

Shabd Leela – The Interplay of Words / Manohar Khushalani



Text of The Review by Manohar Khushalani Published in IIC Diary

Directed by K K Raina, conceived, scripted and narrated in Hindi by Ila Arun, '**Shabd Leela**' is a partially dramatized reading of the script, which contains selected extracts from the works of the well-known poet and playwright **Dr. Dharamvir Bharti**. Picking up prose from his works, such as, '*Kanupriya*', '*Ek Sahityik Ke Prem Patra*' and '*Andha Yug*', Ila Arun created a biographical sketch of Bharti, focusing on his relationship with two women. Trying to see a resonance from Krishna's life, wherein, even though Rukmani was his wife, yet, only Radha's name is linked with Krishna and taken together with his. Ila justifies Dharamvir's simultaneous dalliance with his first wife, Kanta Bharti and Pushpa Bharti, his paramour, who became his spouse in an informal unconventional ceremony. The three, Dharamvir Kanta and Pushpa, took a vow on the banks of Ganges, that they will always be inseparable. That is why the unconventional consensual bigamous wedlock had a certain mystical piety about

it. Yet, in the construction of the play, Kanta, his first wife, and the third arm of the triangle, was largely ignored.

Ila took up the role of the '*Sutradhar*', allowing Raina to dramatize the play, unsuccessfully though, because the blocking had a static quality about it. A symmetrical set consisting of two desks on either side of the stage and a covered bench in the middle added to the monotony.

However, the visuals projected on the cyclorama were really beautiful and carefully chosen by the Director to enhance the beauty of the poems. The script was well crafted, interspersing quotes from the letters, poetry and drama, with Ila's own critique about them. Actors Rajeswari Sachdev, Varun Badola and all the others read out the pedantic Hindi verses and prose with well punctuated, clearly pronounced dialogue delivery.

The finale of the play was a performance of *Andhayug*. It highlights the last day of the Mahabharata war, when Kurukshetra was covered with corpses, the ramparts were in ruins, the city was in flames, while vultures hovered menacingly above. The few hapless survivors of the defeated Kauravas were overcome with grief and rage. Written immediately after the partition of India, the play is a profound commentary on the politics of violence. True, *Andhayug* showcases Bharti's versatility as a writer craftsman, but, the conclusion appeared to be a departure from the overall theme of the enactment of a complex relationship between three creative and sensitive souls.

Despite everything, the pristine beauty of Bharti's *Shabd Leela* is what remains with you after the performance

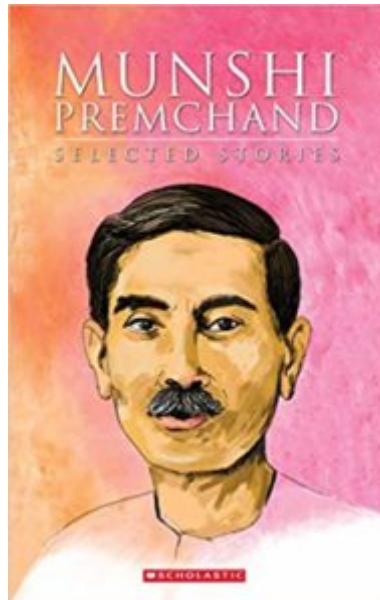
Let the whole world know that Radha;
was not merely a note in your Song-
Radha was The Melody, The Music;
I have come to you my Dearest!

You who weaved fiery blossoms into my tresses!
Tarry not anymore;
To weave meaning into History!

Everything Personal – a taut and gripping play | Manohar Khushalani

The latest new playwright to hit the horizon is Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, a seasoned journalist; whose first play, 'Everything Personal', was presented by Yatrik under the direction of Bhaskar Ghosh. Incidentally, all the three plays were produced by the India International Center, though the first two were presented by Ruchika Theatre Group at IIC earlier.

Rajendranath's Play on Stories of Premchand | Manohar Khushalani



A Review by Prof. Manohar Khushalani

IICs Annual Day was celebrated with a fitting tribute to Munshi Premchand by dramatic renditions of four of his most well known short stories directed by Rajinder Nath and presented by Nepathya Foundation. All the four plays were really heartwarming epitomized by the Director's deft presentation, which was minimalistic and intellectually stimulating, thus doing justice to the author's own style of writing. Competent performances by all the actors, especially Mala Kumar, Rekha Johri, Animesh Singhal and Gaurav Sehgal propelled the play.

Known as a pragmatist, social reality and pathos has been the focus of Premchand's writings, which was also emulated by two of the plays performed that day; Shanti and Satgati. But, pathos isn't the only emotion he could write about. In 'Moteram Ji Shastri', the story of a lovable charlatan, who, like Molier's Mock Doctor, gives us twinkle-eyed humour of unbelievable situations. But, despite his wife's warnings, of not getting entangled with women, Moteram ends up becoming the Queen's physician, enchanting her with his gift of poetic gab, only to be kicked unceremoniously out by the guards.

Bade Bhai Sahab, a light-hearted story of sibling rivalry

between two brothers, one of whom is five years elder to the other. While the elder brother is prone to sermonize the younger one; on the need to take studies seriously, much to his own embarrassment, the younger one catches up with him as he gets promoted each year. Unfortunately, the older one stays put in the same class. Charmingly enacted, the mirthful story ends with food for thought. Is educational qualification really superior to wisdom laden experience?

Published earlier in IIC Diary

Dramatised Stories of Premchand

IIC ANNUAL DAY

Stories of Premchand.

Directed by Rajinder Nath

Presented by Nepathya Foundation

22 January 2019

The IIC Annual Day was celebrated with a tribute to Munshi Premchand. It featured dramatic renditions of four of his best-known short stories, directed by Rajinder Nath and presented by Nepathya Foundation. All the four plays were heartwarming, epitomised by the director's deft presentation, which was minimalistic and intellectually stimulating, thus doing justice to the author's own style of writing. Competent performances by all the actors, especially Mala Kumar, Rekha Johri, Animesh Singhal and Gaurav Sehgal, propelled the play.

Known as a pragmatist, social reality and pathos have been the focus of Premchand's writings, and two of the plays performed that day, *Shanti* and *Satgati*, reflected this. But pathos isn't the only emotion he could write about. *Moteram Ji Shastri* is the humorous story of a lovable charlatan, who like Moliere's Mock Doctor, gives us twinkley-eyed humour of unbelievable situations. Despite his wife's warnings of not getting entangled with women, Moteram ends up becoming the Queen's physician, enchanting her with his gift of poetic prattle, only to be unceremoniously kicked out by the guards.

Bade Bhai Sahab is a light-hearted story of sibling rivalry between two brothers. While the elder brother is prone to sermonising the younger one to take his studies seriously, much to his embarrassment, the younger one catches up with him as he gets promoted each year. Unfortunately, the older one remains in the same class. Charmingly enacted, the mirthful story ends with food for thought. Is educational qualification really superior to wisdom-laden experience?

■ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI



Performance of *Moteram J Shastri*



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Women Against War | Manohar Khushalani



NSD Play Directed by Waman Kendre

A review by **Manohar Khushalani**

First Published in IIC Diary

National School of Drama's "*Ghazab Teri Ada*", an anti-war play, adapted from Aristophane's Greek comedy, *Lysistrata*, was staged at IIC. Adaptation, music design and direction is by Waman Kendre and light design by Suresh Bharadwaj. The play was initially performed at NSD as a tribute to war victims around the centenary of World War I. However, with the prevailing war psychosis, the play has contemporary relevance too. Taking a cue from the Greek play, first performed in classical Athens in 411 BC, which was a comic account of one woman's extraordinary mission to end the Peloponnesian War, the protagonist of the Hindi play, Laya, convinces the wives of soldiers, to withdraw sexual favours to their husbands, until they agree to desist from fighting the War Mongering King's battles. In the non-violent protest, even the Queen is co-opted. In order to seal all alternatives for men, even the lady brothel-keeper is made a co-conspirator. There

are hilarious scenes of desperate men trying to win favours first from their wives and later, in futility, from the women in the brothel. Even the King is brought on his knees by the Queen. The play ends with the soldiers laying down their arms.

The racy musical, with a folk flavor, has been intricately designed by Kendre. The women's protest, was unusually orchestrated with strident ringing of hand held temple bells, in a martial style. He avoided the obvious *Ghungroo*, realizing that it was more a symbol of femininity than feminism.



The Review Published in IIC Diary

Epic Narrative in Regional Theatre Traditions of South

India | Manohar Khushalani

Event: A Talk by Prof. Paula Richman

Learning from Performance: Epic Narrative in Regional Theatre Traditions of South India

Venue: Seminar Rooms I & II, Kamaladevi Complex at IIC

Date: Sept. 7 2013

First Published in IIC Diary Sept-Oct 2013 Issue



Paula Richman, Danforth Professor of South Asian Religions at Oberlin

College in Ohio, USA, gave a talk on Learning from Performance using Epic

Narrative in Regional Theatre Traditions of South India. Supporting her as

the moderator was Prof. Rustom Bharucha, from the School of Arts and

Aesthetics, JNU, where Paula is also doing a short term Fellowship.

Richman's passion for Ramayana is well known, so much so, that her name

has become synonymous with the topic. Paula has travelled to many parts of

the world in hot pursuit of the 'Many Ramayanas ', which is also the title of

one of her books. According to her, people for whom Ramayana is central

now live throughout the globe in countries as diverse as South Africa, Trinidad, Surinam United Kingdom, Australia, USA, Canada, parts of Europe, besides South East Asia, “it has indeed become a global text as well as a global piece of theatre” she added. But the subject of her current research was South India.

She began her talk with a Tamil ‘Morning Sickness Song’, relating to Queen Kausalya’s condition when she was pregnant with her son Rama. The song describes rituals that King Dasharatha and other women performed to support her during her pregnancy, and her food cravings too. One day she wants murukku, then idli, as another woman wants dosas! Idlis in Ayodhya? Sounds weird, but, Tamilians can relate more easily to pregnant women who crave for local dishes. Indian folklore believes in anthropomorphism. It brings Gods closer by imagining that they behave like humans.

Paula also discussed a Kattaikkuttu play called RamaRavana. It expressed the yearning for virtuous governance. One of its songs talks about how people are still waiting to have an ideal, fair, and compassionate leader rule – somewhat reminiscent of Ram Rajya.

Richman hopped from one topic to another as she gushed about Yakshagana dance-dramas of coastal Karnataka and finally, about how the legendary

actress Usha Nangiar enacted the role of Mandodari in one of her performances.

Her underlining thrust was that live performances offer new ways of understanding the experiences of Ramayana characters.

talkdiary

A New Paradigm of Development

TALK: Sustainable Development – Imperatives for India
Speaker: Dr. R.K. Pachauri
Chair : Professor P.S. Ramakrishnan
October 30

The developmental model of advanced nations based upon technological innovations that provided goods and services at less cost had resulted in the over-exploitation of natural resources, thus endangering the eco-system and supplanting human values by emphasising consumption and possession. The finiteness of resources, projected by the Club of Rome study, remained unacknowledged. The hazard of seeking infinite growth led to climatic change which would grow worse if ignored. Dr. Pachauri, chairman of the Inter-Government Group on Climate Change, is uniquely qualified to raise an alarm caused by the reduction of Arctic sea ice, thus raising the sea level by almost one metre, a threat to the island nations of the Maldives and Kiribati.

In order to deal with threats, he proposed a change in paradigm, out-of-the-box thinking, and solutions that

cause less strain on natural resources. Since resources are not available for power plants and transmission losses make technology unaffordable for the poor, he opts for micro-grids that would provide lighting, perfect combustion with a blower that increases the efficiency of cooking with improved stoves, and the churning of milk with solar devices. He bids for public transport that would reduce the demand for fossil fuels and strain upon imports.

Whereas there are diverse agents of change at multiple layers in society, the government must take the initiative in creating healthy competition among innovators by assuring the demand of substantial quantities to encourage entrepreneurs to invest in technologies. The state pollution control boards ought to be accountable to people and not the government alone. A different kind of leadership that is visionary, responsible, and dedicated to humanitarian impulses is required for creating public awareness of hazards, dissemination of success stories, encouraging public transport, and water harvesting. India can surely show the way.

▪ P.S. BAWA

Epics and Theatre Traditions

TALK: Learning from Performance – Epic Narrative in Regional Theatre Traditions of South India
Speaker: Professor Paula Richman
Chair: Professor Rustom Bharucha
Collaboration: Lila Foundation, September 7

Paula Richman's passion for the *Ramayana* is well-known, so much so, that her name has become synonymous with the topic. Paula has travelled to many parts of the world in hot pursuit of the *Many Ramayanas*, which is also the title of one of her books. According to her, people for whom the *Ramayana* is central now live throughout the globe in countries as diverse as South Africa, Trinidad, Surinam, United Kingdom, Australia, USA, Canada, parts of Europe, besides South East Asia: 'it has indeed become a global text as well as a global piece of theatre', she added. But the subject of her current research is South India.

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▪ MANOHAR KHUSHALANI

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DU Professor and Thespian Lola Chatterji Passes Away



Lola Chatterji (26 July 1924 – 5 June 2019)

Lola Chatterji, who died peacefully on 5th June 2019 was a well-recognized figure in theatre circles in the capital. As a member of the English Department at Miranda House for over two decades, she was involved in many theatre productions in Delhi University in the sixties and seventies. Among the plays she directed or co-directed at Miranda House were: *Easter* (Strindberg), *The Rape of the Belt* (Levy), *The Member of the Wedding* (McCullers), *Ring Round the Moon* (Anouilh), *Mourning Becomes Electra* (O'Neill), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde). She was also closely involved as staff advisor and mentor in three plays put up by DUMADS (Delhi University Music And Drama Society): *Rhinoceros* (Ionesco), *A Man for All Seasons* (Robert Bolt), and *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* (Stoppard).

Lola's life-long interest in the theatre continued for many

years after her retirement. She served for many years as Vice President of the Shakespeare Society of India and as a board member of Yatrik. She was particularly known for her make-up skills. There would be few actors in Delhi University theatre or in Yatrik who did not have their make-up done by her.

A memorial event for Lola Chatterji will be held on 4th July 2019 at 6:30 pm in the Multipurpose Hall, Kamaladevi Wing, India International Centre, New Delhi. All are cordially invited to the event

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 19th 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 20th 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 Qudsiya Zaidi's Hindustani Theatre in Delhi. She had managed to gather around herself several talented artistes, amongst them Habib Tanvir, the Hyderabad 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.

16th Natsamrat Natya Utsav opens in the Capital 6th March '19

16th Natsamrat Natya Utsav
6th to 10th MARCH, 2019
10 Different Plays (In Hindi)

Waiting for Godot Translation - Khushi Baidya Mehta Writer - Samuel Beckett Director - Mohit Tripathi Group - Renaissance Theatre Society, Delhi On 6th March, 2019. At 8:30 pm	Beemar Writer - Saadul Hassan Manto Director - Pritika Group - Aakasha Theatre Society On 6th March, 2019. At 8 pm
Chamkaur Ki Garhi Writer - Dr. Harsharan Singh Director - Harpreet Singh Sidhu Group - Heering Star, Faridkot On 7th March, 2019. At 8:30 pm	Djinns of Eidgah Writer - Ashraf Majeed Director - Ashraf Group - Ashraf, Mool Lal Nehru College On 7th March, 2019. At 8 pm
Salyan Bhaye Kotwal Writer - Hassan Sabir Director - Sanjay Bhasin Group - Multi Art Cultural Centre, Kurukshetra On 8th March, 2019. At 8:30 pm	Chetna Writer - Saahil Director - Team Group - Maken, Sri Aurobindo College (Morning) On 8th March, 2019. At 8 pm
Gorakhdhandha Writer - Jayvardhan Director - J. P. Singh Group - Rangmanch, Delhi On 9th March, 2019. At 8:30 pm	The Shadow Box Writer - Michael Crichton Director - Chiranjeev Kumar Group - Vireem, Shri Lal College On 9th March, 2019. At 8 pm
Sandhya Chhaya Writer - Jayvardhan Director - Sulabh Sharma Group - Theatre for Theatre, Chandigarh On 10th March, 2019. At 8:30 pm	Einstein Writer - Mahan Mahalanobis Director - Aluka Anand Group - Rangmanch, AIIBD College On 10th March, 2019. At 8 pm

Venue:
Mukachara Auditorium
18-19, Bhai Veer Singh Marg, Gole Market, ND-01

For More Details:
www.natsamrattheatre.com, M: 9811232672
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Entry Free

Natsamrat is one of Delhi's oldest and most consistent theatre groups. Since its inception in 1998, Natsamrat has presented 1265 shows of 35 renowned plays. Aply led by Actor, Director and Visionary Shyam Kumar, whose philosophy has really been not only to evolve his own group but also to create space for all other theatre groups which are battling heavy odds to survive in theatre. Thus 16 years ago, when Natsamrat was barely four years old, he started the **Natsamrat Natya Utsav** so

that other theatre groups also get a platform to perform. Three years ago, again Natsamrat widened its landscape by starting a Natsamrat Mahavidyalaya Natya Utsav, a student theatre festival, providing a parallel platform for the upcoming theatre generation to evolve and grow. Thus despite limited resources such a grand festival has evolved and grown. Natsamrat theatre festival thus begins with a bang on 6th March 2019 at 6.30 pm with the first performance of **Waiting for Godot**. The schedule is given above and the synopsis of the plays are given below.

On 9th March, at the same venue, Natsamrat will award the Thespians who have been supporting Theatre as Practitioners, on Stage, off stage and as promoters and critics. Read more about elsewhere

1. **WAITING FOR GODOT**

Translation by Krishna Baldev, Witten by Samuel Beckett and Directed by Mohit Tripathi

On 6th March, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.



The plot of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is simple to relate. Two men, Vladimir and Estragon, meet near a tree. They converse on various topics and reveal that they are waiting there for a man named Godot. While they wait, two other men enter. Pozzo is on his way to the market to sell his slave, Lucky. He pauses for a while to converse with Vladimir and Estragon. Lucky entertains them by dancing and thinking, and Pozzo and Lucky leave. After Pozzo and Lucky leave, a boy enters and tells Vladimir that he is a messenger from Godot. He tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming tonight, but

that he will surely come tomorrow. Vladimir asks him some questions about Godot and the boy departs. After his departure, Vladimir and Estragon decide to leave, but they do not move as the curtain falls. The next night, Vladimir and Estragon again meet near the tree to wait for Godot. Lucky and Pozzo enter again, but this time Pozzo is blind and Lucky is dumb. Pozzo does not remember meeting the two men the night before. They leave and Vladimir and Estragon continue to wait. Shortly after, the boy enters and once again tells Vladimir that Godot will not be coming. He insists that he did not speak to Vladimir yesterday. After he leaves, Estragon and Vladimir decide to leave, but again they do not move as the curtain falls, ending the play.

2. **CHAMKOUR KI GARHI**

Written by Dr. Harcharan Singh and Directed by Harjeet Singh Sidhu

On 7th March, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.



‘Chamkour di Gadi’

play Regarded as one of the most important battle of the Sikh history. It was against the Mughal army led by Nahar Khan; the Muslim commander was killed, while on Sikh side the remaining two elder sons of the Guru – Ajit Singh and Jujhar Singh, along with other Sikh soldiers were killed in this battle.

3. **SAIYAN BHAYE KOTWAL**

Written by Vasant Sabnis and Directed by Sanjay Bhasin

On 8th March, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.



Saiyan Bhaye Kotwal is a translation of famous Marathi folk play Vichha Majhi Puri Kara, which was written by Vasant Sabnis. The story of the play is focused on the king and his scheming prime minister. As per the hierarchy, the present Havaladar have to be promoted to that post. However, the wronged Havaladar and hi girl Mainavati, a dancer, plans to frame the new Kotwal. The play is based on traditional tamasha and is a slapstick comedy which brings out the political undercurrents of nepotism.

4. GORAKHDHANDHA

Wriiten by Jayvardhan and Directed by J.P.Singh
On 9th March, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.



When money becomes the be all and end all of one's existence, when money becomes one's religion then all relations, all ethics and morals are rendered meaningless. When one's sole aim is to accumulate wealth then the person's conniving mind keeps on scheming towards that end. There are some people who

are adept at extracting something out of nothing. The protagonist of this play is such a character who will resort to any means to hoodwink people out of their money. While seemingly he is being helpful and charitable towards others, however, all he is doing is helping himself in the guise of helping others. He believes that there is a certain honesty to his dishonesty. In his games of deceit, he is forced to tell lies after lies till in the end he is so caught up in his web of untruths that he is neither able to give up nor get out. Gorakhdhandha is a fictional play based on true stories. Its dialogues and anecdotes don't just tickle our funny bone but rather force us to break out into bouts of laughter.

5. SANDHYA CHHAYA

Written by Jaywant Dalvi and Directed by Sudesh Sharma

On 10th March, 2019 at 6:30 p.m.



Sandhya Chhaya is a story about an old couple, an aged couple who spent their lives in the upbringing of their children and they are the ones who live alone and long for the love, affection and togetherness of their children. It is a story about a man and woman fondly called Nana, Nani respectively and it deals with the emotional turmoil the parents have to go through. In spite of having being deprived of love from their children, they still have the courage to fight the melancholy and pathos of their lives. They support and love each other and as the play unfolds, the audience also falls in love with them. Older people who are not so useful in today's materialistic age bear the brunt of the changing values. They get lonelier and lonelier. This play is entertaining and simultaneously it tells us about old age and Loneliness. It is

a great play, which can be very easily called a classic of Modern times. They have two sons, Deenu (the elder one) and Nandu (the younger one). Deenu is settled in USA and Nandi is in the Air Force. Deenu very rarely comes to meet his parents. He just sends money at regular intervals, meanwhile as the play progresses, they get to know that Nandu has been killed in the war. The whole play revolves on the nuclear families' concept where in the parents are left alone and their children are settled somewhere else. The whole play is poignant collective mixture of emotions portrayed by an old couple, be it happiness, loneliness, love for kids, their childhood etc. On the whole, the play stresses on the fact and asks the society a very straightforward question that parents who have been there for us the whole life, do they deserve such a lonely old age? Do they really?

3rd Mahavidyala Natya Utsav

1. BEEMAR

Wriiten by Saadat Hassan Manto and Directed by Prince
On 6th March, 2019 at 8 p.m.

2. DJINNS OF EIDGAH

Wriiten by Abhishek Majumdar and Directed by Aadhar
On 7th March, 2019 at 8 p.m.

3. CHETNA

Wriiten and Directed by Team
On 8th March, 2019 at 8 p.m.

4. THE SHADOW BOX

Wriiten by Michael Christopher and Directed by Chandan Kumar
On 9th March, 2019 at 8 p.m.

5. EINSTEIN

Wriiten by Mohan Maharishi and Directed by Abdus Ansari
On 10th March, 2019 at 8 p.m.

James Graham's PRIVACY

Director: Ajay Khatri



Playwright: James Graham

Director: Ajay Khatri

Group: N.S.D. Diploma Production, New Delhi

Language: Hindi

Duration: 1 hr

The Play

The play *Privacy* is a story of a writer who is hiding all these years in her shell. She's afraid of coming out in public and the social media. Heartbroken and after having a deep interaction with a psychoanalyst, she is determined to take on the world. She wants to write a play, meet new people, interact and experience their lives. Through the process of meeting she is introduced to the social media and technologies and learns how they are involved in surveillance. She unveils and reveals herself to society and ends up meeting someone

similar.

Director's Note

During my training in Direction at National School of Drama I tried exploring a new language of theatre in the contemporary world. Since past few years, I have been fascinated with technology, media and re-invention in theatre. In this era of globalization, I strive to locate a language that is mutually complementary to masses – as viewers and we as artists.

My interest in privacy and surveillance dates back to graduation days. Initially, social media always intrigued me instigating thoughts to question the way it interfered with our lives. I have extracted the recollections of collective impressions made on me in all these years in the play – *Privacy*.

This adaptation of the play involves gender inequality and how our society reacts to privacy and surveillance predominantly, of females begins from birth, continue into her teens till she matures. Then her next 'milestone' is when she belongs to the watchful eyes of her husband's family. The unstated social activities and other social elements intrude and lay claim on her life. Through this narrative / performance, we try to express and understand how a hitherto unknown woman protects her privacy from being waylaid by agents of society. Though it is strange and difficult for anybody to firstly realize and then accept that there are now new weapons and systems being engaged to trap, track and control targets especially those considered disruptive by society which is also the State. Our social, economic and political leanings are trapped by and handcuffed in a technologically – driven society. Surveillance is meant to intrude upon and deny privacy- a person struggles for his personal expression and existence amidst it's, all pervasive and overpowering presence in our lives.

Violence erupts and flourishes to stop or counter state

sponsored hostility. The State wields a powerful backup or 'in the wings', weapon of sophisticated technology-driven surveillance; destroying and disrupting natural human passages of vent: behavior, emotions, social, work, family or relationships. When an individual's surveillance is used unopposed against his/ her/ or their own will.

The Director

Ajay Khatri is a graduate from National School of Drama. He is instrumental in guiding theater workshops and instilling these with creative energy befitting young independent theatre aspirants and groups, school, colleges and NGOs. Starting his journey in 2005 as director he presented: *Surya Ki Antim Kiran Se Surya Ki Pehli Kiran Tak*, *Yayati*, *Illa*, *Komal Gandhar*. He has worked and designed lights in national projects such as *Othello*, *Comedy of Terrors*, and *Arjun Partigya* among other experimental exploratory pieces include: *Saturday Night* and *Privacy*.

The Playwright

James Graham (born 1982) is a British playwright, television writer and actor. His work has been staged throughout the UK, at theatres including the Bush, Soho Theatre, Clwyd Theatr Cymru and the National Theatre. He was discovered by, and has been a playwright – in – residence at, the Finborough Theatre.

He wrote the script for the film *X+Y*, which premiered in 2015. He has written *The Culture*, *This House*, *Labour of Love*, *Little Madam*, *The Whiskey Taster*, *The Vote*, *Finding Neverland*, *The Men* and *Sixty – Six Books* among several others. His play *Privacy* had its world premiere at the Donmar Warehouse, London.

The Group

This play is being presented as a part of National School of Drama's graduate showcase (class of 2018), which aims to

provide a platform for emerging theatre practitioners, allowing them to share their work with a wider audience.

Cast & Credits

On Stage: Meenakshi Thapa, Sanjeev Jaiswal, Rachna Gupta, Debashree Chakrabarty, Bhagyashree Tarke & Rahul Kumar, Jayanta Rabha, Parag Barouah, Sayan, Shruti

Technical Team: Vishala Mahale, Saras

Lights: Sarthak

Animation: Priyansh

Music: Daood Husain, Vikesh Bisth, Sachin Rohilla, Mahadev Singh Lakhawat, Devika

Story: James Graham

Dramaturge: Ajay Khatri

Translation: Meenakshi Thapa

Adaptation, Design & Direction: Ajay Khatri

Hara Bhattacharya's MEDEARA
Director: Goutam Mukherjee



Playwright: Hara Bhattacharya

Director: Goutam Mukherjee

Group: Chhandam, West Bengal

Language: Bengali

Duration: 1 hr 40 mins

The Play

After 15 years of absence, veteran theatre actress Kamini returns to stage as the protagonist of Euripides' play *Medea*, directed by her ex-fiancé and famous theatre director Purushottam Dasgupta who had used Kamini's acting ability and charm to make his plays successful, but had later married Ipshita, the daughter of an influential Minister. Kamini's friend Kanchan is serving life-imprisonment for killing her new born male child out of vengeance towards her husband, who had got her previous pregnancies aborted since she was carrying a female foetus in her womb. For Kamini, Kanchan is the Medea of our time. Gradually Ipshita also starts identifying herself with Medea, Kanchan and Kamini. Kamini's

interview by a famous theatre critic Tonumoy, in Kolkata's leading newspaper, reveals the present day story of several Medeas.

Director's Note

I have tried my best to give the complex fabric of gender politics a modern stage-language by designing the play with the austerity that it deserves. It was a challenging and thrilling project for me as a director, to bring out the essence of the concept of an intricate and intense subject brilliantly depicted by the playwright. Ultimately, I can humbly say, with chiaroscuro light design, absorbing sounds and a relatable set-design, *Medeara* has become a brilliant play to watch.

The Director

Goutam Mukherjee started his theatre journey as an actor in 1985. He directed the play *Moinuddiner Bhoot* for the group Samay in 1993 which was awarded District's Best Production by Paschimbanga Natya Academy. In 1994, Goutam joined Chhandam and started acting in many remarkable plays by the troupe under the direction of Late Sudhansu Dey, the pioneer director of the troupe. In 2015, at Chhandam, Goutam directed the play *Lajja* written and compiled by him. The play *Medeara* is his second directorial work for the troupe Chhandam.

The Playwright

Hara Bhattacharya is an eminent playwright of West Bengal who has been active in Bengali theatre since 1987. Most of his plays have been produced by eminent directors like Bibhas Chakraborty, Biplab Bandopadhyay, Chandan Sen, Anirban Bhattacharya and others. Some of his remarkable plays are *Nashta Asim*, *Noti o Ghorachor*, *Adbhut Andhar*, *Aguner Barnamala*, *Ashtitwer Akaar*, *Oedipus*, *Medeara*. He was awarded with Sundaram Puraskar in 1990, and West Bengal Journalists Association's Dishari Award for Best Playwright in 1996. His

play *Aguner Barnamala* was staged in Bharat Rang Mahotsav in 2007.

The Group

Chhandam was founded by a few young theatre enthusiasts of Raiganj in 1962. Since then it has been traversing the path of theatre uncompromisingly. It celebrated its golden jubilee in 2012 and has almost 60 outstanding plays to its credit, one of which has been crowned with presidential award and some of which have been honoured with several other awards. It has established its own theatre auditorium where most of the theatre groups across the state regularly stage their productions. Besides producing plays, the group frequently arranges seminars and conducts intimate discussions and workshops to develop the physical skills as well as the mental capabilities of the theatre aspirants of the group.

Cast & Credits

Kamini / Medea: Srabani Dey

Kanchan: Barnali Nandi

Jason: Koushik Das

Tonumoy: Santanu Chatterjee

Purushottam Dasgupta / Creon: Goutam Mukherjee

Reporter: Sumitra Bhowmick

Ipshita: Ratna Basu

Tapan: Subrata Talapatra

Satyada: Satyabrata Deb

Suman / Photo Journalist: Suvra Ghosh,

Medearas / Group of girls: Sangita Ghosh, Shilpa Deb,

Ritwika Biswas, Debolina Paul

Stage & Costume Design: Neel Koushik

Stage Designing Assistance: Koushik Saha, Goutam Basak

Light Design & Application: Soumen Chakraborty

Choreography & Music: Deb Kumar Pal

Music Application: Anirban Mandal

Make-up: Bhanu Mitra

Production Design: Shubhabrata Sinha Roy

Playwright: Hara Bhattacharya

Director: Goutam Mukherjee