think it's even debatable as to how important the School has been. Because before the School, there were only two types of theatre-one that you find in Calcutta, the self-taught people who have done extraordinarily good work in cultivating it and building it; and the other was like the college lecturer type who did all these absurdist plays and who reject everything. They didn't have technology and they also made that into an ideological reason to reject it and wrote all these symbolic plays or whatever. But now look. Almost each one of us has created a certain style, not complete, not very good, but styles that can be carried further. So today you have about ten or fifteen types of theatre with different possibilities and these possibilities are entirely because of the Drama School. I think it's a wrong notion that NSD graduates tend to be

expensive, they use a lot of technology. No. Most of the better ones in NSD have really tried to understand how to use the Indian spaces available, the colleges, the schools, the impromptu auditorium and all that.

STQ: You are saying that the NSD actually provides a space where the students of theatre are getting to know all the native strengths everywhere. And the native strengths would not necessarily mean high technology, they also mean rejection of technology-moving into body theatre, physical theatre, use of space. You feel that the NSD allows you to explore all this?

Prasanna: If it was not for NSD, I don't think the whole question of developing alternate spaces and all that would have even come up the way it has.

Surendra Nath, ex-NSD, talks to B.Jayashree

BJ: When did you join NSD?

SN: In 1976-77-B.V. Karanth and I joined NSD together. He as the director and I as a student. In fact, you see, I had this Government of India scholarship and I had to pick a guru in the field and undergo training under him; and I requested Mr. Karanth to be my guru and he agreed. Later, since he had to join NSD as Director I had to tail him to NSD-though, mind you, I never repented joining NSD

BJ: What are your observations on NSD?

SN: NSD trains a student to be a professional director or theatre worker. And what is happening of late is, everybody who completes the course wants to be a teacher in NSD. This is absolutely wrong. What can they teach, without any experience in theatre? The results show in the students and the Institute. There is a perfect example Mr Karanth quotes. Perhaps this substantiates my statement. Tapas Sen was invited to conduct a lighting workshop. It was a ten day workshop. After two days, Mr Sen runs back to Karanth and says what can he do further, for him everything was over, theoretically. Well this does not mean Mr Sen does not know the art of lighting, just that he cannot teach, he can only execute.

Anybody who matters to the Council can hope to be a teacher and is picked. Further, you know, it is a paradox that these very 'teachers', when they happen to meet real theatre workers elsewhere in the country, deliver sermons on how one has to take theatre very seriously, that theatre is very insecure in India but still they have to hope and not stop working in theatre. How stupid. One thing is certain-theatre exists elsewhere in India, not just in NSD.

As long as Mr Alkazi was Director things were all right. He was an outsider. People accepted him as Director. But once Mr Karanth left, everyone, once out of NSD, aspired to be Director. Maybe not immediately, but a year later, a decade later ... Everyone thought it his right to be Director of NSD. After Mr Karanth all Directors are past NSD students. Does this mean that there are no theatre workers or professionals in India apart from those who come out of NSD? Whatever Mr Karanth planned and started was wiped out during Mr Shah's regime. Everybody started undoing what his predecessor had done. The result? A director was left with no proper syllabus and NSD was forced into lockout for a year. Students screamed for a syllabus and proper teaching.

To be Director of NSD one needs to be an administrator as well as a creative director. But tell me who could sail in two boats at the same time, after Mr. Alkazi left NSD. During Mr. Karanth's period, a Registrar had to step in. A perfect bureaucrat who had nothing to do with creativity, who would apply the reins any time creative excess occurred. Is it possible to restrain one's creative aspirations just because rules say so, that too in a school like NSD? If that is the case, then why don't we go to any university and learn theatre there?

BJ: What are your observations on NSD?

SN: NSD trains a student to be a professional director or theatre worker. And what is happening

BJ: But there is a panel to select the director of NSD, is it not?

SN: Yes, but there is something beyond that too-

a thing called lobbying, a thing called Hindiwallah and non-Hindiwallah. There are many, many theatre professionals who are better suited and equipped to be Directors of NSD, and why doesn't [the panel] ever try to look around, why does it restrict itself to NSD graduates? The same thing applies to the appointment of teachers, too.

BJ: What about the syllabus?

SN: What syllabus ... was there anything like that? I never felt it. The only subjects which were taught syllabus-wise were theories. Modern India Drama, Classical Indian Drama and Western Drama. Because they were taught exactly like they would be taught in colleges. No one barring Barry John ever tried to follow a pattern in teaching. Everything was an improvisation on the spot. They would think of the subject they were going to teach, once they stepped into the classroom. What is sad is that we have spent many, many hours doing nothing in most of the classes. Thank God, there was something called practical work, hands on experience, a fantastic library and a few good people who helped us. And to crown it all we had an examination. With marks. Tell me, is there any way to write a theory paper on make-up? Can anybody write how one makes-up a particular character? Can one write how one plans and designs lights? Don't you think that they have more to do with practice than a classroom discussion? In my opinion, the evaluation of the student must begin the day he starts his life in NSD. And this evaluation and guidance must cover the whole period of three years.

BJ: What about the teaching faculty?

SN: In a field as sensitive and creatively strong as theatre, if one depends heavily on teachers, I think, that particular student is committing harakiri. In a field like this no two persons agree upon one subject. And a student should take as much as he needs from the teacher and cultivate his/her own way of reading. What happens to the weak student who has depended upon the teacher for his inputs is that he becomes regimented. And in a creative field like theatre this is too dangerous. I am of the opinion that one should grow and learn as life teaches. Without the experience of life there exists no theatre.

Apart from the teaching faculty, you have a wonderful library in NSD. Perhaps the best in Asia. And a terrific carpentry workshop. One can harness his intelligence here. I learned more here than inside the classrooms.

BJ: Did you do any specialization?

SN: No. The system was changed. Integral theatre was what we learnt. Joker of all, master of none. One thing I had decided before I joined NSD-not to pitch for acting. Prasanna told me, when he learnt that I was picked for NSD, 'Make use of the library and the technical facilities.'

And this worked wonders for me. Much of the acting in plays-public or classroom-was reserved for boys/girls from Hindi speaking areas. Never was an attempt made to try the non-Hindi people with major roles. In my opinion you never go to NSD to learn acting, you go there to learn theatre as a discipline, theatre as a science.

BJ: You said regimentation is bad for a creative area like theatre. In spite of that you strongly suggest that a director should be an administrator as well as a theatre person.

SN: A strong yes. Because we have an example in Mr Alkazi. If Mr Alkazi could run the school without any hitch, why not others? If he could run the school without any Registrar why not others? I know that he was very strict, but it never hampered the growth of the school.

Time and again we have accepted that while learning a discipline, we need a shepherd. Not only in my opinion, but in most of my classmates' opinions, there is not a single alternative to Mr Alkazi. Count the number of names he has given to theatre. Naseeruddin Shah, Raina, Barisi Kaul, Om Puri, Prasanna, B. Jayashree, Manohar Singh, Ranjeet Kapoor, Pankaj Kapoor ... a who's who of Indian theatre today. I know it is very difficult to get another person like him. A total theatre person. The post-Alkazi period concentrated on Indian theatre. But what about Western concepts?

But still, in spite of all this, if you ask what did NSD give you, I will say confidence. And that is not a small thing.

K. Krishna Rajan, a freelance theatre person trained at NSD, talks to

Dr Jose George.

JG: Why did you select NSD for your formal theatre training, when Calicut University School of Drama is just a stone's throw away from your home?

KKR: Even when I was a student, I was actively involved in campus theatre and political theatre and associated with amateur theatre groups. During those days I came to know about the [Calicut University] School of Drama and their style of productions. It teaches only the basics that I had already learned from my theatre work. I went to NSD for advanced training and also to get a wider perspective on world theatre. Secondly, before selecting a school, I consulted the

late Prof. V.N. Krishnan Namboodri, who was my godfather in theatre. He knew my potential and suggested NSD.

JG: Did you get a wider exposure in NSD?

KKR: What I saw in NSD was entirely different from what I had heard about NSD. At that time, in 1988, NSD was also teaching elementary things and the majority of the students had not had any exposure to theatre. In 1989, there was a student strike in NSD for about three months, and we, the students, demanded advanced training, exposure to avant-garde movements and contemporary world theatre and the introduction of folk and traditional elements in the syllabus. The strike was successful and the authorities yielded to our demands. Since then, a good number of theatre persons from India and abroad have been invited to the school as guest lecturers. I think that practice is still continuing.

JG: How do you react to the Hindi environment of NSD?

KKR: When I left Kerala, I didn't know Hindi. But within a month I picked up the basis of spoken Hindi for communication. Since my option was direction, language was not a problem. However, I feel that there is a cultural difference, and to some extent, a domination of the Hindi culture.

JG: You are an academically trained theatre person serving as a guest lecturer in different established theatre schools. Now, in your talks you often reject a formal training system. Why are you propagating de-schooling activities?

KKR: A tendency I observed is that academically - trained theatre persons are generally producing stereotyped stuff. For instance, the so-called School of Drama type productions have a general structure and a uniform style. First of all, these people borrow from other sources. In almost all the productions, we can see stylized movements and gestures, stylized vocal rendering, the unnecessary use of masks and chorus, and the treatment of obscure and abstract scenes without an emotional touch. They are the symbols of other forms. Borrowing too much from other genres and forms makes for obscurity, not communication.

JG.: Could you explain your ideas more concretely?

KKR: Each school makes its own style and that style is repeated again and again. Individual contributions are missing. For instance, since the last 25 years, we have been speaking about indigenous theatre. What is indigenous theatre? Is it the practice of using Kathakali or Theyyam elements in theatre? Somebody made some experiments in that line and that sort of experiment is repeated again and again meaninglessly in all productions. But still we haven't identified a language of indigenous theatre even at the conceptual level. In that sense, our theatre is handicapped. In this context, a de-schooling movement is a must or a social necessity, to liberate our Malayalam experimental theatre.

JG: How do you define your concept of a deschooled theatre?

KKR: A de-schooled theatre is a theatre that discusses the issues and problems of an individual and society by using a communicative theatre language. In that theatre you can see my issues, your issues and the issues of our community transcended and presented in a theatrical language. The role of the director is to identify and create a language, and that language should be communicable and capable of transcending our problems and presenting issues aesthetically. A director is a strong individual artist who can realize and present these things. No specific school is relevant for this. What I want to emphasize is that a theatre person cannot be a slave of any school.

Academization and De-Academization of Theatre Education: The Kerala Experience

Dr. Jose George

Contemporary Kerala/Malayalam theatre has multiple streams—commercial, professional, amateur, indigenous, experimental, children's, campus, feminist, academic, and so on. Among these, academic theatre is a novel entity—more or less a movement—which emerged only one and a half decades ago in a specific cultural context. By academic theatre is meant a theatre school that is operated as a faculty of a mainstream university/ institution, with all the accompanying academic merits and demerits. Now, in the cultural context of contemporary theatre, academic theatre has two distinct but parallel movements. The first is the academization of theatre (a modern trend) and the second is the de-academization/deschooling of theatre (a post-modern trend). The success of the Nataka Kalaris is the basis of these two movements.

The popular/ commercial Malayalam theatre has evolved from the performative traditions of Parsi and Tamil *sangeet natak* with changes in aesthetic sensibility and narrative techniques. Experimentation in Malayalam theatre was first initiated to liberate the popular audience from the influence of these traditions by opening the vistas of theatre to the avant-garde performative traditions of the West, not taking into consideration that liberation is another form of influence which is also dangerous. What I want to specify here is that experimentation in Malayalam theatre lay mainly in importing Western theatre aesthetics to Kerala, believing that the 'West is the ideal aesthetic model'—a belief rooted in a passive acceptance of 'colonial culturalism'; and that the pre-academic and academic theatres have still not moved far from this belief.

In the 1970s, Malayalam theatrology underwent an epistemological crisis due to the lack of the awareness of the performative language of world theatre. During that period, the 'intelligentsia', educated in Western models, had a sound understanding of the world dramaturgy. Absurd Theatre playwrights, Pirandello, Bertolt Brecht, were introduced to the Malayalam theatre audience, and theatre discourses were mainly centred around the literary and ideological aspects of dramaturgy as in the literature classrooms, rather than their performative language. An

enquiry into the performative language of dramaturgy culminated in the formation of Nataka Kalaris throughout Kerala, and eventually this led to the introduction of a School of Drama.

The Nataka Kalari Movement: This theatre movement started in 1967.¹ *Kalari* in Malayalam means a school for the oral training of the arts, run by a renowned guru. Nataka Kalari means an informal school for theatre discourses. Short-term courses/camps for amateur theatre practitioners are conducted in Nataka Kalaris.

Nataka Kalaris were successful in the 1970s for various reasons. First, it gave an opportunity for drama/theatre persons to gather, share ideas and discuss theatre issues. The concept of indigenous theatre was formed through group discussions; it has been developed into a major school in theory and practice.. Secondly, it opened the doors of Malayalam theatre. Thirdly, the Kalaris demanded and emphasized perfect 'academic discipline' in all aspects of total theatre. They spread the essential idea that strict discipline is a must for theatre persons and Kalari programmes were designed accordingly. Fourthly, Kalaris emphasized the 'doing' aspects of drama with the trained physical body of the actor/actress. Kalaris visualized an actor-centred theatre like the Grotowski school of theatre training. Kalaris brought forward the awareness that training is as essential for theatre persons as for classical performing artists, thus establishing a link between the traditions of classical theatre training and modern theatre training.³ Kalaris were recognized and accepted because those who pioneered and guided this movement were socially, academically, and aesthetically mature scholars and intellectuals who were established in their respective fields of creativity.

Though the activities of the Nataka Kalaris were successful, if evaluated from a post-modernist point of view they had a few drawbacks. Conceptually, Kalaris considered Euro-American avant-garde theatre an ideal theatre and tried to develop a Malayalam Theatre in accordance with Euro-American theatre practice and aesthetic criteria (the concept of indigenous theatre spread as a revolt against this thinking). So they failed to accept the contribution of traditional and mainstream popular theatre artists. Usually a Nataka Kalari is inaugurated with certain stereotypical statements like this: 'We do not have a meaningful theatre here. The theatres which exist here are cheap commercial companies which aim at making money only. Our basic search is for a meaningful theatre.'. Many serious theatre persons earning a living in professional and commercial companies were hurt, and totally disagreed with this sort of sweeping statement and the total rejection of mainstream theatre activities.

Popular theatre in turn rejected Nataka Kalari activities. As a result, Nataka Kalaris retained the support of only a select audience, the so-called 'theatre intelligentsia'.

Drama School Movement: The activities and the success of Nataka Kalaris over a decade made inevitable the formation of a permanent School of Drama, in the faculty of fine arts at the University of Calicut in 1978, for the practice and preservation of an alternative theatre culture. In the initial stages, the School of Drama was not an 'academic construct' in a strict sense, but an organic cultural movement in search of alternative performance aesthetics through radical experimentation in all walks of total theatre. The pioneer academicians of the School of Drama were internationally reputed scholars and artists. The first Director, the late G. Sankara Pillai, was an outstanding avant-garde playwright, theatre director, historian and critic. The late V. N. Krishnan Namboodiri was an experimental theatre director, a choreographer who worked with many avant-garde theatre companies in different parts of Asia and Europe, including the Polish Theatre Lab of Grotowski. Prof. S. Ramanujam is a leading theatre director and scholar, an alumnus of NSD and a student of Ebrahim Alkazi; and Mr G. Venu is an exponent of Indian classical theatre in theory and practice. The aim of the School of Drama, in the words of the late G. Sankara Pillai, is to impart 'professional standards' in theatre production to the students who join the three-year course. Training in how to write a play is not a part of the course. A student of this school may realize his/her own strengths and weaknesses and eventually convert his/her own weaknesses into strengths and move ahead by breaking the narrow boundaries of contemporary theatres

The School of Drama offers a Bachelor of Theatre Arts (BTA) degree to the students who successfully complete six semesters of coursework. A pass in higher secondary school is the minimum qualification for admission to this course and a student is given options for specialization in play direction, acting, and children's theatre according to his/her wish. The syllabus comprises the Eastern and Western methods of theatre training. Before the specialization starts in the third semester, a student gets an understanding of the theory and practice of the Natyashastra-based classical training system, training in yogasanas, Western-model theatre games, physical exercises, patterns of choreography of different dance and theatre forms, history of Malayalam, Indian and world theatre, various forms and genres of

drama and theatre, elements of play production, and so on. The School of Drama is also a research centre for performing arts.

Within its decade and a half of functioning, the School of Drama created three general categories of theatre persons: those who are permanently working in theatre; those who changed their interest to television and cinema and ignored theatre practice; and those who are unemployed or who have other professions for livelihood, but, still practise theatre occasionally, out of love of theatre. Among these three groups, the persons in the first category are really continuing the dramatic zeal of the Nataka Kalaris. They are conducting workshops, orientation courses for amateurs and/or campus theatre persons, producing plays for children and/or serious groups with artistic merits. In the first phase, their works were highly admired and they provided a positive answer to the question of whether a school is needed for studying drama/theatre. Calicut University Little Theatre (CULT), a repertory formed with the financial support of the university to enable the alumnae of the School of Drama to continue with theatre after school, produced many brilliant productions directed by well known directors.

Within a decade the School of Drama achieved or meaningfully claimed the power of representation on behalf of Malayalam academic and experimental theatre. As far as the Malayalam theatre movements are concerned, second to IPTA, the School of Drama movement has been widely discussed as a major influence.

After almost a decade of successful academic guidance, the initial enthusiasm and missionary zeal of the young drama students seems lost. The School of Drama training is considered an indirect way of entering the electronic or celluloid media. One after the other, the founding fathers started leaving the school, and over some 'departmental issues' even G. Sankara Pillai left the school and joined Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, as the director of the School of Letters in 1988, where he introduced an M.Phil. and Ph.D. course in Theatre Arts and continued his academic mission for theatre until his death in January 1989. The first act of the 'academic drama' of Malayalam theatre ends here on a sad note.

Though the School of Drama artists were admired in the first phase of their work, in the second phase they are widely held guilty of repeated faults. These are: Hegemony over amateur and professional theatre persons who do not possess a university degree in theatre arts, and a disregard for their artistic achievements and innovations; biased, subjective and partial judging in drama competitions; neglecting the importance of the actor/actress and the economic realities of

the sponsor. Even in small productions, School of Drama artists lay emphasis on sets, costume and lighting. They are not adequately trained to 'extract' the potential of the actor/actress in performance. Sets, costume and lighting consume a lot of money that cannot be afforded by an average arts club which sponsors a production.

Outside Insiders and Inside Outsiders: In this article I am arguing that the academization of Malayalam theatre is never an 'academic construct' alone, but a movement. A movement is a group construct, and an individual-centred narrative or institution-centred representation may lead to misrepresentation. The academic theatre culture of Kerala is not shaped by an individual or an institution. A meaningful give and take process has been taking place from the conception of academic theatre to the present. Directly and indirectly, the teachers and students of the National School of Drama and similar institutions, theatre practitioners from different parts of Europe and America, Malayali students who are trained outside Kerala or India, all contributed immensely to the shaping of the Malayalam academic theatre, though their services are not properly acknowledged by the Kerala theatre historians.

NSD's influence in shaping Malayalam theatre is still a controversial issue. Many theatre persons believe that NSD has hardly paid attention to conducting workshops in Kerala. Even the existence of NSD is known to only the academically educated theatre persons and among them hardly anyone knows about their repertory or their recent introduction of the 'diversification programme'.

There are many reasons for the lack of popularity of NSD in Kerala. Geographically and culturally, NSD is far beyond the reach of about 99% of theatre persons. NSD has trained less than a dozen Malayalam theatre persons and of these most have left theatre and moved either to cinema or television. The Kerala theatre audience is exposed to the style of NSD through the works of the NSD artists who are hired by Calicut University School of Drama or some Nataka Kalaris. More than that, Kerala people do not like the 'national-ism' of the NSD. 'National-ism' is a political construct or a smoke screen artificially created in the crisis situation of Indian political and cultural history to fight against British Imperialism. When the Britishers left, Indian nationalism became Hindi Nationalism, and nationalistic strategies are used to propagate Hindi linguistic and political culture over the non-Hindi culture.

Some of these sweeping statements may require additional clarification. Kerala theatre persons are not objecting to the whole idea of NSD, but to its hegemony over other theatre schools and its political power to represent Indian theatre culture to the outside world in a single voice, overshadowing the activities of the local theatre schools. Because of our cultural diversity, Indian Theatre cannot be represented by one school or under one heading. The psychology of the Keralites is to accept anything that is good despite its 'national' or 'regional' identity. For instance, the popularity of S. Ramanujam or B.V. Karanth in Kerala is not due to their NSD identity or regional identity, but to their artistry. It is a well known fact that S. Ramanujam was the chief architect behind the structuring of the Calicut University School of Drama. Similarly, NSD trained artists are often hired to work in Kerala. Through their work, NSD culture is reflected in Kerala, though NSD is not actively engaged in the promotion of Malayalam theatre

Since the 1990s, there has been a tendency among the BTA degree holders of the School of Drama to leave the state for post-graduate studies in Theatre Arts. Central Universities of Hyderabad and Pondicherry, Madurai Kamraj University, Rabindra Bharati University etc. have been training Malayali theatre persons. The common opinion they share is that post-graduate studies in theatre arts concentrate on a theoretical foundation rather than opportunities for creative experiments.

Academization is a give and take process. Many outsiders are insiders in their approach to theatre. In the neo-colonial cultural context, a rigid margin cannot be drawn between insiders and outsiders in terms of geopolitics, passport identity or cultural representation. The present academic culture of Malayalam theatre is constructed by insiders and outsiders simultaneously and the mutual influence cannot be measured in mathematical terms.

De-academization/De-schooling Movement: Nataka Kalaris and the School of Drama are constructs of the modernist influence in Malayalam Theatre. They operate on a (pseudo) hypothesis that theatre aesthetics is universal.

In 1994 Malayalam experimental theatre is undergoing an epistemological crisis. The sociopolitical and cultural context in which the structure of Nataka Kalaris and the School of Drama were designed have changed tremendously due to the introduction of the new economic and cultural policies of the government and the influence of the electronic media. The government considers culture a commodity to be sold in the open market and has

almost stopped subsidizing theatre activities except to organize an annual theatre festival.⁹ Doordarshan and cable television networks in India and abroad compete with one another to give the customers what they want.¹⁰ Live art is becoming a cheap commodity. In this context a good number of young theatre persons think that the theatre concept they have developed from Nataka Kalaris and academic institutions are no longer relevant and a new concept has to be evolved in order for theatre to survive in the present cultural crisis. Those who are pioneering this movement are well educated young academicians, theatre researchers and students who are exposed to the deconstructive movements of the post-modern world.

The de-schooling movement is a revolt against the meaningless academic approach to experimental theatre in a university by mediocre literary scholars that neither enables a student to get into a profession nor gives them enough training to work as freelancers. The terrible unemployment among theatre persons," the disappointment of those who failed to enter the competitive world of cinema and television, the resentment of those who are hurt by the hegemonic approach of academic theatre persons, the failure of trained artists to rise to the expectations of a serious audience, a strong belief that theatre can survive without the assistance of the academies, are the sub-textual factors operating behind the activities of the deschooling movement.

Prem Prasad, a young political activist who finished his theatre training from the School of Drama in 1989 says that it is time to 'decode' the concept of the School of Drama. The young artists who are coming out of the School are not equipped to react to the serious socio-political situations of the state.¹³ K. Sreenath is of the opinion that the syllabus of the BTA course has to be 'reconstructed in accordance with the developments of post-colonial cultural theories and theatre practice.'. He has just completed his BTA course from the School of Drama and is now pursuing his post-graduate studies in theatre arts at Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta. 'The School of Drama still preserves the school of thinking of the socialist realists. Unless it moves ahead with liberal and more professionally oriented thinking, it cannot cope with the theatrical realities of the world,' says K. Krishna Rajan, a freelance Malayali theatre director trained at the NSD who is now working with an avant-garde theatre company in France.

When the School of Drama started functioning, the village folk asked a simple question: 'What is there to study in a Natakam? We have been doing and enjoying Natakam without even going to school.' The 'de-schooling' theatre persons now repeat that question in a different way: 'Is a school needed between performers and participants? A creative artist can direct plays without going to a school. Then why a School of Drama?'

The current tendency amongst experimental theatre directors is to reject the jargon of the academic theatre while searching for a meaningful performative language for theatre which should be a continuation of the traditional performative languages of Theyyams, or Kathakali, or Sangeet Natak. Cries for a 'free' tradition-based performative language are heard in the venues and theatre discourse of the young theatre practitioners. They are visualizing an indigenous, ethno-centric theatre which should be a powerful branch of the tree of the world performance tradition.

Notes:

1. The first Nataka Kalari was conducted in Sastamkotta in 1967. G. Sankara Pillai, C. N. Sreekandan Nair, M. Govindhan, Ayyappa Panikkar, G. Aravindhan, P. K. Venukkuttan Nair, N. Muralidharan Nair, S. Ramanujam, M.V. Devan and others were the pioneers of this movement. For details, see G. Sankara Pillai, *Malayala Nataka Sahitya Charitam* (Trichur, 1980), p. 128.
2. The concept of indigenous theatre was first put forward by M. Govindhan, a free thinker of Kerala. In theatre, this movement was initiated by the late C. N. Sreekandan Nair, and now Kavalam Narayana Panikkar seriously practises and popularizes this concept. For reference, G. Sankara Pillai, *ibid.*, pp: 1403
3. Until the first half of the 20th century, stage actors were trained in (martial) arts Kalaris. There was a period, in the 1950s, when it was thought that training was not needed for realistic stage actors. Social dramas that have been popular since 1950s do not insist on actors training prior to their arrival on the stage.
4. The ideas in this quote are compiled from many persons who have participated in Nataka Kalaris.
5. G. Sankara Pillai, *op. cit.*, p. 138
6. Bansi Kaul, Ratan Thiyam, S. Ramanujam, directed plays for CULT. Now CULT is inactive.

7. For this sub-title, I am indebted to Dhruva Gupta (TDR, 37:4)

10.

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8. Many theatre persons from Europe and USA have worked in Kerala. Usually their expenses are sponsored by organizations like British Council, USIS, Max Mueller Bhavan etc.

9. Here an indirect reference is made to the activities of Kerala

Sangeet Natak Akademi. Once in a blue moon, they conduct Nataka Kalaris. Though it provides grants to a few amateur theatre troupes, the Akademi's service in shaping a theatre culture is not worth mentioning.

10. Malayalam Doordarshan telecasts Malayalam films on Sunday evenings. The present tendency of the lower and middle class audience is to watch television rather than go to the theatre. The elite class is interested in cable television programmes. Live theatre is seriously affected by the programme scheduling of Doordarshan.

11. No statistics are available to show the exact percentage of unemployment amongst drama professionals-but almost 75% of the trained personnel are unemployed.

12. There is an accusation that the majority of students who join Drama Schools are more interested in cinema and television than theatre.

13. Interview with Prem Prasad on 22 June 1994. 14. Interview with K. Sreenath on 26 June 1994.

15. Interview with K. Krishna Rajan on 20 December 1993.

Setting Up the Calicut University School of Drama

S. Ramanujam, the first Assistant Director of School of Drama, Calicut University, who designed the course and structure, talks to Dr Jose George.

JG: What was the rationale behind the Calicut University School of Drama? How is it distinct from NSD?

SR: Well, it's a well known fact that NSD gives theatre training to students from all over India and its medium of discourse is Hindi. This is a limitation-the true meaning of NSD can be achieved only if it gives theatre training in different languages and regions as well. Against this conceptual background, a new thought process spread and in Kerala it was initiated by people like G. Sankara Pillai, C. N. Sreekandan Nair, Venukkuttan Nair, G. Aravindhan, Adoor Gopalakrishnan. This thought process culminated in the awareness of the need for a meaningful theatre in the state where a powerful tradition of traditional and classical theatre is still alive. The kind of theatre practised at that time was a sort of commercial theatre, and the stage representation of such theatre was less aesthetic, a cliched type of-thing. So, in that atmosphere, an attempt was made to create an awareness among the people of a good theatre that could be constructed through proper training. For that purpose, a Kalari movement was started in 1976 and it was so popular that the state Sangeet Natak Akademi had to take up the programme. Let me put it this way: NSD is a part of Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, with an independent existence. Similarly, Kerala Sangeet Natak Akademi too thought of giving training to develop theatre consciousness among young people. The outcome of the Kalari movement was the formation of a School of Drama at Calicut University, and its purpose was to help young people to open up their views on Kerala theatre, Indian theatre and global theatre.

JG: More specifically, what sort of theatre consciousness does the School of Drama aim to develop? Is it for the adaptation of Western theatre, or for the revival of traditional theatre?

SR: The syllabus of the Calicut University School of Drama was charted very carefully. When we learn theatre in the 20th century, we have to have an experience of all theatre and theatre personalities at the regional, national and global level. Theatre is like a plant. It is clearly said that the root of theatre is in our soil, the air is around India and the sunlight is from far away. The

question of East or West does not arise here. The syllabus comprises, and is aimed at, a total theatre experience. The first semester starts with traditional Malayalam theatre, followed by Western theatre theories and practice in the second semester. The third semester is devoted to the study of Indian theatre, the fourth to the study of modern concepts in world theatre. An interaction with other media is provided in the fifth semester and the sixth semester is for independent research and thesis framing. I don't think that the East-West issue arises here.

JG: How do you see your role in the shaping of Calicut University School of Drama?

SR: Calicut University consulted Alkazi, my guru at NSD, for some references and he suggested my name. I got a letter from Alkazi informing me that the Registrar of Calicut University would contact me, and asking me to reply positively. At that time, it was rumoured that Calicut University was thinking of inviting a theatre person from the West to lead the drama school. But Keralites were against appointing a 'Western Director'. The people wanted a director who knew something about Kerala theatre culture. When I joined in 1978, G. Sankara Pillai had been selected and appointed Director of the School of Drama. We framed the syllabus together, after duly consulting many resources, and got it approved by the Board of Studies. I played an important role in shaping the syllabus of Calicut University School of Drama, and in my personal opinion it is better than many of our other theatre schools.

JG: How is it different from the NSD syllabus?

SR: NSD's syllabus is very general, and each year they have some plans and schemes in which they cover different aspects of drama. Year after year, new theories and trends are introduced, whereas Calicut University School of Drama follows the semester system of training with a definite syllabus. Each semester concentrates on some specific aspect of theatre, starting from the roots of Kerala to global theatre.

JG: How do the traditional and indigenous theatrical techniques contribute to the training of this modern actor in a school? Forms like Kathakali

SR: It's not limited to Kathakali alone. Kalaripayattu training is given. Yogasanas are taught. Let me explain it in this way: The concept of theatre has changed over the last 50 years. Earlier, theatre was regarded as merely a place for representation and the actors were only representing

some characters on a stage. Now theatre has attained a new meaning. Theatre is a presentation rather than a representation. When an actor presents something, he requires some physical ability, flexibility, and control over his body. For this process, a dialogue between body and mind is needed. Through this dialogue, he can have an intimate conversation with all parts of his body. I think the traditional and indigenous theatre training will help to smooth the process of dialogue.

JG: Could you explain this point more clearly?

SR: For example, let us take a tribal dance. Once they start a movement, they continue that movement for a long time. It is a boring thing for us, but why do they do this? Each one has an individual rhythm and through that individual rhythm they are talking to themselves. In this dance, there is self-dialogue and group dialogue. The action comes out of the totality of these things. Like the tribal dance, the self-dialogue can help an actor to understand his own physical flexibility and mental freedom.

JG: Do you think that the students of School of Drama have succeeded in this?

SR: This question can be asked of each and every individual and each and every institution: An institution can only provide the language. Its assimilation and practice should be studied through a survey for a concrete answer.

JG: Within this one and a half decades of training, do you think that the School of Drama has created a unique style in any aspect of total theatre?

SR: I cannot say that the School of Drama has created a unique style but I can say that it has made an impact on the Kerala theatre. Of course, it is true that Kavalam Narayana Panikkar has created a style. It is best that the School of Drama not give one particular style in school. It will help the students to find out their own individual styles.

JG: In what sense has the School of Drama made an impact on Kerala theatre?

SR: The students leave the school with some awareness about the sign language of theatre. They realize that theatre is not merely a place for rendering dialogue; it works between dialogue and presentation in terms of a spatial language, spatial in relation to the body, in

relation to the theme, in relation to the society, and in relation to the culture. This awareness itself is a great contribution to theatre.

JG: How many years did you work at School of Drama?

SR: I joined in 1978 as Assistant Director and left in 1984.

JG: Why did you leave the School?

SR: Not because of any disagreement or difference of opinion with anybody. The people of Tamil University were badly in need of my help and service, and knowing their need and the need of Tamil theatre, I left the School to take up my new job as a professor of theatre at Tamil University.

JG: How do you view the diversification programme of NSD? Positively or negatively?

SR: Positively. Because it is an issue discussed again and again in the NSD meetings. I was in the NSD society, I was on the NSD Board of Studies, and I was in the academic council. NSD itself felt that its activities should spread all over India. But in what ways? Now all states have their theatre schools, each with a different syllabus and different kinds of training. So this idea of starting regional resource centres is good, and I welcome it.

JG: Is it a sort of cultural invasion?

SR: No. Never.

JG: Then is it a service of NSD?

SR: No! not a service. NSD has to take the initiative to implement these sort of programmes. It cannot simply confine itself to Delhi alone. What is lacking in Indian theatre is, we don't have proper theatre educationalists. What we need is good teachers to teach theory and practice in drama schools. It is a part of the programme of NSD to teach and guide theatre educationalists. If NSD cannot take up these issues, it cannot sustain its national identity. NSD has to extend its programme to all parts of India, all regions, and the diversification programme is only one initiative towards that goal.

Theatre Education at Rabindra Bharati University

Ashok Dasgupta

Rabindra Bharati is the only university in West Bengal which runs a drama department. This department has been functioning for more than 45 years, and stalwarts of Bengali theatre like Ahindra Choudhury, Sombhu Mitra, Tarun Roy and Kumar Roy have headed it at various times. As the modern theatre movement is strong in West Bengal, it is natural to expect the drama department of the university to be of immense importance to the theatre workers here. 'So many talented theatre people of the sixties joined Rabindra Bharati as students, with high hopes and aspirations,' Bibhas Chakravarty, the noted theatre director, recalls. 'Many of them were already practising theatre under renowned directors and the theoretical knowledge they acquired as students helped them to grow and develop as total theatre personalities. One will be surprised to find names like Nibedita Das, Shyamal Sen and other talented artists among the students of that time. But a stage came when, to our disappointment, we found that the university was not living up to our expectations and soon nobody in our theatre took Rabindra Bharati or its drama students very seriously. It is also a fact that these students could hardly make any mark on our theatre scene.' Very soon, in the eyes of theatre people of this region, the drama department of Rabindra Bharati University became an insignificant and 'dead' institute with nothing to contribute to Bengali theatre as such.

Problems faced by the drama department seem to range from purely administrative to syllabus and policy related matters. When we talked to the students about the drama department and its problems and functions we received often contradictory opinions. Nevertheless, a general demand of the students is that classes should be held regularly and that teachers should take their allotted classes, which in itself is indicative of the need for tighter administrative control and discipline in the department itself. A student complained, 'When work for a departmental production is on, only the selected ones are engaged and the rest of the students have nothing to do.' Another complaint is that the university authorities have a very casual attitude towards the drama department-apparently even examinations suffer because of

this. One student illustrates it sarcastically, 'It is a very simple affair. After the first student comes out of the examination hall all of us know what we are going to be asked.'

Senior students are able to see the change that is now taking place and feel that the situation has improved a lot recently Teachers like Ashok Mukherjee and Manoj Mitra, who are very busy theatre activists, put in their best efforts. 'All the arrangements are there,' said an MA final year student. 'If anybody wants to learn, he has all the opportunity to learn. If nothing is taught here, how has the department produced students like Debraj Roy, Shaonli Mitra, Debesh Roychoudhury and Deepa Ghosh?' Again, 'The authorities should be much more selective while recruiting students. Many come here only to acquire a degree. They neither learn anything, nor are of any help to theatre.' Senior students are happy to note that recently the syllabus has been revised thoroughly and emphasis has been given to practical classes. For quite some time a good number of ex-students of the university could not find a place in the theatre to practise what they had learnt. According to senior students the scenario has started changing for the better in the last couple of years. In 1994 Bibhas Chakravarty and Arun Mukherjee conducted two lecture demonstrations on their own productions of *Madhab Malanchi Kanya* and *Jagannath* respectively. In the same year the university also organized a mass communication camp through video productions and a seminar on backstage work.

Talking about the drama department, its problems and the reform that is taking place, Dr. Pabitra Sarkar, Vice-Chancellor of the university said, 'The syllabus has already been changed, I am sure, for the better. I think the department will visibly improve soon. The part-time teachers will be guest lecturers from 1st April 1995 and will be paid for each class taken; that will prove a deterrent to absenteeism. The head of the department, Manoj Mitra, and his team are aware of the problems and doing their best to improve the situation.' Dr. Sarkar was also optimistic about some other initiatives the university has taken which will ultimately benefit the drama department, 'We have introduced a new project called *Sanskriti Sanchar Prakalpa* for training underprivileged children in drama, dance, painting and music. Children from about 12 slums of east and central Calcutta are presently under the project and both teachers and students of the university, under the guidance of Dr Somnath Sinha, director of the project, are working in the project area. Mass communication will also be introduced at the undergraduate level and a special paper at the postgraduate level. We are, however, waiting for clearance from the University Grants Commission and the state government. Since we do not have a

repertory theatre, the drama department, aside from training future theatre workers, can work as a troupe or several troupes and produce plays on their own. This is what the department has done last year by producing Tagore's *Rather Rashi* and Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* in Bengali. Now the Information and Cultural Department of Government of West Bengal has come forward with a proposal that our department produce Tagore's *Chirakumar Sabha*. I think this is an excellent opportunity for the department to contribute to the theatre culture of Bengal.' Fortunately, the much needed reform is finally taking place. All this indicates that the university really wants to come out of the impasse it is in.

Interview with Manoj Mitra, Head, Drama Department, Rabindra Bharati

Q : The Drama Department of Rabindra Bharati University has been functioning for a good number of years. How do you think it has been able to contribute to mainstream Bengali theatre?

A: The number of students who have passed out from the university and are now actively engaged in theatre is not negligible at all and some of them are doing well. Many of our present students are engaged with theatre groups and we encourage it, for they can have extra opportunities to learn from rehearsals and other production work. After all, when they pass out, they will have to go back to their own places and we would always like to see them doing theatre, though I cannot give you exact statistics regarding how many of them are doing it.

Now we must try to understand the present condition of our theatre. This course does not guarantee a job for the students in the theatre. As a result, many students are forced to take up other professions which have no connection with theatre. Not only our students, you will find a large number of young theatre workers are opting out to earn their living when they become 25-30 years of age. Had our theatre been in a position to provide jobs, the situation could have been different. There are no openings for our students and they are forced to go in for jobs which do not allow them to do theatre. Well, you can say that we are also earning our living elsewhere and still doing theatre actively, but we knew that we would be earning money first and then doing theatre, and we have never done theatre as a full time job. Our students have studied theatre and when they are forced to do jobs outside, their degree becomes useless,

whereas our degree helps us in our profession so we can spend our spare time on theatre. Our poor students have very few openings in radio and television, and there also they have to compete at the national level. Our theatre does not encourage anybody to become professional (I am not interested in commercial theatre). The other areas are private TV channels and film. In the film industry existing workers are not getting regular work, able directors are not getting finance and the actors are not getting enough roles to support themselves, so where do our students go? Moreover, as the structure of our theatre practice is centred around one person the others hardly get any chance to prove their abilities. We expect our students to become good theatre workers, directors and actors. But theatre is a practical art form, one has to practise continuously to improve. After all, artists are born, they cannot be manufactured in institutions. So each and every student passing out cannot be a good artist. Most of them become mediocre theatre workers, barring a few exceptions. Not only here, the majority of the students everywhere are mediocre. Tell me how many science graduates develop into scientists and how many philosophy students into philosophers?

Q: The syllabus followed in the degree course here seems to put more emphasis on theories than on practice. How do you propose to change it?

A: We have already changed it. Not that we can change it at will. The UGC has sent its recommendations. The ratio between theory and practical has been set at 40:60-it was just the reverse earlier. The UGC has proposed this change through an all-India Convention. The UGC has also recommended that we start a vocational training course. We are also looking forward to starting a vocational course in video production next year. As we feel practice is the only way to improve, we have fixed a full day a week for practical classes on different subjects of theatre production.

Q: There is a general complaint that classes are not held regularly.

A: Yes, I agree that this practice should be changed. We have many problems. Examinations are held here for months together and there are so many examinations. Pre-degree, BA and MA. The classes naturally have to remain suspended during examinations to preserve the sanctity of the examinations. We are trying to overcome this problem by holding the examinations during the vacations. We are also trying to make arrangements for examination

halls in the B.T. Road campus. But the university alone cannot do it. There are other problems also. Each MA student has to do at least one production. There are university productions of Rabindra Natyas and other plays. There are departmental productions and seminars and workshops. When a departmental production is taken up, students from different classes are selected. As we do not have enough space for arranging rehearsals, classes have to be suspended and the students who are not selected feel deprived, though they are supposed to be present at the rehearsals and learn from them. But they demand that classes be taken and keep on complaining that classes are not being held. We do not have sufficient number of teaching staff here, a general problem in almost all universities. So when a teacher goes on leave his classes are usually left unattended. We are planning to engage guest lecturers on contract, to take a certain number of classes on a particular subject, and they will be paid per class taken. I think the introduction of this scheme will definitely benefit the students. Apart from all this, the teachers also complain of poor attendance.

Q: It is often heard that students who do not get admitted elsewhere come here. The senior students also demand that the authorities should be more selective while recruiting students.

A: Yes, we have a selection board. We judge every incumbent by his general aptitude and interest for theatre. But we do not always get students of the same standard. Students take a risk—they do not know how much this degree will help them get a job. Our students can be classified into two categories. Those who are self confident and come here with the firm decision of doing theatre in future are naturally very few in number. And the others, simply out of love for theatre, being charmed by it at a tender age, come here, and then slowly realize that the job is tough, lose interest in it and finally get lost after obtaining the degree. You can compare this with our theatre groups where out of 30-40 boys and girls, hardly 4-5 remain and develop into good artists and theatre workers. So until the total theatre atmosphere is improved, the imposition of restrictions while selecting students for the drama course will not help much. Yes, we know that there are students who do not have much ability, but to run a department sometimes we have to make do with them. For example, we have a subject, script writing, and very few students are interested in it. In literature we have poets, story writers, novelists, but none of them are interested in play writing as it does not pay. So I do not get many students for script writing and in order to run the department I have to make do with a few students,

knowing well that they will not become good script writers. There is a demand for good plays in our theatre, our university is trying to fulfil that demand with its course on script writing, but it does not get promising and talented students. Yes, if we start a course in video, a large number of students will come and we will be able to pick the right ones from among them, but in that case we may not get enough students for the drama department. So unless the total scenario improves, the institutions will continue to face such problems.

Q: You happen to be the head of your group Sundaram, which is a very busy theatre group. Do you miss classes? How do you compensate?

A: Well, when I joined here I did not hide anything. Moreover I think that I have been appointed here only because I am a man from theatre and a performer myself. Otherwise I would not have been selected, as I do not have any degree in theatre. All my predecessors were performers, and had they not been performers themselves they would not have come here. And you can't blame them for being performers. Now, your question is whether my theatrical engagements affect my classes or not. Well, I have been a teacher since 1961 and simultaneously I have been doing theatre and writing plays. I can assure you that my ex-employers were not unhappy with my service. I try to give my best wherever I am employed. Yes, I do films and I don't have to miss classes for that. In our education system a college or university teacher gets so much time off each year that if I do my shooting only in my off-time and vacations, I will still be considered one of the busiest actors in the Bengali film industry as it now stands.

Q: Do you think it is proper to form a repertory company with the students of this university?

A: Yes, we have a plan of producing some plays with students, of performing them in different educational institutes and even in public if possible. A choir has already been formed and we are trying to tour with it. We are thinking of keeping alive the productions we do at university festivals and trying to involve the ex-students in the whole process, so that they also earn some remuneration from the project. The process of forming the repertory has already started, only it is yet to start functioning. The university has taken up a project called

Sanskriti Sanchar Prakalpa. Under this project, teachers and students of this university go to the slums, to the poor people in different areas of Calcutta and take classes in different streams of fine arts with the children, who usually do not get the opportunity of being trained in such subjects. This project is a brain child of our vice-chancellor and has become very popular. If you go to Ultadanga, Muraripukur, you can experience it yourself. We also get a lot of satisfaction from participating in this project.

Q: What is the average number of productions a student is allowed to take part in during his student years?

A: There are three streams in MA: Direction, Acting and Script Writing. Each student of direction has to produce at least one play in the final examination year. The students of Acting are always working in some production. Every class does its own productions every year and there are seven classes. Apart from this, the drama department itself produces at least four plays each year. So if a student is eager to work he can work in a good number of productions during his student years. There are mime productions also. Our students also go to the inter-university festival each year with their productions and win prizes regularly. Moreover, if we find any student doing well in Direction, we always give him opportunities to produce more plays than he is scheduled to do as per the syllabus.

Q: What are the programmes you would like to mention which you have taken up?

A: It is almost two years since I have taken charge as head of department. I think I have been able to organize successfully some very significant programmes in this couple of years. I started with two seminars on Girish Ghosh and Shakespeare. Bibhas Chakravarty and Ganesh Mukherjee, who have recently produced Girish Ghosh's plays, were the main speakers with Satya Banerjee. Soumitra Chatterjee read out 'Bilwamangal' and Ketaki Dutta sang songs from Girish Ghosh's plays. Prof. Jyoti Bhattacharjee led a long discussion on *King Lear*. He even acted out some portions. *Twelfth Night* was produced on that occasion. In May 1993, during Rabindra Janmotsav, Tagore's *Kaler Jatra* was produced. We also produced some of Tagore's short comic plays during the same period. The V.C. himself participated. This was first performed at Rabindra Sadan and broadcast by AIR. The money collected from the Rabindra Sadan show was donated to the Sanskriti Sanchar Prakalpa fund.

After that we invited theatre personalities like Mamoonoor Rashid from Bangladesh and young theatre directors like Dwijen Banerjee to share their experiences with our students. Then we had a six-day seminar on 'backstage' and everybody worth mentioning was invited, from Tapas Sen to Subroto Majumder on lights, Kumar Roy, Tarit Choudhury, Dipen Sen on sets, Salil Choudhury, Murari Roy Choudhury on music, Mohit Chattopadhyay, Pabitra Sarkar, Surajit Ghosh, Nripen Saha and Bishnu Bose on criticism and many others. I think this seminar must have made a tremendous impact on our students. Last year we arranged two lecture demonstrations by Bibhas Chakravarty and Arun Mukherjee respectively. A few months ago a camp on Mass Communication and Video Production was held for ten days, during which workshops were held by journalists and people from radio and television. A team from the National Institute of Fine Arts under the leadership of Jnanesh Mukherjee participated with their equipment, and film director Asit Sen was there to guide us.

And to conclude, we are going to produce Tagore's *Chirakumar Sabha* in a joint venture with Paschim Banga Natya Akademi and this will be performed regularly like the other previous productions of the Akademi.

Medea in Bombay: A Collaboration



Alaknanda Samarth as Medea. Photograph by Benoy Behl.

Heiner Mueller's *Medea* was presented in December 1993 by Max Mueller Bhavan, Bombay, as a collaboration between Nalini Malani, who works in the visual arts, and Alaknanda Samarth, who works in theatre as an actress. Alaknanda's was a solo performance, except for the intervention of Jason (played by Rajit Kapur) on video, in an interactive mode.

The legend of Medea, retold in Euripides' well-known Greek tragedy, goes like this: Medea is the princess of Colchis, and a famous alchemist who knows the secrets of the earth. Jason, the Greek argonaut from Corinth, enters her land to steal its treasure, the

golden fleece belonging to her father, the king. She helps him to steal the fleece, and to kill her own brother and destroy her father. She is forced, thereafter, to flee with Jason, and goes as his bride to Corinth, a country where she will always be considered a barbarian.

Mueller's challenging text has three large segments of monologues and soliloquies. *Medeamaterial* begins with Medea finding out that Jason is to wed the daughter of Creon, king of Corinth. This will render her stateless and powerless, as the cast-off first wife and older woman. Rage and vengeance drive her to kill her two sons in revenge against Jason, in effect destroying herself, an act more tragic than suicide. The nexus between Medea and Jason is a metaphor for the Third and First Worlds. The writer speaks of the corruption within the sexual coupling, the destroying of their creation.

Medeamaterial is flanked by *Despoiled Shore* and *Landscape with Argonauts*. The first section, *Despoiled Shore*, deals with the city as wasteland, and the last section, *Landscape with Argonauts*, alludes to landscape as wasteland that will last longer than the individual.

Nalini Malani speaks to Shanta Gokhale

SG: Nalini, when did your interest in theatre begin in terms of something that you could contribute to, which then led to the entire *Medea* experiment?

NM: The interest began with my encounter with Alak. I have known her for a long time-she used to act in Satyadev Dubey's productions way back in the 60s at the Bulabhai Desai Memorial Trust Institute. I had a studio there during those years. For me, seeing the whole process of theatre in those surroundings was a wonderful experience-the way the rehearsals started and finally the production came out on the stage. It was a bit of a 'ghar ka mamla'-there used to be an open-air auditorium on the terrace, all the rehearsals would take place on the lawn. On the day of the grand performance all the artists (painters, sculptors, dancers etc.) would go upstairs to watch. The costumes would have been designed by one of the artists,

postcards with drawings would serve as invitation cards. I think at the end of the 60s Alaknanda left and I was not in touch with her for several years.

SG: 'Not in touch with her' and 'not in touch with theatre' either or .

NM: Well, not in this sense, not in this involved sense-of course one watches theatre and I was very interested in performing art anyway, but not in this sense. But many years later we met up again,, when I'd already seen her perform in Kumar's [Kumar Sahani] films and subsequently *Kunti* and Jean Cocteau's play *Human Voice*; and after seeing *Human Voice* which affected me greatly-in fact Geeta Kapur and I were both seeing the performance together and we came out completely in tears, it was so moving-I did some watercolours, based on that performance, which I then showed to Alak and she was very thrilled about that. And then began a very fine relationship which lasted for years. After that every year when she came to India we'd have long talks in my studio and I did sketches of her, for she would pose for me. She'd done the role of Nina in *The Seagull* which Rustom Bharucha had directed. She enacted sections of it for me and I had done a whole series of paintings based on her performance. So that was really skirting the issue, you know, going around the performer as such. Then I had an exhibition of the work I'd done based on *The Seagull* and when Alak came to India that time, she saw it and she was very, very excited. She said, let's start a project from the beginning; first a script, you know, what does that involve. I mean, I don't know anything about theatre. I have a notion of it, but it may not have anything to do with the reality of it at all, and then are you willing to have a total novice do this?! I know only the visuals, I can imagine the human body, in a space, as part of my work, but through time, performing through time would be a totally new experience. She said, well let's think about it and I'll give you a text. She said, let's do *Medea*; she already had *Medea* in mind ...

SG: When was this, Nalini?

NM: This was in 1991-January 1991. And she sent me the text. We didn't even have a copy of the text in Max Mueller Bhavan, in English, and she sent me the text from London and I found it very exciting as I had not read a play of this nature before.

SG: You weren't acquainted with Heiner Mueller's work?

NM: Not at all. I didn't know his plays but I knew that he'd been performed in New York and an artist, Robert Wilson, had done several installations and had people perform in these installations based on Mueller's plays. I had read about it. But I had no idea of the text, how these texts were emoted, or spoken, or any of that-or the way the voice intonations and so on were actually used in the text. So it was a totally new experience and the text excited me very much because *Medea* taken in a metaphorical sense then for me became-and I think this is what Mueller has written into the text-the nexus between the third world and the first world-the colonizer and the colonized person.

Medea connives with Jason the colonizer to steal the treasures of her land, the golden fleece, and in order to do this she and Jason destroy her father and kill her brother and then flee to Corinth with the spoils.

SG: Can I just interrupt for one minute? Were you acquainted with the Greek myth itself, had you any ideas about it prior to coming to Mueller's *Medea*? Had you had any kind of strong response, whether aesthetic or even emotional? I'm asking you this question because how you feel about Medea personally and then how you see her revealed through an artist's work, are two things between which you have to, you know, find a way.

NM: Yes. I'm passionately involved in Greek tragedies. My visuals have a lot to do with Greek tragedies-Sophocles as well as Euripedes. I've actually used the concept of the Chorus all through this last series and for me this is a concept I find very relevant even today, maybe because it has a lot to do with psychology. So the Greek tragedies I know very well, not performed, just read. So in that sense I was totally familiar with *Medea*. It was, for me, one of the most difficult plays because how would a woman find a way by which she could justify the killing of her own children, this for me is the most difficult. I'd seen Melina Mercouri in a film adaptation and also Pasolini's *Medea*. But none of them really gave any justification. However, I think Mueller's *Medea*, and Euripedes' *Medea* emphasize that she's not allowed to be *woman*, she's not allowed to be a mother, it's only when she's totally denuded of any voice, that she can say 'This is nothing to me-I have to kill them because they're a part of *him*. . . 'And she justifies it in another way by saying that

the sufferings that these children are going to have later in life would be such that it'd be like death. Even so, it's most difficult. For Alak too, this was the most difficult section.

But, coming back to what I was saying ... I was constantly relating the text to us here, that is, the bourgeoisie which connived with imperialist forces, you have a multinational situation, a Union Carbide situation, killing off whatever is here and using our treasures. I'm saying this simplistically-but even now, in fact more than ever before, we're in that situation. The white man was sent to try us. Even if you think about how colonization took place, it's amazing. How the East India Company came in. How the White Man was considered to be *honest*. Why did the nobility-princelings, whoever-give up things? What was the condition of the times? People could just walk in to this country and take over. What was it in us that allowed it? Which is another way of looking at it-and then the onus falls on us. We can't keep on grumbling that they're doing this to us. Let's just for a moment sit and think why we are letting this happen.

We had initially planned the performance for the winter of 1992; however, the riots changed all that. The project was deferred by a whole year. But during the riots and the aftermath we went through a devastating period. Everything an artist held dear was being threatened: freedom of speech, of thought, everything was affected. We tried to weave all these experiences into our project.

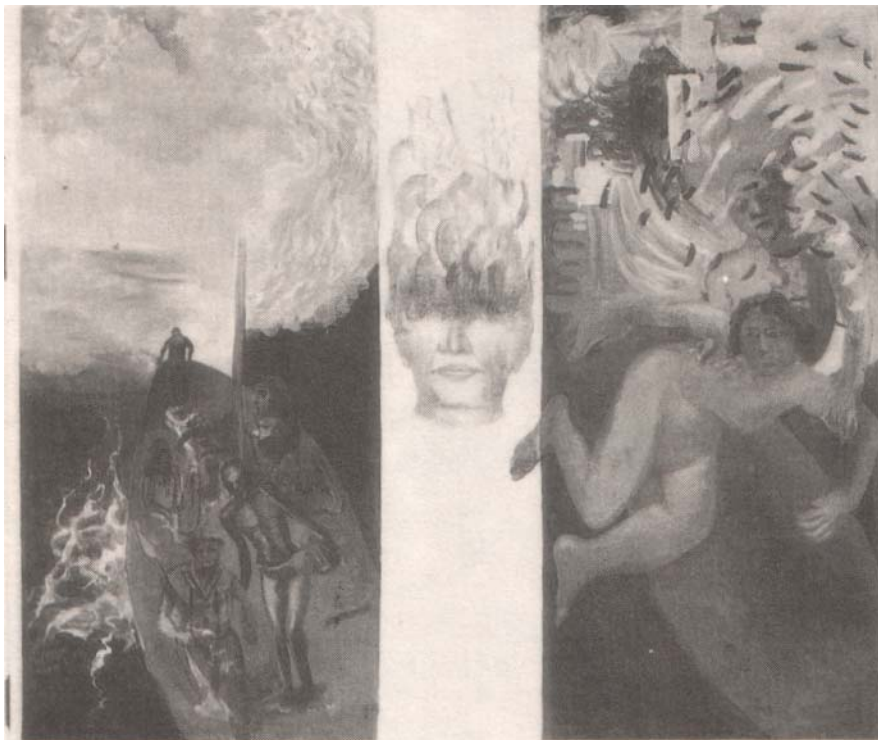
SG: So this was how you felt about the text and the relevance that you found between the text and our situation here through which you were going to relate to it, and that was marvellous because that was your first and very strong response. So it made it possible for you to want to work on it. Having decided that, I guess you had to enter into the aspect of execution, how to go about it, the method whereby you were going to collaborate with Alaknanda, divided by this great distance-she was in London and you were here. So what were the steps by which you sorted this out?

NM: Initially, after reading the text I worked out a plan and sent it to her to get her reactions. She responded very positively to my ideas. Then it was a matter of executing them. For this the Max Mueller Bhavan gave me a very good space and ample time to see the ideas through.

SG: This space is the foyer of the Max Mueller Bhavan and the auditorium of MMB.

NM: And the pavement outside it! I drew out a plan, starting with a paranoid situation: ominous looking motorcyclists cutting through the audience in the street like the secret police. I used bubble plastic to make a great coat for the actress. This for me signified the idealization of technology and its products. Products that we in India are adopting without thought of its ecological consequences. You know, now it is familiar to see styrofoam cups used for tea. Everyone knows that styrofoam despoils the earth. It renders the soil useless for at least 300 years. Why are we using these cups instead of our *khullars* which are made of terracotta. After finishing your tea you smash them and it is dust to dust. Plus the local potters are not rendered jobless.

Landscape with Argonauts deals with the question of plastic, styrofoam and so-called progress taking over and suffocating wo/mankind and its future.



Panels 1 and 2. The panels form a seamless wall 40'x8', painted on board with acrylic. Photos courtesy the artist.

The Motorcyclist was planned, again, because Fascism now doesn't take on the overtones of a Hitler situation, but in insidious ways, so you might finally say, well, this is what I want, not realizing that this is what you have to oppose. And there were a lot of things that happened impromptu, for example the grand piano wrapped up-for me that was the good thing about western culture that we have to protect, this thing called Western classical music. And y'know there was this statement at the time, made by someone who had written a biography of Freud, who said that there they were in Vienna when the bombs were about to fall, discussing Bruckner and Mahler. So such a society exists with this grand civilization, and it's the other side of it which creates this hell. So it had to do with that aspect, the wrapped up piano.

The panels I'd thought about in great detail and I wanted it to move from the very specific, with the colonizer and the colonized. The first panel with the barge is actually to do with that and what I had was a Mildred Archer-like figure who comes to India to find out what the Orient was like, the Orientalist who wants to capture it all in photographs, in writing, taking pictures from here. And she has this local, you know, it could be a native from Africa, or it could be an adivasi-a Naga, who carries her camera, her load, everywhere, it's an odd situation because he is the very person who's the subject of her thesis. So that was the first thing I painted. And then I went on to the man-woman relationship, in the very narrow sense, you know the sexuality between these two, the sexuality was such that no matter that in the outside world she's a princess, but in the arms of this man she is a chattel ... He was an opportunist throughout, from beginning to end-he made no bones about it. What is it that she never understood? Why at that stage when he's about to betray her, does she suddenly realize he's an opportunist? What happened all those years? Thirteen years-her first boy is 13-she was living in a fool's paradise. Is it possible for us to deny so much of our life and not live that life, not see who you're with, live in a fantasy world? So it has to do with the personal relationship and how we women put on blinkers and then our own roles are taken away from us, and to what extent we can actually have the right to our own lives and how we can remove these onion peels that are accumulated through history, through our own accretions ... so that had to do with the second panel.

The third and fourth panels are to do with this. The line drawing you see in the third panel is the young woman with whom Jason is once again going to play the opportunistic game. She is the king of Corinth, Creon's, daughter. This panel deals with the betrayal. He is

masturbating-it is a 'grand' orgasm, but it has nothing to do with coupling or intercourse. The pleasure is solely for himself and not the other, hence narcissistic.

The fourth panel has, amongst other elements, predominantly a woman with a gun. I wanted to portray the woman in an aggressive role. The aggression is available to her to fight her battles. At this time Arpita Singh had painted Durga with a gun, she had been criticized by the right-wing press for this, so she made a very nice statement, she said, it is my prerogative to do what I like. The aggressive role in women is looked at in a very negative way.

The fifth panel has to do with the aggrandization and seduction in Western technology and all the concomitants that go with it. For example, pollution and the mindless destruction of the planet. I saw the Gulf war on television, and CNN's way of *presenting* the Gulf war; here you were making a pact with the news-reader, you know- here you were in this nice, comfortable world and this was happening out there, a bit like in 1984, the story by George Orwell; and even the kind of language that was being used, this syncopated kind of language that's being used today is so much to do with doublespeak and things of that nature

The sixth and seventh panels have to do directly with the riots: a woman not allowing the child to speak because a child would always speak out ... blurt out the truth and it could damn everybody, this I'd planned out fairly much in detail ...

SG: Did Alaknanda know what you were planning-the kinds of images that you were planning to use?

NM: Not till they were done, because the whole adventure of painting is that you can't really plan. I can make notes, I can make drawings ... but finally when you're actually working you throw all of that out, it's only then that you can do something that has a real feeling about it, otherwise it's too trite.

SG: But had she come here before she began rehearsals?

NM: She hadn't seen the panels. She came for a few weeks in July and then for the rehearsals in October.

SG: So actually she saw these images only when she came all set for rehearsals?

NM: That's right, because we didn't have the space even to work in till the end of August ... last week of August-all that time through September till the 15th of October. And I said by hook or by crook there has to be no mess here, when she comes. I was really racing to do that, I was nearly living at Max Mueller Bhavan because I felt that anything extraneous would bother her and I must get through before she comes. So she didn't see the panels till she arrived.

SG: Tell me, these spaces ... had you decided on them or was that through discussions between you and her that it could be the pavement, the foyer and the auditorium?

NM: Yeah, I gave it to her as a possibility, and she said yes. She said yes, try out everything that you want, everything that your heart desires (laughs) ... I had even thought of carving the two children from ice blocks. In the process of the performance they would melt away in the tub. It wasn't possible, of course.

SG: Yes, because in that sense, I think the very choice of the spaces and the way in which these visuals are painted and your neon sign out there, itself became the framework of the performance-I mean it was only within this that she could then evolve what she was going to do.

NM: Yeah but, I think she did, she took a flight, I mean.

SG: Yes, yes, but, I mean you can fly more meaningfully within a framework ...

NM: The hardest task I think for her was not having a director, which has been the most unique experience in this theatre project: not having a director, not have an eye outside to be able to say how the body feels in this space, I think that for her ...

SG: It was very necessary ...

NM: And that's why she rehearsed in darkness ... I can't explain to you what it was to experience these rehearsals. I would be sitting out in the foyer so that nothing would disturb her inside, protecting that space, which was a sacred space, you know, and she would be rehearsing on a table like that and then, maybe not rehearsing at all, just lying

there for hours in the dark and then she would allow me to enter from time to time ... it was a violation of that space if we talked out of context, and I realized the tenseness of that situation because somewhere she had to have a container, and this container then became this dark womb in which she could perform. If there had been a director, she said, you wouldn't have been able to do half the things you wanted to; so in that sense it was a very, very meaningful programme. What I realized was-the vulnerability of the performer, and the fragility of theatre, you know, the delicacy of balance in timing-I saw all six performances and I saw a lot of rehearsals and I realised the element of timing and cueing which is so essential.

SG: Wait, just one moment, before we go on to that, I'd like you also to talk about the video inputs and this image, the first thing against which she poses, which you people called the Glitch, I remember and which actually has stunned a number of people. Now what was this created out of?

NM: I'll tell you what it was-you know, after having decided this area-I wrote to her about it saying let's have Jason on the video and again it came through news broadcast on television, because here you have a situation that people call communication-highways, communication-highways which gives you the possibility of entering someone else's home and speaking to that person ... but is it communication? In the sense that you have the technology to provide the communication, but is real communication taking place or not? There's this news-reader on BBC who's talking to somebody in Somalia and it's a dreadful situation going on there, but what you get is ... you know, this thing called 'news'-it's not about people dying, about starvation... you know ... so this whole thing about talking to somebody who's on the digital. They're all getting energized in little bits and pieces, they're all fragmented, so she is as much fragmented as he is. So I told her ... I'd written to her saying that how would you like him on your set? Because I'd remembered her attitude to the telephone apparatus in the *Human Voice* ... the way she handled that telephone apparatus, it became a kind of fetish ... and so I felt the TV too was something she could keep on her lap, fondle him-but she felt that she didn't want that kind of interaction. So I said you can even have a remote. It can be a figment of your imagination-you can turn him on, turn him off whenever you want, or you can put him into Glitch, into infinity, into dots

and dashes. So that was the first idea of the Glitch, on the TV set. Then when she came, she said I don't know whether it will look very good just having him on the TV, let us project him. We'll have a videoscope. So when she was rehearsing, she was walking in front of the videoscope and the colours prismatically would be breaking up and she was very thrilled about that. So this happened absolutely on the set-I had the idea of the Glitch on the TV screen and she then projected it and used it as the wall, the Berlin Wall, so that when she walks in, she's looking over that wall, you know. So this was her own idea of the wall that on one level shuts you up or on another level becomes glitch membrane that swallows you and renders you into dots and dashes.

SG: So there was the television set there, the projection on the wall and there were some slides ... which were being projected on the third wall.

NM: There is a section of the play called the 'theatre of images'. . . which excited me the most ... because the 'theatre of images' is without sound, like a tableau, and actually it's meant to be performed by something like six actors silently on the stage-but again there were many, many constrictions-how to find such actors ... how to find such bodies ...

SG: Did you consider having other actors? It wasn't always meant to be a one-woman show?

NM: I did ... I would've considered it ... it would've been wonderful to have that ... but, as I said, being a visual artist I felt I'd have more control about directing people for an established shot rather than

SG: Have them in the flesh -

NM: I wouldn't know how to handle that. If Alak had directed them, that would've been another matter, I didn't think that I would be able to direct that through a sequence of time. However, I felt very confident about training. So I trained them and I had them enact the entire *Medea* story till the time when she meets Jason, lusts for him, marries him and then the child is born. And actually what we'd conceived at the time was that there would be this huge projection and she would be in front of it and when this woman's belly is huge, you have the lights coming on her and she's in the bathtub and she ... has the

baby. Mueller uses actual pieces of flesh and blood and it's very gory, you know ... there's one scene in one particular play where they're putting shit on bodies, and there's a lot of that happening . . . and this shit business I liked very much ... it's like their whole coupling was of that nature, their whole coupling was this perverse, evil kind of coupling. So, anyway, it didn't seem to ... we both in a way retracted, maybe we could have had something like that, could have used the flesh, blood, all of that but there was this thing about the audience in Bombay and how will they react, it'll be too much, over the top, so we didn't go all the way. But I think what happened in the acting-so much force, so much passion went into the *Medea* sequence, that I think all of that was carried through by her. And the other thing about the table-now this was entirely her idea, of working on the table, steps and all. For me it was like a Bacon painting and then I tried to shoot it like a Bacon painting, everything on top of a table and all the visceralness of acting. I wanted somewhere to insert a quotation from the Hindi movies actually, from Meena Kumari . . . the great romantic actress, and also I wanted the feeling of Bombay Marine Drive to come in. The auditorium at MMB has large glass windows which face the street. The street was visible to the audience and the glass mirrored the little yellow lights on the floor, thus evoking Marine Drive.

SG: So those fairy lights which suddenly light up on the floor ... quite a brilliant stroke. And what about the costumes-were they designed by you also?

NM: No, together. The coat was designed by me ...

SG: That's the bubble-plastic thing.

NM: Yeah, the black-dress and the little gold 'coatee', it was her idea to have the back, the spine, and also quotations from various painters ... the woman's back is of great significance in Renaissance painting, right from Renaissance, to high Renaissance, decadent Renaissance right upto the impressionists and expressionists ... right up to Degas ... very important; So we tried to put in as many postures-I got all my books ... we tried to posture her back-she has very alabaster skin ... *so* her back was used very much; because when she gets up from the tub for example, it's a very awkward gesture-that's right out of Degas. You see, Degas changed the whole aspect of the woman in painting ... he did not idealize you could smell that woman, you could see her pubic hair ... *you* could

... this is the woman who menstruates ... *you* know ... she's a living body, she's oozing stuff ... she's very different from the Ingres woman who was 'ekdam chikna' you know-so all that we had to evoke. And also on that table, there was this Velasquez allusion, so all of that we had great fun trying to organize. This was one of the things that we worked out together-she's very well read. She knows a lot about painting. It was great fun and very exciting to work on this project together.

SG: Did you ever ... *you* were so involved, so totally and intensely involved with *Medea* for so long-for 2 months nearly. . . more than that ...

NM: Well, conceiving it, as I said, in 1991 when she gave me the play, from then onwards we'd been thinking about it, communicating with each other in letters, faxes and so on and then the actual working started in end-August and went right up to November.

SG: So you must've practically dreamt *Medea*?

NM: I was sleeping *Medea* ... all my paintings were *Medea-I'd* done something like 50 drawings and paintings which were only to do with Heiner Mueller's *Medea*.

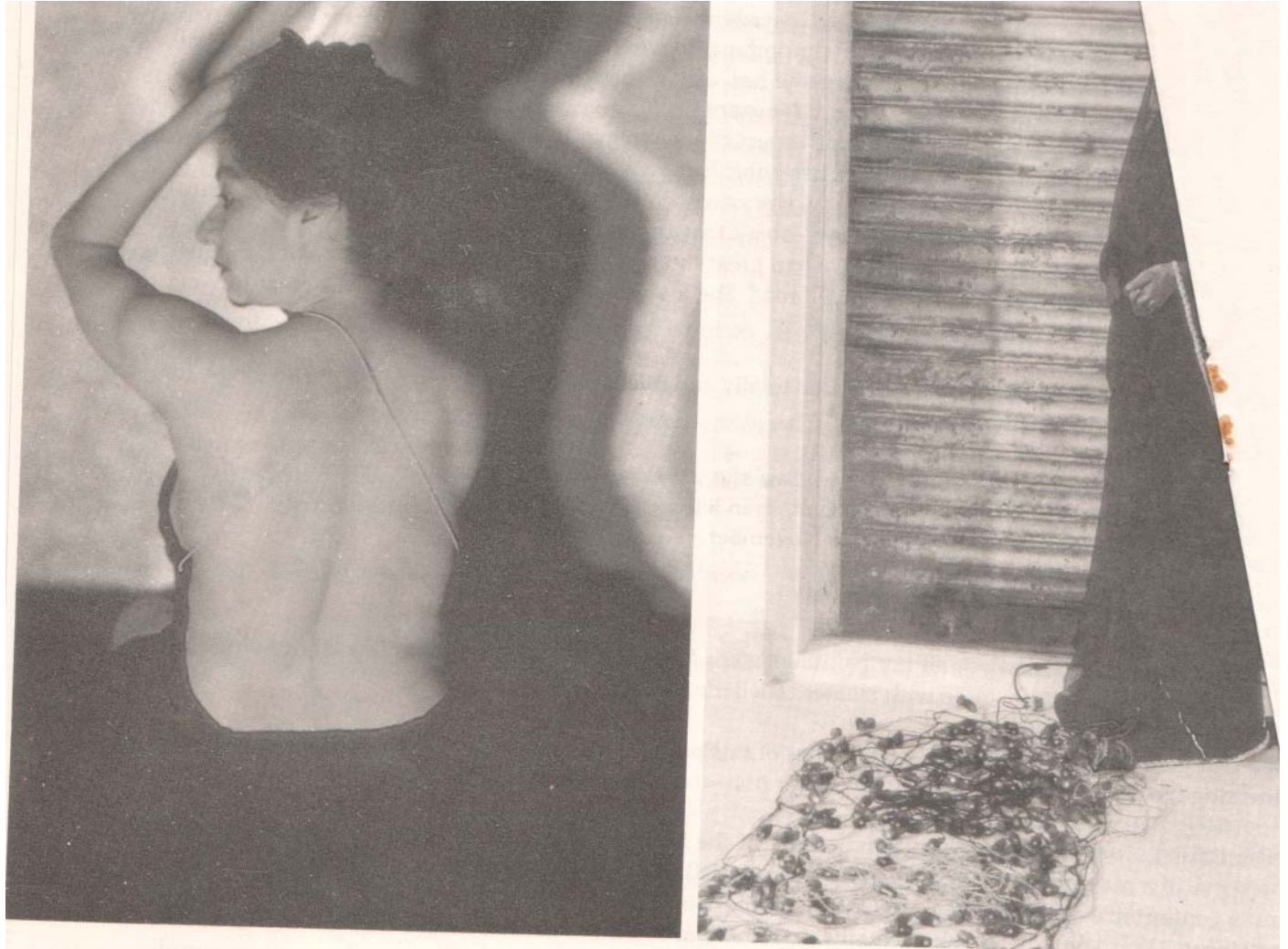
SG: Did you, in your mind's eye, see snatches of this performance? What I'm trying to say is-were you directing the play? Whether you actually did or not-mentally were you directing it?

NM: I don't ... I could see it as a film because of the framing aspect ... somehow, when you're in the presence of a real human being in a space which is 360 degrees-I have a drawback. Framing, I'm much more comfortable with . . . it's more to do with my work, maybe that's why. So, there it was for me, an adventure. You know, when she actually stood here and she kissed that head I thought my God, how fantastic. And then when she bounced the balls-all that has a different feeling, you know, from simply framing a thing-you know, the actual presence of a human being, doing this act-then theatre as ritual, then of course the whole business of what theatre was about, how you would feel after the performance, what kind of emotion are you left with, you know, what *was* this experience? It took hold of you, grabbed you and shook you up and finally, was it an integrated experience-did it break you up or fragment you? What was the healing role of

theatre here? Simply the exposure of it, as a lot of Artaud does, just reacting towards emotional states and emoting, that is for him a way of working out a problem, a psychological problem; or do you have a very controlled kind of Noh theatre which has more to do with the rituals and how you control the emotions. For me Mueller has been such a combination really-there is Artaud, there is Brecht, but it's not this, nor that, and I feel, like in Pina Bausch's case, the emotion is 'superposed' on the person-it's not that the person is not feeling it; he or she is feeling it, and yet I feel that the emotion-somewhere they're describing or demonstrating it, they're not

SG: actually feeling

NM: it, it's not like Artaud's screaming, it's not that gutful, visceral thing in the real ... in that sense. And I got that feeling from Pina Bausch too ... maybe it's a Germanic thing, or Germanic development, but I think it's wonderful and the very act of repeating it, repeating a gesture, on and on; in *Cafe Mueller* for example, in Bausch's work, there is this couple that comes together and the girl slides down, then she's brought back into the arms of this man by another man, and again she slides down, they want to come together and they keep coming apart. And the whole incantation ... and I think theatre has a lot to do with incantations ... that, I think is an aspect that I directly felt with her performance. And in the last *section-Landscape with Argonauts*, that came out brilliantly. I am yet to see a performance of that nature. It's brilliant.



Alaknanda Samarth in *Medea*. Photographs by Benoy Behl. Performer's Note

Bewildering times shuffle the terms of reference at the heart and soul of the actor's work.

The loss and recuperation of the voice and body-the collective voice as flesh-and-body-is what is at stake in the theatre-actor's flow.

Heiner Mueller's texts are fragments: ways, contexts, in violent contradiction-a journey, a vertigo.

Nalini Malani's responses to this, along with mine, is to do with my preoccupations on Memory and its telescoping in language-spatialization within which the actor acts-have driven this work.

Medea was an alchemist and an exile. She had the capacity to live her own death, knew the linkage between the destructive and creative and the act of theatre.

Ultimately, the actor, from a filter, a figure, becomes a Form of Experience.

.Things are always seen from some where, such is the geometric basis of representation ... this 'site of origin' is always the law; the law of society, law of the struggle, law of senses/meaning.

*For the representation to be really deprived of origin and exceed its geometric nature without ceasing to be representation, the price to pay is enormous: it is nothing short of death. "**

***Medeamaterial's* mode of production in Bombay, November-December 1993**

Heiner Mueller's writing is a mangled body which through a mapping of personal psychosis travels zigzagging on to epic socio-historical betrayals, debris, perpetrations and closures, love, animal memory, desire, envy, cannibalism, lust, technological elsewheres, hate, alienation and on to a blueprint that catalyses not only the actor-audience/community but the very idea of a fixed aesthetic, of authorship itself, and goes on to question if innate in the claim of authorship lies posited an act of self betrayal, and denial of vaster change of identities and integrity of passion involves the annihilation of self-perpetuating illusory structures of self.

Its danger then lies not only in detonations/ interpolations of varieties of real and metaphoric, but in the non-adjectival ruthlessness with which it is able to take on its own utter loss of hope, specific and universal-and the innocence with which it places faith in the immediate, disposable participatory act of theatre. In doing so it finds unflinching contemporary form and tempo that galvanizes its practice.

That the contradictions never blur into double standards of duplicity both shadow and substantiate its multiple meanings, and capacitate fluid entries into shifting perspective and identity.

This through a projection/ transposition of that most complex mythological legend of modern experience schooled in the facts of exile: Medea.

These are some of the depths I entered for nearly two years researching universal, specific, gender nature culture, family as state, codes and modes of exchange, the carnal, narcissism, the morphology grace and favour of the word in several languages, the origin of theatre, of cinema, of stories as desire-survival, and out of the genesis of the collaboration with the painter Nalini Malani and lighting designer, Sam Kerawalla, at the object as 'site of theatre', emotional and alchemical qualities of surfaces, at things made of light, materials, internal postures, angles and looks, at the body-as-matter-diapositive-signshadow-some and all of this

through the voluptuous, visceral text with its freewheeling seepages from scatological to heightened, epic to kitsch, cabaret, myth, onanistic, changing scale proportion, allusion, all within the open space of one word, the blink of an eye, a flash of feeling.

Ripples of estrangement from habitual protections in rehearsal process:

To be able to circulate within the contours of this minefield, a reconstruction of other characters in technological elsewhere and minds' eyes, signalling some rude, lonely internal realities.

A further act of distancing was the decision to do without the concept of a director, only partly so that Nalini and I could work on one-to-one idioms creating an arena of cross connections through the terms of reference of our two histories, language of performance and visual art.

A third degree of destabilization-so that the 'whole' was never visible-only the audience could put it together-was the decision not to see the visuals-never a scene design or set, but response to text-paintings, video installations, slide projections, neon lights, objects-till 4 weeks before the show.

Through a topos of internalizations, haphazard, arduous, fleeting, lifelong and enduring, exiled, vulnerably, painfully arrived at in wounded unknown and specific ways, every word of the verbal text was picked up, mutating from a drop of water on the tip of a thirsty tongue to the quest for a torrent of historical-personal-contextual excavations, violations, hurts, delights, massacres, restorations, choice-the topos of the text's own inner life, prerequisites, original context, then find ways of freeing myself from that context without losing sight of it.

An expanse of breath needed to support and arrive at a depth of exchange with a text that allows this level of multiple cultural involvements.

A state of mind/body brought about by new ways of seeking (repeating/ rehearsing) leading to change in internal structures not propped up unilaterally by nation/ territory or geographically sited cultural memory or practice.

Overlapping, a musical inventory, bodily filigrees, impulse, shards into patterns.

Translation as word-to-word coinage, mouth-to-mouth resuscitation I have long since discarded along with the notion of '*adaptation*'.

Cultural signs and practices-kaleidoscopic involvements within which de-personalization occurs, a personality is constructed and broken up, actor/self and his/her nonhomogenous audience translate each other-without impersonation-mimicry-in reading, writing, listening and regenerating understanding.

Here are some rehearsal notes I made in 1990:

Prakriya

Pune-Imphal, February/May

Rehearsal Notes on:

Modes of Acting. Training.

Narratives. Language. Dramaturgy. Audience perceptions.

Ways of meeting-non-homogeneous audiences. Conditions of performance:

social, geographic, artistic, cultural, professional, infrastructural, architectural, textual circumstances.

Testing group dynamics.

Creation of a social unit in a fresh, unknown environment with actors from different conventions

without a common verbal language, perhaps, with a common 'inner speech' exploring definitions of 'meaning', 'sense'-leading to: modes of 'translation' with actor as translator

intertextuality at the levels of literary text, lives, cultures, performative conventions

Rehearsal process:

'translation' arising out of 'verbal' barriers tuning through unconscious images unknown, unspoken ways of actors tuning in the absence of a common language leading to different 'addresses'

shifts of involvement, meanings

'I' of the person

'I' of the actor

'I' of the character 'I' of the role

'I' of the 'joinery'

The 'I' shifts in involvement and meaning all the time It dissolves and reforms.

Texts and Textures

Written, literary text. Musical texts.

Life texts.

Text of the towns.

Performance text.

We didn't have a single language fluently in common. Emotional, stylistic points of entry found to give an inner grip. The actors who'd evolved this method for themselves had a springboard. One actor entered 4 of the languages in the rehearsal process. The other actor entered them in different ways, not directly, because he didn't speak them, but he was forced to encounter and interact with their signs. This should have been allowed to flower.

Thus, each text brought its own inner notations and sense of poise within its specific convention. One actor created the 'presence' of these notations, the other sometimes co-mingled, sometimes created an 'absence', sometimes collided with them.

As the vision consisted of performance before a non-homogeneous group, linguistically, the notion of 'translation' underwent some extraordinary transformation. 'Exercises' had to be created 'on the spot' by the actors and a certain creative approach to actors' training will, in the Indian context, inevitably emerge, if this seminal work continues. (Language-Time-Space-Meaning-Sense-Theatre--Cinema)

An actor 'translates' in many ways. The two actors did not, for the most part, understand what the other was saying on stage, or off-yet a most extraordinary psychic tuning began to develop between them on stage. Marathi, the language predominantly spoken in Pune, was not spoken in performance-on purpose. This tested the audience's ability, capacity to drop and shed and meet a new 'language' and re-assess 'meaning' and 'significance.'

Theatre-as originally coming out of uterine contractions into a ritual space before 'unknown' to gasp for breath.

My search for an ever-increasing freedom from ways of texturizing the word in verbal language in theatre without substituting it with song-gesture, yet splintering and displacing and unleashing its meaning elsewhere, the tensions and counter-tensions of this struggle were the crossroads, personal, historical, idiomatic, of what was 'site specific' in Bombay 1993, the date and place of the production.

I owe a great deal to cinema in my awareness of new equilibriums, implications of reproductibility, ways of seeing, hearing, putting pieces together.

In India, image consciousness has superseded sound consciousness.

Here are some more rehearsal notes I made in Imphal, Pune 1990-Prakriya. Time

Different value systems of timing according to culturally specific and historical modes:

Ritual time Performance time Time as in primeval memory

Time as 'memorization', between two lines of dialogue, challenging

the Stanislavkian notion of motivational subtext, without regressing into false posturization.

Suspension of time Silence between lines Rupture of 'motivation' between lines Erasure of psychology

Silence as 'eloquence' between lines.

The actress played 3 things: essence, and 2 phases of one character The juxtaposition with this going in and out of:

Actress-self, non-self Mother (Saubhadra) Then 18 year old girl Actress who knows she's not a very good actress. Through each 'character'

behavioural is obliterated and a much deeper, hollowed out, mythic, inner proportion is undertaken by the actor.

Phrases ... memorization ... in-between.

These fragments, culturally specific, not 'universally fused', should be then re-aligned in 'rewriting' by the audience.

The audience will then always 'meet' the performance and participate in the act. A new mode of meeting, which goes through the physical performative act into the satvik/spiritual-

re-locates what is 'lost

'even linguistically.'

The 'move' comes out of 'the word'. The breath to speak, out of the fragment organicity out of the move.

I separated the process of finding new bodies from the word.

No beginning, middle, end in this way of rehearsing. Nameless, it comes from everywhere, at all times and is also concrete and grounded.

At heart is both an acceptance and confrontation of difference, negation, surrender and its resurgencies of what we call time-in-the-theatre-to paintings, video images.

I separated the process of finding several new bodies (by internalizing and remaining separate from Nalini's surfaces and responses) from the cry of the word and language.

'The presence of all absences (souvenirs, promises, letters) is the rhythm to which History becomes intelligible and desirable.'*

Words as Lessing's 'Pregnant Instants'.

Each word isolated, wrenched out, rings in emotional cultural, historical gravities and planes. This is then ricocheted on to various surfaces-as-thresholds-wall, screen, oil paint, mirror, video screen glass, cement, gypsum, wood, water, acrylic, mica, buckram, plastic.

Space opened up between words, over, above, around, within each word.

The body as transparency alters shape, encodes itself accordingly.

An articulated meeting point is located, smashed; disarming painful new configurations intuited, sometimes revealed and made manifest. That would depend on the audience's socializations and needs and fears.

The word-as-'musical-object'

Filaments, sound-ghatakas, words-as-moments-in-time, as threads, words-kept-apart.

The voice as its own grain, as playback, comeback, as pre-recorded obsolete, as live amplifications, dilation, diminution, the friction between music and the word-this had something to do with the history of the vocal landscape of this text.

Melodrama-in-music cannot be seen in the theatre as something binary to the word.

The word as Mueller excavates and deploys it is open to almost all archaeological excavations- from 'polyvalent viewpoints'.**

'The song speaks ... or better still, writes . . . '*

As I hear voices within the voice, perspectivize the word-in-the-voice-hidden secret images within the voice image. 'The entire space of the voice, is it not infinite space? '*

'The grain of the voice.. . is better defined by the very friction of the music and something else, which is the language.'*

'It is better to change the musical object itself, such as it offers itself to the word, modify its level of perception and intellection: displace the fringe of the contact of the music and language.'*

The audience is the moment of its cultural-historical context.

Through entering the word-body,, explode into acrobatics of shape and practice by paying reverence to the loves and histories of Nalini's curvatures and imaginings.

For the body to explode cultural valorizations leading to shifts in inner constructions, the word has to be first emptied of prejudice.

Here are some rehearsal notes I made in 1990:

Joinery

Between each `text' and 'convention' and 'unit' on stage there was a 'link' or *joinery*.

The pause. Costume change on stage. 'Silence' and 'context' was created, upheld in these 'units' of *joinery*.

Iconoclasm also occurred through, within, in the moments of joinery.

In other words, you 'destroy' the last form and create another. Each moment, the past moment was 'destroyed'. Since some of the texts were 'theatre within theatre' an actress /character, in a play within a play, and then the actress/ character returning to the scene where she'd played that 'first play' about the 'end of the world'. In between, the joinery revealed the person playing the actress playing the character.

The 'constant' was the actor/character of *Abhimanyu and Memory*.

Memory began to find form

I believe what we attempted was fairly rich an experience at the level of memory.

It is impossible to describe a performance, that is something to be overcome. .

The performance piece was a performance about performance.

About *evolution*. Memory.

The actor from Manipur was dealing with 'pre-expressive' energy. He had to be met. Then there was 'expressivity'. Then the so-called 'post-expressive'.

So there was:

primeval impulse and memory

the theatrical implications of memory and a last
'beat' which went beyond

Thus, the psychic distribution from the Manipuri core-lasya, Father-Mother-Child-internal structures to the discoveries, in and through theatre of the

actant

actress, role, character-the role being that of an actress/
Kaspar/ Saubhadra / Abhimanyu

The attempt was to distil, imply, reveal, camouflage-aspects of memory and use of language/discursive, non-verbal, inner speech.

Abhimanyu -form was geometrical physically.

Abhimanyu forgot. Was never told. Listened. Didn't hear. His mother fell asleep. Gave birth. He grew up. Knew his Dharma. Entered the Heart of Battle. Knew he would have no help from his memory. And gave up his life.

The physicalization was centrally axis-ed. Listening. Discovering the limbs, discovering Being, Not Being. There was no 'characterization'. This was a cocooned moment on stage-looking both inward and spatially looking outward in spatial geometry, evenly distributed, the 'joinery' of that was eventually left to the actors to handle. There were, thus, transitional uncertainties, traumas, inevitable in such conceptualized new work. The traumas were necessary to explode the paternalistic, hierarchical power structures, not only of theatre, but group dynamics.

The experience was as violent as the myth and Today-kaleidoscopic shifting times, fractures its aborted placenta like bits and laminations of culturally enclosed-encoded language-a singular wager to gravities.

The organs spill out and re-form.

Mono-cultural terrorism.

The cultural outsider, insider, the right side and its opposite-notion as not only detonated but as unfixed, alterable, disunified as the perceptions-as-needs-for-survival-as identities of the cultural and social group which seeks to mould it.

The actor incarnates many universes, differently. How the actor is perceived, constrained, shredded up, by whom, where, when and within whose vision? Unhinged, by who is speaking and who is listening? How do you allow yourself to be perceived, by whom, where, and when to refuse?

A fresh configuration at its becoming is both new-and-not-new-enough.

Its potentialities, prophecies prefigure as it unhinges the parameters of its own 'aesthetic'.

The approach to materials has undergone radical change in the last 30 years.

The theatre event is paradoxical.

Every piece of work desystemizes the last; the actor dies in compulsive modern repetition/'reproducibility'.

The same space, text, time every day but a new entry into the universe making the unmanifest manifest.

The actor is then not a thing of theatre but theatre itself. Its facticity and site, focus.

Memory does not reinvest the past with some mythic lost, nostalgic sexuality and exclusive notions of the feminine brought on in panic by male over-compensations to bolster sense-of-self as desire-keeping-death-at-bay.

The socializations within which this circulates vary from culture-time to culture-time.

Everything was made of light. The children were made of water and light.

'Theatre-actor-lives within the 'shot and danger' of desire by the possibility of its own death, and is split for and against itself by the possibility of its own rupture.'**

The actor then also becomes a witness to a memory of loss. By taking this risk he never ceases to militate and affirm and show himself /herself as showing himself/herself the possibility of his own dislocation in cultures and practice on the cusp.

This is the extreme limit at which Mueller's syncopation was played out in Bombay.

Alaknanda Samarth 9 June, 1994

Theatre log

Drama Critics' Meet in Pune: A Report

A drama critics' meet was organized by Rangat Sangat Pratishtan, Pune, from 21 to 23 April this year, the first after 1984. The purpose was an exchange of ideas between playwrights, directors, other theatre craftsmen and the critics who evaluate productions, in an attempt to give a new direction to the criticism of drama.

The meet was inaugurated by Damu Kenkre, a veteran of theatre. The well known drama critic Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni presided over the inaugural function. Atmaram Sawant, Raja Gosavi, V. Y. Gadgil, Pandit Mandke, M. K. Pardhi and Kamalakar Nadkarni were felicitated on this occasion. Mr Kenkre spoke about his expectations of a critic's role. He felt that a critic's task is to understand the inter-relationship of various aspects of a play which are presented in a visual form. He should also impart his knowledge to the readerspectator. Yet, it's harmful when he takes on the role of a judge. Criticism should be objective and at the same, it should be thought-provoking for the actors, directors and stage artisans. In his address Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni said that the main task of the critic is to understand and to interpret the play. Unfortunately contemporary critics are not able to do so. A critic should be bold while interpreting the play. He should be aware of the whole theatre activity of which the specific production is a part. Drama criticism should not be restricted to column writing in newspapers.

The second day's morning session started with a discussion on present day playwrights and directors. Kamalakar Nadkarni presided. Upcoming playwrights and directors like Prashant Dalvi, Abhiram Bhadkamkar, Vijay Kenkre, Waman Kendre, Chandrakant Kulkarni, Anant Kanho, Vivek Lagoo and Sanjay Dole participated in the discussion. One of the points that emerged was that because the critics upheld the experimental theatre, the commercial theatre also dared to try some experiments within its limitations. This was a valuable contribution of the critics. The writers and directors were asked questions like 'How did you have to change yourself in the transition from experimental to commercial theatre? What is your point of view

while watching plays written and directed by somebody else?' Vijay Kenkre said that he does experimental plays to bring in a new vitality, to sharpen his perception, but the commercial theatre is a steady source of livelihood. Waman Kendre said that he is very alert while watching others' performances, and thinks about a particular play as part of theatre on the whole. But he objected that very often the analysis that critics offer is of the script, not the performance. Agreeing with him, Chandrakant Kulkarni said that direction should be discussed in detail. All the same, a critic should express his overall point of view towards theatre as a whole. There should be consistency and honesty in his reviews.

That evening Dr Shriram Lagoo presented Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni the Madhav Manohar award for outstanding critic. Dr Lagoo stated his appreciation for Mr Nadkarni's contribution, saying that he was the Mardhekar of drama criticism. (Mardhekar introduced a new, formalistic mode of criticism in poetics.) In his acceptance speech, Nadkarni spoke about his proposed theatre books. The felicitation was followed by a discussion on the play *Jyachg Tyacha Praksh* written by Abhiram Bhadkamkar and directed by Chandrakant Kulkarni. The theme of faith was discussed in detail. Vijay Kenkre said that for those people who cannot reach the theatre, it must reach them. Only then will the play perform a true mission against blind faith and superstition. While concluding the discussion Pushpa Bhave discussed her views on the choice of colours by the director and the use of voice by the performers.

On the morning of 23 April a discussion was held on the subject 'Marathi Drama Critics-Reality and Expectations'. Veteran playwright Vijay Tendulkar presided. In his inaugural speech, Shriram Lagoo attacked the critics quite aggressively. He said that the criticism that appears in newspaper columns does not merit any serious attention, nor does it open up any new direction for the theatre performers. Criticism does not keep pace with theatre: the Marathi theatre is acquiring new aspects, but the criticism does not take account of it. Critics have largely ignored factors like the institutionalization of criticism in print media linked to commercial interests. Often criticism remains only an intellectual exercise.

In the discussion that followed, various points of view were put forward. Actor-director Vinay Apte stated that most drama critics writing in newspapers acted only as reporters, or exploited their clout, and as a result, playwrights, directors and performers had stopped taking critics' opinions seriously. Producer Lata Narvekar protested against yellow journalism. Ramnath Chavan said that he had had a very good experience with critics. Lalan Sarang stated

that drama critics should be specially trained for the task, and that workshops should be organized for them. Vijay Tendulkar took a balanced view, saying that it was high time criticism established its credibility, but he didn't think critics carried any clout. He ascribed his own versatility to his career in journalism, which, he said, gave him a world view. He suggested that critics should be transferred from one department of the newspaper to another to get an overall sense of trends in various fields. The whole business of criticism needs greater rigour, a clearer focus. A theatre critic should practice criticism without any constraints or vested interests. The performer does not expect mercy or generosity from the critics, but critics must have an understanding of theatre and be aware of the changing reality. He said that a newspaper is a house with many windows, and each window gives a different world view.

The conclusion was that there should be an increasing interaction between theatre people and the critics. An unofficial meeting of the critics was held after the meet was over, and the idea of organizing a workshop for the critics was accepted.

Dr Sushama Jogalekar

Notebook

These entries have been compiled from announcements and literature sent in to STQ by theatre workers and groups all over the country.

For Children

Indian Mime Theatre, Calcutta, in association with the Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, organized a month-long full-time theatre workshop for children in the summer. The concluding programme, held at Calcutta on 18 June, was presided over by P. K. Bhattacharya, regional director of EZCC and inaugurated by veteran actress Ketaki Dutta. In his welcome address Niranjan Goswami, director of Indian Mime Theatre, said that a workshop such as this is needed not only to initiate children into the art of theatre but also for personality development. For the occasion the children performed a play entitled *Ek Ekke Ek* written and directed by Siddhartha Chakravarty, an NSD graduate, and assisted by Sushanta Mandal. The play used techniques of mime and dramatics to look at the adult world from the children's point of view.

The dance sequences were choreographed by Samita Biswas and music was directed by Goutam Mitra. To encourage the children, Indian Mime Theatre has introduced the Keya Chakravarty Memorial Scholarship and this year's scholarship was awarded to Shaona Barik, the best participant of the workshop. Indian Mime Theatre has been allotted some land by the state government to build its own training centre which, according to Niranjan Goswami, will further the cause of mime and theatre in this region.

Nata Sainik of North Lakhimpur, Assam, organized a forty-five day drama workshop for children starting on 6 July. Ali Hydar, playwright and director, was to conduct the workshop and do a play with the participating children.

Natrang Jammu organized a children's theatre festival in July at which five children's plays by this group will be performed. Natrang Jammu works regularly with children for over ten months a year. In the play *Mere Hisse ki Dhoop Kahan Hai?* directed by Balwant Thakur, children learn to understand the implications of overpopulation. Over 53 shows of this play have been performed. *Aaj ki Aurat*, written and directed by Balwant Thakur, and staged in Kamani auditorium, Delhi, in April 1995, also featured child artists who portrayed issues relating to the girl child, dowry and gender discrimination. These plays will form part of the children's theatre festival organized by the group.

Rangaprabhath Children's Theatre

, in collaboration with G. Sankara Pillai Memorial Centre of Performing Arts, is organizing monthly discussions on theatre from July onwards, as part of its silver jubilee celebrations. The inaugural lecture will be delivered by the writer and educationalist Sri T. N. Jayachandran, the former vice-chancellor of Calicut University. This function will be held in Trivandrum.

Srijan is a registered society based in Jodhpur, Rajasthan, which is using theatre for the personality development of children. It regularly conducts speech and theatre workshops for children and the youth. For the last three years, faculty nominated by the Jawahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur, have been working with children between 9 to 15 years of age at training camps

organized by Srijan. The objective is to help the children understand and appreciate theatre and at the same time undergo a process of self-development through theatre. Emphasis is laid on providing maximum opportunities for them to participate, play, imagine and improvise their own scripts. They are encouraged to learn theatre without actually going through a formal training as such. This is accomplished through theatre games. This year, 64 children participated in the camp held in May and they learnt script writing, acting, miming and music. Vilas Janve of West Zone Cultural Centre worked on mime with the children. Three plays were produced at the end of the workshop: *Swapna Duswapna* (Prabhat Kala Mandal), *Idgah* (based on a story by Premchand and adapted by Arvind Bhatt) and *Albela Jasoos Natkhat Laashen* (Rizwan Zamir Usman). Educational Media Research Centre of Jodhpur is making an educational documentary film on the workshop for the UGC sponsored national network.

Silver Jubilee Celebrations:

Darpan Kanpur performed the silver jubilee show of its popular production *Chandi ka Juta* in March this year. The play is written/ directed by Ranjit Kapur, produced by Atulya Satyamurthi, and has music by Gulam Dastgir Khan. Darpan Kanpur's latest production is *Janpath Kiss*, also directed by Ranjit Kapur, who has adapted it from a novel written by Akhileswar jha.

Bhabikal Natya Gosthi of Dibrugarh, Assam, is celebrating its silver jubilee this year. Since its inception in 1971 the group has produced 35 fulllength and 23 one-act plays. Though the group mainly works on the proscenium stage it has often performed in the streets. The group has also organized several seminars and exhibitions, and has a theatre journal called *Natyapatra*. The silver jubilee programme promises new productions, seminars, workshops, children's theatre and a publication.

Seminar/Workshops:

Ethnic Arts Centre, Hyderabad in collaboration with National School of Drama, New Delhi and Samskar of Hyderabad is organizing a retrospective of Badal Sircar's plays on 27 and 28 July, which will be followed by a seminar on alternative theatre and its significance, specially in the context of the Third World. Satabdi of Calcutta will present three of Badal Sircar's *plays-Michhil, Chaduibhati and Sada-Kalo* and the students of NSD will also present a play.

Announcements:

The Puppet is a Pune-based registered charitable organization which has been functioning since 1982. The organisation trains social activists and community workers in puppetry. As an ongoing activity The Puppet runs courses in puppetry, which range from short week-long courses to those lasting a full year. The basic motive is to propagate the use of the folk art of puppetry for social education. The organization has a few scholarships of Rs 250 per month for genuine cases. Individuals or organizations interested in learning about puppetry can contact The Puppet, Building No. 2, Block No. 25, Gopinath Nagar, Kothrud, Pune 411029.

Publications:

Centre for Communication and Cultural Action, a Calcutta-based group of concerned communicators and cultural workers, has published a booklet titled *In Search of Alternative Media* written by Sanjib Sirkar, director of CCCA. The booklet contains articles on mass media and the performative arts. The publication, priced at Rs 15, is available from the Centre's office at 5/11 Rifle Range Road, Calcutta 700 019.