

# National Herald

## Press Reviews of

### DILIP HIRO'S Play TO ANCHOR A CLOUD

(A Play about Inspiration for the **Taj Mahal**)

Directed by  
**MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**



## Close to cloud nine

Almost always 'play-reading' has been a wonderful idea. We have had "Kaifi Aur Main" and a few plays done by Motley group earlier. And this past week, it was Dilip Hiro, the veteran author and historian whose debut play " ;To Anchor A Cloud", inspired by Taj Mahal, was staged at Alliance de Francaise this past week.

Directed by Manohar Khushalani and produced by Pierrot's Troupe, the play unveils the practices of the royal Moghuls inside the palaces – intrigues, gullibility, bargaining, wisdom or lack of it. They are all revealed as the protagonist Shah Jahan (read by Manohar Khushalani and S. Somasundaram) his wife Mumtaz Mahal (Mala Kumar and Joya John) and Jahangir (Manish Manojia and Noor Jahan (Joya) engage in talks focussed on the throne of Delhi. The English play opens with eight

actors on the dais reading out their parts. Some dialogues are delivered against recorded melodious music, of either a shehnai, or a piece of raga by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. It all starts with Jahangir coaxing Shah Jahan to drink. Shah is hesitant for it is prohibited in Islam, but he must please him.

### **All for the throne**

Each time Jahangir promises Shah the throne but ends up discussing “thousands of problems failing the empire”. Here, a loving but scheming Mumtaz Mahal must play a role. She knows that Noorjahan wants to marry off her daughter from the first marriage to Pervez and wants Pervez to get the throne. She must employ a Jesuit Priest and a physician (Sanyam) to kill Purvez and fake Shah’s death, to be in the royal palace. “You a genius”, Shah flatters her of her role. And she must ask something for return of her genius. It should be no less than a throne. This magnificent play, with marvellous readers transported the audience to the bygone era. One could easily ignore Shah Jahan wearing the crown from the wrong side, or Jahangir sporting reading glasses with the crown, or if Noor Jahan or Mumtaz Mahal had modern, short cut hair. Even no decoration on the stage proved to be blessing in disguise for it attracted the audience attention to the readers. Unfortunately, this remarkable play saw a thin attendance!

RANA SIDDIQUI, THE HINDU metroplus, Monday, March 3, 2008

### **EARLIER REVIEWS OF THE LONDON SHOWS**

‘Authentic... makes fascinating theatre, a combination of traditional Indian gestures and attitudes expressed in terms of modern Western dramatic techniques.’ **Rosemary Say, Financial Times**

‘An elegant chronicle-play... expressed in lucid prose and graceful tableaux modelled on Moghul paintings.’ **D.A.N. Jones, Listener**

Saeed Jaffery's career is believed to have flourished in the U.K. with this play and so did Roshan Seth's. In London, it was discussed on the lines of Shakespearean plays. Now, "To Anchor a Cloud" comes to India. Rana Siddiqui, **The Hindu**.

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# The Mock Doctor

Moliere's Play  
THE MOCK DOCTOR

(A Comedy)  
Enacted by  
**MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

**Hindustan Times**

## Khushalani redeems the show

...Mock Doctor presented at the Shri Ram Center was inventive in stage design and very attractive in its main actor – Manohar Khushalani.....

The perfect timing and rapport between actors Manohar and P. Mukherji in the sequence suddenly lifted the play and enthused the onlookers.....

But all said and done without Khushalani's superb effort the play would have collapsed

**Kavita Nagpal**



**National Herald**

**Adaptation well adapted**

Manohar Khushalani as Chander – the main character – was direct clear and played the part effortlessly. His broken-tooth smile suits very well the character of a country bumpkin who loves the bottle and beats his wife after a bout with Lord Bachhus

**Drama Critic**

**National Herald, 16th August 1980**

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RANA SIDDIQUI, THE HINDU ONLINE

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# Hot N Happening

**Epic play about women and war**



[L to R]: Rashmi Vaidyalingam, Charu Malhotra, Nidhi Sharma, Shreya Sharma and Manohar Khushalani

The play “Kurukshetra and After” is a powerful and vivid portrayal on the theme of women and war. It addresses the impact that war has on the lives of women and their struggle to come to terms with its aftermath. It is being presented for Delhi Tourism by “Stage Buzz” a new Theatre Group with a progressive outlook, on December 11 and 12 at SRC auditorium, Mandi House.

As December 12 is Delhi Tourism day, the show is likely to be graced by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. The play is being directed by the well known Theatre Actor/Director and Critic, Manohar Khushalani.

As a member of Theatre Union, Khushalani had taken up major social issues such as dowry, bride burning, Sati and drugs as themes of street plays.



Dario Fo's 'Accidental Death of an Anarchist' and 'Can't Pay Won't Pay', both directed by Manohar Khushalani, received rave notices from critics and audiences alike. An all women play, Kurukshetra and After, has been written by Suryakanthi Tripathi who is the Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. It has five women characters played by experienced actresses – Rashmi Vaidyalingam Charu Malhotra,

Ruchita Puri, Nidhi Sharma and Shreya Sharma, each of them brings to her role both the poignancy and the innate courage of the characters that they portray. While it is based on the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war in the Mahabharata, it deals with the impact of war on women, and has powerful social relevance in the diverse situations that women find themselves in even today.

The script has a powerful poetic format that lends itself to a contemporary rendition yet retaining the epic proportions of a classical genre.

The theme is highlighted through a powerful script based on the experience of women, both royal and common, who suffer devastating losses in Kurukshetra, the great battle of the Indian epic "The Mahabharata". The issues that confronted those women have remarkable contemporary relevance, and are strikingly similar to those that challenge the women of today, The closing and the opening chorus provide the historical and the contemporary contexts to the play, and serve to bring the moral issues of war, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the role of women into sharp focus.

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# No Curtains for Lionhearted

## No curtains for the lionhearted

Call it entertainment, activism or kid stuff, it is always hard to make endsmeet. But the theatre people refuse to call

it curtains, finds ANJANA RAJAN. From 2002 to 2003 is just another stage cue...



### Actors as activists

To some, theatre is relevant only if it is 'activist theatre' – street plays and proscenium productions dealing with social issues. Sanjay Kumar, who heads Pandies theatre group, whose production "Cleansing" based on the communal riots in Gujarat was shown at the Spirit of Friendship Festival in Manchester this year, is upbeat about his workshops with a spectrum of the population from slums to the highest social rung. On growing social intolerance, he says, "Adults have gone crazy, so we are targeting children in classes six to ten," and plan to stage the productions in a big way in the coming year.

Manohar Khushalani – recently in the limelight for directing "Kurukshetra... and after", a play by Kanthi Tripathi on war and suffering and the strength to transcend it – has for a number of years worked with issues such as bride burning in the past.

Most social development workers realise that theatre is a potent medium to get across ideas. Graduates of the National School of Drama have helped NGOs like Literacy India, Mobile Creches and others in designing and conducting workshops for slum communities and presenting street plays with themes ranging from AIDS to the rights of the girl child.

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# CITY ABUZZ

HINDU

FRIDAY REVIEW

Delhi abuzz with Stage Buzz

**ROMESH CHANDER comes back happy and at peace after watching “Kurukshetra ... and After”., taged in New Delhi this past week....**



Kurukshetra .... and After”, staged In New Delhi the other day, was a fine effort by Stage Buzz.

We are familiar with the writings of some of the poets, novelists and short\_ story writers in the Indian Foreign Service but in “Kurukshetra .... and After”, presented in New Delhi by the Delhi Tourism Development Corporation in association with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Stage Buzz we met for the first time Kanthi Tripathi the only playwright among them. The presentation was not only a premier for the playwright but also for Stage Buzz, a new amateur theatre group of some seasoned performers of the English stage in the Capital working with Manohar Khushalani, an experienced

actor director. "Kurukshetra ... and After" holds much promise both for the playwright and Stage Buzz.

The play is set in the ancient city of Hastinapur just after the end of the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, as told in the Mahabharat and underlines its devastating impact, particularly on women. To bring the point

home the playwright builds her play around three women of the great epic: Gandhari, the mother of hundred Kauravas, Kunti, the mother of five Pandavas as also Karna, who fought for the Kauravas and Panchali, wife of the five Pandava brothers. As the action

moves forward, we see that war has had a great effect on these royal women and how they are now fighting to come to terms with life after it. The playwright's introduction of the two maids, Sevika and Kinkari, who have lost their men folk is indeed interesting both visually as also for their double meaning sharp comments. No doubt, the theme is powerful but the script as it stands today is a little too long. At places the characters repeat what they had said earlier but couched in a different way. Kanti Tripathi's language picturesque and her use of blank verse, dramatically delivered by the cast, gives a certain depth to the lines or a stronger impact on the audience, the script needs some editing and so does the closing chorus written by Tripathi herself, composed by Indraneel Hariharan and sung by the cast with Kapil Ghosh as the facilitator.

Manohar Khushalani's overall production design draws inspiration from our classical dances, particularly the Mudras for gestures. Since death is ever present in the play Khushalani has made effective use of masks at places and since most of the cast has had professional training in different Indian dance forms, the director has exploited their talent to the fullest and we have some very interesting dance sequences choreographed by Rashmi Vaidialingam and Ruchita Puri that provide aesthetic interpretation of an event or what the playwright wants to communicate as for instance in the death dance that had 18 different parts. Then again, the masks used by the maids mocked what the royal ladies were saying. Yet another interesting projection was that of cheerharan

after the Pandava brothers lost in the dice game of chaupat. Though Stage Buzz is an amateur group and most of the cast is working in different professions, their performance is quite good. Rashmi Vaidialingam, whom we have seen in quite a few plays, is an experienced actress and her enactment of Gandhari was excellent in her measured speech that projected her inner turmoil. The two maids, Nidhi Sharma and Shreya Sharma, with brisk movements and tongue in cheek lines were a delight to watch. Charu Malhotra's performance as Kunti made a perfect mother of her Pandava sons and while speaking of Karan, also her son, the change in her mode and tone was remarkable. Ruchita Puri playing as Panchali stands out in the dance sequences as also her movement and gait that has marked Kathak characteristics. The presentation created not only the mood of the period but also poetically brought home Kanthi Tripathi's message.

But the costume were a total contradiction of the milieu. In the background of death and devastation even the royalty does not wear such glamorous clothes or ornaments. Surely, there is grace and even beauty of its own in simplicity match the mood and the atmosphere. Manohar Khushalani agrees ~ thinks about it before the play is on boards again.

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# **ABSURD THEATRE AND FANTASIA**

BORIS VIAN'S Play

## **EMPIRE BUILDERS**

Directed by

MANOHAR KHUSHLANI

**LINK WEEKLY**

**Absurd Theatre And Fantasia**

"THEATRE OF THE ABSURD is no more a craze ....the three main characters of the play evolve under Manohar Khusalani's direction .....Khushalani's atmospherics for the play is a product of a combination of two strong stimuli..."

**NNS Link July 6, 1980**



**Evening News**

**Three short plays of different genres**

"The evening began with Boris Vian's The Empire Builders translated by Manohar Khushalani...directed by Manohar Khushalani.....Brilliantly acted, the production created an atmosphere pessimism depicting the pathology of modern society."

**Diwan Singh Bajeli**

**The Evening News June 17, 1980**



**HINDUSTAN TIMES**

**Well balanced production**

"You have to hand it to them. Ruchika (theatre group) never fails in the department of new talent..

.....A well balanced production designed by Manohar Khushalani"



# **“In theatre, we create metaphors out of life.”**

**“In theatre, we create metaphors out of life”: Dr. Chandrashekhhar Kambar at 18<sup>th</sup> Bharat Rang Mahotsav’s Master Class**



**New Delhi, 17th February 2016:** At the last session of Master Class series, Padmashree Dr. Chandrashekhhar Kambar honoured the stage of Bahumukh, National School of Drama at 18<sup>th</sup> Bharat Rang Mahotsav. Dr. Kambar is a prominent poet, playwright, director and folklorist. He has written 25 plays, 11 anthologies of poem, 5 novels and 16 research works.

Sharing his journey in the field of theatre, Dr. Kambar said, “India lost its artistic nature during the independence struggle and political disturbance.” Mr. Kambar holds knowledge of the modern theatre in Indian context. Explaining the value of modern theatre, he said, “We have 13 Shakespeare in our regional translations.”

Expressing his thoughts upon folk theatre, Mr. Kambar mentioned, “Folk theatre needs audience participation, not only actors. Folk theatre is not as sophisticated as modern theatre but the actors emerges from the audiences themselves.” When theatre and literature were discussed in the

session, Mr.Kambar explained the importance of theatre in its practical context and literature added, "When literature and theatre combines in a perfect harmony, we have drama." Emphasising upon the value of art, Mr Kambar said, "We create metaphors out of our lives in theatre." Mr Kambar also recited his creations of prayer songs at audience demand.

For "Meet the Director",Antarmukh hosted the directors of yesterday's productions: Protarak (Sandip Bhattacharya), The Wild (Thom Pasculli) and Tar Aaya (Pandu Ranga). The directors interacted with the audience about the aspects of play. Explaining the production's behaviour, Thom Pasculli, director of "The Wild", said, "Mine is a laboratory production. It has a nature of wilderness in it. Even the rehearsal room allows the chaos to be present."

NSD's diploma production of "Tar Aaya" Pandu Ranga said, "Dalit literature has always been neglected. Through the adaptation of a story written by a Dalit author, I wanted to highlight its important."

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## 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav: Plays performed

Plays performed at the 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav on Feb 2, 2016 Play:

Play: **Agnivarsham**

Playwright: Girish Karnad

Director: Dr. Ram Mohan Holagundi

Group: Nishumbita Ballet & Theatre Group, Hyderabad

Language: Telugu

Duration: 2hrs 20mins



## The Play

The play is a fictionalized version of the story of Aravasu, Paravasu, Yavakri, Vishakha and Nitilai from Mahabharata. Girish Karnad modulates the actual story to stress the social issue of casteism that existed then, and also to stress on the fact that a dedicated art performance is equal to the vedic yagna done by the brahmins to please the gods. The story revolves around power, love, vengeance and art. In the battle between selfless love and selfish ego the former succeeds. The play ends with a statement that the worth of man is evaluated from his actions and not from the caste he or she is born in.



*Glimpse from the play Agnivarsham*

## □□ Director's Note

The major point which made me decide upon *Agnivarsham* is the ostentatious Hindu hierarchy system which is confronted by the world of performing art screaming that theatre & art is equally important & significant, if not more, in appeasing the Gods to shower rains than the yagnas which are the handiworks of orthodox Hindu civilization, a reality that is menacing even today.

□□

Play: **Ramayana**

Choreographer: Shanti Bardhan

Group: Ranga Sri Little Ballet Troupe, Bhopal

Language: Hindi

Duration: 1hr 45mins

## The Play

This novel composition combines the features of ballet and puppet play. It presents a folkloristic version of the *Ramayana* in the manner of a Rajasthani puppet play. The movements of the actors are stylized; all dancers wear square masks on which faces, crowns and headgears are modeled and painted. They create the illusion of wooden, head-heavy puppets, but through skillful execution give a fantastic animation to the faces. Critics have called this a stroke of genius. The first performance of this play was at the Jai Hind College Hall, Bombay, on the 6th of January, 1953.

The theme of *Ramayana* is aptly introduced in the context of a village fair, with peasants and village-women, milling around in the excitement of the market. The performance begins with Ayodhya celebrating the return of Rama and Lakshmana after Rama's wedding and culminates in the celebration of the victory of Rama over Ravana.



*Glimpse of the play Ramayana*

## Director

Shanti Bardhan (1915-1954) will always be remembered in the history of Indian ballet, as a creative artist who, through his choreographic compositions, gave new direction to the evolution of dance in India. A gifted dancer, specially trained in the Manipuri and Tipperah schools of dance to which he devoted twelve years of study and practice, Shanti Bardhan was thoroughly acquainted with several other classical and

folk dance forms.

He created ballets on many themes, utilizing his vast knowledge and varied training. His ballet *Bhookha Hai Bangal* created a profound stir. India's Struggle for Independence led to the creation of *Spirit of India*, *India Immortal* and *The Discovery of India*, of which the last drew inspiration from Jawaharlal Nehru's book of the same title. In 1952 The Little Ballet Troupe came into being. His mature vision made him choreograph scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Panchtantra*. The themes were traditional and a part of an age-old cultural heritage. With an unerring insight of a genius, Shanti Bardhan shed the religious superstructure of the Ramayana story and transformed it into a simple human story of universal significance. In his treatment of the *Panchtantra*, fables in which birds and beasts live human situations, the stage again presented that piquant blend of realism and phantasy, which is perhaps the real source of the power of ballet as an art form.

His untimely death was a tragic loss to the contemporary movement in Indian dance. But his work lives on and is a great source of joy to all.

**Play: Antigone**

Playwright: Sophocles

Translator: Sisir Kumar Das

Director: Koushik Sen

Group: Swapna Sandhani

Language: Bengali

Duration: 2hrs

### **The Play**

Upon her arrival in Thebes, Antigone learns that both her brothers are dead. Eteocles has been given a proper burial, but Creon, Antigone's uncle who has inherited the throne, has issued a royal edict banning the burial of Polynices, who he

believes was a traitor. Antigone defies the law, buries her brother, and is caught. When Creon locks her away in prison, she kills herself. Meanwhile, not realizing Antigone has taken her own life, the blind prophet Teiresias, Creon's son, and Antigone's fiancé Haemon, and the Chorus plead with Creon to release her. Creon finally relents, but finds her dead in her jail cell. Out of despair, Haemon and Creon's wife kill themselves, and Creon is left in distress and sorrow.



*Glimpse of the play Antigone*

## **Director's Note**

While working with Antigone I have wondered a million times why a thousand-year old play still holds relevance. Is it because of its literary excellence or is it because of the writer's wisdom to foresee the times to come... the wisdom which saw that hatred will never cease to exist even when decades and centuries go by and man's hunger for power will bring darkness even before sunset... and will be darker than any night.

□