

Romeo, Juliet and Seven Clowns | Manohar Khushalani



Colourful Costumes Lively Production

A Review by Manohar Khushalani

Published Earlier in **IIC Diary May-June 2013**

The only thing this play had in common with Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is the story line on which the spoof is based. Thankfully, the names of characters had been kept the same as those in the classic, otherwise one would have been at a loss on how to relate to the title of the play. The story has been given the look and feel of a folk lore in the tradition of romantic tales, such as those about; *Umar-Marvi*, *Reshma-Shera*, *Sasi Punoh* and what have you. *Purple Mangoes* is essentially part of, CEVA, a street theatre group, and it was therefore far more challenging for them to put up such an abstract, but artistic, rendition of the theme. Yet, they managed to pull it off as a stand alone theatre piece, but, it was definitely not Shakespeare. Which is why, one came across

such divergent reactions from the audience. Notwithstanding, everyone danced with the performers at the end.

The director of the play was Sukhmani Kohli, a woman, yet there were no women in the play. Even Juliet was performed by a male actor, who however, never made us feel the absence of a female cast. The choice of Bulleh Shah's Sufi poetry would ordinarily have been considered bizarre, yet again, it was some how carried off, perhaps, because the group, which performs largely in rural Punjab, preferred drawing from its own roots.

Experimentation had been unleashed with aplomb in this play. The biggest. being the usage of clowns as tragic figures. According to Kohli, the play is an attempt to go beyond the traditional idea of the red nosed clown who makes people laugh, and see it as an essential part of a human soul that is naïve, warm, accessible, eager for life and 'ready for anything'. There was jugglery, a live orchestra and choreographed blocking. So much fluidity and coordination of movements with music, would not have been possible without intense improvisational routines. It seems that the actors went through a month long workshop that helped them discover how to portray their 'own inner clown'

Experimentation and Improvisation

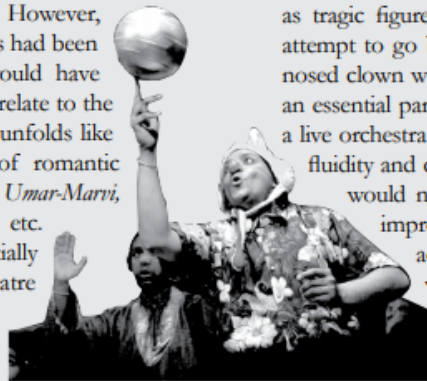
PLAY: *Romeo, Juliet and 7 Clowns*

Director: Sukhmani Kohli

Presented by: Purple Mangoes, Chandigarh

Collaboration: Centre for Education and Voluntary Action (CEVA), May 29

The only thing this play had in common with Shakespeare's 'Romeo and Juliet' is the story line on which the spoof is based. However, the names of the characters had been retained, otherwise one would have been at a loss as to how to relate to the title of the play. The story unfolds like folk lore in the tradition of romantic tales such as those about *Umar-Marvi*, *Reshma-Shera*, *Sasi Punoh*, etc. Purple Mangoes is essentially part of CEVA, a street theatre group, and it was therefore far more challenging for them to put up such an



abstract, but artistic, rendition of the theme. Yet, they managed to pull it off as a stand-alone theatre piece.

The director of the play is a woman, yet there were no women in the play. Even the role of Juliet was essayed by a male actor who, however, never made us feel the absence of a female cast. The choice of Bulleh Shah's Sufi poetry would ordinarily have been considered bizarre; yet again, they carried it off, perhaps because the group, which performs largely in rural Punjab, preferred drawing from its own roots.

Experimentation had been unleashed with aplomb in this play. The most significant being the use of clowns as tragic figures. According to Kohli, the play is an attempt to go beyond the traditional idea of the red-nosed clown who makes people laugh, and see him as an essential part of a human soul. There was jugglery, a live orchestra and choreographed blocking. So much fluidity and coordination of movements with music would not have been possible without intense improvisational routines. It seems that the actors went through a month-long workshop that helped them discover how to portray their 'own inner clown'.

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI