

# Portraying a Chauvinistic Outlook

ARTS  
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Portraying

WEDNESDAY MAY 17, 1995

## 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 bedridden 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.

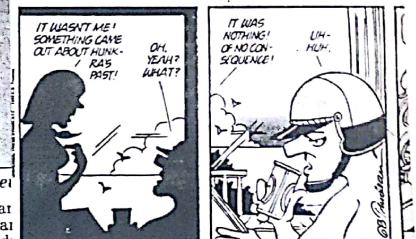
Ambujaksha had already made some provision for Mal-



An honest and unpretentious production that achieves its goal, but because of her so-called indifferent behaviour towards her husband, he prepares a balance sheet. He goes on deducting her share of her errors and omissions that she made during five years of their marriage.



DOONESBURY / Garry Trudeau



## The Travails of Travel

# The travails of travel



## FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

Rahul by SRC Rep

**S**hri 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 Shummi 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 boyā 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 glowering 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.

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# Internet users beware of the e-mail virus on the loose

## *Internet users beware of e-mail virus on the loose*

**Manohar Khushalani**

New Delhi

IF YOU thought the menace of computer viruses are under control, you are mistaken. Because what is now in the offing could best be described as the atom bomb among viruses.

An organisation in Atlanta, USA, called NESTSTEP has issued an Internet virus warning. If this warning is heeded then those who are surfing the Net for e-mail and other services may

want to pay close attention to this. While currently this warning applies to users of Prodigy, America OnLine, CompuServe and most of the other on-line services which provide e-mail access to the Net in USA, the Indian networks like ERNET, NIC-NET, UUNET and Aaccess might get hit soon.

Some miscreants are sending E-Mail under the title "Good Times" nationwide in USA. Considering the fact that India is now on the Information highway, "Good Times" may strike us

soon. According to NESTSTEP, if you get anything like "Good Times" you could be in for a bad time. Delete the file immediately. Without reading it. It essentially re-writes your hard drive, thereby blowing away anything that you had on it. You are left with an empty hard disk that must be reformatted and have all of your software re-loaded onto it.

The FCC, an online news service, released a warning last week concerning a matter of major importance to any regular user of the Internet. Apparently, a now

computer virus has been engineered by a user of America Online that is unparalleled in its destructive capability. Other more well known viruses, such as Stoned and AirWolf, pale in comparison to the prospects of the newest virus in the Net.

What makes this virus so terrifying, said the FCC, is the fact that it can be spread through existing e-mail systems of the Internet. Once a computer is infected, one of several things can happen: If the computer contains a hard drive, it will most likely be

destroyed. If the programme is not stopped, the computer's processor (brain chip) will be placed in an Nth complexity, infinite binary loop.

In other words, this can severely damage the processor if left running for too long. Unfortunately most novice computer users will not realise what is happening until it is too late.

Luckily, there is one sure way to detect what is known as the "GoodTimes" virus. It always travels to new computers/victims the same way — in a text e-mail

message with the subject line simply reading "Good Times".

Avoiding infection is easy. Once the file has been received, do not read it, just delete it. The act of loading the file in the mail server's ASCII buffer causes the mainline programme to initialise and execute. The programme is highly intelligent and will send copies of itself to everyone whose e-mail address is contained in the e-mail directory. It will then proceed to trash the computer it running on.

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## The Modernist Touch



# The modernist touch



## FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

*Ant Anant*

**N**SD Repertory put up P J Unnikrishnan's *Ant Anant* based on H H Munro's *The Background*. The director Abhilash Pillai graduated from the NSD last year. It is a measure of the great confidence in him that he received such a prestigious assignment at such a young age.

The confidence, of course, sprung from his handling of the diploma production *Lanka Lakshmi* which was a runaway success.

Grab these visuals: sudden darkness in the auditorium as the play begins. A combination of Indian and Western music fills the theatre. Darkness continues for quite some time forcing you to listen to the music. The curtain rises belatedly. There is a screen on the right on which a still is projected showing a poster saying, "this is a holy war."

In front there is a bed with someone under the covers. On the centre of the stage are counters with men and women cooking, peeling and ironing. In front of them, downstage are artists and sculptors working on their pieces of art. On the left is a glass cage with a man's life-size statue in *padmasana*.

The cage lights up. The statue comes alive. A man with the figure of a Greek God wearing a headgear and a waistband that reminds one of Egyptian paintings, he breaks into an Indian dance motif.

The three women on the counters are wearing costumes that carry Japanese, Kathakali and Kashmiri influences respectively. Action takes place simultaneously all over the stage without a focus. On bed are Laila and Ishaq, and all the actors converge to wake them up.

On a television monitor one sees computer graphics of a

human body followed by scenes from the *Ramayan*. The dancer emerges from the glass cube, supported by two actors on two poles, which are held like a stretcher. The cyclorama lights up and an overhead video projector displays scenes from Second World War.

The tale revolves around Laila and Ishaq. However these two characters are catalysts on a vast canvas. One can safely assume it to be set in any spot in India—it projects a common ethos which displays the unity in diversity. It represents the onslaught of technologies, multi-media, dogmas, beliefs and religions of a common man from a rural background.

There is also the orchestration of theatre styles envelop-

ed smoothly without a hitch. On the minus side was the lack of focus in the production.

The vastness of the canvas and the range of simultaneous action intrigued initially but became monotonous later. The actors too were not fully involved and appeared to be uncomfortable.

The kind of abandon and lack of inhibition required in a play of this genre was displayed only by Rohitashv Gaur, and to some extent by Gyan Prakash. The remaining actors were either speaking too loudly or without clarity. The sermons at the end of the play appeared to be a total departure from the style of the production. For some, it was the first realisation that religion was the basic



*Interplay of religion and politics*

ing naturalism as well as video and pop art. The sequences do not follow a chronological order. Amongst the many themes and cross currents are various schools of painting, ranging from Kangra to modern art. Music and lighting, too, give a random feel.

It would be easy to be dismissive about a production like this. There is no doubt that modern Indian theatre needs to be much more experimental if it has to find new answers to reality. In that direction, *Ant Anant* took the necessary first step.

There are, of course, many achievements as well as problems in this experiment. On the plus side are all the technological innovations which work-

context of the play.

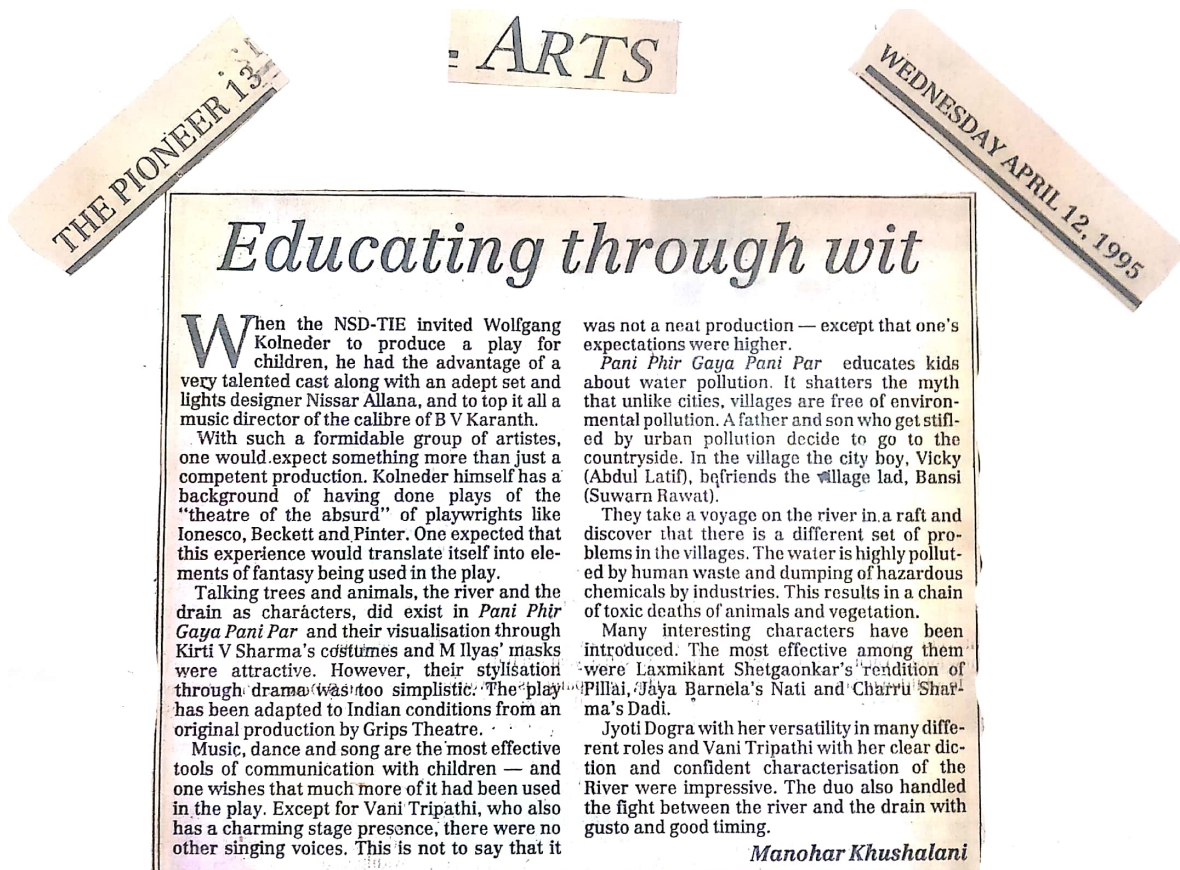
It goes to Pillai's credit that he took such a big risk in his very first directorial venture. While reading the director's note, it becomes apparent that there is a clarity of thought and a convergence in his understanding of the interplay of religion and politics. However, that clarity failed to emerge in the production.

One of the faults lay with the unreasonably short period of rehearsals. The production lacked in the coordination and orchestration of the flow of action.

But what has been proved by Abhilash, is, that we are capable, or at least, have the potential to evolve plays with the modernist touch.

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# Educating Through Wit



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## Ambitious Student Production on Oedipus



## Ambitious production



## FOOTLIGHTS

Manohar Khushalani

*Shanshah Oedipus*

The present batch of students of Shri Ram Centre Acting Course is an enthusiastic lot. One has seen two earlier productions of this batch, *Neelkanth Nirala* and *Bhartendu* directed by resident director of SRC, Sanjay Upadhyay.

Their latest production *Shanshah Oedipus*, based on Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, is directed by the NSD graduate, Pradeep Vernekar, who is a senior lecturer at the Lalit Kala Akademi in Goa.

Sanjay Upadhyay's earlier productions displayed the students' right training and orientation. They showed that the students were being exposed to the kind of text essential for good grooming of a theatre person.

Now, after the completion of the first year, the students took up an ambitious production of a script which has in it the complexity and sensitivity of an epic like Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

Sophocles', the playwright of the fifth century BC, belonged to a time when Athens was at the peak of its cultural, political and economic development. Even if he were to be compared with his great fellow Greek tragedians, Aeschylus and Euripides, he would be considered peerless in creating drama based on perplexing dilemmas of human experience.

His plays brought him recognition and respect during his lifetime itself. Something not many playwrights have been fortunate to receive. Among others, no less a person than Aristotle believed that *Oedipus*

*Rex*, was Sophocles' greatest work.

Obviously, a student production cannot be reviewed by the same yardstick as a professional one, and one year is not sufficient for trainees to mature into full-fledged actors. Keeping this in view, it is heartening to learn that Panna Bharat Ram has decided to extend the acting course to two years.

The set design of the play had two pillars on an elevated platform, with a long flight of steps, at the bottom of which was lit an urn which emitted perfumed smoke. The combination of the smoke and Girdhari's mood lighting created the right kind of atmosphere for a classical play. Nevertheless, the performance of the actors was quite

crime would rid the city of the pall of gloom.

The play demonstrates the inability of a man to escape from his own destiny. Oedipus' fate traps him as he unknowingly kills his own father, Laius, and marries his mother Jocasta, putting her in an unenviable predicament of begetting a father from a father and children from a child.

Oedipus discovers this truth through a self-destructive obsession to unearth the facts about Laius' slayer. The result of his investigation leads Jocasta to hang herself as he himself undergoes the torture of becoming self-blinded.

In Sophoclean drama, disaster or misfortune are never a chance happenstance. There is

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uneven.

In fact, when Murad Ali Khan was on stage as Tiraceous, the old prophet, one felt like walking out. However, later the show gelled together and one was glad that one had stayed on. One wonders why the director had not restrained Murad from putting up a performance so obviously shabby that it threatened to ruin the entire show.

The play opens in Thebus, where death has cast its shadow through a dreaded epidemic. Shanshah Oedipus is informed that according to Lord Apollo, a curse has befallen the city. This is because of a tainted act which caused the murder of King Laius. According to him only the exile of the perpetrator of the heinous

always a meaning behind grief. Tragedy always metamorphoses into a honing of the spirit. Death and agony are always a regeneration. The Greek chorus interprets tragedy to keep the balance.

However, with the exception of Vandana Gupta and Sarita Jha, the chorus which is such an important element of a Greek play was weak and tripped repeatedly on their dialogues. Neelam Ghildyal was too restrained as Jocasta.

This criticism aside, the actors' performances were by and large adequate. Ujjwal Singh Rana, in particular, shone as Oedipus as he displayed a good range of emotions. J N Kaushal's translation was easy on the ears as it gave a good feel of the classic.

# Problems of Survival

## The travails of travel



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Rahul by SRC Rep

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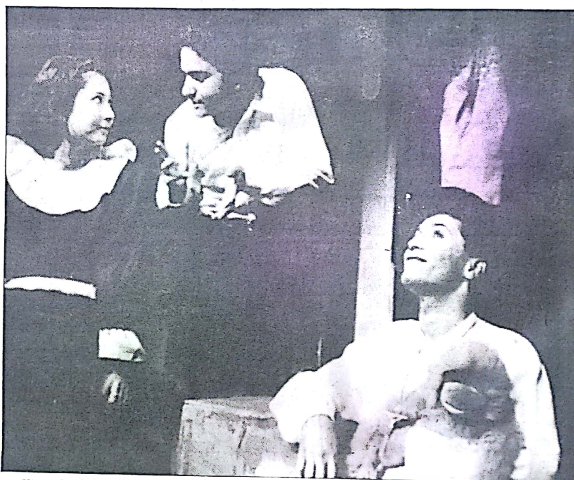
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# Whose Life is it Anyway ? by Manohar Khushalani



