Project Half Widows, in partnership with IAWRT and APDP – Info by Iffat Fatima, Filmmaker

The project ”**Half Widows”** is a three year media project. Which began in 2006. The project is a partnership between International Association of Women in Radio and Television(IAWRT), a forum for personal contact and professional development among women broadcasters worldwide and the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) Kashmir. APDP is an association of the relatives of the victims of **Enforced Disappearances**, campaigning collectively to seek justice and to get information on the whereabouts of the missing members of their families. The project conceived and executed by Iffat Fatima is supported by FOKUS, a Norwegian based organisation which by supporting project based cooperation between Nowegian and their partner organisations in the south, aims to contribute to the improvement of economic, social and political status of women world wide.

The project is about the struggle of the family members of the disappeared persons in Kashmir.who have spent vast sums of money, time, resources and energy in a legal system that has systematically failed to provide justice to the victims.

Enforced disappearance is not recognized as a crime under Indian law. Specifically the project is about women whose husbands have disappeared and are missing in the more than decade old violence in Kashmir. These women known as **half widows** in Kashmir, are living in a state of limbo, suspended in a space where they lead a life of uncertainity and anxiety. There is no closure for them to pick up the threads of their lives and move on. Being young and vulnerable they are under the pressure of their family and society to stay within the framework of marriage and conform to a marital status, while as the reality is that they are without husbands. Their lives are torn apart and their status undefined, subject to Islamic legal procedures which are ambiguous and determined by local interpretations.

APDP was founded in 1994 by Parveena Ahangar whose 17-year-old son was abducted and never heard of again In 1994. Parveena filed a habeas corpus petition in the Srinagar High Court. With the help of human rights activists and lawyers more and more petitions continued to be filed. More and more family members got together, went to court together, held demonstrations together. Thus began a movement, a collective struggle formalized as APDP. The testimonies of the members of APDP and the documentation of cases of disappeared persons in Kashmir indicate that the practice of enforced disappearance is widespread and systematic. Almost 8000 people are thought to have disappeared, some as young as 13 or 14 years old. A large number of disappearance cases remain undocumented for various reasons, including fear of reprisal allegedly by the security forces.

Media Documentation

The media project seeks to document the personal experiences of these women and the stories which emerge from these experiences through the production of a documentary film. The documentary film will explore issues of memory , violence and healing and be a space for women whose voice is buried in the

larger political and militaristic discourse to narrate their experiences with violence from their own perspectives. Besides a video documentary the project also includes 3 to 4 short video magazines which highlight immediate concerns and problems confronted by women as theystruggle to get legal assistance and information about their family members who are missing.

However the larger objective of the project is to assist and support the APDP effort to launch a long term self sustaining information and advocacy campaign against "Disappearances" and to build awareness about its impact on women Community level participation and networking is an important component of the campaign. The process of documentation, dissemination and distribution is being undertaken through a consultative process with APDP members, a network of organisations, activists, academics and practitioners. Through workshops, and conferences APDP members are trained to acquire long term organisational and media skills to be able to carry on the advocacy campaign independently. The project raises important issues of human rights, peace and justice confronting other countries as well. It will generate material that has international resonance as well as relevance and will urge policy makers and those who wield power to address the concerns of human rights , democracy and justice.

Source: IAWRT, Iffat Fatima

Pulling Strings – A review of the Ishara International

Puppet Theatre Festival by Divya Raina

Daddee Pudumjee with his puppeteers and puppets

It doesn’t quite matter whether one pulls strings or uses larger than life marionettes, glove or rod puppets, its pure theatre that one is watching. Quite distinct from a puppet or the ***kathputli*** show this form of theatre is as creative, compelling and meant for adult audiences as much as for kids. In fact **Dadi Pudumjee** has been a staunch crusader for the cause and promotion of puppet theatre for decades now. An extraordinarily talented puppet creator and manipulator, director, performer and choreographer, he along with his remarkably versatile crew of the **Ishara puppet theatre troupe**, has entertained and enabled Indian (and international) audiences to view a totally different type of performance art.

This was vividly brought out at the staging of the Spanish “Batuta” or small baton, at the recent **Ishara International Puppet theatre Festival** held at the **India Habitat Centre** in collaboration with **ICCR** and others. It was quite a treat to watch the interplay of music, lighting, spoken dialogue and most of all, the entrancing moves and gestures of the animated puppets of different shapes and sizes.

What came through clearly was the constant refrain” I love music” and also “*musica classica*”, and the entire duration of the performance was devoted to an exploration of different forms of music with accompanying puppet movement. The saxophone puppet duet was the highlight with its foot –tapping

rhythm, but there were many other musical elements incorporated. It was as though there was an earnest plea in this globalised TV-corrupted world, to both young and old viewers to re-connect with “purer” forms of music than the fusion and confusion of mtv-inspired forms one generally finds today.

Did it work? For most of the audience, with its short-attention -span habits and general restlessness it was quite a novel experience. One wishes however that anxious moms insisting on ramming ‘culture’ down their offspring’s throats would dispense with their loud running commentaries which unfortunately become an unwelcome sound-track thrust upon one on such occasions.

Burqavaganza – Banned in Pakistan staged in BHARANGAM – Compiled by Manohar Khushalani

At the recently concluded **BHARANGAM**, the Theatre Fest organized by the National School of Drama, a Pakistani play, ***Burqavaganza***, produced by **Ajoka** Theatre Group, was staged at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi. The play had been banned in Pakistan last year, because of its irreverence to the *Burqa*, a traditional veil and gown worn by conservative Muslim women. The play is especially relevant and contemporary because the controversy over women covering either their head with a *Hijab* or also their face and the whole body with a*Burqa* rages even in the Muslim majority countries which were known for their secular ideals.

For example, *Hijab*, an obligatory code of dress in Islam, was banned in public buildings, universities, schools and government buildings in Muslim-majority Turkey shortly after a 1980 military coup. Prime Minister of Turkey, **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** (whose wife and daughters are veiled) had promised before his first electoral victory in 2002 that the "unfair ban" would be abolished. Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) opposition party have thrashed out a deal on a compromise head-cover to be allowed on campus after decades of an all-out ban. Under the deal agreed to by the two parties, a day earlier, women at universities are permitted to cover their heads by tying the headscarf in the traditional way beneath the chin.

While the Turkish PM insists that respect for basic human rights is his sole motivation in pushing through the amendments, some believe that the move would cause immense

problems and deal a blow to the separation of state and religion, one of the founding principles of the modern Turkish Republic.

Told in a rollickingly funny mode, ***Burqavaganza*** laughs at the pointless rigidity of customs and dress code and ridicules the system that upholds their sanctity. The play follows the story of the young lovers: the progress of their romance, the wedding and the birth of the first child. Meantime, the police, looking for the terrorist leader Bin Batin, and the *Burqa* Brigade who suspect that their *Burqa*s are too colourful and revealing constantly bicker because of their conflicting agendas. An unveiling ceremony follows where the Minister for *Burqa* Affairs makes a passionate speech about the significance of the *Burqa* and everyone celebrates with song and dance.

The charismatic scholar Hijab Hashmi inspires her devotees to keep their eyes open for the traitors in the *Burqa* Brigade. Bin Batin carries on his bloody fight against the helmet-covered enemy .The stage action is accompanied by telecast of '*Burqavision'* programmes which include a soap, a documentary '*Burqa* Though the Ages', News, Sports, a fashion show and 'Breaking News'. While *Burqa*s of all shapes and sizes create images and situations reminding the audience of the socio-political situation in Pakistan, two *maulanas* sitting on the edges of the stage, in a TV show, respond to the questions from their viewers about apparently important questions about interpretation and application of religious teachings. The statements of the *maulanas* are in fact extracts from '*Beheshti Zaiver'*, a book given to girls at the time of their marriage.

Denouncing the ban on the play **Madiha Gauhar** had then said that the ban was imposed because of pressure from the "*burqa* brigade", and that it proved that the government's enlightened moderation policies were a farce. It was in the early eighties that I had first met Madiha, when I was hanging around with Badal Sircar, Ragini Prakash and Vinod Dua at the Sri Ram Centre Canteen in New Delhi. We were told by Mrs. Acharya, the

owner of the canteen, that a Pakistani actress wanted to meet us. We were accosted by this strapping young and beautiful lady who told Badal Sircar that their group had performed his play ***Juloos*** (Procession) in Pakistan despite the censorship. A little later, Shahid Nadeem with his Ajoka Theatre Group, performed with our group, Theatre Union, at JNU. Shahid even recorded our play ***Toba Tek Singh*** and took it back with him to Pakistan.

Set up by a small group of cultural activists in 1983, during **General Zia-ul-Haq's** politically and culturally repressive regime, **Ajoka** has struggled with determination against very heavy odds to produce socially meaningful art. It has addressed vital, sometimes taboo subjects through its hard-hitting and innovative productions. Committed to the ideals of peace and tolerance within Pakistan and in the neighbouring regions, it has frequently collaborated with theatre activists from other countries of South Asia particularly from India, viz. Indian directors such as **Badal Sircar, Safdar Hashmi, Anuradha Kapur and Kewal Dhaliwal.**

Founder-playwright of **Ajoka** Theatre, **Shahid Nadeem**, known for his commitment to human rights and peace, is the author of more than 35 original plays and several adaptations. His plays have been performed in Pakistan, India, USA, UK, Norway, Bangladesh, Nepal, Iran and Oman. He is currently the Director of PTV Academy; and Co-director of Panjpaani Indo-Pak Theatre Festival, a festival pioneering interaction between theatre activists of India and Pakistan. He has also worked as Communications Officer of Amnesty International, based in London and Hong Kong. He was awarded **Feuchtwanger/Getty** fellowship in 2001 and has lectured at various universities in the US.

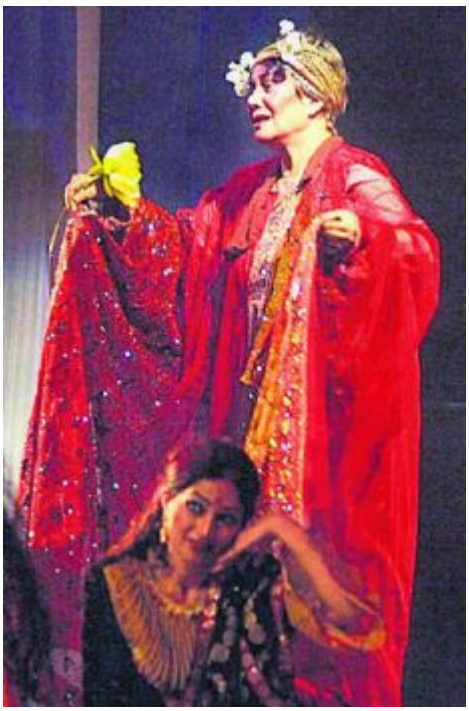
(Sources: *Islam Online*/NSD/Reuters/ANI)

Cast and Credits

Minister/ Bin Batin/ Chambeli/ Cameraman: Sarfraz Ansari
Maulana 1: Ziafat Arfat
Maulana 2: Imran-ul-Haq
Haseena: Samiya Mumtaz
Khoobroo: Furqaan Majid
Brigade Commander: Khola qurashi
Brigade 1: Asif Japani
Brigade 2: Azaan Malik
Police Officer: Usman Zia
Constable 1: Shahid Zafar
Constable 2: Shehzad
Chorus/Dancers: Taqoob Masih, Nadeem Abbas, Waseem Luka, Meena
Hijab Hashmi/ Mother: Samina Butt
Guitar Player: Vicky

Play and Direction: Shahid Nadeem
Sets and Lighting Design: Kewal Dhaliwal
Music: M Aslam
Costume: Zahra Batool
Assistant Director: Malik Aslam
Production Manager: Imran-ul-Haq
Research: Ziafat Arfat
Video recording / editing: Nadeem Mir, Shakeel Siddiqui

NATI BINODINI steals the show at Bharat Rang Mahotsav



Nati Binodini, presented at Kamani in January 2008 in the **NSD Theatre Utsav 2008** by **Theatre and Television Associates**, New Delhi, Directed by Amal Allana received a standing ovation and was one of the landmark plays of the fest along with Kewal Dahliwal's ***Yatra***. Girish Ghosh, Binodini's Mentor and Theatre Director was brilliantly portrayed by Jayanto Das with his earthy and authentic performance style. The performance of the protogonist was rendered simultaneously by five actresses: Salima Raza, Swaroopa Ghosh, Natasha Rastogi, Sonam Kalra and Amita Ailawadi. Each one of them represented different ages and stages of the Nati's life. Salima Raza enthralled the audience with her virtuoso performance and her remarkable stage presence. Nissar Allana's Moving Venetian Blind style of backdrops with projected images and Glass floor gave the production a kind of slickness that only Nissar can create.

The play opens with the five actresses dressed in white hooded sarees creating a remarkable visual composition. The actresses one by one unfold the multilayered and colored identity of Binodini orchestrated by appropriately dramatic music composed by Devajit Bandyopadhyay. A take-off from Binodini Dasi's (1863-1942) autobiography, the play seeks to interrogate and problematize the layered and complex existence of the

immensely talented actresses, virtuoso performers in their own right, in nineteenth century Bengali theatre—an existence where their social and economic insecurity became a handle for exploitation by a whole section of the nouveau riche dandified gentry on the one hand, and the mentor-director-playwright-manager of the theatre, on the other. The action is divided into ten sequences, with the ageing Binodini as the Narrator addressing Girish Ghosh and recounting the story of her life, through all its losses and hurts, and its occasional moments of hope and joy. The play ends with an Epilogue where Binodini makes up an uneasy truce with life that had not been very kind to her.

The script jointly deviced by Amal and Salima depicts two journeys—one, that of 'becoming' the actress, and the other, the writing of her autobiography, shifting constantly between construction and deconstruction of the dimensions of the persona. Binodini requested Girish Ghosh to write the preface to her book, because she needed the 'father' of theatre in Bengal to authenticate the document. He hesitated, declined, then wrote a sort of a condescending apologia. Structurally, the narrative does not follow any time sequence, but there is an overwhelming sense of skepticism about life, humanity and the Almighty.

The partition play, YATRA, moves Bharangam audiences

One has been a great admirer of Kewal Dhaliwal's work and when Madiha Gauhar, the theatre director and actor from Pakistan recommended it to me I realized that it would definitely be a momentous occasion with an intercontinental flavour. And sure enough it was. Like some of Kewal's previous productions, this too was an intensely moving experience.

Manch-Rangmanch's ***Yatra 1947***, conceived without a script and structured through improvisations, was performed in the Bharangam Fest on 9th January 2008. It draws its material from real life incidents, often from oral history—tales told by elderly relatives who had been through the trauma of the times—portraying the suffering of the people who had to undertake arduous journeys, most often, away from their homeland, to another country and milieu. The play consists of more than 40 poems, originating from both India and Pakistan, with theatre students from both sides of the borders taking part.

At the end of the show with audience applauding quite a few of them holding lighted candles of peace and brotherhood in their hands. When Madiha Gauhar asked them if they knew which actors were from India and which ones were from Pakistan, they all said in unison "we don't even want to know." Such was the extent to which the audience had been moved by the depth and emotions of the poetry and the fluidly conceived choreography.

As Kewal puts it; "All of us had heard of Partition through the various stories told by our elders. As the days went by in the theatre workshop, and we started to actually perform those

stories, we gained profound insights into what those people would have gone through. Thus one of the purposes of this workshop was accomplished. We have taken small steps in making the younger generation aware of the tragedy of the Partition, making them value both the countries. The play does not try to rub salt into the wounds of Partition, but rather attempts to heal them, to transform the barbed wires of hatred into soft lines of life and love. The Punjabi Theatre group **Manch-Rangmanch** hails from Chandigarh and has also taken its plays to England, Canada, Germany, USA, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Cast and Credits

John Paruej, Bakht Arif, Zora Brar, Prabhjot Kaur, Amir Ismail, M Abid Hussain, Bharat Sadana, Jaskaran Singh Sahota, Ranjit Bansal, Rajwinder Kaur Deol, Rupinder Kaur, Gurjot Singh, Gurleen Kaur, Jagwinder Singh Sodhi, Shallu Arora, Vikramjit Singh, Nitin Singh, Varun Patel, Veerpal Kaur, Gurinder Kumar, Kanwal Nain Kaur, Kanwar Gurpartap Singh, Yadwinder Singh, Rahi Batra, Rajiv Jindal, Ranjit Tapiala, Khola Qureshi, Meena Sadiq, Shahzad Sadiq, Nirwan Nadeem, Bikramjit Ranjha, Muhammad Azaz Khalid, Shahid Zafar, Usmaan Zia, Humayun Pervez

Music: Harinder Sohal Singer: Harinder Sohal, Misha Accompaniment: Jagjit Singh (sarangi), Sony (dholak) Properties: Rajiv Jindal, Gurinder Kumar Costume: Humayun Parvez, Kunwargur Partap Sets: Shallu, Shahid and Shahzad Assistant Director: Zora Brar, Jajwinder SodhiStage Management: Varun Patel

6th Pune International Film Festival inaugurated in a glittering ceremony

It is that time of the year again which is much awaited by lovers of cinema. The Sixth Pune International Film Festival (PIFF 2008) was inaugurated on Thursday, 10th January at the hands of Sharmila Tagore, Suresh Kalmadi and Nana Patekar in a grand ceremony organized at Ganesh Kala Krida Manch. This week long festival which kicked off from 10th of January will end on 17th January, treating film buffs to an exclusive collection of national and international movies.

Rajlakshmi Bhosale (Mayor of Pune), Antino Gogala (Councilor of Republic of Slovenia in India), Daniel Johar Zonshine (Council General of Israel), Pravinsinh Pardeshi (Pune Municipal Commissioner) graced the occasion. The international jury and guests were also present for the ceremony. Apart from this, some of the renowned Bollywood stars like Nana Patekar, Ameesha Patel, Amruta Khanvilkar (Sade – Made Teen Fame), Zeenat Amman were also present.

The inauguration ceremony of the festival began with the lighting of the lamp by the guest of honors and “A Naandi” which was followed by dance medley on famous songs

Introducing PIFF at the inauguration, Suresh Kalmadi chairman of PIFF 2008 said, “Pune is the cultural and sports capital of the nation, and is home to several famous institutions like FTII, Prabhat Studio and National Film Archives. This event offers a perfect platform to showcase a group of extremely talented film makers from the international arena to Pune. Around 145 movies were selected from across 43 countries for this year’s film festival.” Further he said, “The much awaited Commonwealth Youth Games, 2008 is the next step forward in

placing Pune on the international map of sporting arena. This year Pune is the proud host of the 3rd Commonwealth Youth Games which is being held in Asia for the first time, where nearly 71 countries will be participating.

This year’s Lifetime Achievement Awards were conferred upon eminent actors, Shammi Kapoor and Sharmila Tagore to acknowledge their invaluable contribution to Indian cinema. Later an audiovisual on their career was screened which effortlessly took the audiences to the golden era of Indian film history. Nana Patekar stole the show with his sense of humour. He said,” I am very happy to be here today on stage with eminent actors like Shammi Kapoor, Sharmila Tagore and Zeenat Amman and I respect them for all the hardwork they have done to achieve this success.”

Courtesy M/s Perfect Relations