

Me, Kash & Cruise

**Me, Kash & Cruise – A Competent and Cleverly Crafted
Production of Significance**

A Review by Manohar Khushalani



(Left) Rajit Kapoor as many faces of “Bombay” (Right) Amit Mistry & Neil Bhoopalam

As a finale to his earlier plays: **Class of 84** and **Pune Highway**, Matrix Presented Rahul Da Cunha’s last one of the trilogy, **Me, Kash and Cruise** at India HabitatCenter. For me personally it was a watershed of memories. The play opens with a backdrop of 1984 Bombay Riots. It was in 1984 when our street theatre group, **Theatre Union**, disembarked at Mumbai’s Churchgate Station to participate in the Natya Jatra, a festival of Street plays performed by Theatre Workers and activists from all over India. It was at the railway platform itself that we learnt that Indira Gandhi had been assassinated by her Sikh Bodyguards. We arrived at Rabindra Rangshala, the venue of performance to learn that all the shows had been cancelled. Not to be deterred we proceeded to Flora Fountain for our first impromptu performance. Despite the tragedy my sense of humour about the irony of the situation had not abated as I showered my jokes on my hapless colleagues in the local train to the venue of the show. Apparently a pick pocket was not amused or maybe he decided to have the last laugh as he slickly dispossessed me of my purse, which contained all my finances. But the show must go on and perform we did to an appreciative audience.

In the next ten days we were all stuck at Rabindra Rangshala as the

trains were not moving and all the theatre groups performed for each other. Just as a singer is requested for an encore, our rendition of Sadat Hasan Manto's **Toba Tek Singh** was most popular, and we performed it repeatedly for other groups. No. One is not going on a tangent. I am coming to the point.

Amongst the performers was a troupe led by Gursharan Singh, A famous Sikh playwright director from Punjab who performed courageously against militancy in Punjab. Throughout our incarceration we continued to hear all kinds of rumours about how Sikhs were being butchered in the communal riots in Delhi. There were also rumours about protection money given by them to the Underworld for remaining safe in Mumbai. One had also heard about how Shiv Sena in Mumbai and RSS in Delhi had offered protection to the Sikhs. In an environment of fear and fervour – with and without veracity – rumours abounded. **It is this atmosphere that Rahul Da Cunha's play captured with authenticity, that one can vouch for, from personal experience.**

Set in Bombay, the play covers a twenty four year time horizon – 1984 to 2008. Bombay has been a city that encompasses every emotion – from nostalgia to frustration. And joy to fear. ***Me, Kash and Cruise*** is the roller coaster story of three Bombayites and their attempts to deal with the city's ever changing social, civic and political landscape – with mostly hilarious, and sometimes tragic consequences. The play opens with the death of Indira Gandhi, while the three protagonists – Pooja Thomas (unabashed Bombay lover), Rajesh Kashyap (true blue South Bombayite) and Cruise (A Delhiite, and named after the Hollywood star) traverse their way through the 1992 riots, the 1993 bomb blasts, the Moral Police and Bollywood mania, as well as the age of marketing and hype – among other dramatic events that have shaken and influenced our city. Including man made disasters such as dug up roads and festival band *baaja*. And of course, Himesh Reshammiya !!

Da Cunha's assembled and portable set design is a labyrinth of multi level cat walks with interconnecting stairs – almost a reflection of the intertwining relationships of the three main characters torn apart by their own complexities and yet thrown together by circumstances and similar interests – primarily theatre, Pooja Thomas and Rajesh Kashyap

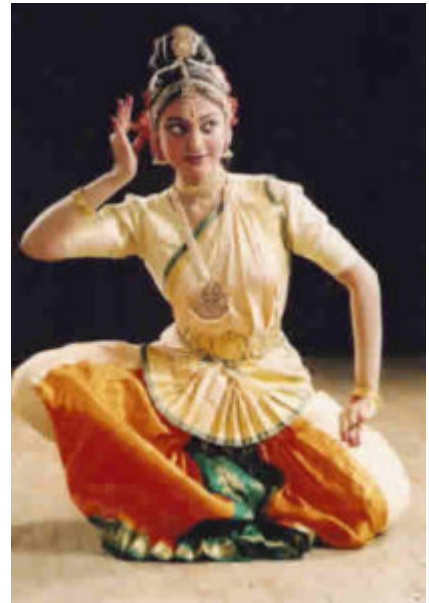
are well grounded bombayites. Cruise a typical “struggler” from Delhi 6 – the place in Delhi which has contributed maximum actors to Delhi Theatre. Since Cruise is trying to ‘make it’ while the other two are established in the city there is bound to be a difference in their priorities. While Pooja is attracted by; the entrepreneur spirit of Cruise, Kashyap disapproves of his lack of commitment to theatre. Da Cunha script comes to terms with these realities in an objective manner. He also sketches out how their relationships and lives change with the external influences of the traumatic political events that rock the city. How people cannot remain unaffected islands and how the social upheavals suck people into their vortex. The director is very original in the way the blocking has been done. People can be interacting with each other directly, but from different levels. Even the classic ‘asides’ can be belted out from different spaces. The division of the stage is not the typical horizontally segmented ‘upstage’ and ‘downstage’ but more literally – vertically – up down and middle levels.

The performances of the three actors Yamini Namjoshi, Amit Mistry and Neil Bhoopalam are fluid and flawless. The well known actor Rajit Kapoor does many roles of the other characters. He is the fourth character, mysteriously named BOMBAY winds away through the play, donning many guises and avatars – Gateway photographer, police havaladar, marketing executive etc.

Cast : Yamini Namjoshi, Amit Mistry, Neil Bhoopalam and Rajit Kapur
Written & Directed by Rahul da Cunha

A Rage Production
Sponsor Matrix

Arunima – a dancer who educates as she performs



I first saw Arunima dance before a TV camera in Lodhi Gardens. The effortless ease with which she glided through her steps almost simulated levitation. She is one of the India's most versatile leading young Kuchipudi dancers. The senior most disciple of the renowned dancing duo, **Padamashree Guru JayaRama Rao and Vanasree Rao**, she started learning Kuchipudi at the age of seven.

As a young girl of 9, Arunima acted in the ballet "Amrapali". The Kuchipudi Dance Academy formally launched her in 1995 where she performed her '**Arangetram**' at the **Triveni Kala Sangam**, New Delhi. Since then there has been no stopping her as she pursued her art with relentless devotion to achieve soaring heights in the field of classical dance.

Her dance is different from the way most others perform. It is interactive. She assumes that her audience doesn't necessarily understand the significance of bhavas and mudras. At a recent performance in the Malvia Durbar hall of Banaras Hindu University she endeared the audience not only with her performance but also with the way she conducted it like a lec-

dem (Lecture Demonstration). She had been invited by the Sanskrit Akademi and she chose to perform the 'Nala Damyanti' story from the Mahabharata.

Nala was a valorous, handsome, and popular king. He heard about the beauty of Damayanthi – the princess of Kundinapuram in Vidarbha, and decided to make her his consort. It so happened that when Narada visited Nala he spoke glowingly of Damayanthi and also told him that she would make an ideal match for our now besotted king .

The lovelorn King tries to distract himself by composing music and loitering in the royal garden. Suddenly one day he sees a beautiful, golden swan by the lake. Nala creeps upto the sleeping bird to capture the swan. The swan is released after persuading Nala that he will play cupid and win Damyanthi over for the King –

The cupid swan proceeds to Kundinam, and is amused to find that Damayanthi was also pathetically lovelorn. Obviously she too had heard of Nala's fame. He attracts her attention, lures her away from her companions- and eventually pretends to have come into her clasp – he teases her about her childishness. This scene was rendered in a charming fashion – the swan consoles Damayanthi, narrates Nala's goodness and eligibility and promises to help them. One can easily gather that there was a lot of scope for *abhinay* and the dancer exploited the theme to perfection. As Arunima quips in her eloquent style; **"dancing is like dreaming with your feet"**

Arunima has performed widely across the nation both as a solo artiste and as part of her gurus' team at various dance festivals, prestigious venues and lecture demonstrations including **the Andhra Day Celebrations in Hyderabad 1993, Hyderabad Arts Festival 1994, India International Centre, Andhra Bhawan, the India Habitat Centre, Ayappa Temple, Triveni Kala Sangam, Trade Fair 1999, 2002, 2003, 2006 SOPAN festival by Sahitya Kala Parishad, Delhi Tourism Festival at**

Santushti 2003, the Bharat Yatra Festival in Lucknow 2001, Shringaramani Festival in Mumbai 2001, Kuchipudi dance festival in Kuchipudi Village, Chitrangada Ballet – National Choreography Festival at Habitat Centre 2003, Qutab Festival in 2003, Young Dancers Festival at Kolkata sponsored by Sangeet Natak Academy in 2004, Legends of India Festival in 2004, 2007, Kalidasa Festival at Nagpur in 2004, Habitat World in September 2005, Virasat Festival at Dehradun in 2005, the Mardol Classical Dance Festival at Goa, the Goa International Centre in 2006, Nehru Center in Mumbai in 2006, Biotech Conference in Hyderabad in 2006, Ugaadi (AP Bhawan) Celebrations in 2006, Jhansi Mahotsav in 2006 and Chamba festival in 2006, Mahabalipuram festival in Chennai in 2007, Jugalbandi with Kathak, choreographed by Pdt. Birju Maharaj at Holi Ke Rang Mahotsav (sponsored by Kalashram) at Habitat Centre in March 2007, Budh Mahotsav in Patna, May 2007 (where she performed the dance ballet Vasavadatta on Rabindra Sangeet Choreographed by her gurus), Jaya Smriti in Mumbai in June 2007 organised by Hema Malini, Radha Asthami in Barsana, September 2007, Indo-European Conference organized by ICCR, September 2007, Fusion concert with Band Advaita, September 2007, Sahitya Kala Parishad young dancer's Festival, September 2007, Neemrana Fort Palace in Oct 2007, SAARC Band festival November 2007, JNU Delhi November 2007 , HCL Concert Series at Habitat Center December 2007, Haridas Sammelan in Mumbai December 2008, Delhi International Arts Festival December 2007, Brahma Gana Sabha in Chennai January 2008, Nungambakkam Cultural Academy in Chennai , January 2008, Bhavbhuti Festival – Gwalior, February 2008., Ustad Allaiddin Khan Samaoroh – Maihar, Gwalior February 2008.

She was also invited to perform for the Honorable President of India at Rashtrapati Bhawan in June 2006.

Arunima has displayed her art in prestigious international dance festivals – EXPO 1998, Lisbon, Portugal, India's 50th year of Independence held in Bonn, Germany, EXPO 2000 in

Hanover, Germany, IC.C.R. tour in 2003, Ministry of External Affairs of India, in prestigious venues in Australia, including Canberra Festival, Sydney Opera House, Melbourne, Brisbane, Fiji, Thailand, Malaysia & Indonesia, India Week Celebrations at Buremburg and Frankfurt, Tagore International Center in Berlin in 2005, Nehru Centre in London, 2005, Asian Arts Festival in Manila , Philippines 2007.

Recognition has also come to Arunima in the form of the State Government of **India Sahitya Kala Parishad Scholarship** for Dance in 998 and the **Shringarmani title by Sur Shringar Samsad**. Besides being empanelled as an Established artiste at the I.C.C.R., Arunima is also an A grade artiste of the **All India Radio and Doordarshan**. Her appreciative reviews and dynamic profile have been featured in all leading television and radio channels (Doordarshan, Sony, Aaj Tak, Star News etc) and newspapers including **Hindustan Times, Times of India, Indian Express, Business Standard, India Today etc.**, She also featured in the **London School of Economics Newsletter** for her outstanding performance. In an endeavor to share the joy of being closely involved with India's rich cultural heritage, she has also worked for SPIC MACAY, a voluntary cultural organization as its Planning and Finance coordinator. She is also a member of a *GATI*, a young dancers' art forum.

Besides Dance, Arunima has also excelled in academics. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics from India's prestigious **St. Stephen's College** and then studied **MSc in Accounting and Finance from the London School of Economics**. Her outstanding performance led her to **teach** at the LSE summer school in 2002. After completing her teaching assignment, she returned to India to continue with her dance. Until recently, she was managing a career in management consulting at a leading US based firm. She is now focusing to build her own arts foundation to promote performing arts across the globe. Arunima has also successfully ventured into dance choreography and research to explore different creative

aspects of the performing arts

She is also a **keen Pistol shooter** and has won several medals in State and National Championships, including a Gold Medal in national Championship in 1999. She was also, the Captain of the Rifle Shooting Club in her college and received College Colors for her outstanding performance in Shooting. She is also the recipient of the **Government of India Sports Talent Search Scholarship (1991-1992)**. She is also keenly interested **in dramatics** and has performed in several radio and TV programs (Yog Yatra on Star news etc), music videos and commercials.

However Kuchipudi continues to be her abiding passion, which she pursues with relentless devotion.

Endowed with “a pair of large eyes, a mobile visage and attractive stage presence”. Arunima is a devoted dancer with a promising career ahead....

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A Young Dancer's First Solo

A Young Dancer's First Solo

-Manohar Khushalani

An *Arangetram* in dance is like an airplane pilots first solo flight – an announcement to the world that you have arrived and can now go it alone. Shruti Gurudanti is still in school, in class twelve, she had her *Bharatanatyam Arangetram* this Sunday after having practised dance

since the age of eight. The debut performance was also the dancer's personal saga of courage – despite a knee operation last November, she chose to go ahead with the show. Shruti's performance was technically flawless. Credit would also go to her Guru, Vasanthi Sridhar, who was able to inspire her to work so hard for her performance.

Gurudanti's rendition started with *Pushpanjali* in Raga *Tala Malika*. An offering of flowers to the audience, with brisk and agile light footed movements which built up to a crescendo of the pulsating beat of percussion. This was followed by *Khanda Allaripu* set to *Khanda Jati*. This is a short and crisp item symbolising the flowering or opening up of the body as a warm up for the more difficult pieces that follow. Shruti used fluid movements of the shoulder with neck and eye rolls to embellish this dance sequence. In *Jatiswaram*, which is a combination of *jati* (rhythmic syllables) and *swara*, the dancer used side stepping with symmetrical and circular movements of the arms. She gave an inspired performance of pure *Nritya*, drawing repeated applause of the audience.



Above: *Shruti Gurudanti*

Not many of the celebrated Gurus these days create worthy disciples, for fear of creating competition for themselves. An insecurity that Guru Sridhar does not suffer from. Under the aegis of Prashanti Natya Nilayam, she has conjured up a number of collective Arangetram's and Dance Drama's to introduce her

young disciples to the real world.



Above: (L) *Guru Vasnathi Shridhar*
(R) *Shruti Gurudanti*

Varnam was the *piece de resistance* of the show. Through *abhinay* the danseuse described the naughty Krishna and how he enchants the Gopis with his pranks. The vanishing trick is used by him while playing hide and seek with the Gopis, and the audience is bemused by the intriguing confusion he creates in their mind by insisting that he was always there. The transformation of this prankster to a full fledged artist by melodiously playing the flute along with the accompanying instruments to placate the agitated gopis is a popular sequence in Bharatanatyam. The nayika is so much in love with Krishna that she has lost consciousness of her own existence.



Shruti displayed a range of expressions as she recreated the Draupadi *cheer haran* sequence playing the wily Duryodhan and the anguished Draupadi alternatively. The sequence included the sight of the little Krishna dancing on the poisonous snake Kaaliya *Varnam* was set in Ragam “Mohanam”, Talam “Adi”.

Padam “Padari” set to Ragam “Kamboji” Talam “Roopakam”, is a endearing interplay between the nayika who has recently fallen in love and her sakhi who is her confidante. The sakhi pretends not to care or bother about what she was being told. She only appears to admire her own self and strut about without a care in the world. The nayika ultimately pleads to her sakhi to go fetch her lord for her. Shruti concluded her recital with the *Tillana*. in Ragam “Kadanakuduralam” and Talam “Adi”. The young danseuse displayed a great promise, provided she applied herself and internalised the moods of abhinay. Something that will follow with age and practice.

The Owl and the Pussy Cat –

Art review by Seema Bawa



Director: Satyajit Sharma



Actors: Kavita Dang
and Kumud Mishra

"The Owl and the pussy cat went to sea in a beautiful pea green boat..."

Thrown together in a low-rent bachelor's flat instead of a 'pea-green boat', the odd couple in this highly amusing **Bill Manhoff** comedy, is certainly not at sea! 'The Owl', Felix played by **Kumud Misra**, a highly accomplished actor, is a self-styled intellectual author – while 'the Pussycat' played by **Kanika Dang**, is a wannabe actress and model – however, to pay the bills she entertains gentleman callers, a prostitute but not promiscuous.

Having noticed the stream of gentlemen caller at her apartment

through his binoculars, the peeping owl does his 'civic' duty by informing the superintendent of the building. The pussycat with nowhere to spend the night seeks revenge by imposing on the owl for a bed. And then, through a battle of wits, words, and wisdoms they both start to 'educate' each other as well as the audience in ways they never knew they could.

The current production by Dotted Line Productions has wisely kept it simple and has not endeavored to create convoluted and over intellectualized caricatures of the protagonists. The director, **Satyajit Sharma**, an NSD Alumni with several outstanding acting and directorial performances to his credit, takes two great actors who handle some good old fashioned repartee rather well; coupled with adept handling of a witty script to put together an eminently watchable show.

The play focuses on two people who get to know each other, have sex, and eventually fall in love. As in most romantic comedies, one-liners abound and the protagonists are shown falling from their own self constructed identities. The fight in Felix's apartment after Doris barges in at the beginning is hilarious. She gets upset by his use of big words, but eventually buys her own guide to extending one's vocabulary. He is horrified by her "filthy" animal existence exemplified in his use of words like gutter slime and filth for her, but delights in the new experiences she has to offer. The two show each other new ways of looking at things and which is why Doris and Felix's chemistry works for the audience. It's is akin to what *happens* in real life. Their romance is played for laughs, but it's also sweet and touching. Felix, like most men, has to have a near nervous breakdown before deciding Doris is the one for him through a bitter-sweet dream sequence that evokes meta-theatre. As each displays their softer selves, the audience realizes they have more in common than they think. The two are in transition; looking for that obscure goal of success; he in writing, she in acting. This shared ground draws them together and reflects to the audience

a very real struggle that we all experience in relationships.

Odd couples, whether of the same or different sexes have been a comedy formula for decades. The play enthralls with its at times salty language. Most importantly, Kumud and Kanika have a very definite chemistry. Though Kanika's is better delineated and intrinsically is the more outrageous and attractive character (being the underdog) in the script, it does not steal the focus. Kumud interprets the inherent wimpyness and prissyness of the character with a paradoxical male strength and libido. This makes for a powerful performance that converts the essentially mono-dimensionality of the character into a rather complex and conflicted one. The interlude when the wimpy Felix transforms briefly to a randy 'baby' is remarkably executed with Kumud performing from each pore of his being. Kanika has put in a lot of effort into building her character but while she is able to bring to fore the tartness of Doris, the vulnerability written into the character does not come out as well as it may have. Though this prostitute has a heart and it shows. While the play per se is not deep enough to allow for great acting, it does give scope to the two protagonists to demonstrate impressive technical finesse; the director who is apparently debuting for the group needs to be complemented for this.

In order to be memorable theater, the discovery by Felix and Doris that they are good for each other need not be revelatory in the vein of a metaphysical revelation, but should be funny. The director and his cast achieve this with ease. The humor in "The Owl and The Pussycat," depends largely on sarcasm, insult and the sort of logic that has Doris announce: "I may be a prostitute, but I'm not promiscuous." A lot of the humor of the play depends on language and the "play" thereon. Much is made of the fact that Doris doesn't understand words like despicable, aesthetic, assimilate and intrinsic while Felix who seeks to define himself through words or concepts finds them completely incapable of

addressing his feelings for Doris. A comedy based largely on language and timing is always a difficult ask and the current production delivers in aces.

Directorial skill is amply demonstrated in terms of technique, stage craft and spatial usage. The fundamentals of good stagecraft such as blocking, body language and use of space have a refreshing rehearsed certainty and professionalism fast disappearing from current productions. Interludes of well chosen music pieces and the intermittent use of gaps during the play deserve to be commended. This despite the somewhat inadequate lighting arrangement around the proscenium of the LTG auditorium

Pulling Strings – A review of the Ishara International Puppet Theatre Festival by Divya Raina



Daddee Pudumjee with
his puppeteers and
puppets

It doesn't quite matter whether one pulls strings or uses larger than life marionettes, glove or rod puppets, its pure theatre that one is watching. Quite distinct from a puppet or the *kathputli* show this form of theatre is as creative, compelling and meant for adult audiences as much as for kids. In fact **Dadi Pudumjee** has been a staunch crusader for the

cause and promotion of puppet theatre for decades now. An extraordinarily talented puppet creator and manipulator, director, performer and choreographer, he along with his remarkably versatile crew of the **Ishara puppet theatre troupe**, has entertained and enabled Indian (and international) audiences to view a totally different type of performance art.

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

What came through clearly was the constant refrain” I love music” and also “*musica classica*”, and the entire duration of the performance was devoted to an exploration of different forms of music with accompanying puppet movement. The saxophone puppet duet was the highlight with its foot –tapping rhythm, but there were many other musical elements incorporated. It was as though there was an earnest plea in this globalised TV-corrupted world, to both young and old viewers to re-connect with “purer” forms of music than the fusion and confusion of mtv-inspired forms one generally finds today.

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

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



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

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

While the Turkish PM insists that respect for basic human rights is his sole motivation in pushing through the amendments, some believe that the move would cause immense problems and deal a blow to the separation of state and religion, one of the founding principles of the modern Turkish Republic.

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

The charismatic scholar Hijab Hashmi inspires her devotees to keep their eyes open for the traitors in the *Burqa* Brigade. Bin Batin carries on his bloody fight against the helmet-covered enemy. The stage action is accompanied by telecast of

'*Burqavision*' programmes which include a soap, a documentary '*Burqa* Though the Ages', News, Sports, a fashion show and 'Breaking News'. While *Burqas* of all shapes and sizes create images and situations reminding the audience of the socio-political situation in Pakistan, two *maulanas* sitting on the edges of the stage, in a TV show, respond to the questions from their viewers about apparently important questions about interpretation and application of religious teachings. The statements of the *maulanas* are in fact extracts from '*Beheshti Zaiver*', a book given to girls at the time of their marriage.

Denouncing the ban on the play **Madiha Gauhar** had then said that the ban was imposed because of pressure from the "*burqa* brigade", and that it proved that the government's enlightened moderation policies were a farce. It was in the early eighties that I had first met Madiha, when I was hanging around with Badal Sircar, Ragini Prakash and Vinod Dua at the Sri Ram Centre Canteen in New Delhi. We were told by Mrs. Acharya, the owner of the canteen, that a Pakistani actress wanted to meet us. We were accosted by this strapping young and beautiful lady who told Badal Sircar that their group had performed his play **Juloos** (Procession) in Pakistan despite the censorship. A little later, Shahid Nadeem with his Ajoka Theatre Group, performed with our group, Theatre Union, at JNU. Shahid even recorded our play **Toba Tek Singh** and took it back with him to Pakistan.

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

Anuradha Kapur and Kewal Dhaliwal.

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

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

Cast and Credits

Minister/ Bin Batin/ Chambeli/ Cameraman: Sarfraz Ansari

Maulana 1: Ziafat Arfat

Maulana 2: Imran-ul-Haq

Haseena: Samiya Mumtaz

Khoobroo: Furqaan Majid

Brigade Commander: Khola qurashi

Brigade 1: Asif Japani

Brigade 2: Azaan Malik

Police Officer: Usman Zia

Constable 1: Shahid Zafar

Constable 2: Shehzad

Chorus/Dancers: Taqoob Masih, Nadeem Abbas, Waseem Luka, Meena

Hijab Hashmi/ Mother: Samina Butt

Guitar Player: Vicky

Play and Direction: Shahid Nadeem

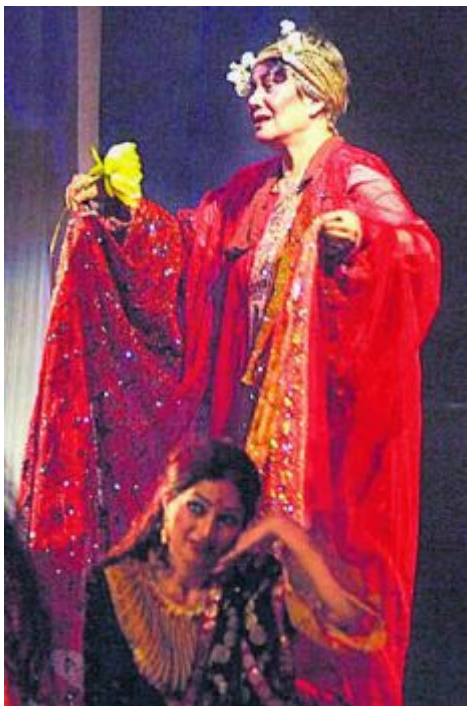
Sets and Lighting Design: Kewal Dhaliwal

Music: M Aslam

Costume: Zahra Batool

Assistant Director: Malik Aslam
Production Manager: Imran-ul-Haq
Research: Ziafat Arfat
Video recording / editing: Nadeem Mir, Shakeel Siddiqui

NATI BINODINI steals the show at Bharat Rang Mahotsav



Nati Binodini, presented at Kamani in January 2008 in the **NSD Theatre Utsav 2008** by **Theatre and Television Associates**, New Delhi, Directed by Amal Allana received a standing ovation and was one of the landmark plays of the fest along with Kewal Dahliwal's ***Yatra***. Girish Ghosh, Binodini's Mentor and Theatre Director was brilliantly portrayed by Jayanto Das with his earthy and authentic performance style. The performance of the protagonist was rendered simultaneously by five actresses: Salima Raza, Swaroopa Ghosh, Natasha Rastogi, Sonam Kalra and Amita Ailawadi. Each one of them represented different ages

and stages of the Nati's life. Salima Raza enthralled the audience with her virtuoso performance and her remarkable stage presence. Nissar Allana's Moving Venetian Blind style of backdrops with projected images and Glass floor gave the production a kind of slickness that only Nissar can create.

The play opens with the five actresses dressed in white hooded sarees creating a remarkable visual composition. The actresses one by one unfold the multilayered and colored identity of Binodini orchestrated by appropriately dramatic music composed by Devajit Bandyopadhyay. A take-off from Binodini Dasi's (1863-1942) autobiography, the play seeks to interrogate and problematize the layered and complex existence of the immensely talented actresses, virtuoso performers in their own right, in nineteenth century Bengali theatre—an existence where their social and economic insecurity became a handle for exploitation by a whole section of the nouveau riche dandified gentry on the one hand, and the mentor-director-playwright-manager of the theatre, on the other. The action is divided into ten sequences, with the ageing Binodini as the Narrator addressing Girish Ghosh and recounting the story of her life, through all its losses and hurts, and its occasional moments of hope and joy. The play ends with an Epilogue where Binodini makes up an uneasy truce with life that had not been very kind to her.

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

The partition play, YATRA, moves Bharangam audiences



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

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

At the end of the show with audience applauding quite a few of them holding lighted candles of peace and brotherhood in their hands. When Madiha Gauhar asked them if they knew which actors

were from India and which ones were from Pakistan, they all said in unison “we don’t even want to know.” Such was the extent to which the audience had been moved by the depth and emotions of the poetry and the fluidly conceived choreography.

As Kewal puts it; “All of us had heard of Partition through the various stories told by our elders. As the days went by in the theatre workshop, and we started to actually perform those stories, we gained profound insights into what those people would have gone through. Thus one of the purposes of this workshop was accomplished. We have taken small steps in making the younger generation aware of the tragedy of the Partition, making them value both the countries. The play does not try to rub salt into the wounds of Partition, but rather attempts to heal them, to transform the barbed wires of hatred into soft lines of life and love. The Punjabi Theatre group **Manch-Rangmanch** hails from Chandigarh and has also taken its plays to England, Canada, Germany, USA, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Cast and Credits

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

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

Can Amateur Theatre Survive ? by Manohar Khushalani



And the Award Goes to... by Manohar Khushalani

