

# Aurangzeb – a critique of the play by Manohar Khushalani

A review of the play performed at IIC in March 2013

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The story of **Aurangzeb** is well known. In 1657, **Emperor Shahjahan** fell ill, leading to a war of succession among his four sons, The main contenders were **Dara Shuko** and Aurangzeb supported by their sisters, **Jahanara** and **Roshanara** respectively,

The Emperor, however, favoured his eldest son Dara, who, was conveniently present at Agra and willing to undertake his financially wasteful project of building a black-marble-masoleum for his father on the other side of Yamuna river

facing Mumtaz's Tajmahal. The playwright, Indira Parthasarthy, through Ideological Interplay and historical references to the earlier secular reign of Akbar, has brought out the inner conflicts of the characters.

The Director **K.S. Rajendran** has evolved a gripping tale through his presentation. The set was erected in the IIC rose garden. By relocating simple elements such as an arch, a make shift throne, a stool, Rajendran was able to switch the ambience from a palace, to a prison, to a war-zone. It was a treat to watch intense performances by actors playing Aurangzeb (Mahendra Mewati), Roshanara (Priyanka Sharma), Dara, and Shahjahan (Neelesh Deepak). In different productions, one has seen very different interpretation of the same historic event.

Ajoka theatre group from Pakistan presented 'Dara Shuko', in Bharat Rang Mahotsav, in 1911, which was totally empathetic to the elder brother Dara. Rajendran's play empathised with Aurangzeb, highlighting him as a tragic figure who was repentant in his old age. The play was written during Emergency and in some ways reflects the political compulsions of that time as well.

Manohar Khushalani

March 20, 2013

## Focus Northeast

**FILM:** *Mayong-Myth/Reality*

**Director:** Utpal Borpujari, March 11

*Mayong: Myth/Reality* is a fascinating documentary on the magical heritage of Mayong, a mystical land of black magic situated in the Marigaon district of Assam. Since time immemorial, this place has earned its reputation as a land of sorcery and has a legendary status in Assamese folklore. The film beautifully traces the cultural as well as historical elements in the practice of black magic in Mayong. We see the visual exploration of contemporary magic practices in the village, and also the fascinating, strange and inexplicable ways people use

magic practices in day-to-day life. *Mayong Myth/Reality* firmly establishes Mayong's magical history and its status as the magic capital of India. The camera shows various shots in the village setting of the people and also visually explores the books and devices used in this age-old practice.

This 53-minute documentary film has been done in ethnographic travelogue format, directed by Utpal Borpujari and produced by Jayanta Goswami of Darpan Cine Production. This visually enticing documentary has been shot by Biswajit Changmai and the captivating music, a blend of traditional and contemporary, has been created by Anuraag Saikia. The narration has been done by Robin Kalita and the documentary has been edited by Parveen.

■ DAISY DEKA

## Aurangzeb

**PLAY:** *Aurangzeb*

**Directed by** K. S. Rajendran, March 14

The story of Aurangzeb is well-known. In 1657, Emperor Shahjahan fell ill, leading to a war of succession among his four sons. The main contenders were Dara Shuko and Aurangzeb supported by their sisters, Jahanara and Roshanara, respectively. The Emperor favoured his eldest son Dara, who was conveniently present at Agra and willing to undertake his financially wasteful project of building a black marble masoleum for his father on the other side of the Yamuna river facing Mumtaz's Taj Mahal. The playwright, Indira Parthasarthy, through ideological interplay and historical references to the earlier secular reign of Akbar, has brought out the inner



conflicts of the characters. Director K.S. Rajendran has evolved a gripping tale through his presentation. The setting was the IIC Rose Garden. By relocating simple elements such as an arch, a make-shift throne, a stool, Rajendran was able to switch the ambience from a palace, to a prison, to a war zone. It was a treat to watch intense performances by actors playing Aurangzeb (Mahendra Mewati), Roshanara (Priyanka Sharma), Dara, and Shahjahan (Neelesh Deepak). In

different productions, one has seen varying interpretations of the same historic event. Ajoka theatre group from Pakistan presented 'Dara Shuko', in Bharat Rang Mahotsav in 1911, which was totally empathetic to the elder brother Dara. Rajendran's play empathized with Aurangzeb, highlighting him as a tragic figure who was repentant in his old age. The play was written during the Emergency and in some ways reflects the political compulsions of that time as well.

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI