

Mohan Se Mahatma – a review by Manohar Khushalani

As a Part of IIC's 'Festival of the Arts' 2017, Pierrot's Troupe presented 'Mohan Se Mahatma', directed by Sayeed Alam. It was a play about the Champaran Satyagrah, an episode that happened a century ago. It introduced Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi to the Indian rural milieu. The performance was dedicated to the memory of the late Tom Alter, who had played this role, just before he passed away.

Nostalgia Street

by

Manohar Khushalani

Having been associated with Street Theatre from late seventies my memories of Jan Natya Manch are equally old. It was way back in 1977 that I first met Safdar Hashmi. Our group, Workshop Theatre, which was formed after a workshop with Badal Sircar was rehearsing for William Hinton's, Fanshen, a play about communist revolution in a village in China. Safdar had come to meet the late Sudhanshu Mishra. He sat through our rehearsal and gave many suggestions. Our group contained people, most of whom later migrated to Television – Sudhir Mishra, Sushmita Mukherjee, Bina Pal, Anil Mehta. Only Anamika Haksar and I stuck on to theatre. But the two years that we did street theatre were full of intensity. Our most memorable production was Badal Sircar's Bhooma, for which Badal Da himself came specially to Delhi to do a workshop with us. Often people wept in our shows, and so did we, shamelessly,

while performing. Although I was also performing in the Proscenium Arch, this liberty one could only take in a street play. When we came in touch with M.K. Raina, most of Workshop Theatre members opted to work in his Street Production of Julos and later in Spartacus & Mother.

Our first test of our beliefs came when Raina took our performance of Mother to the Brecht International Festival held in Calcutta in 1978. There we were greeted by the biggest floods in the last 100 years of the city. While our street plays dealt with the underdog and deprived sections of society we were confronted with a dilemma. The floods created a pool of neck deep water around the Dharamshala that we stayed in. The water remained for three days and we were holed up on the first floor at the same time that the pavement dwellers were living all around the Dharamshala with their aluminum utensils floating before their eyes . We were helpless – unable to offer them refuge in our own rooms. What kind of street theatre were we doing? We often debated on whether doing plays was enough and whether it should not be supplemented with social work. The answers came much later when Maya Rao, Anuradha Kapoor and myself met by chance at SRC and decided to form Theater Union. Later we co-opted fellow Prayog members like Vinod Dua , Ein Lal and Ragini Prakash, along with women activists like Urvashi Butalia and Sudesh Sehgal.

Our first play was prepared in association with several women's groups. It was called Balatkar Kanoon . The Rape Bill was before a Select Committee, whose recommendation would be considered before it became an Act. We examined the bill, discovered the lacunae as well as the strengths. We created a play which would warn the select committee about the loop holes while educating the common women about their rights as per the Bill. During this play we had an opportunity to interact with social workers who worked in the very communities that we performed in. Needless to say this gave us more satisfaction. Much later TU prepared a play on

Multinational Drug Companies who were dumping in the Third World, all those drugs which were banned in the Developed World. This play we prepared in association with Voluntary Health Association of India and got lot of information from Mira Shiva. This information we used to create an educative play in a comic vein. This play too was a useful supplement for medical workers. We also did our bit by distributing printed literature at the end of the show. However, by now the debate on whether a street theatre group should also do social work had resolved itself. It had now dawned on us that we were performers and we should stick to that. If we created a consciousness in just a few people it would spread to others by conduction.

Some times people had created doubts amongst us about the reach of street theatre. Television was cited as a medium with a greater reach. One still remembers a talk that Safdar Hashmi gave at the Jawahar Lal Nehru University City Auditorium which was so prophetic. At that time few people owned TVs. There was only one Doordarshan channel and no private channels. Hashmi warned that TV will create antisocial vibes. While performing arts are a community affairs and bring many people under one roof the television will divided people by restricting them to their homes. He cited the example of people who visit homes of Television owners. Often the host spoke to his guest by using his ear as his mouth. Since his mouth was turned away as he himself had his eyes glued to Television. Ofcourse he saw a deliberate conspiracy in this and felt that television had been created to divide people, to break up communities and to destroy the collective spirit. So inspired was I by what he said that I went up to the stage to congratulate him.

But the real truth about TV having a greater reach has been resolved in my mind by history. The answer lies in credibility. A human being looking into your eyes and delivering a messages has greater credibility than an electronic media supported by vested interests and money

power. When we did the play against Bride burning, just 200 shows were enough to create Media & Government attention on the issue. Soon the issue was seen everywhere in newspapers on television in and in films. Mera Devan's award winning film on Bride Burning, used our play's sound track interspersed with her own visuals. Theatre Union performed shoulder to shoulder with Jan Natya Manch at many venues. There we got to see each others plays – appreciate and criticise each others work. While Safdar appreciated the choreography and aesthetics of TU productions, he felt that the message was not direct. We felt that Janam plays were hard hitting but some times (not always) there was a poster effect. Though I must say Janam productions have been changing over the years and the last play that I saw looked like a Theatre Union play to me. Since TU had performers who also acted on the proscenium stage our productions were bound to be different. However this I am talking about the eighties. Now Janam has also performed on stage – it is alive and kicking while Theatre Union has gone into hibernation.

I still remember how it was considered a taboo for a street theatre worker to perform on stage. The first time I remember Safdar showing an interest about problems of Proscenium theatre was when the Bombay police act was introduced in Delhi and theatre workers were up in arms against it. Said Hashmi in a seminar specially organised against it; "this was the first step towards government censorship of theatre". I was particularly agitated about it since I felt that police was ill equipped to understand the nuances of theatre. Little did I realise at that time, that in effect, given the usually inefficiency of the official machinery, getting a police license, irritating though it may be, was just another formality to be completed. Also, street theatre, which had the maximum potential of a political irritant was outside the purview of a performance license since these performance were not in an auditorium. Yet Hashmi spoke most ardently followed by M.K. Raina who had a foot in both the boats.

Street theatre does not mean just taking up any issue , assembling a bunch of enthusiasts, and converging the first street corner one comes across. It may take months to write a nukkad natak script. Workshop Theatre took three months to translate Badal Sircar's Bhooma and six months to further evolve the play! An issue may arise from a slum. It may be wife beating, or a drunkard husband, or a middle class dowry problem. It is chosen, by a general consensus, workshop sessions are organised and a script is evolved keeping in mind the target audience. Few people know that Badal Sircar's Juloos has been performed in Pakistan as well. Street theatre has attracted a few people because of the romanticism involved in the whole exercise. Since they are often exposed, the police which never, likes references to its own brutalities, often tries to stop the performances. Sometimes even the audience gets pulled up because of the personal, one to one relationship that this medium tries to establish. When the police tried to stop a performance of Juloos by Prayog at Connaught Place's central park, more than a decade ago, the audience intervened on behalf of the performers and battled with the police. Similarly, during the Emergency, when the police stopped a street performance at Curzon Park, Calcutta, the common people responded by turning up in thousands to watch the same performance the next day. The romanticism, however, wears off after some time. Only a few who are genuinely committed stick to the movement. "If ever you do street theatre, forget that you will be happy, forget that you will be famous, forget that you will be rich," warns Badal Sircar. However, Safdar Hashmi's unfortunate martyrdom has changed all that. "people have become more conscious of a performer's right to perform. But Street Theatre which appeared to be on the decline is bound to rise up again and fight the menaces of social evils. Be it with plays like Janam's unforgettable Aurat or Theatre Union's similarly memorable Toba Tek Singh.

(This Article was first published by Jan Natya Manch and is

being republished to commemorate the IFA event at Studio Safdar titled *An Evening on Street Theatre in Delhi* on Friday, June 23, 2017)

Bharat Rang Mahotsav '16

Synopsis of six plays performed at Bharat Rang Mahotsav '16

The Mother of a Traitor

It was performed in Dollu Kunitha Form. It is one of the popular folk forms of Karnataka. It is generally played during festivals and fairs that take place in the name of respected regional Gods. It is a form of Drum dance where large drums are adorned with colored cloths and hung around the neck of men. The songs used in this dance usually have religious and battle fervour. The main emphasis is on quick and light movements of the feet and legs. It is a short story revolving around the concept of motherhood. The whole region is afraid of a traitor and his group for their menace due to which the life of people has got stuck with the malevolent blackness of their cry. The mother of traitor wanders around the walls of cit in quest of hers son's existence and witness a woman kneeling down in front of her son's corps. The woman says, "May he be accursed and the womb that bore him!" The mother meets her son and her son started expressing pride on his desks. Dealing with the conflict of love for her son on one side and country on the other, she finally kills her son, who is resting on her breasts.

The Transparent Trap

It was a non verbal play. The body language of the actors used was fantastic. Plastic is an important part of our lives. We, humans have used it in almost each and everything except the edible stuff. But we do used it in packing of edible stuff. We used plastic daily because of it's extreme user friendly character. It is one of the prime reasons for global warming and ha skilled many aquatic, terrestrial and amphibian species. One of us invented it and now all of us use it extensively. A material which was invented for betterment and become the killer of humanity itself. This hazardous entity is destroying, choking and trapping all over. This play tries to search for solutions to find way out of plastic trap.

Tar aaya

It is based on introduction of tar roads to a small village in Mysore. The tar roads bring division of opinion between the youth and the more rigid elders of the village, seen as clash of modernity and traditional values. But interestingly, it is the village elders who are in favour of modernity while the young youth fights to keep it at bay. From a simple narrative, the story plunges into diverse issues of caste , religion and the role of women in rural society. The story refuses to submit to traditional defined roles and creates newer perspective of each issue. The nature of the story is inspirational even though it is grounded in reality. Though the ending is quite tragic as in the fight between urbanization and corruption, an innocent child is killed in the molten tar.

Dopehri

Dopehri is set in the streets of Lucknow where sits the haveli of an old lonely woman, Amma Bi. He brings to us her story, stringing us through the emotions and nuances of these characters and the milieu of an old Lucknow. It transports us through Amma Bi's journey from loneliness to self discovery. It is based on the novella written by Pankaj Kapur and now rendered by him on stage, with the help of lights and music.

Nyayapriya

An underground progressive gathering arrangements to kill a British Collector in provincial India. Tej Pratap, a criminal living in Canada, comes and joins the gathering. Shekhar, prevalently called Mastana in the gathering, on seeing kids riding in the British authority's carriage, does not toss the bomb as anticipated the learned day. There is warmed contention in the gathering as a result of this. Damyanti, a senior individual from the gathering, is infatuated with Shekhar. The gathering pioneer Baldev arrangements to toss the bomb two days after the fact. Shekhar is captured after the passing of the Collector. A watchfulness officer tries to purchase off Shekhar in the jail. English gatherer's significant other and Pandit Trivedi visit Shekhar in the jail with the goal that he apologizes. Shekhar is hanged to death. Upon the arrival of the hanging Damyanti, profoundly lamented, chooses to toss the following bomb and endure a comparative destiny.

Land where the Life is Good

Land Where Life Is Good discusses the different personalities that are concealed in the covers of a solitary character called 'Indian'. It tries to take a gander at the disarray that this activity of digestion for nationhood has made in the brains of the present era, particularly with regards to Nagaland. Does there exist a performance personality of a man or would we say we are today the result of numerous characters? What is bona fide – the old or the new? What are the bits of character that we clutched and why do we relinquish different bits? These are a portion of the inquiries that roused this generation. This is an endeavor to address these inquiries through the voyage of a youthful Naga kid – Tako, his unwavering pooch and his mystical performer companion Nogazenba. At no time do we attempt to answer the inquiries raised, on the grounds that for every person, the answers are distinctive.

“In theatre, we create metaphors out of life.”

“In theatre, we create metaphors out of life”: Dr. Chandrashekar Kambar at 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav’s Master Class



New Delhi, 17th February 2016: At the last session of Master Class series, Padmashree Dr. Chandrashekar Kambar honoured the stage of Bahumukh, National School of Drama at 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav. Dr. Kambar is a prominent poet, playwright, director and folklorist. He has written 25 plays, 11 anthologies of poem, 5 novels and 16 research works.

Sharing his journey in the field of theatre, Dr. Kambar said, “India lost its artistic nature during the independence struggle and political disturbance.” Mr. Kambar holds knowledge of the modern theatre in Indian context. Explaining the value of modern theatre, he said, “We have 13 Shakespeare in our regional translations.”

Expressing his thoughts upon folk theatre, Mr. Kambar mentioned, “Folk theatre needs audience participation, not

only actors. Folk theatre is not as sophisticated as modern theatre but the actors emerges from the audiences themselves."When theatre and literature were discussed in the session, Mr.Kambar explained the importance of theatre in its practical context and literature added, "When literature and theatre combines in a perfect harmony, we have drama." Emphasising upon the value of art, Mr Kambar said, "We create metaphors out of our lives in theatre." Mr Kambar also recited his creations of prayer songs at audience demand.

For "Meet the Director",Antarmukh hosted the directors of yesterday's productions: Protarak (Sandip Bhattacharya), The Wild (Thom Pasculli) and Tar Aaya (Pandu Ranga). The directors interacted with the audience about the aspects of play. Explaining the production's behaviour, Thom Pasculli, director of "The Wild", said, "Mine is a laboratory production. It has a nature of wilderness in it. Even the rehearsal room allows the chaos to be present."

NSD's diploma production of "Tar Aaya" Pandu Ranga said, "Dalit literature has always been neglected. Through the adaptation of a story written by a Dalit author, I wanted to highlight its important."

18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav: Plays performed

Plays performed at the 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav on Feb 2, 2016 Play:

Play: **Agnivarsham**

Playwright: Girish Karnad

Director: Dr. Ram Mohan Holagundi

Group: Nishumbita Ballet & Theatre Group, Hyderabad

Language: Telugu

Duration: 2hrs 20mins

The Play

The play is a fictionalized version of the story of Aravasu, Paravasu, Yavakri, Vishakha and Nitilai from Mahabharata. Girish Karnad modulates the actual story to stress the social issue of casteism that existed then, and also to stress on the fact that a dedicated art performance is equal to the vedic yagna done by the brahmins to please the gods. The story revolves around power, love, vengeance and art. In the battle between selfless love and selfish ego the former succeeds. The play ends with a statement that the worth of man is evaluated from his actions and not from the caste he or she is born in.



Glimpse from the play Agnivarsham

□□ Director's Note

The major point which made me decide upon *Agnivarsham* is the ostentatious Hindu hierarchy system which is confronted by the world of performing art screaming that theatre & art is equally important & significant, if not more, in appeasing the Gods to shower rains than the yagnas which are the handiworks of orthodox Hindu civilization, a reality that is menacing even today.

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Play: **Ramayana**

Choreographer: Shanti Bardhan

Group: Ranga Sri Little Ballet Troupe, Bhopal

Language: Hindi

Duration: 1hr 45mins

The Play

This novel composition combines the features of ballet and puppet play. It presents a folkloristic version of the *Ramayana* in the manner of a Rajasthani puppet play. The movements of the actors are stylized; all dancers wear square masks on which faces, crowns and headgears are modeled and painted. They create the illusion of wooden, head-heavy puppets, but through skillful execution give a fantastic animation to the faces. Critics have called this a stroke of genius. The first performance of this play was at the Jai Hind College Hall, Bombay, on the 6th of January, 1953.

The theme of *Ramayana* is aptly introduced in the context of a village fair, with peasants and village-women, milling around in the excitement of the market. The performance begins with Ayodhya celebrating the return of Rama and Lakshmana after Rama's wedding and culminates in the celebration of the victory of Rama over Ravana.



Glimpse of the play Ramayana

Director

Shanti Bardhan (1915-1954) will always be remembered in the history of Indian ballet, as a creative artist who, through his choreographic compositions, gave new direction to the

evolution of dance in India. A gifted dancer, specially trained in the Manipuri and Tipperah schools of dance to which he devoted twelve years of study and practice, Shanti Bardhan was thoroughly acquainted with several other classical and folk dance forms.

He created ballets on many themes, utilizing his vast knowledge and varied training. His ballet *Bhookha Hai Bangal* created a profound stir. India's Struggle for Independence led to the creation of *Spirit of India*, *India Immortal* and *The Discovery of India*, of which the last drew inspiration from Jawaharlal Nehru's book of the same title. In 1952 The Little Ballet Troupe came into being. His mature vision made him choreograph scenes from the *Ramayana* and the *Panchtantra*. The themes were traditional and a part of an age-old cultural heritage. With an unerring insight of a genius, Shanti Bardhan shed the religious superstructure of the *Ramayana* story and transformed it into a simple human story of universal significance. In his treatment of the *Panchtantra*, fables in which birds and beasts live human situations, the stage again presented that piquant blend of realism and phantasy, which is perhaps the real source of the power of ballet as an art form.

His untimely death was a tragic loss to the contemporary movement in Indian dance. But his work lives on and is a great source of joy to all.

Play: **Antigone**

Playwright: Sophocles

Translator: Sisir Kumar Das

Director: Koushik Sen

Group: Swapna Sandhani

Language: Bengali

Duration: 2hrs

The Play

Upon her arrival in Thebes, Antigone learns that both her brothers are dead. Eteocles has been given a proper burial, but Creon, Antigone's uncle who has inherited the throne, has issued a royal edict banning the burial of Polynices, who he believes was a traitor. Antigone defies the law, buries her brother, and is caught. When Creon locks her away in prison, she kills herself. Meanwhile, not realizing Antigone has taken her own life, the blind prophet Teiresias, Creon's son, and Antigone's fiancé Haemon, and the Chorus plead with Creon to release her. Creon finally relents, but finds her dead in her jail cell. Out of despair, Haemon and Creon's wife kill themselves, and Creon is left in distress and sorrow.



Glimpse of the play Antigone

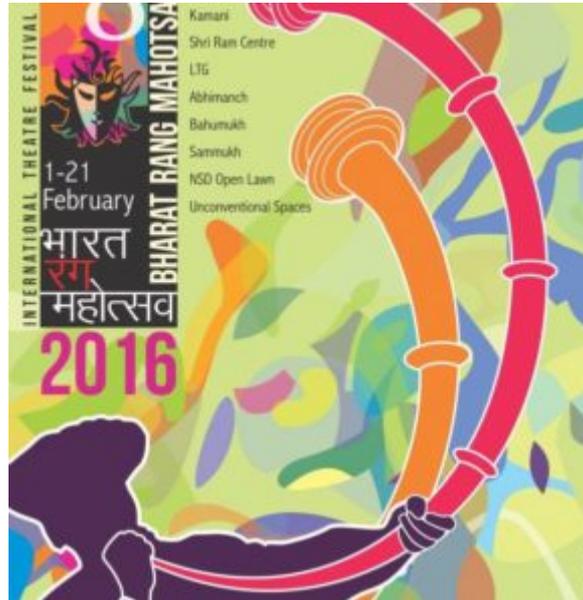
Director's Note

While working with Antigone I have wondered a million times why a thousand-year old play still holds relevance. Is it because of its literary excellence or is it because of the writer's wisdom to foresee the times to come... the wisdom which saw that hatred will never cease to exist even when decades and centuries go by and man's hunger for power will bring darkness even before sunset... and will be darker than any night.

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18TH BHARAT RANG MAHOTSAV

18TH BHARAT RANG MAHOTSAV KICKS OFF IN GRAND STYLE



National School of Drama's international theatre festival is underway

- NSD's 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav is being held in New Delhi from February 1 to February 21, 2016.
- More than 10 countries from around the world with almost all the states of India to come together to showcase their best theatre talent.
- 'World Theatre Forum' to be a part of BRM, where eminent theatre personalities from various countries will come together.
- Some of the finest names in the theatre world, including Nana Patekar, Mohan Agashe Pankaj Kapur, Anupam Kher, Paresh Rawal, Saurabh Shukla, among others to be a part of the festival
- BRM to also travel to Jammu, Ahmedabad, Bhubaneswar and Thiruvananthapuram this year

The 18th Bharat Rang Mahotsav commenced today in the capital with great fanfare. National School of Drama's flagship festival, which is one of the biggest theatre festivals in the world, is being held in New Delhi from 1st to 21st February 2016.

The inaugural ceremony took place in the presence of Shri N K Sinha, Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India, while eminent stage and film personality Mr. Nana Patekar was the Guest of Honour. The evening was presided by Shri Ratan Thiyam, Chairperson, NSD Society and Prof. Waman Kendre, Director, National School of Drama was also present on the occasion. The inauguration was followed by the performance of MACBETH in Manipuri by Chorus Repertory Theatre, and directed by Shri Ratan Thiyam.

Bharat Rang Mahotsav this year promises to be bigger and better than ever with theatre groups from over 10 countries including **USA, Australia, Italy, Sri Lanka, Poland, Bangladesh, Spain, China, Pakistan, Austria**. Some of the finest names in the theatre world from India and abroad are set to be a part of the festival. The biggest theatre groups from almost all the states of India will also travel to showcase their talent at the festival. In a bid to promote theatre in other parts of the country as well, Bharat Rang Mahotsav will also be held at **Jammu** (Jammu and Kashmir), **Ahmedabad** (Gujarat), **Thiruvananthapuram** (Kerala), and **Bhubaneswar** (Odisha).

The performances will be held at Abhimanch and Open Air Theatre at the NSD Campus along with LTG Auditorium, Kamani Auditorium and Shri Ram Centre in New Delhi. Tickets will be available at NSD box office and at the website <http://eticket.nsd.gov.in/> in denominations of Rs. 50 and Rs. 100 at Open Air Theatre; and Rs. 50, Rs. 100, Rs. 200 and Rs. 300 at all other venues.

Independent Study on Folk Theatre by Ishita Ahlawat and Mansi Panwar

FOLK THEATER

Folk Theater is a Theater which originated, evolved among and has been transmitted through the common people. Its relationship with the common people is deep, multiple and multi layered. It carries within it the entire culture with all its social religious institutions. We find reflection of customs, rituals and beliefs of common people. It aims at common man, the common man is emotionally and intellectually involved with this Theater, for him the Theater is not something external or superficial. It is part of his tradition with which he has lived for generations. Italo Calvino's define folk Theater India Today: Folk Theater is "a work which persists as background noise even when a present that is totally incompatible with it holds sway".

HISTORY

According to some historians, it was during the 15th and 16th century that folk Theater emerged in local dialects in different regions, and the themes it borrowed were Sanskrit epics and the Puranas, historical events, local folk tales of romance and bravery and biographical accounts of local heroes. The traditions of Indian folk Theater are not fully documented, for they stretch back into distant prehistory right from aboriginal cave dwellers who have left some record of their Theater in the form of wall and cave paintings. Even

Buddhist and Vedic literature-works such as Arthashastra- tell art historians about rich traditions of Indian folk Theater. The classical and regional forms of Theater revolved around religion, legends and myths. There are indications of the impact of folk Theater even on the classical Sanskrit Theater. It thus became imperative to include Sanskrit Theater in this issue.

TYPES OF FOLK THEATER

- Jatra of Bengal
- Nautanki
- Ramlila of North India
- Raslila of North India
- Bhavai of Gujarat
- Tamasha of Maharashtra
- Terrakoothu of Tamilnadu
- Yakshagana of Karnataka
- Chhau of seraikella







MY CONTRIBUTION

I went to “Bharat Rang Mahotsav“15” which takes place in National School of Drama. I attended few folk plays there and out of all the plays following are the two I liked most.

PANDWANI (DUSHASHAN VADH)



'Pandwani' is a form of play from Chhattisgarh. The Director of the play is Teejan Bai. It depicts the story of the Pandavas, the leading characters in the epic Mahabharata.

It is narrated in a very lively form. The lead artist narrated one episode after another from the epic in a very forceful manner. She enacted the characters in the scenes to produce a more realistic effect. Occasionally, she also breaks out into a dance movement. During the performance she even sang along the rhythm produced by the ektara held in his hand.

There are two styles of narration in Pandwani; 'Vedamati' and 'Kapalik'. In the Vedamati style the lead artist narrates in a simple manner by sitting on the floor throughout the performance. The Kapalik style is livelier, where the narrator actually enacts the scenes and characters. Teejan Bai has been the most popular artist of the Kapalik style in the past five decades.

MADALYA

This form of play is from Gujarat the following three skits were performed. The very first script was on socio-economic aspects of the forest-based agrarian society. The tribes believed that the forest belonged to them and no-one else. Not even the government had any right over it. But British took control of the forest with the Forest Law of 1842, prohibiting the free usage of forest by natives. This skit was created in order to express the anger and protest against the law.

Another play performed was Sautish; Sautish in Dangi translates as 'Sautan' in Hindi or Polygamy. Polygamy was not socially accepted by a large part of the society. This skit in the most hilarious way portrayed the position of a husband with two wives. This universal story of a man with two women

and their eternal quarrels remains the same for each society.

The last one was; Vagh-bokadi. It was quite common to encounter wild animals like tigers and bears in Dangs. Many a times they lost their cattle too. This skit refers to the everyday presence of wild animals in Dangi life and how they bump into these animals. Vaghdev was feared and yet worshipped. These contradictory emotions of love and fear are expressed in this skit. It is a comedy depicting an incident of a tiger eating the wandering goat of a careless Dangi farmer.

BHAVAI

Bhavai is the folk Theater of Gujarat, the homeland of Mahatma Gandhi. Backward inhibited the people are known for their shrewd business acumen. The rich and middle class are colorless. But the farmers, craftsmen, village artisans, poor and less inhibited bring color to their folk arts.

Gujarat state has two extremes. The upper class are prudish and preach and puritanism. The lower strata derive energy from the worship of Amba Mata, the Goddess of Power. The bhavai is performed during Navratri in form of shrine of Amba Mata. The players are convinced that the goddess attends the performance. That word bhavai has several interpretations. 'Bhav' means 'life' , 'bhava' means 'sentiments' and 'vai' means 'carrier' or a 'diary'. So bhavai could mean "carrier of life" or "expressive of sentiment" or "diary of life".



HISTORY

It was started in the early fifteenth century by Asita Thakur. A Brahmin of the Audichya Clan. He recited scriptures singing the texts and explaining their meaning to the devotees in the precincts of a temple in town of Sidhpur. An unusual incident turned Asatia into the originator of a new form of drama. Ganga beautiful daughter of the farmer of a neighbouring village was abducted by Muslim Chief. The villagers were infuriated, but no one dared challenge the Muslim Chief. Asaita Thakar went to him and pleased him with his singing. In return he asked him to set Ganga free, claiming that she is his daughter. The Chief knowing that Hindu orthodoxy did not allow a Brahmin to eat from the same plate as a farmer's daughter put the poet singer to the test and asked him to eat with Ganga. Asaita ate and thus brought her back, but he was ostracized by his community. This turned him against Brahmins. He left with his three sons and decided to earn his living by singing and acting. He composed play let's attacking social injustice, prudery and the caste system.

The three sons were boycotted by the society, their families were called 'Trigala'. Today trigala is itself a caste and inheritor of Bhavai. The village headmen were grateful to Asaita and promised that in future

village headmen would look after the needs of Asaita's son and grandsons wherever they performed.

Asaita's plays are an integral part of every troupe's repertoire. A famous one is 'Joothan Mian, others are Kajora, Chhail Batau etc.

In spite of the deep devotion of its players to the goddess, the bhavai is secular at its roots. Its jokes, dances, themes and songs deal with the life of common people. Mythological heroes are rare. It is the saucy maid, the miserly merchant, the betraying wife, the romantic stranger, the lascivious old man, the braggart, who regale the audiences.

PERFORMANCE

A Bhavai troupe consists of fourteen people, the Naik who is the director, stage manager and the leader of the party, who holds license to perform on other districts. The two male actors (Veshgor and Veshacharya) playing the hero and the secondary hero, the female actors (Kanchaliyas) of heroin and secondary heroine, the clown (Rangalo) and the instrumentalists. The troupe members are expected to observe celibacy for six months during performance time. Hindus generally believe that celibacy contributes to willpower and physical energy.

The Bhavai, like Tamasha is down to Earth. Women do not go to see it and this allows actors more freedom in vulgar jokes, abuses and off colour remarks. The women in Gujarat observe purdah an influence of century's old Muslim rule and Hindu orthodoxy. She draws ghunghat across her face and looks through the fine muslin or silk as she talks. She speaks even to her husband behind the veil. Because of her purdah, men always take part of women in the Bhavai.

The lamp is placed on two bricks near the wall on which Amba Mata's trishul (trident) is symbolically drawn with the white dots around it. The actors pass their hands over their eyes

and foreheads to incorporate light. The sputtering lamp is the incarnation of Amba Mata. A symbol of power, it gives light and dispels darkness. The actors worship it. They put incense, fruits, camphor and coconut in front of it.

After putting on their makeup, the players sing a devotional song, garbi, invoking the goddess, and then walk to the arena, where the Naik draws a circle with a ten foot radius on the ground using the point of his sword. This is the acting area (pauhd or chachar), sacred place only the performers can enter it. The actors and singers sitting in the pauhd sing 5 devotional songs Then they rise and invoke the mother.

The instrumentalists are placed on one side. The Pakhawaj has a drum slung horizontally around his neck. The narghan player has a pair of small drums tied around his waist, and he plays them standing. One man jingles the sarangi, producing the subtlest undertones and overtones. The cymbal player adds metallic rhythm and clang. The most dramatic and unusual instrument is bhungal, a five foot long pipe with the tapering mouthpiece and a large bell shaped end. The bhungal folds up like a telescope. Its trumpet like sound is used for entries, exits and climaxes. The two bhungal players must have good breath control and stamina.

When the first invocation is sung, only the bhungal notes accompany it. No drum or cymbal is allowed. No one dances. Everyone is in meditation. During the invocation all the players are in pauhd. The actors who are part of subsequent scene suddenly disappear. The actors slip into the dressing room in turn as their cues approach. Other actors are part of chorus. Every one of them can sing and dance and can play an instrument.

After this God Ganesha is invoked. The actor playing role of Ganesha wears ankle bells, a yellow silk dhoti, a silk jacket, garlands, and a cap. He holds a shining brass plate and moves

it horizontally and vertically before his plate. The brass plate is there to hide his face since no one is expected to impersonate Ganesha.

When the prayer to Ganesha is over, The village barber walks through the passage carrying a big brass torch. In olden times the torch was invariably of silver if the Bhavai troupe was prosperous. When an important character is to strike a pose, the barber promptly rushes to him with his flaming torch and moves along with him, highlighting his facial expressions.

The performance starts about 9 in the evening and continues until eleven in the following morning. A sequence of dialogue completing a thought process or an incident is marked by a brisk dance phrase. The Naik speaks out the drum syllables: tata-thai thai, tata-thai thai, tata thai ta. The characters dance to the rhythmic syllables which are repeated three times. This breaks the monotony of the spoken word and stitches together the rambling dialogue.

COSTUME, MAKUP and PROPS

Each character carries his own costume and does his own make up. The colours mostly used in makeup are white, red and black.

The characters of humbler social status like a barber, a farmer, a merchant, a scavenger or a gardener do not use any makeup or period costumes. Kings and Chiefs have exaggerated moustaches, eyebrows and a faint reddish paint over their face. A king's costume is a mixture of the Mughal and the local Gujarati folk style. The tunic is tight at the waist and flares below. The pyjamas are narrow at the calves and bulge at the thighs.

The Brahmin is dressed in a thin, red bordered white dhoti. The sacred thread (janiyau) runs from his left shoulder across his bare chest down to his waist at the right. On his forehead

three lines of sandalwood paste with two crimson spots in the centre. Wearing a tilted cap on his close shaven head, he carries a brass jug in his hand and scriptures under his arm.

The actors have very few costume changes. The same actors may play different characters. By tilting their turban, changing his gait, changing position of the scarf etc.

MADALYA

Another folk form of Gujarat. The term Madalya is derived from Madal, a large tribal percussion instrument, similar to dhol. Madalya plays central role in the play. This form is thus named after it.

The body language, gestures as well as movements of the body are self-expressive. The imaginative use of makeup is really impressive.

HISTORY

The Dangi is a small district located in southern Gujarat. It shares more than 50% of the border with Maharashtra and this has influenced its culture and language a lot. Dangi is a tiny forest area. However from 1818 onwards, it came under the British. The British had realised importance of its rich forests of teak and bamboo and wanted to exploit these. Until this arrival the dangs were divided under four rulers of the tribe of Bhils, the original inhabitants of this area.

In order to own the forests, British struck a deal with these kings. They were given a meagre 'privy purses' in exchange for the ownership of the forests. The property rights of the forests were transferred to the Indian Government after Independence.

The transfer of forests did not affect Dangi's much at first.

But later on the restrictions imposed by the British authorities and subsequently by the Indian Government too, brought it home to them that they no longer had any rights on the forest produce. This irritated the Dangis. These tribes indulged in their traditional habits of cutting the trees etc. This seemed to flout the 'rights' and 'laws' of authorities, who then beat them, punished them and even jailed them at times. They were doing what they had been doing for centuries. But that was no longer legal and so the chastisements. This disrupted their understanding and they could not reconcile to the new phase of life. This led to irritation and resentment against these restrictions, for these affected their sources of income adversely too. It was the forest department which was earning profit from the forest produce instead of them, and they turned into mere labours for the forest department.

The Bhils felt displaced and alienated in their own land. Their anger and frustration, resentment and protestations found expression in Theater. The Madalya form proved a proper medium for airing their helplessness and resentment against the new set-up. It has an innate strength of expressions and can communicate their innermost feelings, thoughts using humour and laughter to bring the message to fore.

This form has the capacity to advocate the social changes needed in their own society by exposing its evil practices. Several skits reveal the major characteristics of the socioeconomic life of the Dangis as it used to be and how it was jeopardized. Madalya form of Theater acted as a 'safety value' to let off their steam of frustration and resentment which otherwise could have resulted in open rebellion.

PERFORMANCE

Madalya is a night long affair. It is performed from late evening to nearly early morning. The audience

surrounds the performing area and the actors face in all the directions. In an open plot, the vesh is performed with lightning provided by the petromax lamps or torches or electricity if available.

A Madalya team belongs to a village and is named after that village. The performers are usually numbered between 14 and 20 with 4-6 Madal players, 2-3 Gamars (lead singers), 5-7 Chorus singers, 1-2 Sohngis one Rambha Patra (female character) and one Sutradhar or Patil. Four to six huge Madal drums are used simultaneously in Madalya. The performance is inaugurated by the Madal players, The singers stand in either a straight line or in a semi-circle. They open the performance by Naman Geet, a kind of prayer to Ramdev, Mahadev, Krishna's Dwarka, Unaidevi, Pandavas etc. The Madal drum players give the beats and also dance in rhythm in a linear or circular movement. The movement patterns are of seven types and these are selected according to the skit. Madal has to be played in a particular taal. There are three basic taals Thirsya, Dobing and Madal. The Thirsya taal is used at the times of marriages and is similar to Dadra Taal of Indian music. Dobing taal is used when the Madalis are playing the drum and dancing. The Madal Taal is most frequently used like when the performance begins.

The lead singer or singers (Ganar) sing the songs and the chorus repeat the lines together, The song gives a brief idea of what is to follow in the next phase of performance or another skit that would be coming up.

One can recognize this Theater form not only by the madal drum but also some typical arrangements of characters in them. The common characters are Sohngi (Vidushak or the fool), Gandey Natwa (Sutradhar or Patil) and Rambha Patra (female character) played by men only.

COSTUMES, MAKEUP and PROPS

It is interesting to note the costumes and makeup in this character, as they are prominent by their simplicity and sometimes totally without any special provision. Sohngai wears only a loincloth, the usual dress of Dangi. Others may wear pants and shirts. Patil wears a shirt and dhoti along with a cap to show his power. The Rambha Patra wears a saree and blouse, sometimes jewellery too and always covers his head with the loose end of the saree.

Make-up is also minimal and used only to heighten expressions. The usual theatrical make-up is not used at all. Some sohngis paint their chest and face with soot and lamp black. A beard made of string of jute is used to indicate old man, old woman. Dark glasses, tiger masks, artificial moustaches are used to and when needed in a skit.

Kudkas is an instrument to indicate the power of the Patil who uses to hit the Sohngi for his pranks throughout the vesh. Other props are adapted from whatever material is at the hand. Even human bodies are made use of. For example, they substitute logs by rolling human bodies or men arrange themselves in such a fashion that we can see a stone wall made of them.

CLASSIFICATION

Madalya Vesh can be classified based on the themes into

- Social
- Nature- Related
- Protest
- Occupational

The Social Skits deal with the problems of their own community. These are full of humour and laughter even when sarcastic. Popular social skits are Be Bairi no vesh (Tale of two wives) and Pahana (Guest) Environment being an integral part of their lives, it is seen in their vesh too. For

instance, in Wagh Bakdi , The goat of Sohangi is eaten up by a tiger in the forest. Such incidents are common in their lives. This experience was converted into comedy of errors. It is a popular skit.

Rebellion against authorities is strongly expressed. When the tribals lost control over their forests, the restrictions imposed by the authorities were resented by the Dangis and they voiced their protest through Theater.

Some themes are even related to special occupations that are connected with environmental needs such as hunting, castration of oxen, grazing cattle, goats in the jungle The occupational hazards the face are also shown in a way that generates laughter in the audience.

There are few skits that are both related to occupation and nature. For instance, skits of Harpin and Murain revolve around female characters that have to go into the jungle due to their occupation or duty.

Undoubtedly, Madalya Theater provides interesting entertainment and voices the feelings of Dangis very well. But it's not that popular now. Modern sources of entertainment such as television, radio and films make Theater no longer thrilling or enjoyable. A small number of scripts repeated over time, also lose power to entertain the new generation of Dangis. Especially when no new skits are coming forth. It is an all-night affair but now-a-days people prefer spending their night time with television.

Even the visual attraction is lacking in this Theater. as their costumes remained simple. It does not have mythological or epic stories that find acceptance even in the modern times. The artists so not have a good income from their performances, this also discourages the new generation from joining the team of their village and continuing the art. The advent of other forms like Tamasha

from Maharashtra, diminished the popularity of Maharashtra. The music of Tamasha is based on Hindi films which attracts large crowd.

Utpala Desai has written in Horizon'03 " In spite of such a strong capacity and structure, this form of Theater has not received the attention it deserves. If taken seriously it can be a competition to even modern Indian Theater. I think because it makes no little use of props. It lets imagination run riot and achieves easily aim of all performing arts where the audience feels one with the performers. It is high time that we study this form and develop it so that it receives acceptance and gives us an opportunity explore another form of folk entertainment. Instead of treating it as a museum piece, it should be brought to life with new techniques and themes of current interest and shouldn't be left to die, as we have done with so many other inherited art forms."

TRADITIONAL THEATER OF INDIA – CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

It is believed that Theater and drama are gift of west to India. We have some popular entertainments like Nautanki or the Jatra but these had little to do with drama which was introduced by British. Indian Drama is more of dramatic poetry even that had become extinct and was rediscovered for India by the western scholars. Nothing could be further more truth.

The distinctiveness of Indian Theater tradition in the dramatic cultures of the world- its antiquity as well as its imaginative and aesthetic quality is more or less indisputable today. The roots of Theater in our country are very old and deep. It had undergone wide ranging, fundamental changes during the last two to three thousand years.

It can be safely asserted that some kind of theatrical activity with elements of music, dance, acting had been in vogue in the country for at least a thousand years before

the Christian era. With the appearance of more favourable socio-cultural conditions, it gradually acquired more regular and complex forms, such as those of Sanskrit drama and Theater from sixth to fourth century B.C. Thus began that fascinating period of the unique flowering and achievements of the Indian dramatic tradition.

In this new phase plays of different kinds, styles and artistic excellence were written in Sanskrit, the language of literary expressions of that time. Many innovative and often highly sophisticated styles for the presentation of those plays were also developed. This burst of energy was not confined to creative exploration dramatic writing and staging.

But this Theater, established on such a strong base of theory and practice had disintegrated gradually by 10th century A.D. There are many reasons for this decline: social and political instability created by foreign invasion and internal conflicts, loss of creative energy in the Sanskrit language gradually confined to a small elite, fall in the standard of dramatic writing due to lack of talent, loss of appeal for common spectators too. And this Theater gave way to another Theater tradition that flowered in different regions of India.

We thus came to the next phase of Indian Theater which took place not in Sanskrit but in different regional languages carrying with the distinct social, cultural, literary milieu and flavour of each region. This phase of Indian Theater is spread over a period of about one thousand years, and many of its strands and forms have continued up to the present day. The activity in this entire phase is often called 'folk Theater' today, because unlike the town based classical Sanskrit Theater it has flourished in the countryside.

A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

If one were to look for a gender identity for theatrical forms, then clearly folk Theater would be feminine as against

the masculine classical form. As Rubees observes, "a feminist dramaturgical aesthetic spurns these structures based on conflict and resolution. Where everything gets built up to one screaming point and then everything is released. Women often write in waves, repeated climaxes, collages.."

Despite the ongoing efforts of groups of women in India to Indianize the feminist movement, the popular conception of the term Feminism remains both ignorant and imitative. Sociological studies outline a movement that is at best skeletal, too amorphous and rambling to have any meaningful impact in any but a sporadic way. Most importantly, the reach of feminism is restricted to an urban upper class. India's urban rural divide intensifies the problem of disparity between women of varied socio economic backgrounds, problematized further by the aspect of caste. Women's class „economic grounding, family and geographical locations" have a direct bearing on their intellectual leanings. Work is not a common yardstick of liberation for urban and rural sisters. For a woman belonging to the elite class, a job spells economic independence and therefore liberation while for rural women belonging to the lower classes; work is a reminder of their economic bondage. Gender in their context is not a distinguishing factor since both sexes have an economic responsibility to fulfil. The status and position of women within the Indian patriarchal system however, leaves a lot to be desired. If Indian society is to become truly modern and progressive, the concept of equal rights and awareness of social realities must reach all women but particularly rural women who are the most exploited. For the feminist quest, folk Theater displays an almost natural propensity. When compared, the features of the sub genres of folk Theater and feminist Theater (as it exists in the West) divulge a large number of similarities in both form and structure. The parallels between folk Theater and the feminist quest are undeniable. Balwant Gargi in Folk Theater of India listed out

certain characteristics of folk Theater. He stated that some precepts of folk Theater remain common, regardless of state and cultural identity. Primarily rural, it is rustic, unselfconscious, spontaneous and boisterously naïve. Folk Theater does not offer a slice of life, but a panoramic view of existence and elicits enthusiastic audience participation.

Ann Saddlemyer, eminent feminist critic, says of Feminist Theater, "that's how our art should be all encompassing, sucking in, surrounding, embracing, not linear, not clear cut, not sequential...film, slides, music, puppets actresses, dancers, everywhere on top of you., below you, around you. That would be women's Theater•a circus feeling throughout the play, a circus that people could enter. Ideologically then, there is a definite match but structurally too, similarities between folk Theater and feminist Theater are too many to ignore. Both defy the linearity of time and space favored by classical (male) Theater, in an effort to achieve timelessness. Both refrain from the concept of linear time and may build up a montage of varied dramatic episodes. Because both are performed by the marginalized, there might be a paucity of funds, so the same set is often transformed via word or action. Props are also minimal. Furthermore, the actor/character is chameleon•like. One actor sometimes plays several roles. The feminist protagonist plays several roles to heighten the sense of female perspective of various incidents. Feminist Theater by definition is drama that embraces transformation, inspires and asserts the possibility for change. Its emphasis on role playing implies that we (human beings) are what we do and what we become and that no one, neither man nor woman, is restricted from becoming the other.

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Theatre – The Way Forward : A discussion between Prof. Waman Kendre (NSD) and Prof. Manohar Khushalani

17th Bharat Rang Mahotsav – A Report



Bharat Rang Mahotsav was established a decade ago by the National School of Drama to stimulate the growth and

development of theatre across the country. Originally a national festival showcasing the work of the most creative theatre workers in India, it has evolved to international scope, hosting theatre companies from around the world, and is now the largest theatre festival of Asia. The 17th Mahotsav included several national and international performances, and various associated events in a wrap-around program.

[Click here for the list of plays.](#)

AN ENEMY OF THE PEOPLE

The Play

Dr. Stockmann discovers that the source of drinking and spa water is riddled with pathogenic micro-organisms, caused by industrial effluence. Stockmann wants to publish the findings in the newspaper and demands that the city council re-route the water pipes. Influential citizens and local journalists promise their support. However, his brother Peter, the councilor of the city, raises some serious concerns. The economic prosperity of the spa town will be threatened and the citizens will have to bear the brunt of the high repair costs. Suddenly the support for Stockman from the town's policymakers begins to wane. They spread seeds of doubt about his plans and try to cover up the fact of the contaminated water. But Stockmann insists on transparency and intends to go public on the matter. In an all-important speech, he hopes to win the town over to his way of thinking. He accepts that this will cause a permanent rift between himself and his brother and that he also runs the risk of being ostracized by the community. For him the affair has long since ceased to be about the polluted health spa, his target is society as a

whole. Ibsen's drama wavers on a fine line between honesty and fanaticism. What is the potential for transparency in a commercialized society?

The Director

Thomas Ostermeier was born in 1968 in Soltau. He spent his youth in Landshut. From 1992 to 1996 he studied directing at the Ernst Busch Academy of Dramatic Art Berlin. From 1996 to 1999 Ostermeier was Artistic Director of the Baracke at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin.

Since September 1999 Ostermeier is a member of the Artistic Direction and Resident Director of the Schaubühne. He has been awarded with numerous international prizes. Ostermeier has been appointed Officier des Arts et des Lettres by the French Ministry of Culture. In 2010 he was announced as president of the German-French Council of Culture. His productions are touring worldwide and have been shown in cities such as Adelaide, Athens, Avignon, Barcelona, Bordeaux, Brussels, Caracas, Copenhagen, Dublin, Hong Kong, Krakow, Lisbon, London, Madrid, Marseille, Melbourne, Moscow, Naples, New York, Omsk, Oslo, Ottawa, Paris, Prague, Québec, Reims, Rennes, Seoul, Sydney, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo, Venice and Vienna.

Playwright

Henrik Johan Ibsen (20 March 1828 – 23 May 1906) was a major 19th-century Norwegian playwright, theatre director, and poet. He is often referred to as "the father of realism" and is one of the founders of Modernism in theatre. His major works include *Brand*, *Peer Gynt*, *An Enemy of the People*, *Emperor and Galilean*, *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler*, *Ghosts*, *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, and *The Master Builder*. He is the most frequently performed dramatist in the world after Shakespeare, and *A Doll's House* became the world's

most performed play in early 20th century.

The Group

The Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz was founded in 1962. Since 1999 it has been led by artistic director Thomas Ostermeier. The foundation of his tenure was laid in the formation of a new ensemble of permanently employed actors, who essentially have been working together ever since, regularly extended by new appointments. The Schaubühne premieres a minimum of ten shows per season alongside a repertoire of over 30 existing productions.