

A Boat Ride from India to Japan by Manohar Khushalani



Kurukshetra and After, an Aftermath by Manohar Khushalani



'Britain hit by Bollywood fever': Review by Manohar Khushalani



Seema Par – A dalliance with Death by Manohar Khushalani

Seema Par - a dalliance with death

CRITIQUE COOKING
Seema Par

I have known the husband and wife since they were in their 20s. In fact I have even worked as an actor under his direction in a play called 'Seema Par'. Seema's interest has always been an actor's life rather than a writer's.

Often what he produces gives you food for thought. In early 1990s when I happened to be in Chandernagore, he produced a TV serial based on Don Quixote leading to India. The serial was to be produced as a TV serial by himself, and was to be directed by Seema. It was written by Seema. It was a very brilliant.

Seema had involved a character from Chandernagore into the Indian film with care and perception. Unfortunately even though the script was approved it never got filmed.

It was for this reason that I really could myself be missing the first part of the 1992 Bombay play *Seema Par* written and directed by

Seema. However I was able to view the production in the form during the summer 1993 Bombay Theatre Festival. There were the work of Seema as a director but I was by doing with the subject of another



Seema's writer's life as a playwright that I was really curious about. The playwright to focus was the characteristically creative poet and writer, Manojkumar, an extremely complex and subtle person of his time.

The story of the play revolves the national personality attributes of the playwright through an imaginary situation. In this, Seema seems to have delved

deeply into the life of Seema's creative spirit. Manojkumar's character is a complex, multi-faceted one. He is a poet, a writer, a thinker, a dreamer, a visionary. He is a man who is always looking for the truth, for the meaning of life, for the purpose of existence.

There is a link to the play when the character of Seema is actually in Chandernagore. One suspects that the author was having a lot of fun with it. In those times, when the world is very interesting and one could see some similarity with the writing style of Seema. Seema's personality of death is extremely vast.

This is not a reflection on the actor, Girish Parikh, who was playing death. Because he is a very talented. One of all the ways of a writer's personality of death when so many Indian poets are available, each in his own way.

Maybe Seema himself is more comfortable with words. Perhaps that is why he did it with the first act. But it was not the first of his acts but he was the first of his acts. There seems to be a sense of imagination in the treatment of the, which seems to be a sense

of the play. The only interesting relationship in the play between Seema and Manojkumar. All the other characters seem to be secondary characters. Even the end seems to be somewhat anticlimactic. But the play does have immense potential. Seema is willing to work further on it.

The characters of the play are designed with precision by Girish Parikh. Manojkumar's character is typically seen as the one who is completely with his mind. Manojkumar's character Seema's character appears to have been out of character. Seema's character is a person who is very

But it is not about the comparison of the play of characters and settings, and particularly speaking. The first character of the play has a complex style that makes a strong statement about the play. A case in point was a line which he uttered in the play.

But the play did not seem to be a very good one. It was designed with much precision as to it in such a way that they looked like a character. The performance of Seema's play Seema's play, with Girish Parikh's direction.



Manisha Koirala at the celebrations

If Kathmandu is the seat of power of the only Hindu kingdom on earth, it is also probably the only country where you don't need a passport, where your very own Indian credit cards are accepted, where a rupee has greater buying power and where Indian film stars are just as popular as in their own homeland — if not more.

Little wonder therefore that the Indian ambassador to Nepal, K.V. Rajan, hit upon the idea of celebrating fifty years of Indian independence with a film festival commemorating fifty years of Indian cinema. Four Indian stars were also felicitated. Among them, two stalwarts, Dev Anand and Waheeda Rehman, and two youngsters of the new generation of the two nations, Shah Rukh Khan and Manisha Koirala. If Raj Kapoor's 'Mera Joota hai Japani...' made him a legend in the USSR, Dev Anand's 'Dum

A festival to remember

Manohar Khushalani writes about an event celebrating 50 years of Indian cinema in Nepal

EVENT

...dum... did the same for him in the mountain state.

Kathmandu, a sleepy capital with a small-town atmosphere, protected in the womb of the tallest mountain ranges of the world, suddenly became alive and vibrant. The ten days of festivities, flagged off by Jaaved Jaafari's quaint sense of humor, proved that laughter defies all

barriers and unites all ages, sexes and nationalities. "Why are we Asians obsessed with films just as we are with our own mothers? Is it because even cinema has a *maa* in it? Unfortunately Oedipus could not see *cinema* during his lifetime." For detective movie fans Jaaved belted out an Ajit joke. "How was Peter supposed

to respond to Michael's 'Off On Off' signal? With an 'On Off On' signal, silly!" Nobody was spared — other victims of his mimicry included Dilip Kumar, Rajendra Kumar and Amitabh Bachchan. Not to miss the formula film in which the villain is about to drink the hero's blood, Dracula style ("Main tumhara khoon pi

jaunga"), but for the pendant which he discovers in his adversary's neck and realises they are brothers. And, if he would have us believe him, modern women's clothes remind him of barbed wires which protect the property without obstructing the view. Whew! Thank God for little mercies. There was also the brilliant audiovisual commissioned by the embassy which took us down memory lane and provided nostalgic relief. There were old songs that uplift one's spirits even today 'Ai mere pyare watan...' 'Ye kahaani hai diye ki aur toofan ki...' 'Jhanak jhanak payal baje...' There were also excerpts from films that have immortalised Indian cinema: *Mother India*, *Guide*, *Chalti Ka Naam Gaadi*, *Anarkali*, *Mughal-E-Azam*, *Nagin*, *Bajju Bawra*. The list is endless.

Among the stars Dev Anand was called on stage first. He struck such an instant rapport with the audience that it kept him on stage for half an hour. The performance was so brilliant that Waheeda Rehman decided to lose her voice to an allergy and Manisha Koirala had to resort to her native tongue. Shah Rukh Khan of course could not hold a candle to Jaaved despite his Ka-Ka-Kathmandu in his now famous stammer. But it was all in good fun and if the stars did not partake of the cocktails for long, one could not blame them, they were after all being mobbed in *desi* style. If the milling crowds outside the Birendra International Convention Centre were any indication to go by, the festival was a grand success — so what if none of the government officials were present due to "other engagements"? The people were there in full strength to again prove that a people to people relationship is far stronger than ties between politicians.

Manohar Khushalani interviews the Indian ambassador to Nepal, K V Rajan

Mr Ambassador, it is known that this idea of a film festival in Kathmandu was your brainchild..

We found that people here had a lot of interest in Indian films. It seemed a pity not to recognise it as a boosting factor in Indo-Nepalese friendship.

So, this was our way of expressing our appreciation of the Indian film industry, for the friendship and goodwill they have helped build between India and Nepal.

What are the other ramifications of this festival besides goodwill?

Of course, once the idea matured, other suggestions began to flow in. When we decided that *Tamanna* would be one of the films to be premiered, Pooja Bhatt offered the film free of cost, provided there was a good charity, especially for the girl child.

When we started talking to government officials and NGOs interested in the problem of illegal trafficking of minors, particularly girls, from Nepal to India, it struck us that this could be an opportunity for the Indian film industry to support Nepalese projects aimed at preventing this flow of children.

How would you go about it?

By encouraging education, awareness and developmental activities in identified villages here. We also thought the Indian film industry could be motivated into taking up themes concerned with the Nepalese girl child.

What role do you see for the North India Films Association (NIFA) in Nepal?

What you need is some institutional contact between NIFA and the Nepalese film industry. The proximity is there, it is easy to come back and forth, easy to trade films, and so on.

What other role could the Indian film industry play?

Quite a lot. If films are made in collaboration with the Nepalese film industry, or shot in Nepal, it will create an awareness of the tremendous tourist potential in this country.

Are there still some irritants between the two countries? For example, the entire government machinery was absent from the function.

No. This happened only because the entire function had to be postponed by one day. Because of the crippling air traffic controllers' strike in India the stars arrived a day late. There was a lot of interest in this function.

Manohar Khushalani in Come Back Little Sheba

There's a Room at the Top

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There's room at the top

WHO will be the next director of the National School of Drama when the tenure of the present director Kirti Jain expires in November? This is a matter of much conjecture and discussion among the theatre buffs.

Unlike popular belief the NSD is not purely a government department, but an autonomous, registered society funded by the government. The appointment of its director falls under the jurisdiction of the society, but, due to financial dependence, gradually the society has got into the habit of referring everything to the government.

The most important decision that the society has to take, in concurrence with the government, is the one relating to the appointment of a new director every few years. The list of ex-directors of the NSD reads like a who's who of theatre giants; B. V. Karanth, Rattan Thaliyram, B. M. Shah, Mohan Maharishi and, of course, the inimitable Ebrahim Alkazi, who has had the longest tenure of 13 years. Most often directors stayed barely for two years and departed post haste, either due to student politics or their own professional preoccupation.

Surprisingly, Kirti Jain has had the second longest tenure

Come November, and the tenure of the present director of New Delhi's prestigious National School of Drama will expire.

Who will fill the coveted post, asks **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

of seven years. This, of course, happened due to a change of rules. The teaching faculty at the NSD voted for a minimum tenure of five years, instead of two years, because they felt that two years are not enough to implement any programme. Thus, when Kirti was renominated after two years she had a long stretch of seven years to implement her ideas about what the students at school should do: While the NSD has had a chequered history of strikes and student unrest, there haven't been any signs of student restlessness during her tenure.

Obviously, having spent many years in the faculty, Jain's approach appears to be: 'Hard work and no politics makes students a disciplined lot'. Certainly the approach is working because the students are doing what they should be doing, ie, learning.

Although Jain has not been as prolific as her predecessors, she appears to have a better record of administration and because she does not have a theatre group of her own, she is spending more time in school

and responding to the student's problems. For example, during Rattan Thaliyram's tenure there was a major student strike — their grouse: Thaliyram was spending less time in school.

Usually the society has been selecting a single director and putting up his or her name for approval. However, this time, a search committee comprising of Rajendra Nath, Vijay Tendulkar, Chandrashekhar Kambar and Sai Paranjape was appointed to create a panel of three people. While opinion has been divided between continuity and change, the committee also approved the names of Satish Alekar and Satyadev Dube. It was learnt from reliable sources that by a majority of five to two Kirti's name was kept on top of the panel. If Kirti Jain is re-appointed then her tenure will be nearly equal to Alkazi's.

There are a number of problems that the new director (whoever he or she is) will have to address. The faculty members have for long been demanding better scales of pay. The P. N. Haksar Committee suggested that their scales should be better than the UGC scales, but



BETTER ADMINISTRATOR: Kirti Jain, director of the National School of Drama

so far their scales are not even equal to that of UGC.

The NSD repertory committee needs to be strengthened as it has been over a decade since Manohar Singh, their chief, resigned. Since then the company continues to have an acting chief. Although, we all know that the repertory has to deal with actors, but always adding the prefix "acting" to the post of the chief is a little too much, isn't it? But then the all mighty bureaucrats who deal with the NSD have their own qualms. The Haksar Committee also suggested making the repertory chief's job a contractual one.

There have been other suggestions about upgrading this position to that of a full-fledged professor in place of the present assistant professor, so that the tough task is given its due weightage.

The NSD has contributed some of the best stage, cinema and television talent in the country. While teaching standards and the quality of student productions have gone up in the last few years, the impoverished school has an uphill task in consolidating these achievements. The incumbent to the top post thus has a challenging task to fulfil.

To Trust or Distrust?

CULTURAL CONTROVERSIES

The Bharat Bhawan in Bhopal, the country's premier cultural organisation plans to induct two additional members into its Trust, but has run into rough weather in the bargain, reports **MANOHAR KHUSHALANI**

To trust or distrust?

RECENTLY, when Bharat Bhawan, Bhopal, India's premier cultural organisation, went through its round of appointments of new trustees, it became the bone of contention for many an artiste. Guns were trained and charges exchanged regarding the filling up of the coveted and prestigious vacancies.

The first salvo was fired when the Central government announced the name of Alka Raghuvanshi, the former arts editor of *Pioneer*, Delhi, as one of its three nominees. The other two already appointed were M. F. Hussain and Prashant Mehta. While the other Delhi newspapers carried the news without comment, there appeared

page and only she was in a position to answer the charges.

When asked why she had been branded a saffron-clad activist, she said, "How can I be saffron-clad when so many radical views were expressed in the arts page without any interference from my side? If indeed I am a BJP supporter, how come the Congress government is sponsoring my name? Actually, anybody who is not a part of the card carrying left cadre is branded a fascist and communalist by them. To my mind it is they who practise the worst kind of fascism."

Besides the Central government nominees, Bharat Bhawan Trust has trustees appointed by the state government which

as a trustee has also turned controversial. Except for his occasional forays to Delhi for production of NSD plays, Prasanna has confined himself to a remote village Hegudu in Karnataka, where he has founded the Kavi Kavya Trust, which publishes a Kannada quarterly magazine *Rajuvatu* edited by Ananthamurthy.

In an open letter to the member secretary, Bharat Bhawan Trust, which was carried prominently by the Hindi daily *Jansatta*, Prasanna has charged that Ashok Vajpayi was casting aspersions about him. It referred to a fellowship which Bharat Bhawan had awarded on the project. According to



PRIZED MOMENT: Alka Raghuvanshi receiving the award for

a small news item in *Miran Express* reporting a statement, amongst others, by Vivan Sundaram, Anjolie Ela Menon, Dilip Padgaonkar and Praful Bijwai, objecting to her appointment following the release of her book on artistes by the President at Rashtrapati Bhawan.

The signatories blamed the HRD Ministry for it and went on to add that the trust was a symbolic entity not dealing with day-to-day affairs and so the most eminent people should be in it, quoting the names of previous trustees such as B. V. Karanth, Swaminathan and Mani Kaul. Alka Raghuvanshi, the former Chameli Devi Jain Award winner for outstanding women media persons, dismissed the report and called it "professional jealousy", since the report was filed by an arts editor and not a correspondent. "Why were so many entities concerned by a non-entity like me," she asked, "either they are non-entities or I am an entity."

Not known to mince her words, she went on to add that the problem with the so-called Leftists was that they hunted in packs. "Since they all get together, their collective strength is a formidable force, which is why they have been able to scare a lot of people. They tried to do that earlier. When we carried a story against Sahmat, they marched in a demonstration against me into the office of the then editor of *Pioneer*, Vinod Mehta." According to her, when Vinod summoned her to his office, they refused to talk, saying that they could not say anything in her presence since the charges were against her. Vinod, however, expressed his inability to discuss the matter in her absence, as Raghuvanshi was the one dealing with the arts

include Jaya Bachchan and Anand Patwardhan. Vijay Kichloo of the Sangeet Research Academy is the "music" nominee and Anshu Vaish is the secretary. Surprisingly, Ashok Vajpayi, Joint Secretary, Department of Culture, is a state nominee.

The trustees met last month to induct two additional members and amongst the many names discussed were Vijay Tendulkar, Ananthamurthy and stage director, writer, poet Prasanna. Interestingly, Prasanna is considered to be on the other end of the political spectrum — he is considered a Leftist (though he has of late been attracted to Gandhian philosophy). A suggestion regarding his appointment

Prasanna, the most recent remark of his on this subject had been in a trust meeting where Vajpayi was trying to turn down a suggestion that he be made a trustee. Since the charge had been made in a forum, in which he could not defend himself, he had decided to go public.

"The trust has not bothered to find out the truth for nearly a decade after the incident," claims Prasanna. "I had felt honoured when Bharat Bhawan awarded the said fellowship and accepted it. Since the Fellowship was the first of its nature for Bharat Bhawan, they did not have a methodology for doing theoretical work." Accord-

outstanding women media persons from President Shankar Dayal Sharma

ing to him he sent quarterly reports for about a year, at the end of which he was asked to send an abstract in English, on the work done for the project.

That was the last he heard from Bharat Bhawan. They stopped sending him the Fellowship amount and did not answer his letters. On writing to B. V. Karanth he discovered that Ashok Vajpayi and Vijay Tendulkar, who had tormented themselves into a committee to judge his work, had decided on the basis of the English abstract, that the work was 'sub-standard'. They in turn had decided to fail him.

Since he was then an activist working in the villages of Karnataka, and did not possess the resources needed to go to Bhopal or Delhi, he decided to defend his honour by publishing the work. "Fortunately for me," he adds, "a Kannada publisher who is also an eminent theatre personality in India, liked my work and offered to publish it. It was published as *Natak: Rangkriti* in Kannada. My published work is on modern Indian drama. This book has become a landmark in Kannada criticism since then. I sent a copy of my work along with a letter to Bharat Bhawan, under the fond hope that some day somebody who understood critical idiom would read my work at Bharat Bhawan and redeem my tarnished honour."

Much later, at the intervention of Ford Foundation, USA, which had founded Bharat Bhawan, he got his money. According to him, the Foundation felt that a fellowship was given to a person for his contribution and that it was in bad taste to 'fail' the scholar.

Prasanna, however, admits that in a chance-meeting he had with him, Ashok Vajpayi denied having said all this. Manjit Bawa, well-known painter and president of Bharat Bhawan, was critical of Prasanna having gone public on this matter. He also denied that Vajpayi alone made the charge. According to him "it was all in the files." He went on to add, "There are so many defaulters and it was only mentioned that Prasanna had not fulfilled his obligation. Prasanna's name was amongst the many proposed, and he should not feel bad if he was not selected. Prasanna, however, denies having any interest in the trusteeship. "In fact I was annoyed that my name was mentioned. Organisations like Bharat Bhawan are top-heavy and non-activist. It is really not my cup of tea," remarked Prasanna.

That criticism might be valid. Right now amongst the four streams of the trust, only 'Roopankar', headed by Manjit Bawa, is active with its 'Bien-nial' — exhibition of contemporary and tribal arts. In fact 'Wahghat' (poetry) and 'Anahad' (music) have for long been dormant. However, during B. V. Karanth's tenure the fourth stream — theatre — was very active.

Ultimately it all boils down to personalities. Maybe public postures are taken on issues and ideologies, but the battles are totally personal. The trust really needs to take a long, hard and introspective look at its functioning and mandate. Granting recognitions or disbursing favours need not be the sole activity of this fountainhead of culture.



DRIVING A POINT: Alka Raghuvanshi, no mincing of words