

# AIKYAM 2025 Concludes at Ajanta–Ellora with a Vibrant Tribute to UN@80

By Kanika Bansal



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Artists, scholars and delegates from over 30 countries convened over three days to celebrate India's heritage and shared global values

India's tourism sector is witnessing strong growth, with 20.57 million international arrivals and over 2.94 billion domestic tourist visits in 2024, reinforcing the country's global cultural influence

In 2024, Maharashtra recorded the highest foreign tourist inflow among all Indian states, receiving 3.71 million

international visitors

Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar (Aurangabad), Maharashtra, November 22, 2025: Sopaan's flagship cultural initiative, AIKYAM 2025, successfully concluded its three-day celebration (November 21-23, 2025) today at the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ajanta and Ellora. The event marked the 80th anniversary of the United Nations through an immersive convergence of art, heritage, diplomacy and sustainability. Set amid the breathtaking rock-cut caves of Ajanta and Ellora, AIKYAM 2025 brought together global cultural practitioners, historians, artists and diplomats for a rare celebration of India's timeless wisdom and living traditions.

The event witnessed the presence of key dignitaries from UNESCO, Maharashtra Tourism and the Municipal Corporation of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, alongside ambassadors, diplomats and



Cultural Ambassadors from over 30 countries were amongst the

attendees

cultural representatives from over 30 countries. Among the distinguished attendees were Shri Sanjay Khandare, Principal Secretary, Maharashtra Tourism, Dr. Timothy Curtis, Director, UNESCO Regional Office in India, and Shri G. Sreekanth, Municipal Commissioner of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar. Their participation reinforced AIKYAM's core message of global unity, responsible cultural tourism and the harmonious blending of tradition with modern innovation. Several senior diplomats, including the High Commissioners of the United Kingdom and New Zealand; the Ambassadors of France, China, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and Thailand; and the Country Head of UNDP, also graced the festival.

Shri Sanjay Khandare, Principal Secretary, Maharashtra Tourism, said, "Maharashtra stands at the forefront of India's tourism landscape, committed to becoming a premier global cultural destination, with the Ajanta and Ellora caves serving as living expressions of our civilisational depth and artistic brilliance. As we commemorate 80 years of the United Nations, we gather for AIKYAM, a celebration rooted in the philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, reminding us that the world is one family and reflecting Maharashtra's legacy of bridging faiths, fostering art and inspiring unity across centuries. In 2024, the state recorded India's highest foreign tourist inflow with 3.71 million international visitors. Our outlook remains strong as we continue to enhance infrastructure, visitor services and opportunities across key destinations. It is our goal that every traveller leaves with an experience that is enriching, memorable and deeply connected to our cultural soul. In the spirit of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, we hope Maharashtra's cultural richness inspires harmony across nations and strengthens unity in diversity."



**“This confluence of music, art, dance and dialogue pays homage to the spiritual and cultural essence of Ajanta and Ellora. Rooted in the values of science, sustainability and spirituality, AIKYAM marks UN@80 and seeks to inspire reflection and meaningful exchange. We aim to deepen the global community’s engagement with India’s artistic legacy and sustainable future.”**

**Siddhaant Mohta, Co-Founder and Director of Sopaan**



**Siddhaant Mohta**, Co-Founder and Director of Sopaan, said, “AIKYAM is a strategic initiative that reimagines how heritage, performance and dialogue can come together to build global understanding. Conceived as an immersive three-day journey, it transforms the sacred cave complexes of Ajanta and Ellora into living stages for unity and exchange. Drawing from

Sopaan's experience curating cross-cultural programmes with the royal families of Jaisalmer and Gwalior, and with the Delhi Government at Purana Qila, AIKYAM marks 80 years of the United Nations. We stand

at a global pedestal where we amalgamate a unique confluence of art, culture and spirituality to echo the United Nations' founding ideals of peace, cooperation and a shared global future."

Dr. Timothy Curtis, Director, UNESCO Regional Office in India, remarked, "Ajanta and Ellora, among the earliest Indian sites inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List, stand as dynamic Indian repositories of philosophy, creativity, and shared human endeavor. Their legacy, rooted in artistic excellence, scientific prowess and in the coexistence of diverse traditions, reminds us of what humanity can achieve together. In a rapidly changing world, these sites call on us to renew our commitment to dialogue, cooperation and collective action. AIKYAM 2025 brings this spirit to life, demonstrating how cultural heritage is not just a record of human achievement but a roadmap for building dialogue, understanding, and collective action in the spirit of UN@80 and our shared future."

Extending his welcome, Shri G. Sreekanth, Municipal Commissioner of Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar, noted, "Celebrated amid the timeless grandeur of our UNESCO World Heritage Sites, AIKYAM beautifully bridges our cultural heritage with innovation. As we commemorate UN@80, this event highlights Maharashtra's commitment to honouring tradition while embracing the future."

AIKYAM 2025, celebrating oneness, was a vibrant convergence of culture, heritage and global dialogue centred at the Ajanta and Ellora caves. As dusk gathered, the forecourt of the monolithic Kailasa Temple, Ellora, carved from a single rock to honour Lord Shiva, became an open-air amphitheatre. The evening opened with a Shiva Invocation by HH Maharani Raseshwari Rajya Laxmi of Jaisalmer and Nick Booker, whose

Sanskrit chants and interpretations evoked the cosmic principle of Aikyam. This was followed by AIKYAM Omkara, choreographed by Gauri Sharma Tripathi and performed by international artists using Kathak, Bharatnatyam and Odissi, to embody the universal rhythm of creation, continuum and dissolution. Intellectually, the event featured a major lecture by historian William Dalrymple, "The Golden Road: How Ancient India Transformed the World," which connected India's civilisational ethos to the UN's global vision, alongside talks by other thought leaders, including Dr. Timothy Curtis and Booker.

Complementing the performances and talks, the festival featured significant artistic and historical recreations, underscoring its theme of global cultural dialogue. A highlight was the musical recreation of the historic 1967 UN General Assembly concert by Pandit Ravi Shankar and Yehudi Menuhin, expertly performed by Pandit Shubhendra Rao and Dutch cellist Saskia Rao-de Haas, emphasising dialogue as audible harmony. Brazilian artist Sergio Cordeiro also contributed with a live mural reinterpreting the Ajanta murals in a contemporary idiom. The overall experience was enriched by curated heritage tours to sites like the Daulatabad Fort and Bibi ka Maqbara, textile showcases of Paithani and Himroo, and a celebration of Maharashtrian cuisine, culminating in contemplative visits to the Ajanta caves on the final day.

Cultural tourism accounts for nearly 40% of tourist arrivals in India, and the country's heritage tourism market, valued at USD 19.9 billion in 2024, is projected to reach USD 27.1 billion by 2033. AIKYAM 2025 positioned heritage as a powerful tool for cultural exchange, sustainability and global connection, further strengthening India's soft power footprint. Anchored in the philosophy of oneness of science and spirituality, humanity and nature, AIKYAM 2025 showcased India's alignment with the UN Sustainable Development Goals while celebrating the artistic and spiritual genius of ancient civilisations.

**Founded by Ambassador Monika Kapil Mohta and Siddhaant Mohta,**

**Sopaan continues to build immersive cultural journeys that honour India's heritage while fostering meaningful global dialogue.**

As AIKYAM 2025 drew to a close, the resonance of its message remained clear, that culture, when shared, becomes a bridge between people, nations and the collective future of humanity. The success of the festival was supported by its key partners and sponsors, including Endurance Technologies, Trident Group, JSW, RMZ Corp, VFS Global, TVS Motors, Bharat Forge, SPP Pumps, Volvo, Kalpataru Projects, CBSL Group, ZF Group and IndiGo.

#### **About Sopaan**

Sopaan crafts rich, bespoke events that represent Indian cultural heritage on the world stage, bringing historical sites alive in a contemporary context and creating meaningful cross-cultural connections. By blending music, dance, fashion, painting, sculpture, textiles, cinema, architecture and cuisine, Sopaan creates enriching sensory experiences that celebrate India's living culture with ancient roots and an exciting future. With a mission to craft the world's cultural connections with India, Sopaan has partnered with state governments, royal families and renowned curators to showcase the country's incredible history and extraordinary people against the backdrop of its timeless heritage.

#### **About Maharashtra Tourism**

The Government of Maharashtra is committed to promoting the state's diverse tourism offerings, spanning heritage, culture, nature and adventure. With world-renowned destinations such as the UNESCO World Heritage Sites of Ajanta and Ellora, the vibrant cities of Mumbai and Pune and serene hill stations like Mahabaleshwar and Lonavala, Maharashtra offers a rich tapestry of experiences. Through initiatives that enhance infrastructure, promote sustainable and eco-tourism and celebrate cultural festivals such as the Ganesh Festival and Hindavi Swarajya Mahotsav, Maharashtra Tourism continues to highlight the state's unique heritage and vibrant spirit while

ensuring memorable and responsible travel for all visitors.  
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## **An Opportunity to Look East – IIC Experience | Manohar Khushalani**

During the North East fest on Monday, the 29th October, at the Fountain Lawns, the audience was confronted by a disturbing solo performance by actor director, Lapdhang Syiem from Meghalaya, called A Being Human. Earlier on the same day we had a presentation by Soli Roy about a Manipuri play, Crimson Rainclouds, written by his own mother, Sahitya Akademi Awardee, Binodini Devi

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## **Aurangzeb – a critique of the play by Manohar Khushalani**

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

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# **Diary of Anne Frank – a review by Manohar Khushalani**

This is recreation of a review Manohar Khushalani wrote in Dec 2000: Ruchika Theatre Group is one of the oldest surviving theatre groups of Delhi. The reason is simple. It keeps regenerating itself. The Diary of Anne Frank was one such exercise in which, Feisal Alkazi, the director of the play, used an entirely inexperienced cast, inducted from the Little Actors Club. Obviously, therefore, there would be unevenness of talent, but viewed within those limitations The show put up at India Habitat Centre last week held together due to sheer sincerity of effort and excellent performance

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# **An Ode to Sushant | Renu Mal**

In April, Sushant had deleted all his old pictures that he had posted since he created his account on Instagram. Yet nobody had time to look into his trauma. Read the touching Ode Renu Mal has dedicated to his memory

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# The Elusive Mr Tanvir / Partha Chatterjee



Habib Tanvir  
(Courtesy Outlook)

Habib Tanvir (1923-2009), was perhaps the most famous Theatre personality in north India. An actor-manager in the Old-School mould, he led a crowded professional life, which, over the years, had invariably spilt over into private moments with family, friends and lovers, often to detrimental effect. The Raipur-born Habib Ahmed Khan assumed the nom-de-plume of Tanvir after he started writing poetry in Urdu in his senior years at school. He rose to fame as the founder-director of Naya Theatre along with his wife, Moneeka Misra Tanvir, a strong, dedicated and talented theatre person in her own right. The actors were from the folk-theatre of Chattisgarh, near Raipur in Madhya Pradesh. It was through his unknown but highly accomplished actors and actresses that Tanvir was able to create a body of work in the Hindustani (Hindi-Urdu) theatre that stands alone. Two plays that come to mind and were hugely popular in their time, are Agra Bazar, based on the times of Nazir Akbarabadi( d-1830), the great Urdu poet, and, Charandas Chor taken from a Chattisgarhi folk tale. Not without reason, he has remained for many, the most important director-playwright in the region. He was, for all his

artistic accomplishments, a sadly flawed man. Without purporting to be a review of his memoirs, simply titled ' 'Habib Tanvir : Memoirs' ', (publisher-Penguin-Viking) this piece is a rebuttal of some of its contents to set the record straight.

The book is a translation from the Urdu by Mahmood Farooqui, a well-known historian and performer of Dastangoi, a near extinct art of story-telling, popular in 19<sup>th</sup> century Avadh, of which Lucknow was the cultural centre. Habib Tanvir's life has been reconstructed through a series of remembrances dictated to Farooqui. One of the problems to arise from such an exercise is the propensity of the person remembering, to distort facts that may be too painful or embarrassing to remember. There were many such instances in Tanvir's life but his letting down of Barbara Jill Christie nee Macdonald, a fine trained singer from Dartington Hall, Devonshire, England is the worst because it had a far reaching psychological effect on Anna, the talented singer daughter born of this relationship, on Nageen , his daughter from his marriage to Moneeka. The shadows of Anna and her mother Jill, through no fault of their own, always hovered over Nageen and her late mother Moneeka. Tanvir continued to visit Anna and her mother Jill, in England and France till 1996, when he was seventy three.

When Habib Tanvir had first met Jill, in England, he was thirty two and she, an easily impressionable sixteen. The year was 1955. He was handsome, dashing, a poet, and a student at RADA (Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts) in London. There was no Moneeka Misra then, on the horizon. He was already a man of the world, though with the airs of an idealist. It was easy to capture Jill's heart. She loved him with a kind of sincerity and intensity that possesses the starry-eyed young, who in their optimism can go through hell and high water in search of the pure and the beautiful. One must also remember that when Habib and Jill had met the Second World War had ended only

eight years ago, and the world, then as now, was desperately in need of love and hope.

It was indeed a pleasure and a revelation meeting Barbara Jill Christie and Anna, a couple of years earlier at the India International Centre in New Delhi. An elegant, handsome lady of seventy two, Jill, came across as a cultured, really educated, as opposed to highly literate, though she was that too, person who viewed the past, that is, her relationship with Habib Tanvir, with warmth, and a certain detachment. She was quite aware of the fact that in spite of being treated irresponsibly by him, she had played an important role in his life, not the least because of Anna, their daughter and the three grandsons. Anna's first son, Mukti, is eighteen; his grandmother has addressed her memoirs titled, "Dreaming of Being" to him. The recollections are written as a long letter to him, interspersed with his grandfather Habib's letters written to Jill, his grandmother, over a period of nearly twenty years; beginning in 1955, and with the last letter dated 15 April, 1964.

The following quotation appears on page one of the manuscript:-

*"The desire to write a letter, to put down what you don't want anybody else to see but the person you are writing to, but which you do not want to be destroyed, but perhaps hope may be preserved for complete strangers to read, is ineradicable. We want to confess ourselves in writing to a few friends, and we do not always want to feel that no one but those friends will ever read what we have written."*

— T S Eliot

This beginning, on a note of seriousness, is sustained throughout the narrative of 153 pages. Barbara Jill Christie writes with deep but controlled emotion and respect for her

chosen subject.

Anna Tanvir has written the foreword to her mother's Memoirs. She begins thus, " I first read my father's letters written to my mother a few months after his death. I was sitting in the aeroplane on my way to India to attend a festival celebrating his life and work that was taking place in Bhopal in October 2009. It was a confusing moment as I had not been to the state funeral held in Bhopal a few months earlier, and had not had the time to absorb the finality of his absence, nor was I sure why I was undertaking this journey at this particular moment. I simply felt I had to go to where he lived, meet the actors of Naya Theatre whom I knew well, and meet my Indian family; I needed to be in India, on his home-ground, to properly accept that he was no longer physically there."

Nageen, Habib and Moneeka's daughter, and Anna's half-sister, always remained deeply unhappy at her father's philandering with various women over the years, though she would dutifully accompany him when he visited Jill and Anna in England and France in his old age. Once, in Exeter, Nageen, having gone to stay with Jill and Anna, turned hysterical. She kept saying that Jill did not really know Habib, for the compulsive womaniser he was. She also held Jill responsible for her mother's continuous unhappiness. Nageen, all too aware of her father's failings, loved him unconditionally. She could not tolerate the fact that she had to always share her father's love with Anna and Jill. Habib, in his old age called Anna and Jill, "my two pearls". He was spot on. Anna, born in Ireland, seven months before Nageen, is a gifted singer and has several albums to her credit. Nageen is a fine singer of the folk songs of Chattisgarh she learnt from the actors in her father's troupe, is also a trained singer, she has also learnt Hindustani vocal music from the famous Salochana Yajurvedi. Anna and Nageen continue to be distanced from each other.

The release of Habib Tanvir's memoirs on 28 May, 2013 at the Habitat Centre, New Delhi was a sham Public Relations job. Translator Mahmood Farooqui went on stage with Nageen, and together the two, lionised the deceased Tanvir. The announcer, a young lady, set the proceedings in motion by calling him one of the greatest Indian theatre directors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a fact that can be challenged by the serious followers of the work of Shambhu Mitra, Utpal Dutt and Ajitesh Bandopadhyay, all stalwarts of the Bengali theatre, and Jabbar Patel, a major figure of the Marathi stage. It was a veritable love-in, where critical judgement had been completely suspended. Habib Tanvir, the uncanny spotter of talent hardly got a mention. He was instead hailed as a messiah of Indian theatre, who worked with hardly any props, in the last twenty five years of his career. No one said while his minimalist approach was often very effective, he was not the first to use it well. There was not a word about Jill and Anna, for all practical purpose they did not exist. They are mentioned, albeit in passing, in the closing portion of the book. What Tanvir, with his cavalier attitude to facts related to his private life, could not ignore, his craven fans did.

As stated earlier, this is not a review of his memoirs but an attempt to redress a wrong committed fifty years earlier. Habib,, at forty, is still playing the 'young Lochivar'; this is after his marrying the constant, deeply loving but neurotic Moneeka, and the consigning of Jill far into the background. In a letter dated 21 December 1963, written to Jill from Raipur, MP, he says thus :-

*Dearest Jill,*

*Yes, I know. You have every right to feel sore. It is five weeks since I arrived. Well, this is the first time I am writing any letter at all. But darling, not for a day have you ever been out of my mind. I was having the sweetest thoughts*

*about you and your wonderful letter was so welcome. It came in very good time. And I began to visualise all kinds of lovely things about you. Actually this is the first time we have ever shared life at all properly and for any length of time – and the whole things haunts.*

He proceeds to tell about the acute paucity of funds and how theatre groups were falling all over him to work with them. To quote from the letter once more, “My mind goes back to each detail whenever parallel situations occur striking a contrast and I even think of the peace with which we shared our monies. Oh thank you so much Jill darling for all that most wonderful period of time”. Jill, writing to her grandson nearly fifty years after receiving the letter said, “I like this letter so much Mukti and I remember being overjoyed to get it – the longest Habib ever wrote to me and full of warmth and interesting news.”

Domesticity never suited him, though he had schooled himself into accepting it, lest he seem an ingrate to Moneeka and Nageen, and vital, rejuvenating romance that had awakened the artist in him after he fell in love with Jill, became a dream he could not sustain with any degree of consistency or loyalty. He was cleaved right down the middle of his being, if such a thing were possible.

Jill remembers in her memoirs, “By this I was still living in London but had to move into the house of a friend called Betsy Phillips, a rare and wonderful being. She had been an art teacher who taught me when i was a child. I had loved her lessons and we had always kept in touch. ... She was not censorious, either of myself or Habib, nor particularly worried, which was most unusual under the circumstances! She seemed to be more than a little excited that a baby was coming along. I think the idea of a new life appealed very much to her sensitive, creative nature and she knew that I had loved Habib for many years, and that I would cope. That such a thoughtful person actually believed in me was indeed a great

help."

Habib 's take on Jill, her pregnancy, and then motherhood, in his memoirs is weary and resigned.

"Somehow, Jill managed to trace me in Dallas, Texas, and landed there. From there she accompanied me to New Orleans, East Virginia and Washington D.C. and stuck to me like a shadow. This was a great phase for my poetry. ... I came back via London and went to Edinburgh from there. Jill's dream eventually bore fruit. Anna was born on 6 May 1964. Later Jill married Christie who gave her another daughter. ... When both daughters joined school, Jill wanted them to have separate identities – one should have Christy as a surname and the other should be called Tanvir. She sent me the school form, and I signed it and sent it back. ... But Moneeka did not like it." (pg 308, Habib Tanvir : Memoirs).

He goes on to say how Moneeka, who had earlier lost their first child in Panchmarhi, had three miscarriages in quick succession. This was after Tanvir's return to Delhi in 1963. Thanks to the timely intervention of Sheela Malhotra, who advised Moneeka to use a bolster under her feet while lying down, Nageen was born 28 November 1964. "Moneeka was amazed and always considered Sheela to be Nageen's second mother." (pg 308, Habib Tanvir : Memoirs).

Habib's life, over the years, thus rolled on amongst the comings and goings of girl friends, with whom, to his amazement, Moneeka, invariably bonded! Jill, of course was an exception, she was the great love of his life and the mother of his child, and so, was the 'outsider' whom, Habib, could neither forget, nor give up. He visited Mother and daughter, whenever he could. His silence, for some years following the birth of Anna was, in retrospect, not inexplicable. He just did not know how to accept responsibility for his actions, especially in his private life, not that he would acknowledge, much less accept, responsibility for his feckless and even

cruel behaviour towards colleagues in his professional life. Deep down inside he seemed to be convinced that since he was an artiste, he was entitled to behave as he pleased.

Habib Tanvir's training in England in Theatre, first at Rada in direction, following which, a stint in acting at the Bristol Old Vic, cured of participating in the joys of the proscenium theatre and the dramaturgy it required. He was for a more spontaneous kind of theatre that had its roots in the Indian soil, where sets and props were imaginative, and could be carried in a couple of suitcases and actors could express themselves with ease and freedom. 1954, found him working with Begum Qudsia Zaidi's Hindustani Theatre in Delhi. She had managed to gather around herself several talented artistes, amongst them Habib Tanvir, the Hyderabadi Urdu poet Niaz Haider, the music composer from Bengal, Jyotirindranath Moitra, who had at one time or another been associated with IPTA ( Indian Peoples Theatre Association), the cultural arm of the Communist Party of India

Hindustani Theatre did three Sanskrit plays, Mriccha Kattikam by Shudraka, Shakuntala by Kalidas , and a play each of Bhasa and Bhavbhuti. It was with Hindustani Theatre that Habib Tanvir did his first production of Agra Bazar comprising tableaux of life in the times of Nazir Akbarabadi, the great Urdu poet whose verse sang of the joys and sorrows of everyday life. Habib was to tinker with the script over the years to make it more expressive and lively. Agra Bazar opened the doors to fame and Charandas Chor confirmed it. The grand success of this play was largely due to its blend of satirical comedy and high seriousness. The idea came from a Chattisgarhi folk tale, and which was brought sparkingly alive by a set of actors from there. Charandas Chor with its cast of folk actors, toured internationally, conquering the hearts of audiences everywhere despite its script being in a dialect from Madhya Pradesh.

It was the actors who did the trick with the plasticity of

their body language and a gamut of emotions and ideas that their vocal inflections were able to convey to an audience that did not ostensibly understand the language in which the play was written.

Tanvir's relationship with his actors had always been fraught on and off the stage. In spite of his wide and varied learning he was a little afraid of his actors, most of whom were barely literate. Why? Was it because they possessed an unusual amount of native artistic intelligence and so were able to convey his ideas with ease? It was widely said that they had to be coached in minute detail in the course of the rehearsals. This may have been true in the case of certain actors but certainly not with the gifted ones. His actors were already known names in the folk theatre of Chattisgarh.

Laluram, Punaram, Majid, Bhulwaram, Madanlal, Fida Bai, Teejan Bai, are some of the actors that come to mind who graced the plays staged by Naya Theatre. They were, like some who came in their wake, marvellous, and brought the intentions of the playwright, be it Habib Tanvir or Shakespeare, yes! Habib did do a Chattisgarhi version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*! These were poor folk who worked as farmers and artisans, did a little folk theatre, of which Naacha was an essential part, were discovered by Habib and brought to live and work in Delhi in the Naya Theatre plays.

These actors and actresses were poor in their villages and they remained poor in the Metropolis of Delhi. It was a lot more difficult to survive economically in Delhi, where day to day living was murderously expensive. In their villages in Chattisgarh, they could somehow get back, possibly by sharing their meagre resources. Life in Delhi offered no such consolation. Habib had very little money but he was loath to share it with the actors who had made him famous. Theatre is an actor's medium. It is the actors who bring to life a director's vision once the performance begins onstage. Habib's actors from Chattisgarh, served him very well for a long time,

but he had little for them once the play was over. The actors led a miserable life, while he managed to lead economically, an acceptable middle-class existence.

Habib had scrounged around for 'pennies' till his early forties, but once he found his actors to interpret his vision of the theatre in the Chattisgarh folk idiom, his fortunes began to change rapidly. He managed to slowly but surely stabilise himself economically. The grants that he got from various state institutions were barely adequate to run his drama company. And what was coming in (from performances abroad) he did not share with the actors. His attitude was, if the Government grants were insufficient to pay his actors, so be it. It was inevitable that his actors go on strike and they did when they and Habib were staying in a number of tiny Government flats in Ber Sarai, New Delhi, in the early 1990s. They went public with their grievances, saying that they knew that Habib had money, but he did not want to give what they thought was owed them.

Habib Tanvir's career, since his association with the Chhatisgarh actors, progressed steadily. The Government of India first awarded him the Padmashree, and later, the Padmabhushan. The Madhya Pradesh state government, then Congress-led, honoured him and gave him a decent flat to live in. He showed exemplary courage persisting with the production of his play, Ponga Pundit, about religious hypocrisy, when activists of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) and allied organisations of the Hindu Far Right, made repeated violent attempts to disrupt performances, after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh. His Leftist political upbringing, with its emphasis on the exercise of discipline when under siege, came in handy. When the end came he was given a state funeral in June, 2009.

He had the privilege of courting the Soviet Union, and finding life-saving employment there as a Dubbing artist, and the United States of America, where he was invited as a speaker on

theatre, and later with Naya Theatre Troupe, for performances. East and West Germany before the cold war, and then plain Germany, after the fall of the Berlin wall along with Poland were favourite destinations for work as were England and Scotland; the production of Charandas Chor with Chattisgarh actors was highly appreciated at the Edinburgh and won the Fringe First award.

As far as his sense of entitlement was concerned, he knew how much he could 'squeeze' in a relationship. Women continued to drool over him even in old age, as he smoked his pipe with a preoccupied air. Moneeka and Nageen, as wife and daughter, performed their filial duties with unflinching devotion. Moneeka passed away on 28 May, 2005. After having attempted suicide over Habib, as a young woman, she became indispensable to him, without her support he could not have gone very far in any direction. After her mother, went, Nageen looked after her father very well. The young, particularly those inclined towards the political Left came in droves to worship at his feet. Habib Tanvir had done very well for himself. There are two other participants in his story, namely Jill, the great love of his life, whom he had let down, and their daughter Anna.

When Anna was born in Dublin, her father Habib Tanvir was far away in India. His deafening silence worried her mother Jill terribly. Writing in old age to grandson Mukti, she recalls :

I wrote to Habib and sent pictures, but received nothing in return. You ask me Mukti what I thought had happened? It occurred to me that he might have died, or at least become ill. I read and re-read that last letter with its cool beginning, its preoccupation with theatre productions and its wistful air at the end. At the time I simply didn't know, but felt that if no disaster had befallen him, he must have withdrawn. It was a horribly chilling sensation to feel that closeness simply disappearing as if it had never been, with no explanation. ... Having a small person to care for who took up

almost every waking moment meant I did not sink into despair. Even so his silence was insupportable; a dead-weight on my life, and totally bewildering. Looking after my dark-haired daughter who I so badly wanted him to see, made me wonder each day what momentous happening was stopping him from being in touch.''

After two years of silence Habib responded to a letter from Jill informing him of her brother Kev's death. Jill remembers, " I was surprised to get a reply. He wrote rather formally but comfortingly and asked after our daughter Anna, saying he would love to see her one day. ... At long last, he did manage to come to see us, and continued to visit from time to time right up to the end of his life. There remained a genuine fondness between us and always unspoken efforts on his behalf to put things right."

Anna responds to her father Habib's absence in her childhood in the Epilogue to her mother's memoirs :

My first meeting with my father was unforgettable. It was not until I was nine years old that he came to meet me, by which time my mother had married, and I had a half-sister Vickie, who was as fair as I was dark. I spent my childhood conjuring up his image in my imagination, inventing him over and over again, in more and more exotic colours. My mother had always talked of him, trying to give me a sense of my Indian heritage through her stories and descriptions. ... My father accompanied us in our daily lives in the imagination, and for me his image was so strong that he was somehow present despite his physical absence."

Anna remembers her first meeting with her father:

" He arrived clutching a chillum pipe that he puffed continuously that he puffed at continuously clouding him in wreaths of smoke, and wearing a large colourful shawl, a beret, a hand-made kurta and stylish jeans. ... He seemed to

create magic wherever he went, and as for telling a story without a book, he recounted to me hour after hour stories from the Mahabharata and the Ramayana, and I was utterly mesmerised."

Anna and her mother Jill loved Habib devotedly, despite the years of absence and neglect, and that things came a full circle to bring hope and optimism before he passed away is indeed lovely.

Courage in his private life had never been Habib Tanvir's strength, despite professions of often real love towards those he had, in some way, wronged. He gave Nageen exclusive rights over all his writing, including his correspondence. She is not keen that her father's letters to Jill, and, hers to him should ever be published. It is perhaps out of a misplaced sense of loyalty to her mother Moneeka's memory that she is acting in this manner. Who would know better than Nageen, how much her mother and Jill had suffered because of her father's irresponsible behaviour towards both. It is time for a mature reconsideration of the past. It is time to let wounds heal. It is time to look forward rather than back. It is time to understand that life is the source of all art and that artists are, at once, both strong and frail creatures, who are but mortals.

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## **Marcello Mastrianni- An Actor for All Seasons / Partha**

# Chatterjee



Marcello Mastroianni with Sofia Loren in Yesterday Today Tomorrow

Marcello Mastroianni (1924-1996) was for many the most charismatic of European actors, and along with Jean Paul Belmondo, the most subtle. He was, for many the most versatile actor in the world. There is something loutish about the obviously gifted Gerard Depardieu as there was about Marlon Brando, but there was nothing but finesse about Marcello Mastroianni's screen performances, even when he played negative characters. In his own gentle, self-effacing way he became the embodiment of the Italian, and even the European male, marooned, between the romantic, poetic memories of a not too industrialised Italy/Europe before the First World War, and the aftermath of the Atom bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States of America to end the Second World War. His first memorable role was opposite the young, sassy Sophia Loren, already with her talent for comedy in place, in Alessandro Blasetti's, *Too Bad She's Bad*. He played a harried taxi driver pushed beyond his bounds of patience by a beautiful girl-pickpocket (Loren) and her bogus professor father (Vittorio de Sica). Mastroianni revealed a flair for comic timing, and held his ground against a formidable actor/comedian like de Sica, who was also one of the giants of Italian Neorealism having directed emblematic films like *Bicycle Thieves*, *Umberto D*, and *Miracle in Milan*.

His throwaway good looks also made him over the years a huge star in Italy, and eventually internationally. He wore his stardom lightly as he did his enormous acting talent. Chiara, his daughter by longtime lover and dazzling French cinema actress Catherine Deneuve, remembers him as a father who came to fetch her from school when she was a child. He was the embodiment of an extraordinary man hidden inside an ordinary man; perhaps that is the reason why women found him so attractive. Both his strength and his vulnerability can be seen in that sequence from Luchino Visconti's, *White Nights*, in which he is dancing frantically in a public place, and suddenly falls down. Visconti's interpretation of a tale by Dostoevsky became both controversial and famous, and Mastroianni's performance remained in people's minds. Federico Fellini found in him the ideal actor to play his frazzled, alienated characters, funny in an off-centre way in two films, *La Dolce Vita*, and *8½*. The first film dealt with the Roman glitterati at the end of the 1950s determined to live it up as if there was no tomorrow, the second, was about a film maker who is trying to shoot a film with autobiographical dimensions but does not know what to do. When asked by journalists how does he plan to end the film? the Stetson-hatted director (Mastroianni) replies "I am looking for an answer." His reply rings true.

Michelangelo Antonioni, between the two Fellini films, cast him in *La Notte*, in 1961. There was no scope for humour, even implied, in this dour master's films, not in this one. Mastroianni took it in his stride and delivered a quietly moving performance alongside the sultry French actress, Jeanne Moreau. Antonioni's angst-ridden film captured the imagination of intellectuals in Europe and America. It was time to get back to comedy with a serious touch.

Vittorio de Sica cast him opposite Sophia Loren in *Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow*. It was a three-part film about Naples and Neopolitans. In the first story he is a harassed husband and father of a large family, whose wife has been sent to prison for selling American cigarettes in the blackmarket; in the second he is a journalist having a clandestine affair with a multi-millionaire's wife whose Rolls Royce car he manages to damage while saving a child; finally he is a foolish son of a rich man in love with a religious prostitute! Loren and Mastroianni excelled themselves in this film, need one add. He showed his versatility again by playing a turncoat who literally puts on the wrong coat and gets shot dead in Allonsanfan by the Taviani brothers, which was set in the Garibaldi period and the unification of Italy in the late 19th century. A little before that he had played *Mersault*, the accidental killer, very convincingly in Visconti's, *The Stranger*, a rather academic version of Albert Camus's profound novel, *The Outsider*. Of course, there was that wonderful chemistry with Sophia Loren, in Dino Risi's bitter-sweet comedy, *The Priest's Wife*.

The 1980's saw him reunited with Fellini: He played himself in *Intervista*, a film about Fellini, and then in *Ginger and Fred*, he was paired with Giuletta Masina a marvellous actress and Fellini's wife. It was a poignant story of a couple of old time Music Hall performers who do the dance routines of Fred Astair and Ginger Rogers from old Hollywood musicals on a Television Christmas Special. It is difficult to forget him as a middle-class homosexual with whom a fading, overworked housewife (Loren, who else) falls in love during the Fascist late 1930s under Mussolini.

He remained married to his wife from 1948, Flora Carabella, and the union produced a daughter, Barbara. When he died of cancer, his last partner film maker, Anna Maria Tato was with him. The most enduring image of him, that weds the person to his art, is of him as Mandrake the Magician dancing with the aging but still voluptuous Anita Ekberg, first in front of the camera, and then in silhouette behind a translucent screen in *Intervista*. It was the acme of romance.

# **Barun Chanda's Murder in the Monastery: A Mini Review / Raj Ayyar**

Yet it vanishes leaving a distraught abbot, tense monks running around, and two murders linked to the missing manuscript.

Chanda, unlike Dan Brown, manages a credible, minimalist diplomatic secularism—though the murderer is a hired goon of some Christian sect or other, Chanda does not point fingers at the Catholic church or Opus Dei, a la Brown in ‘The Da Vinci Code’.

I liked the erotic undercurrents in the novel overall—the steamy one-night stand between Miriam the fair-skinned Coorgi Catholic nun novice and Tenzing, the fully grown adolescent Buddhist monk novice, is deliberately understated and leaves the reader’s pornographic imagination to fill in the details.

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## **Jashnebachpan: Puberty**



## **Puberty**

Director: Sachithra Rahubadda

Group: Red Apple International Theatre Gathering, Sri Lanka

Language: Non-Verbal

Duration: 45 Minutes

### **About the Group**

Red Apple Theatre Gathering seeks to develop appreciative skills in youth and children to create a new dimension in theatre while finding new methodology. It has received the highest award in Sri Lanka at the State Drama Festival twice. This year Red Apple Theatre Gathering has participated in the National Children's Drama Festival. It will now be participating in the Colombo International Drama Festival, Kathmandu International Children's Drama Festival, and Jashn - e- Bachpan International Children's Theatre Festival, held by National School of Drama, Delhi, India.

### **About the Play**

This is the story of the journey of a sperm and an ova. They get together and make a child. Be it a girl or a boy, the sperm and ova do not discriminate – same power, same energy and same hope. Just a different gender in the world. And then? Pink for the girl and blue for the boy which they never ask; car for the boy and doll for the girl which also they never ask. We divide them. We make different laws and rules for each. Then comes puberty!

In Sri Lanka we care so much about our 'nationality', but do not care about the nation of our girls. As an Asian country, our society is concerned more about the virginity of girls than the girls themselves, more about their discipline than their life, love or hope. Puberty makes it worst. This play talks about the difference in the life journey of a baby girl and a baby boy.

### **Director**

Sachithra Rahubadda is an active director of children and youth theatre in Sri Lanka. He began his study of theatre at school. He began producing plays while still in school and later did a Diploma course in Drama and Theatre at the Institute of Sinhala culture, and then a Diploma in Script writing and Communication at the University of Sri Jayawardenapura. He obtained his BA degree in Drama and Theatre from the University of Kaleniya. He conducts workshops and stage shows in schools around the country, as a result of which Red Apple Theatre Gathering was founded. He gives the children and youth of Sri Lanka necessary training and makes all the effort to bring their talents forth. Many of his students are contributing in many creative fields throughout the country.

### **Director's Note**

Children's world is totally different from that of the adults. It is difficult to understand them. Our interpretation of children's imagination can be erroneous. Puberty reveals the modern children – instant and innovative. But with roots that are cultural and social. Within the Asian cultural background, life circle of two new born children is the theme of the play. The structure of the production is modern, choreographic, non-verbal and musical.

### **Cast & Credits**

#### *On Stage*

Jayawardhana Pedige Yeshmi Thakshila Madhumali Jayawardhana, Samarasinghe Dhanushka, Sooriyaarachchige Nadun Tharanga, Dewathanthri Arachchige Tharindu Madusanka, Ambanwala Gedara Chandima Lakmali Sirinayake, Ilandari Pedige Jeewan Madusanka Kumara

#### *Off Stage*

Ilandari Pedige Janaka Sumith Kumara, Samarasinghe Vithana Pathirannahelage Chana Thushsari, Koralegama Hewage Ruwan Chandana

**Direction** Sachithra Rahubadda

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# Jashnebachpan: Ichhapuran



## Ichhapuran

Writer: Rabindranath Tagore

Director: Rajesh Bakshi

Group: Theatre Actor Studio, Delhi

Language: Hindi

Duration: 1 hr

## About the Group

Theatre Actor Studio has been participating in children's

workshops for a long time now. Rajesh Bakshi, the founder of this group, has been directing these workshops for the last 10 years. Some of the group's important productions are Ichhapuran (Rabindranath Tagore), Kalakar (Phanishwar Nath Renu), Paazeb (Jainendra Kumar), Wizard of Oz (adapted by Bharti Dang) etc. Some of the short plays directed by Rajesh Bakshi are Savdhani Hi Suraksha, Rishi Ki Seekh, Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, Nasha Mukti, Say No to Crackers, Sadak Yatayat Ke Niyam, Shiksha, Changu-Mangu, Ghogha Sant etc. Rajesh Bakshi has long been associated with Hindi Akademi, Sahitya Kala Parishad, Shri Ram Centre, Udyam Orphan Trust, Yuva Sanstha, Ayam Sansthan and Dramabaaz Company.

### **About the Play**

The play is about a father and son who wish to live each other's life. Devi Ichhapuran grants them their wish but living each other's age, joys and sorrows becomes unbearable for both.

### **Director**

Rajesh Bakshi has acted in more than 45 plays and participated in many cultural theatre festivals including Bharat Rang Mahotsav, Nandikar Rang Mahotsav, Bharatendu Natya Utsav, Bharat Muni Rang Mahotsav, Sarang Rang Mahotsav, Uttar Pradesh Sanskritik Mahotsav, IPTA Rashtriya Utsav etc. He has 12 years of experience in teaching theatre. He has conducted many theatre workshops for children with organisations like Hindi Akademi, Dramabaaz, Multivalent, Ayam, CCRT etc. Some of the plays directed by him are Jasma Oden (folk play), Aankh Micholi, Doosra Admi – Doosri Aurat, and Ila.

### **Director's Note**

Childhood, with its restless playfulness, can be understood only with love and intelligence, whereas adulthood brings not only independence but also responsibility along with it. To make this story written by Rabindranath Tagore, more interesting and meaningful, a few of Tagore's poems and

another story by him 'Vidhyarthi Ki Pariksha' have been incorporated.

## **Cast & Credits**

### *On Stage*

Mrinalini Jindal, Aman Sharma, Vikrant Sharma, Jitesh Sharma, Olive Jain, Eshna Jain, Nandika Chadda, Gurjas Bhatia, Samaira Grover, Shivaye Madan, Diva Gandhi, Yuvraj Mavi, Maya Parashar, Saksham Gupta, Saksham Parashar, Ragav Mehta, Siya Singh, Ananaya Mukerjee, Rahul Mukherjee, Samarth Girotra, Yatharth Gaurav Gupta, Ayam Sharma, Sneha Chaubey, Dattatreya Buddhiraja Haldar, Ira Jasuja. Naisha Prem, Dipti Purohit, Mahua Aggarwal

### *Off Stage*

Music	Bharti Dang
Music Operator	Garima Arya
Property in-charge	Aman, Vikrant, Jitesh, Narendra
Light Design	Rahul Chauhan
Make-up	Narendra Kumar
Choreography	Vikram Mohan
Costume	Yashasvini Bose
Creative Input	Bharti Dang
Special Thanks	Dramabaaz Company & Garima Arya

### **Playwright**

**Rabindranath Tagore**

### **Design & Direction**

**Rajesh Bakshi**

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