Mirza Ghalib in a Time Warp

Mirza Ghalib in a Time Warp
A Review of the Comedy by Manish Vidhani





(Left) A Painting Depicting Mirza Assadullah Khan Ghalib (Right) A Scene from the Play

As a part of the recently concluded The Best of Pierrot's theatre festival, Dr. M. Sayeed Alam and his troupe performed "Ghalib in New Delhi" on 26th April, 2008 at Sri Ram Centre here in New Delhi.

The play showcases Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, the erstwhile former Urdu poet's adventures in the modern day, in his second birth. Ghalib, once he is informed about his posthumous fame, decides to take a rebirth to experience it first hand (the fame that eluded him during his lifetime) and appears at the ISBT. The plot revolves around Ghalib facing an incessant identity crisis and his desperate attempts to fight it. He is famous, but only through the voice of Jagjit Singh and the screen portrayal of Naseeruddin Shah.

His luck brings him to stay with Jay Hind, a Bihari boy, in the servant quarters of Mrs. Chaddha, a typical Punjabi *auntyjee*. Ghalib's character evolves in a subtle way as the play progresses. From his absolute intolerance towards incorrect grammar to his understanding of the 'star couples' in Bollywood, Ghalib endures it all.

Despite it being a riotous comedy, I couldn't help but notice the following. The voice of Niti Sayeed, lacked the boom that a theatre artist is known for, to the extent of being inaudible at times. It stood out in stark contrast with the other cast members. Also, a few scenes such as the one with the *hawaldaar* could have been done away

with. But all said and done, the performance received a well deserved standing ovation from the audience.

TENDULKAR NO MORE!

TENDULKAR NO MORE!

Pune, May 19 Celeberated Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar died this morning at a private nursing home here following a protracted illness. He was 80. Tendulkar is survived by his two daughters and brothers.

Vijay Tendulkar (1928-2008)

Born on January 6,1928, Vijay Tendulkar began his playwriting career in the 1940's, initially for college societies and later for the Bombay group Rangayan. An important contemporary Playwright, he has to his credit a large body of work including some forty plays. Among his plays are Shantala ! Court Chalu Ahe, which received the Kamladevi Chattopadhyay Award in 1970, Ghasiram Kotwal, Gidhade, and Manus Navache Bet. Vijay Tendulkar received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for playwriting in 1970 and the Padma Bhushan in 1984.

Tendulkar was equally at ease in the medium of films. Among his well known screenplays are Nishant (1975), Manthan (1977), Akrosh (1980), Ardhasatya (1983) and Samna (1985)

His short stories are collected in five volumes: Kachpatre (1958), Meshpatre, Dwandwa (1961), Gane (1966) and Phulapakharu (1970). His journalistic writings on people and

events are collected in Raatrani (1971) and Phuge Sabanche (1974).

Amidst his multifarious activities, Tendulkar had found time to enrich Marathi literature by translating into Marathi, works of Mark Van Doren, Tennessee Williams, Henry James, Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh.

Vijay Tendulkar enjoys the unique distinction of receiving the Maharastra Stage Government Award nine times.

As a tribute to him we reproduce an article by the Editor of Stagebuzz which was published in Midday in 2003 when Tendulkar was felicitated at an award ceremony in New Delhi

Culture Cocktail

Manohar Khushalani

Rewarding Unsung Heroes

It was way back in the forties, when Indian Theatre was in its incipient state, when a modest, unassuming, and diligent backstage worker innovated and developed indigenous stage lights. His name was Chaman Lal. An event which is highly attended by the glitterati of Delhi and is looked forward to every year is the Chaman Lal Memorial Society Awards. This is the only society of its kind in India which recognizes the services of those artists of the country who unappreciated for their contribution to Stage Light Designing, Stage Craft, Make-up, and Costume Designing. The Society has been honouring these back stage artists for the last 8 yrs and recognizing that these artists are as important as an actors performing on the stage. The Chief Guest this year was Raj Babbar. As Reoti Sharan Sharma, the President of the society put it, that although Raj Babbar is now a Member of Parliament, he was originally a graduate of NSD, and it was in that capacity that he had been invited. Sharma’s request that Babbar should re-enter stage as an actor, since he would be able to command

large audiences was perhaps in a humorous vein. But an opportunity was lost in reminding Babbar that he had done absolutely nothing for solving the problems of the struggling Delhi theatre, which was in fact, wholly responsible for bringing him into lime light. The earlier Chief Guests of the award ceremony have been, Shashi Kapoor, Rajesh Khanna, Ustad Amjad All Khan, Naseeruddin Shah, Vyjantimala Bali, Anupam Kher, Shabana Azmi and Farooque Sheikh

For the year of 2003, the society honoured the leading playwright, Vijay Tendulkar of Mumbai for his life time achievement in the theatre world, and the awardees in the technical arena were Dolly Ahluwalia Tiwari of Chandigarh for Costume Design, . Vinay Capila of New Delhi for Stage Craft. This year an International organisation, ROSCO (U.K.), offered to sponsor one annual award this "Special Award" went to N.K. Chaurasia of New Delhi for Stage Lighting. The awards carrie a cash presentation of Rs. 25,000, a Shawl and a Momento. These were presented at a glittering function at Kamani Auditorium. Now that the society has started awarding playwrights as well, perhaps the name of Badal Sircar cannot be ignored for his path breaking plays like Evam Indrajeet. Sircar is perhaps the only Indian playwright of international eminence, who also directs his own plays. He is getting very old and should be preferably be rewarded during his life time itself.

One of the major attraction at this award ceremony is that it is always followed by a special multimedia, light and sound presentation which show cases the latest equipment available with R.K. Dhingra's Modern Stage Service. Earlier Dhingra has been presenting annually revised versions of ***Manav***. This year a new show, an anti war dance drama, ***Kyun***, was launched. It was choreographed by Santosh Nair while Concept, Light Design and Direction were by Dhingra. As in previous years the audio visual and lighting effects were stunning. There were laser beams, reflected by finely oriented mirrors to create a symphony between music and synchronized lights. There were

computerised profilers which bombarded the audience with lighting patterns. There were cutout of bombers projected on screen. A diaphanous curtain was used to project organic light patterns with actors performing behind and blending with the visual. Video film projections of the Normandy beach landing and world war two bombers were combined with remotely controlled spot lights giving the illusion of live search lights. There was a new flame machine which created the illusion of a live orange-yellow flame. While one lost count of the effects for which; Naresh Kapuria was responsible for the Environment, Navneet Wadhwa for Sound, Swarupp Ghosh for Laser Graphic Design and above all Dhingra and staff of Modern Stage Service who need to be complimented. However one felt that the overall effect of the presentation was scattered as compared to the earlier production of Manav which was more consolidated and integrated. However the human element introduced by the highly professional performance by all the dancers was remarkable. Amongst them, Priyaanka Bose stood out for her amazing sense of rhythm and fluid body movements. (Author’s email: stagebuzz@gmail.com)

Baghdad Burning – “We are accused of terrorism:”

Baghdad Burning – “We are accused of terrorism:”
A review by Jai Chandiram





Thundering sound of warplanes, bombs , distant cries Ebrahim identifies the plane, whose plane, the type of bomb, and the and the area of the fall . Ebrahim tries to get Rahila into his game . from his dimly lit stark underground shelter . Suddenly the tank sound outside the door puts an end to the guessing and makes the group scurry with their water bottles to the shelter and the anxious wait for the knock on the door, the usual harassment by the soldiers which must be received with humbleness of a conquered nation ..Riverbend records the spirit and destruction of the war on Rahila , Mama , Baba , Aban and many others . Multiple roles by a cast of twelve and excellent characterisation makes this piece of theater a moving experience. The blog of Riverbend (a woman) vignettes the changes in the lives of women who were free to study and work and the growth of fundamentalism and its restrictions on their lives . The war leaves them without electricity and water … but the community continues to support each other through shortage of water and the daily routines for survival . They constantly thank Mr. Bush for liberating them ! The minimalist staging of benches and white sheets which from the bedroom become shrouds are visuals which will be seared in memory!

The dark humor of Mama as she takes the journalist through the shelter hit by a bomb and now a museum has the burnt out figure of a mother trying to save the child with her body , another woman her body leapt in the air as the bomb hits her and freezes her as a figure flying with the impact . Shocking images graphically describe the effect of the bomb on 400 people chill the audience in a harsh reality of the war even though the telling is with embarrassed laughs .

A great play , well enacted and brilliantly staged with a soundtrack that drumbeats into the soul with piercing screech of the bombs and the silence that follows . Grim with dark humor it describes the history of our times

The blog displays :

- These weapons of Mass Destruction cannot be displayed .
- Some countries require 128 thousand troops to liberate them
- Click the *regime change* or *try again later* Button
- Click the *Bomb* Button if you are Donald Rumsfeld

Some War Statistics

Iraqis displaced inside Iraq 2,255,000
Iraqi unemployment rate 27%-60% where curfew is not in effect
Iraqi's without access to adequate water supplies 70%
Prewar daily supply of electricity 16-24 hours , Average today 1-2 hours .

… It feels like we've gone back 50 years ever since the beginning of the occupation. A woman, or girl, out alone risks anything from insults to abduction .

We are seeing the increase of fundamentalism in Iraq which is terrifying .

" Governing Council is something of an interesting hobby – a nice diversion in a monthly routine : golf on Saturdays.. a movie with the family in London on Fridays….. and yes nation building for 5 minutes with Bremer on the 10th of each month .

And so Bush liberates and moves Iraq into democracy!
Based on the internet blog by ***Riverbend***
Script by Supriya Shukla (Hindi)
Design and Direction by **Kirti Jain**
Aaranjan in collaboration with Zubaan , and Abhimanch , National School of Drama

Politically Correct?

Politically Correct?

The Sudhir Mishra Retrospective at the IndiaHabitat Centre

The Inaugural film *“Hazaaron Khwaishen Aisi”*

a review by Divya Raina







1.Actors Yashpal and Manohar Khushalani 2. Mishra with Chitrangada 3. A scene depicting Rajiv Gandhi

One was heartened to see a fairly sizable audience for the India Habitat Centre’s Film Festival screening of Sudhir Mishra’s “*Hazaar Khwaishen Aisi*” (HKA).Apart from the regular viewers there were many film buffs of a more vintage period whom one remembers frequenting the Panorama sections of the India International film festivals of yore (before IFFI moved to Goa, of course).The director’s presence at the venue was a bonus and though he spoke briefly, even his persona prepared one for what was to follow. One was immediately transported back in time when youthful passions, at least in some sections of the university in major metros, particularlyDelhi, were not into pragmatic issues and concerns but more about ideas of changing the world.

This film attempts a relook at a pretty turbulent period of India’s recent history, depicted through following the trajectory of three friends and their intertwining lives. The personal *is* political in this film: you have the ardent radical, the man-on –the-make, the

woman they both claim to love and who herself is repeatedly torn between the two worlds. She marries neither of her friends but the secure, conventional IAS Officer (a little too fond of his drink) and is shown flouting convention but unhappily moving from one ideology and geographical area to another in the course of the film.

All this makes for a pretty gripping tale and the film does pack in quite a few punches. It also makes some telling points about an entire generation-its restless yearning to find a cause, to make sense of the left- liberal ideas they were exposed to and a desire to do something to both alleviate its guilt and at the same time rid the rural deprived of their exploitative predicament. There is space here to form one's own value judgment and judge with the advantage of hindsight as to whether the youth shown were misguided or actually very heroic.

The film in fact paints a rather wide canvas, both in the sweep of time (the sixties, seventies and particularly the time of the infamous Emergency) and the many significant points it wants to cover, as tellingly and economically as it can. The result is bold brush strokes, tropes and visual metaphors, poster like scenes, theatrical settings, and vivid well cast characters representing different professions, castes and classes, you can find them all here.

Politicians, particularly of the Youth congress type, with a caricature of Sanjay Gandhi thrown in, all come in for a satirical sweep in the screenplay which is a joint collaborative effort of Sudhir Mishra, Shiv Subramaniam and Ruchi Narain. The police too are depicted repeatedly as coarse, inefficient, brutal, uneducated and buffoon -like in their exercise of power, making mistakes that have disastrous consequences and repercussions.

The various twists and turns in the lives of Siddharth Tayebji(KayKay Menon), Vikram Malhotra(Shiney Ahuja) and Geeta Rao(Chitrangada Singh) with their letters to each other in the form of voice-overs serve as a cinematic device to cue us in. The swift cuts are due to the editing of Catherine D'Hoir and the effective cinematography is by Jacques Bouquin and Aseem Bajaj. We are shown the almost idyllic green fields

of Bhojpur, Bihar and the various interiors in the urban landscape separated, as we are informed in the voice-over “by 1000 miles and 5000 years”. The contrasts are well established and the “alienation” effect of both Brechtian theatre and a Godardian cinematic are at work here. This is clearly a film that makes you think, it is not going to lull you into a soporific state that is typical of mainstream Bollywood films.

The scene with the Raja and his insane son is particularly effective; representingIndia’s decaying aristocracy and their selling of palaces and their estates and all that this entails, in a vivid episode that is as dramatic as it is telling. Manohar Khushalani has a brief appearance here and is as convincing as always.

This is a significant film that makes many snapshot assessments of a lost generation, with its restlessness being mirrored in the cinematic style and deserves many screenings, particularly for the university youth of today (but obviously not restricted to them alone): they may then get to know why their parents used to be so fired up, till they too got co-opted eventually.

THE ART OF MITRANAND MAITHANI

THE ART OF MITRANAND MAITHANI





1. Earth Air Subjects 10.25X14.75 coloured ink on whatman paper 2. Let me glow 15X21.5 Gouache on whatman paper

The graphic art of Mitranand has alternated between acute observation and lyrical invention. Indeed he has achieved a body of work in the graphic arts which consistently parellels their imagery in what are thought to be the graver media of tempera and ink. Mitranand Maithani, a gifted painter was born in 1933 at Baingwari in the lap of Pauri Garhwal. After completing his education at Messmore College he moved to Simla to earn a living. Destiny brought him closer to Mr. Parasher a renowned master and the architect of a new generation of promising painters. Mr. Parasher saw in him promise and the potential of a genuine painter eager to learn. Soon after joining the college of Arts in early 1952 he revealed his class by being awarded the merit scholarship which he retained till 1957. He had the rare distinction of learning under the able guidance of the noted Gurus like Mr. Pran Nath Mago, B. R. Rattan, N. K. Dey & Raman Trivedi. He came out of the college with flying colors and rare distinction. Mr. Parasher lent a big hand in shaping him to what he is now. Mitranand Maithani's early work is characterised by conservative development in water colour as he states "My primary source in painting comes through my teacher Prof. B. R. Rattan, a noted water colourist." Later he fused all his experience into a highly personal style. Late in 1960, Mitranand came out to be a prolific painter of primitive sub-conscious and automatism. His major interest and involvement in graphics has been and

continuously to be a deep interest in nature and landscape elements, architecture and the human figure placed in a real and tangible space. These have always been the complimentary focal points of Mitranand’s absorption in exploring the potentials of colour elements in combination with black and white. He fused to paint directly, with warmth and gusto and in doing so restored to genre its spontaneity and its essential truth. Furthermore it was generally conceded in our aesthetic theory of the time that the painter had the right to alter nature for the expressive effect and to distort visual reality in order to give it emotional meaning. His new dramatic quality often turned into melodrama, and his passionate inwardness places him in the small company of authentic visionaries. His most characteristic subject, however, is world of sub-conscious mind, to be the cityscape, its people or else, sometimes the abstract pattern of the city rather than the life of its inhabitants that moved him. His unpeopled canvases have the strength of understatement, a feeling for design that is both sensitive and profound, and a mute poetry of colour. In the recent years, he enjoys himself free in subject and time for he is a painter of inmost subjects who finds no ready made images in nature but must create them from his own deeply pondered ideas, whether of a man’s character or the significance of religious experience. His works are like his life, bereft of complications and showmanship. Maithani’s work runs like a strong and steady stream, skirting all the obstacles of prevalent fads and fashions after many years of graphic activities. There is no let up, no signs of battle fatigue, no lack of new ideas

Awards

2008 Parvat Gaurav Samman by Parvartiya Lok Vikas Samiti

2006 Honoured by the then chief minister N. D. Tiwari for contribution in culture

2003 Included in Uttarakhand ki Pratibhayein by Chandan Dangi

2000 Shresht Shree Award for meritorious services in culture from Delhi citizen forum for civil rights

1996 AIIFACS Veteran Artist award

1969 Indian Railways All India Art Exhibition (Prize)

1968 Annual Fxhibition of the All India Fine Arts and Crafts Society (Prize)

1956 Annual Exhibition, Panchal Kala Samiti (Prize)

1955 Annual Exhibition of The ColIege of Arts (First Prize)

1953 Panchal Kala Samiti (First Prize)

Exhibition of drawings and paintings through the years

by
MITRANAND MAITHANI

26 May to 1 June, 2008
Daily 11am to 7pm
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Jehangir Art Gallery,
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Ph.: 9891236943, 9911083697

Fourth Asian Women's Film

Festival 2008 showcased “Insights and Aspirations of Women” by Jai Chandiram



Madhushree Dutta’s ‘Scribbles on Akka’



Anupama Sriniwasan’s ‘Everyday’

Inaugurating the two-day Fourth IAWRT Asian Women’s Film Festival in New Delhi, Dr Vatsyayan, Chairperson of the India International Centre Asia Project said that the observance of the International Women’s Day had both ‘deep positive and negative messages’ since it drew attention to the inequities among the genders even as it had the avowed objective of empowerment. She added that the documentary had the ripeness to highlight various important issues as it had the capacity

to cheer and to disturb.

Eminent film critic and historian Aruna Vasudev, who is also founder President of the Network for Promotion of Asian Cinema (NETPAC), wondered whether the pronouncements made by political leaders on International Women's Day were mere lip service. She stressed the power of cinema to inspire people to make a change in society.

In her message read out on the occasion, Jocelyne Josiah of UNESCO said women still remained highly under-represented in all fields and this was of great concern to UNESCO. She called upon the media to let women handle the editorial content of the media on the International Women's Day tomorrow, a project that UNESCO has been supporting for the last eight years.

The International Association of Women in Radio and Television (IAWRT) has been organizing this Festival for the past four years. The aim was to celebrate the vision of women through film. The festival reflects how women film makers explore reflect, negotiate, resist and document self , family religion ,political, social, cultural, environment. The IAWRT is presently concentrating on two projects, under the broad theme 'Violence and Women'. One project was on "Enforced Disappearances" and the struggle of Kashmiri women for human rights and the second on 'Trafficking of Women in Nepal , India and Bangladesh'.

Around 25 films from five countries were screened in the festival being held in collaboration with the IIC Asia Project and UNESCO on the theme 'Insights and Aspirations'. They included features documentaries and animation films from UK, Japan, Pakistan, and the United States besides India.

The festival featured, "Mortality TV and the Loving Jehad by Paromita Vohra. The film looks outside the Breaking News and covers the complex dynamics of fear of love, scrutiny and control of women's mobility and sexuality and the feudal

mindsets. “Lakshmi and Me” by Nishtha Jain explores her changing relationship with Lakshmi her part-time maid, “Word Within The Word” by Rajula Shah in her film shows how Kabir, the mystic poet resonates with ordinary lives today. Madhushree Dutta in her film “Scribbles on Akka” looks at the bhakti and rebellion of the 12th century poet Mahadevi Aka. Chandra Siddan enquires into her first marriage when she was a child and many more films that inspire.

Haruyo Kato captures her mother who is dying of cancer in her film . A film that that inspires as it challenges the ravages of the disease

Each screening was well attended by students from local media institutes and colleges .

The distinguished filmmaker Paromita Vohra revealed her approach to filmmaking , she said she opened up many windows so people can go in and out without being judgmental. Academics/ professionals spoke about their concerns in popular music culture and struggles in human rights . Truly an inspiring fare . Other filmmakers shared their experiences and discussed the emerging trends in documentaries.

Some of the underlying questions during the festival examined whether women are creating a new language of filmmaking, which reflects, and explores new politics of filmmaking, and how women are widening the frame for issues concerning women.

Overall, recognizing the critical need for a forum that can sustain the form of documentary as well as women’s contribution to this unique form, the festival showcased documentary films created by women, covering a range of genres and expressive styles.

The author is Managing Trustee at IAWRT.

Curtain Call(Keval Arora)

Keval Arora’s Kolumn

Curtain Call

For most of us, the curtain call is a ritual that marks the close of a performance. As a ritual it cuts both ways. It’s gratifying when we’ve enjoyed the show and wish to demonstrate our appreciation. Or, it’s a tiresome chore when we haven’t and are keen to duck our heads and run. Understandably, this spectacle of playmakers lined up to receive applause is often regarded as simply an appendage to the main event, a polite form of ‘goodbye’ and nothing more. But, I sometimes wonder if we have anything else, amongst the wide variety of conventions that govern the theatre, to match the curtain call in the way it underlines, with economy and assurance, the ‘live’ aspect of theatrical performance.

For, until that moment when performers shed their fictional selves and return to the stage in their own persons, the actor-spectator relation in the theatre is essentially no different from that found in other kinds of performance, such as the television or the cinema. That is to say, it is a relation where performers and audiences are hermetically sealed off from each other, each inhabiting qualitatively different zones of being. Sure, when compared to the actor in cinema/television who is a fixed and unvarying aggregate of pre-recorded decisions, the theatre actor is available as a ‘live’, volatile presence that forever holds out the promise of doing things differently in each performance. However, the degree to which the spectator is separated from the ‘character’ised actor in both these cases is remarkably

similar. It is only with the curtain call in the theatre that the boundaries which segregate the two are comprehensively dissolved.

When actors slip out of their ‘characters’ and step up to receive the audience’s applause, when spectators gesture their appreciation directly to the actors, the world of make-believe finally ceases to be. The actor re-enters his own (and the audience’s) world, so to speak, and a different, informal, and more ‘real’ compact between the two parties in the performance equation comes into being. On the occasions when performers and spectators have interacted after the show, either through Q&A sessions or in cocktail-fuelled get-togethers, such cohabitation has taken on a life of its own. But, even when there is no post-performance transaction, the curtain call remains an acknowledgement, albeit brief and perfunctory, of the basic contract that underlies all theatre performance and consumption. As a gathering together of distinct strands of being, the curtain call affirms in its own way the communitarian nature of the theatre – a place where people come together to enact and to witness. It is therefore possible to celebrate the humble curtain call as a distinctive marker of theatrical performance.

Am I reading too much into what is today an automatic practice rather than a deliberated expression of pleasure and praise? Perhaps. But, the fact that we often feel guilty when we do not play our part as spectators (and therefore compensate by applauding the actors’ effort even when there is little of merit in their achievement) is proof that we attach value to such gestures, even when they are at their most mechanical.

Incidentally, we ought not to confuse such transitions, as formalised by the curtain call, with similar moments in the work of Bertolt Brecht. In Brecht’s theatre, we do find transitions from a fictive world peopled by actors to the everyday world of the audience, from the magic of ‘another

place, another time' to the reality of the 'here and now', but here these categories are sequential and mutually exclusive. Brecht's theatre challenges the conventions that separate actor from character, and embeds the performer's political responsibility within such equivalence. However, he works it out mainly as an interruptive device – that is, as a rupture which is most effective when it subverts the common assumption that the best works of art ought to possess an organic unity. The sequential and exclusionary quality of transition that is intrinsic to the curtain call is thus completely alien to the Brechtian project both in method and intent.

It is interesting to note that in Ebrahim Alkazi's time at the National School of Drama, the NSD Repertory did not take curtain calls. Not (though one can never be sure of the reasons for this policy) in spite of its celebratory nature, but because of it. For, the one danger with curtain calls is that these can be hijacked, by performer and spectator alike, into re-structuring relations in terms that are quite inimical to the collaborative nature of theatre production. An instance: curtain calls, especially in our English-language theatre, are often arranged as a series of separate entrances, with actors in the leading roles being the last to complete the line-up while minions in the minor parts are thrust in right at the beginning. The purpose may well be to lead the audience into a swelling applause which culminates in a final burst of appreciation for the lead actors. But talent isn't always marked by such an easy lineage – the lead may have been boringly flat, whereas a small cameo may have provided the production's abiding memory. Also, when audiences are encouraged to applaud each actor's contribution separately, and when the play's cast is stratified in a hierarchy of minor and major actors, theatre groups' claims to being ensembles of equal contributors stand embarrassingly exposed.

It is now the accepted thing, after the clapping is over and done with, for actors to call the backstage and production

crew on stage, to gesture towards the lights and sound booths, and then to invite the director onto the stage. Which most directors do after a decent pause, as if caught short by an unexpected request. Apart from the peculiar arrangement of this credits sequence, I've always found it interesting that directors preface their arrival on stage by an 'invitation' extended by the cast, especially as it is usually the director who orchestrates the curtain call in the first place! What is this – humility, coyness, or self-celebration?

Role-playing of course isn't confined only to the performers. You can find it even in something as uni-dimensional as applause. The recent tendency of Delhi's English-language theatre audiences to offer standing ovations – or, as a friend pointed out the other day, "an ovation while standing" – to even mediocre productions, in apparent deference to the pedigree of the performing group, is evidence of yet another kind of hijacking of the curtain call, and that by the spectators this time!

One spin-off of austerity such as the NSD's is that it reminds actors to look at the work at hand as something to be done for its own sake rather than for the plaudits that could come their way. I must however confess that, despite my belief that this is a good thing (especially in the environs of a training school), I too have felt cheated and resentful, when I have thoroughly enjoyed a production, at being denied an opportunity to demonstrate my appreciation. Perhaps the mainstream theatre too needs a dose of such self-denial, for it could do with less self-congratulatory preening and greater attention to quality.

The curtain call, like most artistic conventions, can be employed to great effect. Either through silence and a no-show (as in Rabih Mroue's *Looking for a Missing Employee*, performed at NSD's Theatre Utsav 2006); or through a technique of ironic quotation (as in the TAG production of Peter Weiss' *Marat/Sade* several decades ago).

The curtain-call Peter Brook devised for his well-known production of *Marat/Sade* closed with the chorus of asylum inmates breaking into a slow handclap in mimicry of the audience's end-of-show applause. Each time this happened during the TAG production at the Kamani (Barry John had picked up the idea from Brook's production, lock, stock and barrel), the audience's applause had petered out, as if to demonstrate that audiences are capable of lapping up even the most savage spectacles of non-conformism only so long as they aren't made to feel they're the victims. By thus undermining the sanctity of this 'last of meeting places' and challenging the comforting superiority that spectators usually feel in their capacity as observers, Brook seemed to have made his audiences experience a truth which was till then for them only an aspect of the fiction.

It's of course another matter that Brook's decision to make the actors, who played the inmates of the lunatic asylum, stay within their characters as they mimicked and parodied the audience's behaviour during the curtain call dilutes its subversive thrust considerably. With spectators finding it easy to deflect whatever discomfort they may have initially felt (these guys are mad after all!), Brook's innovation shows up as surprisingly inelastic, an innovation that agitates the surface but leaves the essential structure placidly intact.

Mroue's *Looking for a Missing Employee* was a solo narration of a man trying to piece together – through print and TV news clippings, interviews, and of course logical deduction – the story of a real bureaucrat who suddenly went missing in Beirut. The performance's highlight lay in the narration being delivered entirely through live and recorded videocam feeds projected simultaneously on three video screens. The stage, consisting of just a table and chair, remained unused throughout the performance. What then could be a more fitting conclusion to this brilliant performance of a tale of a missing man, by an actor missing from the stage, than a no-

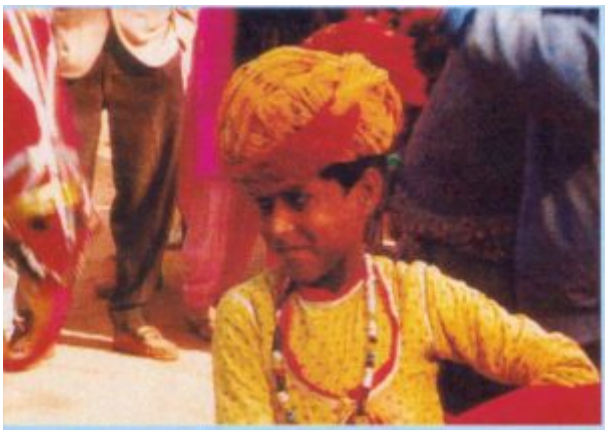
show by the performer-director during the curtain call? The audience at the Abhimanch that January night had hung on, applauding no one in particular and testing Mroue's determination to stay away from the stage. But, as the minutes went by and the audience milled about confusedly, it struck me that we were experiencing an unscripted, impromptu performance that could be titled 'Looking for a Missing Performer'. As in the case of *Marat/Sade*, this production too extended its thematic dynamics into a space that properly does not belong to the fiction, but for precisely that reason can be used to extend meanings in a different and perhaps more resonant register

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Promoting culture in educational films (Manohar Khushalani)

Promoting Culture in Educational Films

-Manohar Khushalani



Let's face it. If one has to enjoy educational video, then it must be presented in a pleasing and absorbing fashion. It was

realised by the promoters of Educational Television that if viewers were to be attracted to their programs then the films must have impeccable aesthetics. To encourage and promote creative excellence The First UGC-CEC Educational Video Competition was organised in the year 1988 in Delhi. As Pradeep Kaul, Director, Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC), put it: "The annual UGC-CEC Educational Video Competition was instituted so as to nurture, encourage, and recognise excellence in educational video programming in India."

Rajendra Mishra, Research Scientist, CEC, who has been associated with organising the Jury screenings every year, adds; "In the beginning the Competition was restricted only to the productions of Media Centres. However, since last seven years this Competition has been made open to all citizens and organisations of India who produce educational Programmes." Unfortunately the Educational Films segment has not received the kind of support that it deserves. In fact the support has been dwindling. This writer too has been fortunate to be a part of the Jury for a number of years and can vouch for the quality of some of the films which won the awards. There are some films which one has seen as far back as seven years ago and remembers their brilliance to this day. Such was the impact of those rare films.

This year too the Jury has met and chosen the best Educational Films of 2002 under various categories, such as Best Educational Programme (for any audience); Best Educational Programme (for undergraduates); Best Educational Programme for Children, Teachers, Adults, on Child & Women Issues and on Environment Development and Human Rights; Technical Excellence awards and awards for Best Amateur Video Production for the year. CEC also instituted an award for Life Time Achievement in Educational Communication. In the last 5 years this award has been given to Fr. Gaston Roberge, Prof. E.V. Chitnis, Prof. Yash Pal, Vijaya Mulay, and Kiran Karnik. The life time

award contains a citation, a trophy, and a shawl. All the other awards contain a cash prize, a trophy which is a stylised form of ‘veena’ and a certificate of excellence. The announcement for this year’s awards is due any day now and as soon as they are made public the readers of Mid Day will be privy to the results.

The Consortium for Educational Communication (CEC) is an Inter-University Centre set up by the University Grants Commission (UGC) with the responsibility of utilising electronic media in education. Countrywide Classroom programmes are produced by 17 Media Centres set up by the UGC in the universities/institutions in India. These programmes produced in Hindi and English are telecast over the national network of Doordarshan CEC is vested with the responsibility of coordinating the management, research and production of the programmes at the Media Centres.

What may be of interest to the regular readers of this column is the fact that UGC-CEC recognises culture to be a definitive part of Education. This year too there were a number of films on this theme. ‘Some Roots Grow Upwards’ was a film based on the theatre of Rattan Thiyam, set against the backdrop of a strife torn region. ‘Rangayana- the Soul of Theatre’ was a film about the theatrical institution set up in Karnataka by the legendry B.V. Karanth. A series called ‘Creativity’ dealt with works of various painters such as Krishen Khanna, Arpita Singh, and Amitava Das. A couple of films on music completed the picture such as one on ‘Tabla’ from Pune and another on ‘Bauls’ from Calcutta. ‘Pung Cholom’ dealt with a Manipuri instrument by the same name. ‘Living in the Shadows’ was about leather puppeteers of Andhra Pradesh who were getting marginalised. Mishra is quite optimistic about the future, since the number of entries is on the rise each year. “India is the biggest producer of educational films,” claims Kaul, “in fact CEC itself has a repository of 11000 films!” Perhaps CEC could conduct a film appreciation course for educational

films, similar to the one being conducted by FTII which deals with fictional films?

Actor at large (Manohar Khushalani)

Actor at large

-Manohar Khushalani





When was the last time you heard of a guy actually getting nabbed by the police on the basis of a newspaper ad displaying his mug? Don't we all remember how different a terrorist, caught recently in Portugal, looked from his picture circulated earlier? Ask an actor – he will tell you all about bahoorupias.

What is an actor after all? A mimic who transforms himself to ape another person? A turncoat who abandons his own persona? A split personality? An exhibitionist? A person vying to be some one else? A being wanting to lead multiple lives? A person seeking a catharsis? May be he is all this and more. But 60 year old Subba Rao, former Dean Academics, who teaches Yoga and Voice at the National School of Drama, at an interactive

workshop with students and the makeup man demonstrated just one such aspect of the actor – how makeup, with a bit of wool, a dab of colour, crepe and improvised objects (such as two pipes to replace a double barrel gun or a chunni for a pugree), and the appropriate expressions can make all the difference between truth and make believe. Subba also proves that make up need not be loud, just one additional tuft of hair and you can transcend your race to another. Just the addition of a pair spectacles can soften your face. A little bit of kajal and rouge can transform you sex. Did one hear someone say – looks could be deceptive?





Without Boundaries – Hindu Temples in Pakistan

Without Boundaries – Hindu Temples in Pakistan

-Manohar Khushalani

The Indo-Pak cricket war has brought into limelight some of the temples that still exist in Pakistan and have been shown on TV. In the thaw generated by people to people and cultural

exchanges between India and Pakistan, four Secular Pakistani artists were invited by Shumita Didi of **Eclectica** in collaboration with **Anhad** to show their works in Delhi. The artists had come under the aegis of **Lahore Chitrakar**, which is a studio and gallery established in 2001 by a group of painters, musicians, writers and theatre workers to revive and preserve the tremendous tradition of classical music, visual and performing arts. The town of Wazirabad in Pakistani Punjab, is known for its Hindu Temples and Sikh Gurdwaras. After the Babri Masjid incident some miscreants tried to attack these Temples and Gurdwaras only to be dissuaded by the people of the township led by **Hafeez Khilji**, a Poet and a political activist.



Above: Hindu Temples In Pakistan

Muhammad Imran, a photographer and an active member of 'Save Apna Wazirabad' a project aimed at documenting and preserving the historical buildings of Wazirabad. His body of work, on display portrayed the present state of historical buildings and drew attention to the need to preserve that heritage. **Akram Varraich** is freelance photographer from Wazirabad. His main area of interest is the portrait; he possesses an ability to draw out the human and innocent aspects of the common folks. The work which he displayed in the exhibition were based mostly on the images of Hindu and Sikh temples in Punjab, Pakistan. Some of those works can be seen in this article. **Shadi Khan** is a labourer from Wazirabad, Punjab who started wood carving when Varraich gifted with carpentry

tools. In his spare time he makes carvings of secular themes. Among his works one saw Christ on the Cross and a Gurdwara. The characters and situations from folklore are his primary choice for carvings. **Shahid Mirza** who is the moving spirit of 'Lahore Chitrakar', conducts painting and drawing class. He is a graduate of' National College of Arts (former Mayo school of arts, as sister school of J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai). Mirza believes that the famous folk character of Ranjha in the 'Heer-Ranjha' romantic duo is inspired by Krishna's persona. Like Krishna, Ranjha too was a flute player and a cowherd whose soulful tunes made the cows dance with joy.

Probably the most focussed work was of the Dawn Photographer, **Azher Jafri,** Chief Photographer, Dawn and Lahore representative of AFP. His works reflected the plight of the underprivileged and the struggle against oppression in Pakistan. There was a picture of anti bomb protesters after the Nuclear blast in Pakistan. A very dramatic picture was of a temple supposedly built pre-partition by Motilal Nehru in Shalmi market, being razed to the ground. A pic of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's wife protesting after her husband was overthrown. To end this article – an amusing tailpiece – a picture of a poor and naked child, which was handed to a newspaper by Jafri, appeared in the paper next day, but the kid – merely two year old – was wearing an underpant. That's self censorship for you!