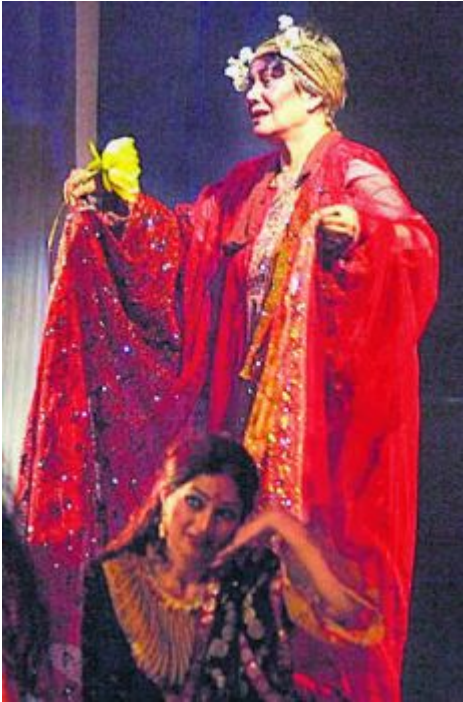


# NATI BINODINI steals the show at Bharat Rang Mahotsav



*Nati Binodini*, presented at Kamani in January 2008 in the **NSD Theatre Utsav 2008** by **Theatre and Television Associates**, New Delhi, Directed by Amal Allana received a standing ovation and was one of the landmark plays of the fest along with Kewal Dahliwal's *Yatra*. Girish Ghosh, Binodini's Mentor and Theatre Director was brilliantly portrayed by Jayanto Das with his earthy and authentic performance style. The performance of the protagonist was rendered simultaneously by five actresses: Salima Raza, Swaroopa Ghosh, Natasha Rastogi, Sonam Kalra and Amita Ailawadi. Each one of them represented different ages and stages of the Nati's life. Salima Raza enthralled the audience with her virtuoso performance and her remarkable stage presence. Nissar Allana's Moving Venetian Blind style of backdrops with projected images and Glass floor gave the production a kind of slickness that only Nissar can create.

The play opens with the five actresses dressed in white hooded sarees creating a remarkable visual composition. The actresses

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

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

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# The partition play, YATRA, moves Bharangam audiences



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

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

At the end of the show with audience applauding quite a few of them holding lighted candles of peace and brotherhood in their hands. When Madiha Gauhar asked them if they knew which actors were from India and which ones were from Pakistan, they all said in unison "we don't even want to know." Such was the extent to which the audience had been moved by the depth and

emotions of the poetry and the fluidly conceived choreography.

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

### **Cast and Credits**

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

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

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