A Festival to Remember

THE SUNDAY OBSERVER INFOTAINMENT MAY 11-17, 1997



Manisha Koirala at the celebrations

A festival to remember

Manohar Khushalani writes about an event celebrating 50 years of Indian cinema in Nepal

EVENT

If Kathmandu is the seat of power of the only Hindu kingdom on earth, it is also probably the only country where you don't need a passport, where your very own Indian credit cards are accepted, where a rupee has greater buying power and where Indian film stars are just as popular as in their own homeland — if not more.

Little wonder therefore that the Indian ambassador to Nepal, K.V. Rajan, hit upon the idea of celebrating fifty years of Indian independence with a film festival commemorating fifty years of Indian cinema. Four Indian stars were also felicitated. Among them, two stalwarts, Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, and two youngsters of the new generation of the two nations, Shah Rukh Khan and Manisha Koirala. If Raj Kapoor's 'Mera joota hai Japani...' made him a legend in the USSR, Dev Anand's 'Dum ... dum...' did the same for him in the mountain state.

Kathmandu, a sleepy capital with a small-town atmosphere, protected in the womb of the tallest mountain ranges of the world, suddenly became alive and vibrant. The ten days of festivities, flagged off by Jaaved Jaaferi's quaint sense of humor, proved that laughter defies all barriers and unites all ages, sexes and nationalities. "Why are we Asians obsessed with films just as we are with our own mothers? Is it because even cinema has a *maa* in it? Unfortunately Oedipus could not see cine*maa* during his lifetime." For detective movie fans Jaaved belted out an Ajit joke. "How was Peter supposed to respond to Michael's 'Off On Off' signal? With an 'On Off On' signal, silly!" Nobody was spared — other victims of his mimicry included Dilip Kumar, Rajendra Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan. Not to miss the formula film in which the villain is about to drink the hero's blood, Dracula style ("*Main tumhara khoon pi jaunga*"), but for the pendant which he discovers in his adversary's neck and realises they are brothers. And, if he would have us believe him, modern women's clothes remind him of barbed wires which protect the property without obstructing the view. Whew! Thank God for little mercies. There was also the brilliant audiovisual commissioned by the embassy which took us down memory lane and provided nostalgic relief. There were old songs that uplift one's spirits even today 'Ai mere pyare watan...' 'Ye kahani hai diye ki aur toofan ki...' 'Jhanak jhanak payal baje....' There were also excerpts from films that have immortalised Indian cinema: *Mother India, Guide, Chalti Ka Nam Gaadi, Anarkali, Mughal-E-Azam, Nagin, Baiju Bawra*. The list is endless.

Among the stars Dev Anand was called on stage first. He struck such an instant rapport with the audience that it kept him on stage for half an hour. The performance was so brilliant that Waheeda Rehman decided to lose her voice to an allergy and Manisha Koirala had to resort to her native tongue. Shah Rukh Khan of course could not hold a candle to Jaaved despite his Ka-Ka-Kathmandu in his now famous stammer. But it was all in good fun and if the stars did not partake of the cocktails for long, one could not blame them, they were after all being mobbed in *desi* style. If the milling crowds outside the Birendra International Convention Centre were any indication to go by, the festival was a grand success — so what if none of the government officials were present due to "other engagements"? The people were there in full strength to again prove that a people to people relationship is far stronger than ties between politicians.

Manohar Khushalani interviews the Indian ambassador to Nepal, K V Rajan

Mr Ambassador, it is known that this idea of a film festival in Kathmandu was your brainchild..

We found that people here had a lot of interest in Indian films. It seemed a pity not to recognise it as a boosting factor in Indo-Nepalese friendship.

So, this was our way of expressing our appreciation of the Indian film industry, for the friendship and goodwill they have helped build between India and Nepal.

What are the other ramifications of this festival besides goodwill?

Of course, once the idea matured, other suggestions began to flow in. When we decided that *Tamanna* would be one of the films to be premiered, Pooja Bhatt offered the film free of cost, provided there was a good charity, especially for the girl child.

When we started talking to government officials and NGOs interested in the problem of illegal trafficking of minors, particularly girls, from Nepal to India, it struck us that this could be an opportunity for the Indian film industry to support Nepalese projects aimed at preventing this flow of children.

How would you go about it?

By encouraging education, awareness and developmental activities in identified villages here. We also thought the Indian film industry could be motivated into taking up themes concerned with the Nepalese girl child.

What role do you see for the North India Films Association (NIFA) in Nepal?

What you need is some institutional contact between NIFA and the Nepalese film industry. The proximity is there, it is easy to come back and forth, easy to trade films, and so on.

What other role could the Indian film industry play?

Quite a lot. If films are made in collaboration with the Nepalese film industry, or shot in Nepal, it will create an awareness of the tremendous tourist potential in this country.

Are there still some irritants between the two countries? For example, the entire government machinery was absent from the function.

No. This happened only because the entire function had to be postponed by one day. Because of the crippling air traffic controllers' strike in India the stars arrived a day late. There was a lot of interest in this function.

Stars Shine in Himalayan Kingdom | Manohar Khushalani

Along with Dev Anand, Waheeda Rehman, Shahrukh Khan and Manisha Koirala, Manohar Khushalani was invited, by the Indian Embassy, to Kathmandu to attend the celebrations of 50 years

of Indian Cinema as a Columnist of Pioneer, where he ran a column called “Footlights’. The clip of the review published on 2nd May, 1997 is shown in the attachment. Here is a small extract from the 7 column spread that Pioneer gave his piece.

Probably the best public relations exercise between two country is to establish a people to people interaction through cultural activity. Raj Kapoor was probably the best Indian Ambassador of good will for the soviet Union. Nobody perhaps known it better than the snake Indian Ambassador to Nepal. K.V. Rajan. By organising a festival of Indian films at Kathmandu he proved that what Raj Kapoor did at USSR Dev Anand can do in the Land locked Himalayan State. The incredible love and affection of Nepalese common men for Indian actors was brought home by the adulatory response to four Indian sorry three Indian and one Nepales star; Waheeda Rehman, Dev Anand, Shahrukh Khan and Manisha Koirala.

“I am very fond of nature & open spaces. In Bombay it was difficult. What I noticed was that when they retired from cinema long ago, my son was still in school. When someone asked him, where the milk came from. He said Mother Dairy. That’s when we decided to move to a Farm and expose our child to that aspect of life as well.”

Waheeda Rahman who is leading a more or less retired life & last asked nearly seven years ago is willing to perform only of she gets a central role. “Unfortunately most of the roles available for performers of my agee are stereo typed roles of Aunts or mothers, I would rather not perform than take up such roles”

Waheeda shifted bag & Baggage to a farm house in the outskirts of Bangalore because of she put it her children were not even aware about how the milk come they only knew that it come from a machine in the milk booth. Being a lover of nature she preferred to shift close to it….

“I am very fond of nature & open spaces. In Bombay it was difficult. What I noticed was that when they retired from cinema long ago, my son was still in school. When someone asked him, where the milk came from. He said Mother Dairy. That’s when we decided to move to a Farm and expose our child to that aspect of life as well.” She told me, this too when we were flying later over the everest and I was seated next to her. Both of us were admiring the pristine beauty of nature

Dev Anand despite his severely years displayed such energy and enthusiasm that he would put many younger people to shame. He said that he was greatly in love with this Country and would never forego an opportunity to come to Nepal. He had always advocated that this Country was a good location of or shooting films but not many producers were willing to come due to difficulties of terrash & communication. Dev to probably the most active amongst the stars of his generation. Right now he was making a film in which he was acting as himself © Dev Anand as the actor. A teen age female fun follows him around the counting observing him as an action. She finally manges to meet him. The story appeared to be similar to Guddi.

Later at a function to felicitate the stars. Dev held the audience spellbound with his half hour long talk which was special with experiences of Nepal, tales of the role of the King in shooting of his films and personal advice on how to lead a dynamics life like him.

Manisha Koirala’s entering was greeted by compliments to her beauty and brains in Dev’s inimitable style. The local scribes were most comfortable with Manisha in her native tongue. Ms Koirala had no plans to act in a Nepali film in the near future she left it vaguely to events and occassions.

Ô

Manohar Khushalani accompanies Indian filmstars on a recent trip to Nepal for a celebration of the golden jubilee of India's independence

Stars shine in Himalayan kingdom

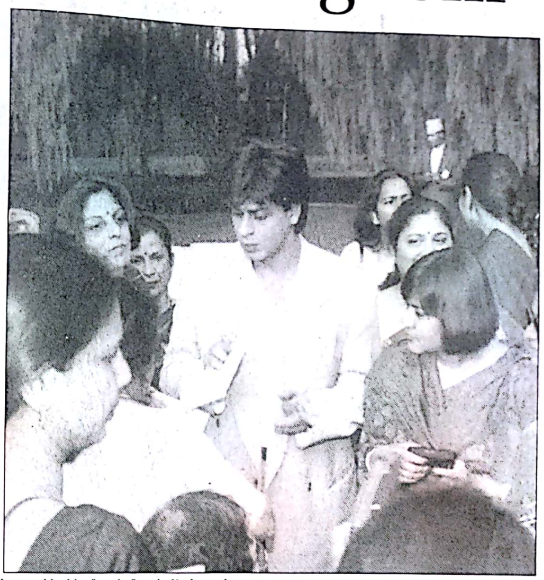
As the Royal Nepal Airlines Boeing 737 circled over the Himalayan ranges to get a clearer view through the dense cloud layers of the jewel of the Himalayas — Kathmandu — our hearts thumped in anticipation. At the very first sight of the toy-like township nestled in the mountain ranges, gone was the fatigue of the two sleepless nights due to the 48-hour flight delay, caused by the lightning all-India ATC strike. What awaited us was the first official celebration of 50 years of Indian independence in Nepal. Thankfully there were no political speeches on the cards, only entertainment and more entertainment.

Probably the best public relations exercise between any two countries is to establish a people-to-people interaction through cultural activities. Nobody perhaps knows it better than the suave Indian ambassador to Nepal, K V Rajan. By organising a festival of Indian films at Kathmandu he proved that what Raj Kapoor could do for India in the Soviet Union, Dev Anand can do in the land-locked Himalayan kingdom. Later this year, the ambassador is also planning an NSD theatre festival in Kathmandu.

The incredible love and affection of the Nepalese common man for Indian actors and actresses was brought home by the adulatory response to the four filmstars: Waheeda Rehman, Dev Anand, Shah Rukh Khan and Nepal's own Manisha Koirala, of whom the valiant Gorkhas are extremely proud. The streets around the Birendra International Convention Centre were jam-packed with fans as the four stars waded through the milling crowds to attend a function organised to felicitate them.

Inside, Dev held the audiences spellbound with his half-hour-long talk which was spiced with his experiences of the hill state, tales about the part King Birendra played in easing the way of Dev Anand's shootings in Nepal, the guitar-toting hippie girl who inspired the creation of a role for Zeenat Aman in *Hare Rama Hare Krishna*, and of course some personal advice on how to lead a dynamic life and remain young like himself.





Representatives of cultural camaraderie: Dev Anand meets Queen Aishwarya (left); Shah Rukh Khan mobbed by female fans in Kathmandu

As far as Shah Rukh Khan was concerned, great as the confluence of two generations of performers may have been, he was too busy warding off the bevy of Himalayan beauties out to mob him. "Oh, no, not here too!" he smirked.

The programme was anchored by none other than the inimitable imitator, Jaaved Jaffrey, who interspersed the audio-visual on Indian cinema with his pet, often heard and sometimes unheard of jokes. While Jaaved did his best to liven up the proceedings, what was really a treat were the nostalgic numbers segmented decade-wise.

The first decade from 1947 to '57 had songs like *Awara hoon, Jeevan hai agar zahar to, Chhor da aanchal zamana kya kahega, Mera dil ye pukare aa ja,* and *Ai mere pyare watan*. What a comedown it was moving into the present decade with songs like *Chhoo le chhoo le, Choli ke peeche kya hai* and *Chumma de de*.

Earlier at an informal Press conference the Nepalese and Indian scribes had the opportunity to talk to the Bollywood stars and one particularly got an interesting glimpse of the mindsets of the older legends and how they were coping with the new trends in cinema. Waheeda for example was surprisingly positive about modern Indian cinema.

She disagreed with the suggestion that there was too much exposure in today's films and quoted examples of many films which were wholesome like *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* and *Kabhi Ha Kabhi Na*. Waheeda herself is leading a more or less retired life and last faced a camera nearly seven years ago.

She was willing to undergo the ordeal again only if she got a satisfying role. "Unfortunately, most of the roles available for performers of my age are stereotyped ones of aunts or mothers," she clarified. "I would rather not perform than take up such assignments."

Talking of the time when she lived in Bombay, Waheeda said that her children there worked hard in school and watched television rest of the time. They were not even aware about where the milk on their table came from. They only knew that it came from a machine in the milk booth. That was enough for her and she shifted bag and baggage to a farmhouse in the outskirts of Bangalore. Being a lover of nature she thus got an opportunity to get close to it.

Dev Anand, despite his 70-odd years, appears to be getting younger — if not in appearance, then in intensity. He displayed such energy and enthusiasm that would put many younger people to shame. As he said, he is greatly in love with Nepal and will never forego an opportunity to come to this country. He had always advocated that this place was a good location for shooting films but not many producers were willing to come, due to difficulties of terrain and poor communications.

Unlike Waheeda, Dev Anand will like to work right till his last breath. Currently, he is making a film in which he is acting as himself — Dev Anand, the actor — who is followed by a teenage female fan around the country until he awards her an audience. Although the thespian would not admit it, the story sounded similar to *Guddi*.

Manisha Koirala's entry to the Press conference was greeted by the evergreen Dev in his own inimitable style. While she felt awed by the presence of performers whom she admired as a youngster, he promptly claimed that now he was her admirer. "You know, I kept my hand close to my heart when I shook hands with you the first time," he confided to the giggling star.

The local scribes were most comfortable with Manisha as she switched to her native tongue. Manisha has no plans to act in a Nepali film in the near future. She left it vaguely to events and occasions. Manisha was happy to come to her country but she had no desire to settle here, she said. Living in Mumbai suited her.

Dev Anand was not bothered by the repeated box-office failures of his recent films. He claimed that he never lost money in any film and that if any of his films were appreciated for their quality, that was enough of a reward for him. When this correspondent asked Manisha Koirala if she would prefer to make a good film or a box-office hit — she said she would rather have both, but if it came to a crunch, she would opt for a role in a good film.

Dev Anand put it more succinctly: Many times a good film succeeds at the box office and many times it doesn't. Many times an average film also succeeds. But if a film succeeds it must have some merits — it cannot be ignored even if the critics think it should be.

Shah Rukh Khan had very little to say except that he would not act in an art film and would no longer do the anti-hero roles. Of course, once upon a time he acted in a Mani Kaul film, because he understood it. Most art films according to him were pseudo-intellectual.

A special flight over Mount Everest with Waheeda Rehman and Jaaved Jaffrey, however, struck an ominous note. The Everest was not visible due to heavy clouds, even while we were in the midst of a golden jubilee celebration. A government had fallen in New Delhi and the future was equally cloudy.

Fortunately, the clouds in Indian politics shifted a little just before the curtains were drawn over the festival in Nepal, with the installation of a new government in India.

Manohar Khushalani in Come Back Little Sheba

There's a Room at the Top

There's room at the top

Come November, and the tenure of the present director of New Delhi's prestigious National School of Drama will expire. Who will fill the coveted post, asks **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

WHO will be the next director of the National School of Drama when the tenure of the present director Kirti Jain expires in November? This is a matter of much conjecture and discussion among the theatre buffs.

Unlike popular belief the NSD is not purely a government department, but an autonomous, registered society funded by the government. The appointment of its director falls under the jurisdiction of the society, but, due to financial dependence, gradually the society has got into the habit of referring everything to the government.

The most important decision that the society has to take, in concurrence with the government, is the one relating to the appointment of a new director every few years. The list of ex-directors of the NSD reads like a who's who of theatre giants; B. V. Karanth, Rattan Thaiyyam, B. M. Shah, Mohan Maharishi and, of course, the inimitable Ebrahim Alkazi, who has had the longest tenure of 13 years. Most often directors stayed barely for two years and departed post haste, either due to student politics or their own professional preoccupation.

Surprisingly, Kirti Jain has had the second longest tenure of seven years. This, of course, happened due to a change of rules. The teaching faculty at the NSD voted for a minimum tenure of five years, instead of two years, because they felt that two years are not enough to implement any programme. Thus, when Kirti was renominated after two years she had a long stretch of seven years to implement her ideas about what the students at school should do. While the NSD has had a chequered history of strikes and student unrest, there haven't been any signs of student restlessness during her tenure.

Obviously, having spent many years in the faculty, Jain's approach appears to be: 'Hard work and no politics makes students a disciplined lot'. Certainly the approach is working because the students are doing what they should be doing, ie, learning.

Although Jain has not been as prolific as her predecessors, she appears to have a better record of administration and because she does not have a theatre group of her own, she is spending more time in school and responding to the student's problems. For example, during Rattan Thaiyyam's tenure there was a major student strike — their grouse: Thaiyyam was spending less time in school.

Usually the society has been selecting a single director and putting up his or her name for approval. However, this time, a search committee comprising of Rajendra Nath, Vijay Tendulkar, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Sai Paranjape was appointed to create a panel of three people. While opinion has been divided between continuity and change, the committee also approved the names of Satish Alekar and Satyadev Dube. It was learnt from reliable sources that by a majority of five to two Kirti's name was kept on top of the panel. If Kirti Jain is re-appointed then her tenure will be nearly equal to Alkazi's.

There are a number of problems that the new director (whoever he or she is) will have to address. The faculty members have for long been demanding better scales of pay. The P. N. Haksar Committee suggested that their scales should be better than the UGC scales, but so far their scales are not even equal to that of UGC.

The NSD repertory committee needs to be strengthened as it has been over a decade since Manohar Singh, their chief, resigned. Since then the company continues to have an acting chief. Although, we all know that the repertory has to deal with actors, but always adding the prefix "acting" to the post of the chief is a little too much, isn't it? But then the all mighty bureaucrats who deal with the NSD have their own qualms. The Haksar Committee also suggested making the repertory chief's job a contractual one.

There have been other suggestions about upgrading this position to that of a full-fledged professor in place of the present assistant professor, so that the tough task is given its due weightage.

The NSD has contributed some of the best stage, cinema and television talent in the country. While teaching standards and the quality of student productions have gone up in the last few years, the impoverished school has an uphill task in consolidating these achievements. The incumbent to the top post thus has a challenging task to fulfil.



BETTER ADMINISTRATOR: *Kirti Jain, director of the National School of Drama*

To Trust or Distrust?

The Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal, the country's premier cultural organisation plans to induct two additional members into its Trust, but has run into rough weather in the bargain, reports **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

To trust or distrust?

RECENTLY, when Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, India's premier cultural organisation, went through its round of appointments of new trustees, it became the bone of contention for many an artiste. Guns were trained and charges exchanged regarding the filling up of the coveted and prestigious vacancies.

The first salvo was fired when the Central government announced the name of Alka Raghuvanshi, the former arts editor of *Pioneer*, Delhi, as one of its three nominees. The other two already appointed were M. F. Hussain and Prashant Mehta. While the other Delhi newspapers carried the news without comment, there appeared page and only she was in a position to answer the charges.

When asked why she had been branded a saffron-clad activist, she said, "How can I be saffron-clad when so many radical views were expressed in the arts page without any interference from my side? If indeed I am a BJP supporter, how come the Congress government is sponsoring my name? Actually, anybody who is not a part of the card carrying left cadre is branded a fascist and communalist by them. To my mind it is they who practise the worst kind of fascism."

Besides the Central government nominees, Bharat Bhawan Trust has trustees appointed by the state government which as a trustee has also turned controversial. Except for his occasional forays to Delhi for production of NSD plays, Prasanna has confined himself to a remote village Hegudu in Karnataka, where he has founded the Kavi Kavya Trust, which publishes a Kannada quarterly magazine *Rajuvatu* edited by Ananthamurthy.

In an open letter to the member secretary, Bharat Bhawan Trust, which was carried prominently by the Hindi daily *Jansatta*, Prasanna has charged that Ashok Vajpayi was casting aspersions about him. It referred to a fellowship which Bharat Bhawan had awarded on the project. According to



PRIZED MOMENT: *Alka Raghuvanshi receiving the award for*

a small news item in *Indian Express* reporting a statement, amongst others, by Vivan Sundaram, Anjolie Ela Menon, Dilip Padgaonkar and Praful Bijwai, objecting to her appointment following the release of her book on artistes by the President at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

The signatories blamed the HRD Ministry for it and went on to add that the trust was a symbolic entity not dealing with day-to-day affairs and so the most eminent people should be in it, quoting the names of previous trustees such as B. V. Karanth, Swaminathan and Mani Kaul. Alka Raghuvanshi, the former Chameli Devi Jain Award winner for outstanding women media persons, dismissed the report and called it "professional jealousy", since the report was filed by an arts editor and not a correspondent. "Why were so many entities concerned by a non-entity like me," she asked, "either they are non-entities or I am an entity."

Not known to mince her words, she went on to add that the problem with the so-called Leftists was that they hunted in packs. "Since they all get together, their collective strength is a formidable force, which is why they have been able to scare a lot of people. They tried to do that earlier. When we carried a story against Sahmat, they marched in a demonstration against me into the office of the then editor of *Pioneer*, Vinod Mehta." According to her, when Vinod summoned her to his office, they refused to talk, saying that they could not say anything in her presence since the charges were against her. Vinod, however, expressed his inability to discuss the matter in her absence, as Raghuvanshi was the one dealing with the arts

include Jaya Bachchan and Anand Patwardhan. Vijay Kichloo of the Sangeet Research Academy is the "music" nominee and Anshu Vaish is the secretary. Surprisingly, Ashok Vajpayi, Joint Secretary, Department of Culture, is a state nominee.

The trustees met last month to induct two additional members and amongst the many names discussed were Vijay Tendulkar, Ananthamurthy and stage director, writer, poet Prasanna. Interestingly, Prasanna is considered to be on the other end of the political spectrum — he is considered a Leftist (though he has of late been attracted to Gandhian philosophy). A suggestion regarding his appointment

Prasanna, the most recent remark of his on this subject had been in a trust meeting where Vajpayi was trying to turn down a suggestion that he be made a trustee. Since the charge had been made in a forum, in which he could not defend himself, he had decided to go public.

"The trust has not bothered to find out the truth for nearly a decade after the incident," claims Prasanna. "I had felt honoured when Bharat Bhawan awarded the said fellowship and accepted it. Since the Fellowship was the first of its nature for Bharat Bhawan, they did not have a methodology for doing theoretical work." Accord-



DRIVING A POINT: *Alka Raghuvanshi, no mincing of words*

outstanding women media persons from President Shankar Dayal Sharma

ing to him he sent quarterly reports for about a year, at the end of which he was asked to send an abstract in English, on the work done for the project.

That was the last he heard from Bharat Bhawan. They stopped sending him the Fellowship amount and did not answer his letters. On writing to B. V. Karanth he discovered that Ashok Vajpayi and Vijay Tendulkar, who had formed themselves into a committee to judge his work, had decided on the basis of the English abstract, that the work was 'sub-standard'. They in turn had decided to fail him.

Since he was then an activist working in the villages of Karnataka, and did not possess the resources needed to go to Bhopal or Delhi, he decided to defend his honour by publishing the work. "Fortunately for me," he adds, "a Kannada publisher who is also an eminent theatre personality in India, liked my work and offered to publish it. It was published as *Natak: Rangkriti* in Kannada. My published work is on modern Indian drama. This book has become a landmark in Kannada criticism since then. I sent a copy of my work along with a letter to Bharat Bhawan, under the fond hope that some day somebody who understood critical idiom would read my work at Bharat Bhawan and redeem my tarnished honour."

Much later, at the intervention of Ford Foundation, USA, which had founded Bharat Bhawan, he got his money. According to him, the Foundation felt that a fellowship was given to a person for his contribution and that it was in bad taste to 'fail' the scholar.

Prasanna, however, admits that in a chance-meeting he had with him, Ashok Vajpayi denied having said all this. Manjit Bawa, well-known painter and president of Bharat Bhawan, was critical of Prasanna having gone public on this matter. He also denied that Vajpayi alone made the charge. According to him "it was all in the files." He went on to add, "There are so many defaulters and it was only mentioned that Prasanna had not fulfilled his obligation. Prasanna's name was amongst the many proposed, and he should not feel bad if he was not selected. Prasanna, however, denies having any interest in the trusteeship. "In fact I was annoyed that my name was mentioned. Organisations like Bharat Bhavan are top-heavy and non-activist. It is really not my cup of tea," remarked Prasanna.

That criticism might be valid. Right now amongst the four streams of the trust, only 'Roopankar', headed by Manjit Bawa, is active with its *'Biennial'* — exhibition of contemporary and tribal arts. In fact 'Wahghat' (poetry) and 'Anahad' (music) have for long been dormant. However, during B. V. Karanth's tenure the fourth stream — theatre —was very active.

Ultimately it all boils down to personalities. Maybe public postures are taken on issues and ideologies, but the battles are totally personal. The trust really needs to take a long, hard and introspective look at its functioning and mandate. Granting recognitions or disbursing favours need not be the sole activity of this fountainhead of culture.

Portraying a Chauvinistic Outlook

Portraying a chauvinistic outlook

FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Jama Kharch by

People's Drama League

Panchanan Pathak has been conducting a drama acting course under the banner of People's Drama League every year. The course students consist of young boys and girls who cannot afford to pay very steep fees.

He prepares a play with his students and puts up two shows at the SRC basement. It is always a low budget production with no sets and only some minor props. The show is neither advertised nor ticketed and therefore cannot be reviewed with the same ruthlessness that some of the semi-professional plays can. In fact, Pathak's forte is music and not theatre, but he does this modest exercise as a kind of social work to keep young minds creatively engaged.

This year, People's Drama League presented *Jama Kharch* which is a Hindi adaptation of the original Bangla play *Hiseb Kodi* written by Chandan Sen. The story of *Hiseb Kodi* is a typical middle-class tale full of moralising and sermonising. But it also has a touch of humour.

Ambujaksha (Vinod Panchal) is a rice merchant who is bedridden after a road accident which subsequently proves fatal. His second wife Mallika (Minakshi Malik) who is much younger than him, and his live in father-in-law Nirapad (D Goswami), pester Ambujaksha to review his earlier will which benefits Amit, his son from an earlier marriage.

Ambujaksha had already made some provision for Mallika, but because of her so-called indifferent behaviour towards her husband, he prepares a balance sheet. He goes on deducting her shar ing her for errors a sions that she made d five years of their mar



An honest and unpretentious production that achie



DOONESBURY / *Garry Trudeau*

The Travails of Travel

The travails of travel

FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Rahul by SRC Rep

Shri Ram Centre Repertory put up its latest production, *Rahul*, at its main auditorium. The play was based on the life story and ideas of Rahul Sanskritayan, the famous Indian traveller, poet, thinker and writer who died in April 1963 and who again made news last year when his statue was installed in Darjeeling and a street there was named after him.

The set consisted of a low circular platform with three ramps. The play opened with the poet on a wheelchair silhouetted in the beam which projected onto the cyclorama, a slide of Rahul's facial close-up. The slide is becoming a frequently used device and the director tried to create a variation by installing a smaller screen in front of the cyclorama. Thus the pictures were projected on the two planes and this gave some depth to the two-dimensional images.

Sanjay Upadhyay, the resident theatre director of SRC Repertory, has been consistent in his choice of scripts both for the acting course as well as the repertory. After working on difficult subjects like Nirala, Mahendra Simir and Bhartendu, he decided to evolve the story of the mercurial Rahul Sanskritayan, in collaboration with the scriptwriter Anubha.

The script was developed by Anubha in an interactive free flowing style. This was aided by the style of presentation in which Rahul was represented by three actors who took over from each other very smoothly.

This representation of the same character by different actors prevented the audience from getting empathetically involved in the life story of Sanskritayan. While this had a Brechtian alienation effect, at the same time, the three actors, Rajesh Tiwari, Shiv Gupta and A R Shammi were so cast as to represent three different aspects of Rahul's ideology.

Thus focus was more on ideas than on the story line. The repertory does not have a single actor powerful enough to project the gigantic personality. The subdivision, therefore, served the purpose of exploring the multi-dimensional personality of Rahul.



Telling the tale of the mercurial Sanskritayan

A man of strong likes and dislikes, he had a blind love for the Hindi language. But this did not create an inhibiting effect on his personality. The fact that he knew 40 languages proved that he was not a psychophant and was a linguist in a true sense.

His political ideology swung from Marxism and socialism to religion. Thus he could encompass opposing ideologies by taking the best from each of them during various phases of his life. His embracing different communities and getting absorbed in their culture displayed a kind of universal outlook and made him into a sort of radical humanist or a neo humanist.

Soviet Union was like a second homeland for him. Here he had a wife Lola (Manisha Shivam) and son Igor (Dhruv Jyoti Sengupta). This relationship was examined with compassion. The fact that Rahul had many wives and mistresses was projected with a sensitive understanding of a creative mind. In fact if anything, the production put Sanskritayan too much on a pedestal and did not examine his failings with the ruthlessness of an objective mind.

If this aspect had been strengthened, it could have become a powerful production. Certain emotional aspects were tackled with an intellectual dispassionateness — for instance Rahul being torn between different countries and wives. How the giant mind could resolve personal dilemmas was reflected by the statement he made to his Indian wife Kamla: "I know I have to provide for you materially because you live in a capitalist society. I do not have to worry much about Lola and Igor since a socialist state provides for its citizens."

Rahul's childhood marriage, and more marriages later, his embracing the Buddhist faith, his travels to China, Tibet, Nepal and Sri Lanka, his involvement in the freedom movement as well as the peasant rebellion, are some of the many aspects of his story which would be too difficult to encompass. Sanjay Upadhyay's choice of a semi-documentary style of presentation can therefore be understood. But perhaps some playwright could also attempt to capture the emotional drama behind the dilemmas of the man who tragically died a schizophrenic.

What Sanskritayan wrote after Tilak's death hold's good for him too: *Beej boya tha jiska tune yahan/ Khoon se sincha tha jise tu yahan/ Phool lagne ka us pe vakt aaya/ Nazre daurin na tu nazar aaya.* (You were nowhere to be seen when time came for you to enjoy the fruits of your own labour.)

In a Contemporary Milieu

THURSDAY MAY 4, 1995

ARTS

THE PIONEER 13

In a contemporary milieu

FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Romeo and Juliet

by NSD Second Year

The NSD second year students' production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Anuradha Kapoor and translated by Atul Tiwari at the Ghalib Auditorium last week was in keeping with the current NSD trend of experimental theatre. The play was recast visually in a contemporary urban milieu.

The newly rediscovered Ghalib Auditorium has the intimacy of the SRC Basement and the seating capacity of the main auditorium. It lends itself well to the optimum usage of its space. With Arpita Singh's sets, consisting of painted blocks, ropes and swings decorated with props like wheels, umbrellas, and balloons, a mobile like flexibility of composition was created.

Dolly Ahluwalia chose black glossy tights with red scars and gowns for women and T-shirts, shorts and jeans for men with different colour schemes for the Montagues and the Capulets, setting the pace for the stylisation of presentation. The movements were brisk and the actors used the swings like balls and other props in an acrobatic fashion lending the show with far greater mobility than seen in Kapoor's earlier production done under the Vivadi banner.

Although it is believed that a lot of skill and learned guidance are needed for an intelligent understanding of Shakespeare, the directness of his appeal remains even for the lay man. As the editor of *The First Folio* recommended the plays for everyone, how "odd so ever" his brains be, since, Shakespeare is not a didactic playwright and understanding of the reasoning of his plays usually comes on subconsciously.

The fear of interpreting Shakespeare is what puts the challenge in it. Of late the old reverence to the Bard has given way to an investigative kind of irreverence. While today, Shakespeare's plays are performed all over the world and new kinds of experimental work finds inspiration in them let's face it, any attempt to rewrite Shakespeare cannot enhance the text in any way.

It can, at best, give yet another dimension to viewing the text. No wonder Atul Tiwari, the translator of the Shakespearean play, most candidly compared his attempt at translation with climbing the Everest or swimming the ocean. Yet, reinterpreting Shakespeare's plays, does help in the understanding of the text, which is one of the objectives of a student production.

Translating Shakespeare even in English is not easy. For example, what was called 'presently' then, means immediately today, 'will' meant 'lust' 'rage' was 'folly' and 'silly' strangely meant that somebody was 'innocent'. In Hindi, the context too, is different. Judging by the complexity of the problem, Atul's translation skirted the difficulties intelligently by interweaving the prose with the poetry and keeping the colloquialism of the language intact even while borrowing the imagery from the English.

According to Peter Brook, "In the second half of the 20th century in England, we are faced with the infuriating fact that Shakespeare is still our model" and this, despite the fact that since the days of Shakespeare, outlooks and political ideas have changed. Shakespeare's contemporaries almost unanimously believed in authoritarian monarchy, they accepted a police state and believed that there was divine intervention in history. Most of them were bigoted enough to hold the fundamentalist view that a man should be burnt at the stake for religious heresies. Maybe it is the medieval outlook in *Romeo and Juliet* that still finds its echoes in a third world society like India.

No wonder the echoes of the tale of Romeo and Juliet can be seen in at least half a dozen Bollywood films every year. Love amidst family rivalry is a formula which has been heavily overused. Anuradha Kapoor's attempt to relocate *Romeo and Juliet* in a claustrophobic cityscape, amongst other things, almost lampooned, maybe unintendedly, the formula film with its associative imagery. The vast sweep of music ranging from classical to modern, Indian to western, added a universal and youthful dimension.

On opening any text of Shakespeare, one's attention can be held by a few lines of verse or a complexly constructed sentence or just one glottering or perceptive word. The bard had an absolute command over words, evocation of images, creation of sounds, rhythm, metre and the building up of texture of the text.

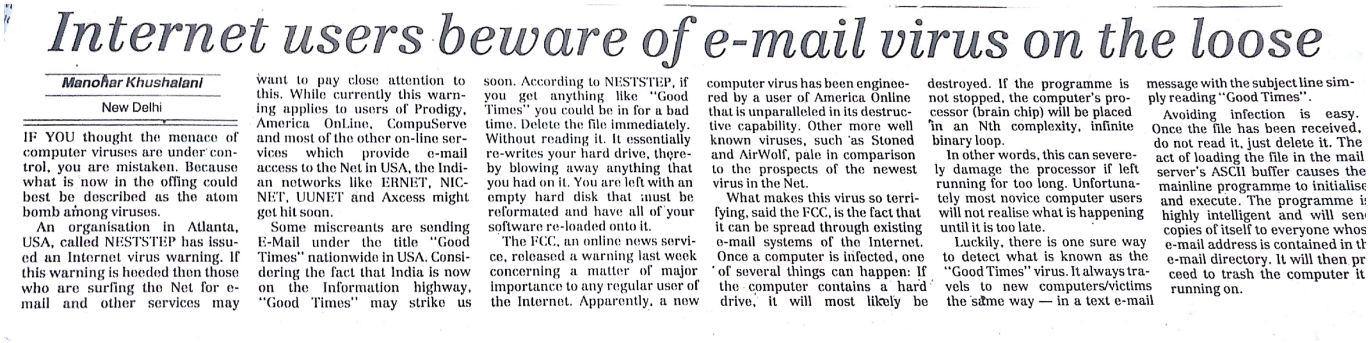
After overcoming the initial awe over his lyricism, one's attention is engaged by the highly evolved individual characters. Many of the early critiques on Shakespeare, were, about his characters and controversy about them still continues as if they were living beings.

Despite its many strengths, it was in the area of characterisation that the production suffered. Even though there was an abundance of enthusiasm, except for Geetanjali Sherikar as the nurse, most other actors lacked the variation required for evolution of well-sketched personalities.



Romeo and Juliet is in keeping with the current NSD trend of experimental theatre

Internet users beware of the e-mail virus on the loose



Internet users beware of e-mail virus on the loose

Manohar Khushalani

New Delhi

IF YOU thought the menace of computer viruses are under control, you are mistaken. Because what is now in the offing could best be described as the atom bomb among viruses.

An organisation in Atlanta, USA, called NESTSTEP has issued an Internet virus warning. If this warning is heeded then those who are surfing the Net for e-mail and other services may want to pay close attention to this. While currently this warning applies to users of Prodigy, America OnLine, CompuServe and most of the other on-line services which provide e-mail access to the Net in USA, the Indian networks like ERNET, NICNET, UUNET and Axcess might get hit soon.

Some miscreants are sending E-Mail under the title "Good Times" nationwide in USA. Considering the fact that India is now on the Information highway, "Good Times" may strike us soon. According to NESTSTEP, if you get anything like "Good Times" you could be in for a bad time. Delete the file immediately. Without reading it. It essentially re-writes your hard drive, thereby blowing away anything that you had on it. You are left with an empty hard disk that must be reformated and have all of your software re-loaded onto it.

The FCC, an online news service, released a warning last week concerning a matter of major importance to any regular user of the Internet. Apparently, a new computer virus has been engineered by a user of America Online that is unparalleled in its destructive capability. Other more well known viruses, such as Stoned and AirWolf, pale in comparison to the prospects of the newest virus in the Net.

What makes this virus so terrifying, said the FCC, is the fact that it can be spread through existing e-mail systems of the Internet. Once a computer is infected, one of several things can happen: If the computer contains a hard drive, it will most likely be destroyed. If the programme is not stopped, the computer's processor (brain chip) will be placed in an Nth complexity, infinite binary loop.

In other words, this can severely damage the processor if left running for too long. Unfortunately most novice computer users will not realise what is happening until it is too late.

Luckily, there is one sure way to detect what is known as the "Good Times" virus. It always travels to new computers/victims the same way — in a text e-mail message with the subject line simply reading "Good Times".

Avoiding infection is easy. Once the file has been received, do not read it, just delete it. The act of loading the file in the mail server's ASCII buffer causes the mainline programme to initialise and execute. The programme is highly intelligent and will send copies of itself to everyone whose e-mail address is contained in the e-mail directory. It will then proceed to trash the computer it running on.

The Modernist Touch

The modernist touch

FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Ant Anant

NSD Repertory put up P J Unnikrishnan's *Ant Anant* based on H H Munro's *The Background*. The director Abhilash Pillai graduated from the NSD last year. It is a measure of the great confidence in him that he received such a prestigious assignment at such a young age.

The confidence, of course, sprung from his handling of the diploma production *Lanka Lakshmi* which was a runaway success.

Grab these visuals: sudden darkness in the auditorium as the play begins..A combination of Indian and Western music fills the theatre. Darkness continues for quite some time forcing you to listen to the music. The curtain rises belatedly. There is a screen on the right on which a still is projected showing a poster saying, "this is a holy war."

In front there is a bed with someone under the covers. On the centre of the stage are counters with men and women cooking, peeling and ironing. In front of them, downstage are artists and sculptors working on their pieces of art. On the left is a glass cage with a man's life-size statue in *padmasana*.

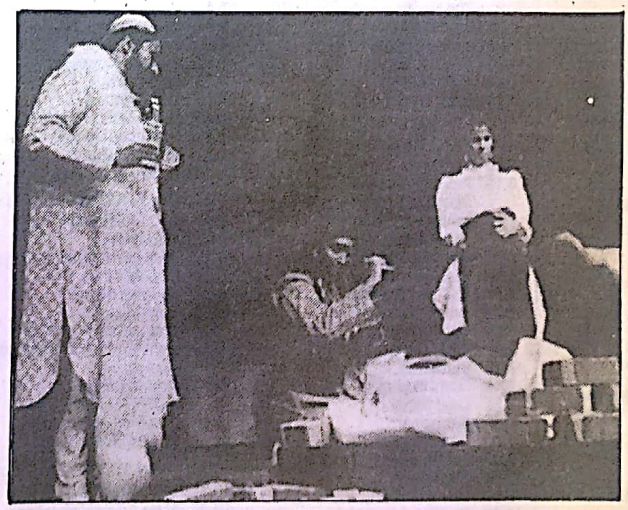
The cage lights up. The statue comes alive. A man with the figure of a Greek God wearing a headgear and a waistband that reminds one of Egyptian paintings, he breaks into an Indian dance motif.

The three women on the counters are wearing costumes that carry Japanese; Kathakali and Kashmiri influences respectively. Action takes place simultaneously all over the stage without a focus. On bed are Laila and Ishaq, and all the actors converge to wake them up.

On a television monitor one sees computer graphics of a human body followed by scenes from the *Ramayan*. The dancer emerges from the glass cube, supported by two actors on two poles, which are held like a stretcher. The cyclorama lights up and an overhead video projector displays scenes from Second World War.

The tale revolves around Laila and Ishaq. However these two characters are catalysts on a vast canvas. One can safely assume it to be set in any spot in India—it projects a common ethos which displays the unity in diversity. It represents the onslaught of technologies, multi-media, dogmas, beliefs and religions of a common man from a rural background.

There is also the orchestration of theatre styles envelop-



Interplay of religion and politics

ing naturalism as well as video and pop art. The sequences do not follow a chronological order. Amongst the many themes and cross currents are various schools of painting, ranging from Kangra to modern art. Music and lighting, too, give a random feel.

It would be easy to be dismissive about a production like this. There is no doubt that modern Indian theatre needs to be much more experimental if it has to find new answers to reality. In that direction, *Ant Anant* took the necessary first step.

There are, of course, many achievements as well as problems in this experiment. On the plus side are all the technological innovations which worked smoothly without a hitch. On the minus side was the lack of focus in the production.

The vastness of the canvas and the range of simultaneous action intrigued initially but became monotonous later. The actors too were not fully involved and appeared to be uncomfortable.

The kind of abandon and lack of inhibition required in a play of this genre was displayed only by Rohitashv Gaur, and to some extent by Gyan Prakash. The remaining actors were either speaking too loudly or without clarity. The sermons at the end of the play appeared to be a total departure from the style of the production. For some, it was the first realisation that religion was the basic context of the play.

It goes to Pillai's credit that he took such a big risk in his very first directorial venture. While reading the director's note, it becomes apparent that there is a clarity of thought and a convergence in his understanding of the interplay of religion and politics. However, that clarity failed to emerge in the production.

One of the faults lay with the unreasonably short period of rehearsals. The production lacked in the coordination and orchestration of the flow of action.

But what has been proved by Abhilash, is, that we are capable, or at least, have the potential to evolve plays with the modernist touch.