



Manisha Koirala at the celebrations

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

BLITZ, OCTOBER 28, 1995 ■ PAGE 13

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

Portraying a Chauvinistic Outlook

a chauvinistic outlook



FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Jama Kharch by

People's Drama League

Panchanan Pathak has been conducting a drama acting course under the banner of People's Drama League every year. The course students consist of young boys and girls who cannot afford to pay very steep fees.

He prepares a play with his students and puts up two shows at the SRC basement. It is always a low budget production with no sets and only some minor props. The show is neither advertised nor ticketed and therefore cannot be reviewed

with the same ruthlessness that some of the semi-professional plays can. In fact, Pathak's forte is music and not theatre, but he does this modest exercise as a kind of social work to keep young minds creatively engaged.

This year, People's Drama League presented *Jama Kharch* which is a Hindi adaptation of the original Bangla play *Hiseb Kodi* written by Chandan Sen. The story of *Hiseb Kodi* is a typical middle-class tale full of moralising and sermonising. But it also has a touch of humour.

Ambujaksha (Vinod Panchal) is a rice merchant who is bed-ridden after a road accident which subsequently proves fatal. His second wife Mallika (Minakshi Malik) who is much younger than him, and his live-in father-in-law Nirapad (D Goswami), pester Ambujaksha to review his earlier will which benefits Amit, his son from an earlier marriage.

Ambujaksha had already made some provision for Mal-



An honest and unpretentious production that achieves

likability, but because of her so-called indifferent behaviour towards her husband, he prepares a balance sheet. He goes on deducting her share of her for errors and omissions that she made during five years of their mar-



DOONESBURY / Garry Trudeau



The Travails of Travel

The travails of travel



FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Rahul by SRC Rep

Shri Ram Centre Repertory put up its latest production, *Rahul*, at its main auditorium. The play was based on the life story and ideas of Rahul Sanskritayan, the famous Indian traveller, poet, thinker and writer who died in April 1963 and who again made news last year when his statue was installed in Darjeeling and a street there was named after him.

The set consisted of a low circular platform with three ramps. The play opened with the poet on a wheelchair silhouetted in the beam which projected onto the cyclorama, a slide of Rahul's facial close-up. The slide is becoming a frequently used device and the director tried to create a variation by installing a smaller screen in front of the cyclorama. Thus the pictures were projected on the two planes and this gave some depth to the two-dimensional images.

Sanjay Upadhyay, the resident theatre director of SRC Repertory, has been consistent in his choice of scripts both for the acting course as well as the repertory. After working on difficult subjects like Nirala, Mahendra Simir and Bhartendu, he decided to evolve the story of the mercurial Rahul Sanskritayan, in collaboration with the scriptwriter Anubha.

The script was developed by Anubha in an interactive free flowing style. This was aided by the style of presentation in which Rahul was represented by three actors who took over from each other very smoothly.

This representation of the same character by different actors prevented the audience from getting empathetically involved in the life story of San-

skritayan. While this had a Brechtian alienation effect, at the same time, the three actors, Rajesh Tiwari, Shiv Gupta and A R Shamma were so cast as to represent three different aspects of Rahul's ideology.

Thus focus was more on ideas than on the story line. The repertory does not have a single actor powerful enough to project the gigantic personality. The subdivision, therefore, served the purpose of exploring the multi-dimensional personality of Rahul.

kind of universal outlook and made him into a sort of radical humanist or a neo humanist.

Soviet Union was like a second homeland for him. Here he had a wife Lola (Manisha Shivam) and son Igor (Dhruv Jyoti Sengupta). This relationship was examined with compassion. The fact that Rahul had many wives and mistresses was projected with a sensitive understanding of a creative mind. In fact if anything, the production put Sanskritayan too much on a pedestal and did

talist society. I do not have to worry much about Lola and Igor since a socialist state provides for its citizens."

Rahul's childhood marriage, and more marriages later, his embracing the Buddhist faith, his travels to China, Tibet, Nepal and Sri Lanka, his involvement in the freedom movement as well as the peasant rebellion, are some of the many aspects of his story which would be too difficult to encompass. Sanjay Upadhyay's choice of a semi-documentary style



Telling the tale of the mercurial Sanskritayan

A man of strong likes and dislikes, he had a blind love for the Hindi language. But this did not create an inhibiting effect on his personality. The fact that he knew 40 languages proved that he was not a psychophant and was a linguist in a true sense.

His political ideology swung from Marxism and socialism to religion. Thus he could encompass opposing ideologies by taking the best from each of them during various phases of his life. His embracing different communities and getting absorbed in their culture displayed a

not examine his failings with the ruthlessness of an objective mind.

If this aspect had been strengthened, it could have become a powerful production. Certain emotional aspects were tackled with an intellectual dispassionateness — for instance Rahul being torn between different countries and wives. How the giant mind could resolve personal dilemmas was reflected by the statement he made to his Indian wife Kamla: "I know I have to provide for you materially because you live in a capi-

of presentation can therefore be understood. But perhaps some playwright could also attempt to capture the emotional drama behind the dilemmas of the man who tragically died a schizophrenic.

What Sanskritayan wrote after Tilak's death hold's good for him too: *Beej boya tha jiska tune yahan/ Khoon se sincha tha jise tu yahan/ Phool lagne ka us pe vakt aaya/ Nazre daurin na tu nazar aaya.* (You were nowhere to be seen when time came for you to enjoy the fruits of your own labour.)

In a Contemporary Milieu

THURSDAY MAY 4, 1995

ARTS

THE PIONEER 13

In a contemporary milieu



FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Romeo and Juliet

by NSD Second Year

The NSD second year students' production of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* directed by Anuradha Kapoor and translated by Atul Tiwari at the Ghalib Auditorium last week was in keeping with the current NSD trend of experimental theatre. The play was recast visually in a contemporary urban milieu.

The newly rediscovered Ghalib Auditorium has the intimacy of the SRC Basement and the seating capacity of the main auditorium. It lends itself well to the optimum usage of its space. With Arpita Singh's sets, consisting of painted blocks, ropes and swings decorated with props like wheels, umbrellas, and balloons, a mobile like flexibility of composition was created.

Dolly Ahluwalia chose black glossy tights with red scars and gowns for women and T-shirts, shorts and jeans for men with different colour schemes for the Montagues and the Capulets, setting the pace for the stylisation of presentation. The movements were brisk and the actors used the swings like balls and other props in an acrobatic fashion lending the show with far greater mobility than seen in Kapoor's earlier production done under the Vivadi banner.

Although it is believed that a lot of skill and learned guidance are needed for an intelligent understanding of Shakespeare, the directness of his appeal remains even for the lay man. As the editor of *The First Folio* recommended the plays for everyone, how "odd so ever" his brains be, since, Shakespeare is not a didactic playwright and understanding of the reasoning of his plays usually comes on subconsciously.

The fear of interpreting Shakespeare what puts the challenge in it. Of late the old reverence to the Bard has given way

to an investigative kind of irreverence. While today, Shakespeare's plays are performed all over the world and new kinds of experimental work finds inspiration in them let's face it, any attempt to rewrite Shakespeare cannot enhance the text in any way.

It can, at best, give yet another dimension to viewing the text. No wonder Atul Tiwari, the translator of the Shakespearean play, most candidly compared his attempt at translation with climbing the Everest or swimming the ocean. Yet, reinterpreting Shakespeare's

intact even while borrowing the imagery from the English.

According to Peter Brook, "In the second half of the 20th century in England, we are faced with the infuriating fact that Shakespeare is still our model" and this, despite the fact that since the days of Shakespeare, outlooks and political ideas have changed. Shakespeare's contemporaries almost unanimously believed in authoritarian monarchy, they accepted a police state and believed that there was divine intervention in history. Most of them were bigoted enough to hold the fun-

mula film with its associative imagery. The vast sweep of music ranging from classical to modern, Indian to western, added a universal and youthful dimension.

On opening any text of Shakespeare, one's attention can be held by a few lines of verse or a complexly constructed sentence or just one glittering or perceptive word. The bard had an absolute command over words, evocation of images, creation of sounds, rhythm, metre and the building up of texture of the text.

After overcoming the initial



Romeo and Juliet is in keeping with the current NSD trend of experimental theatre

plays, does help in the understanding of the text, which is one of the objectives of a student production.

Translating Shakespeare even in English is not easy. For example, what was called 'presently' then, means immediately today, 'will' meant 'lust' 'rage' was 'folly' and 'silly' strangely meant that somebody was 'innocent'. In Hindi, the context too, is different. Judging by the complexity of the problem, Atul's translation skirted the difficulties intelligently by interweaving the prose with the poetry and keeping the colloquialism of the language

damentalist view that a man should be burnt at the stake for religious heresies. Maybe it is the medieval outlook in *Romeo and Juliet* that still finds its echoes in a third world society like India.

No wonder the echoes of the tale of *Romeo and Juliet* can be seen in at least half a dozen Bollywood films every year. Love amidst family rivalry is a formula which has been heavily overused. Anuradha Kapoor's attempt to relocate *Romeo and Juliet* in a claustrophobic cityscape, amongst other things, almost lampooned, maybe unintendedly, the for-

awe over his lyricism, one's attention is engaged by the highly evolved individual characters. Many of the early critiques on Shakespeare, were, about his characters and controversy about them still continues as if they were living beings.

Despite its many strengths, it was in the area of characterisation that the production suffered. Even though there was an abundance of enthusiasm, except for Geetanjali Sherikar as the nurse, most other actors lacked the variation required for evolution of well-sketched personalities.