

Everything Personal – a taut and gripping play | Manohar Khushalani

A Review by Prof. Manohar Khushalani

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Indian theatre professionals have been complaining about lack of contemporary indigenous playwrights. But a crop of new playwrights is emerging. Abhishek Bhattacharya's '*Nothing Will Happen Between Us*' and Anushka Ravi Shankar's '*Phoenix*' come to one's mind. The latest new playwright to hit the horizon is Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a seasoned journalist; whose first play, '*Everything Personal*', was presented by Yatrik under the direction of Bhaskar Ghosh. Incidentally, all the three plays were produced by the India International Center, though the first two were presented by Ruchika Theatre Group at IIC earlier.

Mukhopadhyay's precisely written script is about what happens when *Everything Personal* leaks into the public domain. The play revolves around a radio reality show. The show has listeners phoning in, and, using made-up names, answering very personal questions, hopefully truthfully – since they are promised by the Radio Channel that their identities will be kept concealed. The story revolves around two couples whose lives get intertwined due to the radio show. Vivek (Sunit Tandon) and Nupur (Rupali Sharma) are a lovey-dovey couple who have Ganesh, (Vishaal Sethia) and Madhuri (Isha Joshi) as frequent visitors, often coming over for dinner. Vivek is intrigued by the show and is uncontrollably attracted to it with his thrill-seeking temperament. As Vivek is artfully drawn in by the Radio Jockey (Aarti Nayar) to reveal intimate secrets of his life, it creates a turmoil in the lives of the

remaining three. For one, Vivek had a previous relationship with Madhuri, which he confessed about on the radio show, without revealing her identity – though, it didn't take long for the spouses to guess. As the shows progressed, the pressure of keeping the listeners entertained led to unprecedented brinkmanship on Vivek's part. So much so, that he inadvertently revealed a deep dark secret of his life which shocked even the radio channel.

Bhaskar's taught direction did full justice to Mukhopadhyay's script which kept the audience on tenterhooks. Sunit Tandon's rendition of an unfathomable liar, who keeps others guessing as to whether he was lying or not, was well crafted. Arti Nayar, Rupali Sharma and Vishaal Sethia gave competent performances. Sinia Dugal and Ramesh Thakur as Vivek's parents provided the appropriate support, however, Isha Joshi needs to work on her voice projection. The play was not just entertaining, but it also examined some issues regarding the high expectations of the younger generation and marital loyalty in a contemporary framework. One hopes that the Playwright will continue to write and contribute to the Indian theatre scene.

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Himachali Beats

TALK: Music and Dance Heritage of Himachal

Presenter: Vijay K. Stokes

Collaboration: Manana, November 8

Audio and video clips were used to describe the rich music and dance traditions of *ilaga* Kotgarh (80 km from Shimla), which had three highly developed genres of folk music: *geet*, or songs, set to a four-beat rhythm; *laune*, a chant form in which women accompanied various marriage functions; and *luman*, a free-form poetic recitation of thoughts—about sorrow, life and death, and romance. It also had three genres of dance: the *nati*, in which large groups of people danced around a circular path to a four-beat rhythm; the *bhitru naach*, a structured indoor solo dance; and the *phunki nati*, in which many individuals performed unstructured dances set to several different beats.



Rhythm, a critical component of *pahari* culture, was generated by an ensemble of instruments (*baja*), which typically consisted of two large base drums (*dhols*), a higher frequency half drum (*nagara*) and a metal plate (*blama*) which produced a high-frequency metallic sound. A characteristic uneven tessellation of each beat made the *nati* sound unlike any other four-beat rhythm. Besides these percussion instruments, the *baja* also had three pairs of horns: a flared lower-frequency horn (*karnal*); a bulbous, higher frequency horn (*kaori*); and an S-shaped high-frequency horn (*barnshinga*). The *baja* could be accompanied by a shehnai (*a sarna*) that played the song melody.

This sophisticated music form now faced extinction because the *baja* was played by the local Harijans, whose younger generation have distanced themselves from this activity because of the associated stigma.

■ ANSHU DOGRA

Intertwined Lives

PLAY: *Everything Personal*

By Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay,

Presented by Yatrik; Directed by Bhaskar Ghose, December 6–7

Indian theatre professionals have been complaining about the lack of contemporary indigenous playwrights. But a crop of new playwrights are emerging. The latest new playwright to hit the horizon is Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, whose first play was presented by Yatrik under the direction of Bhaskar Ghose.

What happens when *Everything Personal* becomes 'everything public'? The play revolves around a radio reality show, in which listeners phone in anonymously, using pseudonyms, answering personal questions. Centre stage are two couples whose lives get intertwined due to the radio show. Vivek (Sunit Tandon) and Nupur are a lovey-dovey couple who have Ganesh and Madhuri as frequent visitors, often staying on for dinner.

Vivek's thrill-seeking temperament helps the RJ to artfully draw him in to reveal intimate secrets of his life. This creates a turmoil in the lives of the remaining three. Vivek confesses to a previous relationship with Madhuri; without revealing her identity, though, it doesn't take long for the spouses to guess. As the show progresses, the pressure of keeping the listeners entertained leads to brinkmanship on Vivek's part, and he inadvertently reveals a dark secret of his life which shocks even the radio channel.

Bhaskar's taut direction did full justice to Mukhopadhyay's script, which kept the audience on tenterhooks. Sunit Tandon's rendition of an unfathomable liar, was well-crafted. Arti Nayar, Rupali Sharma and Vishal Sethia gave competent performances; however, Isha Joshi needs to work on her voice projection. The play was not only entertaining, but also examined issues of the generation gap and marital loyalty in a contemporary framework. One hopes the playwright will continue to write and contribute to Indian theatre.

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI