

Close to cloud nine

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Directed by Manohar Khushalani and produced by Pierrot's Troupe, the play unveils the practices of the royal Moghuls inside the palaces – intrigues, gullibility, bargaining, wisdom or lack of it. They are all revealed as the protagonist Shah Jahan (read by Manohar Khushalani and S. Somasundaram) his wife Mumtaz Mahal (Mala Kumar and Joya John) and Jahangir (Manish Manoj and Noor Jahan (Joya) engage in talks focussed on the throne of Delhi. The English play opens with eight actors on the dais reading out their parts. Some dialogues are delivered against recorded melodious music, of either a shehnai, or a piece of raga by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. It all starts with Jahangir coaxing Shah Jahan to drink. Shah is hesitant for it is prohibited in Islam, but he must please him.

All for the throne

Each time Jahangir promises Shah the throne but ends up discussing "thousands of problems failing the empire". Here, a loving but scheming Mumtaz Mahal must play a role. She knows that Noorjahan wants to marry off her daughter from the first marriage to Pervez and wants Pervez to get the throne. She must employ a Jesuit Priest and a physician (Sanyam) to kill Purvez and fake Shah's death, to be in the royal palace. "You a genius", Shah flatters her of her role. And she must ask something for return of her genius. It should be no less than a throne. This magnificent play, with marvellous readers transported the audience to the bygone era. One could easily ignore Shah Jahan wearing the crown from the wrong side, or

Jahangir sporting reading glasses with the crown, or if Noor Jahan or Mumtaz Mahal had modern, short cut hair. Even no decoration on the stage proved to be blessing in disguise for it attracted the audience attention to the readers. Unfortunately, this remarkable play saw a thin attendance!

RANA SIDDIQUI, THE HINDU metroplus, Monday, March 3, 2008

EARLIER REVIEWS OF THE LONDON SHOWS

‘Authentic... makes fascinating theatre, a combination of traditional Indian gestures and attitudes expressed in terms of modern Western dramatic techniques.’ **Rosemary Say, Financial Times**

‘An elegant chronicle-play... expressed in lucid prose and graceful tableaux modelled on Moghul paintings.’ **D.A.N. Jones, Listener**

Saeed Jaffery’s career is believed to have flourished in the U.K. with this play and so did Roshan Seth’s. In London, it was discussed on the lines of Shakespearean plays. Now, “To Anchor a Cloud” comes to India. Rana Siddiqui, **The Hindu**.

The Mock Doctor

Moliere’s Play
THE MOCK DOCTOR

(A Comedy)

Enacted by

MANOHAR KHUSHALANI

Hindustan Times

Khushalani redeems the show

...Mock Doctor presented at the Shri Ram Center was inventive in stage design and very attractive in its main actor – Manohar Khushalani.....

The perfect timing and rapport between actors Manohar and P. Mukherji in the sequence suddenly lifted the play and enthused the onlookers.....

But all said and done without Khushalani's superb effort the play would have collapsed

Kavita Nagpal



National Herald

Adaptation well adapted

Manohar Khushalani as Chander – the main character – was direct clear and played the part effortlessly. His broken-tooth smile suits very well the character of a country bumpkin who loves the bottle and beats his wife after a bout with Lord Bachhus

Drama Critic

National Herald, 16th August 1980

Close to Cloud Nine

Online Review

of

DILIP HIRO'S Play
TO ANCHOR A CLOUD

(A Play about Inspiration for the **Taj Mahal**)

Directed by

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Hot N Happening

Epic play about women and war



[L to R]: Rashmi Vaidyalingam, Charu Malhotra, Nidhi Sharma, Shreya Sharma and Manohar Khushalani

The play “Kurukshetra and After” is a powerful and vivid portrayal on the theme of women and war. It addresses the impact that war has on the lives of women and their struggle to come to terms with its aftermath. It is being presented for Delhi Tourism by “Stage Buzz” a new Theatre Group with a progressive outlook, on December 11 and 12 at SRC auditorium, Mandi House.

As December 12 is Delhi Tourism day, the show is likely to be graced by Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit. The play is being directed by the well known Theatre Actor/Director and Critic, Manohar Khushalani.

As a member of Theatre Union, Khushalani had taken up major social issues such as dowry, bride burning, Sati and drugs as themes of street plays.

Dario Fo’s ‘Accidental Death of an Anarchist’ and ‘Can’t Pay Won’t Pay’, both directed by Manohar Khushalani, received rave notices from critics and audiences alike. An all women play, Kurukshetra and After, has been written by Suryakanthi Tripathi who is the Director General of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations. It has five women characters played by experienced actresses – Rashmi Vaidyalingam Charu Malhotra,

Ruchita Puri, Nidhi Sharma and Shreya Sharma, each of them brings to her role both the poignancy and the innate courage of the characters that they portray. While it is based on the aftermath of the Kurukshetra war

in the Mahabharata, it deals with the impact of war on women, and has powerful social relevance in the diverse situations that women find themselves in even today.

The script has a powerful poetic format that lends itself to a contemporary rendition yet retaining the epic proportions of a classical genre.

The theme is highlighted through a powerful script based on the experience of women, both royal and common, who suffer devastating losses in Kurukshetra, the great battle of the Indian epic "The Mahabharata". The issues that confronted those women have remarkable contemporary relevance, and are strikingly similar to those that challenge the women of today, The closing and the opening chorus provide the historical and the contemporary contexts to the play, and serve to bring the moral issues of war, the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, and the role of women into sharp focus.

No Curtains for Lionhearted

No curtains for the lionhearted

Call it entertainment, activism or kid stuff, it is always hard to make ends meet. But the theatre people refuse to call it curtains, finds ANJANA RAJAN. From 2002 to 2003 is just another stage cue...



Actors as activists

To some, theatre is relevant only if it is 'activist theatre' – street plays and proscenium productions dealing with social issues. Sanjay Kumar, who heads Pandies theatre group, whose production "Cleansing" based on the communal riots in Gujarat was shown at the Spirit of Friendship Festival in Manchester this year, is upbeat about his workshops with a spectrum of the population from slums to the highest social rung. On growing social intolerance, he says, "Adults have gone crazy, so we are targeting children in classes six to ten," and plan to stage the productions in a big way in the coming year.

Manohar Khushalani – recently in the limelight for directing "Kurukshetra... and after", a play by Kanthi Tripathi on war and suffering and the strength to transcend it – has for a number of years worked with issues such as bride burning in the past.

Most social development workers realise that theatre is a potent medium to get across ideas. Graduates of the National School of Drama have helped NGOs like Literacy India, Mobile Creches and others in designing and conducting workshops for slum communities and presenting street plays with themes ranging from AIDS to the rights of the girl child.

CITY ABUZZ

HINDU

FRIDAY REVIEW

Delhi abuzz with Stage Buzz

ROMESH CHANDER comes back happy and at peace after watching “Kuruksheetra ... and After”., taged in New Delhi this past week....



Kuruksheetra ... and After”, staged In New Delhi the other day, was a fine effort by Stage Buzz.

We are familiar with the writings of some of the poets, novelists and short_ story writers in the Indian Foreign Service but in “Kuruksheetra ... and After”, presented in New Delhi by the Delhi Tourism Development Corporation in association with the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Stage Buzz we met for the first time Kanthi Tripathi the only playwright among them. The presentation was not only a premier for the playwright but also for Stage Buzz, a new amateur theatre group of some seasoned performers of the English stage in the Capital working with Manohar Khushalani, an experienced actor director. “Kuruksheetra ... and After” holds much promise both for the playwright and Stage Buzz.

The play is set in the ancient city of Hastinapur just after

the end of the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas, as told in the Mahabharat and underlines its devastating impact, particularly on women. To bring the point home the playwright builds her play around three women of the great epic: Gandhari, the mother of hundred Kauravas, Kunti, the mother of five Pandavas as also Karna, who fought for the Kauravas and Panchali, wife of the five Pandava brothers. As the action

moves forward, we see that war has had a great effect on these royal women and how they are now fighting to come to terms with life after it. The playwright's introduction of the two maids, Sevika and Kinkari, who have lost their men folk is indeed interesting both visually as also for their double meaning sharp comments. No doubt, the theme is powerful but the script as it stands today is a little too long. At places the characters repeat what they had said earlier but couched in a different way. Kanti Tripathi's language picturesque and her use of blank verse, dramatically delivered by the cast, gives a certain depth to the lines or a stronger impact on the audience, the script needs some editing and so does the closing chorus written by Tripathi herself, composed by Indraneel Hariharan and sung by the cast with Kapil Ghosh as the facilitator.

Manohar Khushalani's overall production design draws inspiration from our classical dances, particularly the Mudras for gestures. Since death is ever present in the play Khushalani has made effective use of masks at places and since most of the cast has had professional training in different Indian dance forms, the director has exploited their talent to the fullest and we have some very interesting dance sequences choreographed by Rashmi Vaidialingam and Ruchita Puri that provide aesthetic interpretation of an event or what the playwright wants to communicate as for instance in the death dance that had 18 different parts. Then again, the masks used by the maids mocked what the royal ladies were saying. Yet another interesting projection was that of cheerharan after the Pandava brothers lost in the dice game of chaupat. Though Stage Buzz is an amateur group and most of the cast is working in different professions, their performance is quite good. Rashmi Vaidialingam, whom we have seen in quite a few

plays, is an experienced actress and her enactment of Gandhari was excellent in her measured speech that projected her inner turmoil. The two maids, Nidhi Sharma and Shreya Sharma, with brisk movements and tongue in cheek lines were a delight to watch. Charu Malhotra's performance as Kunti made a perfect mother of her Pandava sons and while speaking of Karan, also her son, the change in her mode and tone was remarkable. Ruchita Puri playing as Panchali stands out in the dance sequences as also her movement and gait that has marked Kathak characteristics. The presentation created not only the mood of the period but also poetically brought home Kanthi Tripathi's message.

But the costume were a total contradiction of the milieu. In the background of death and devastation even the royalty does not wear such glamorous clothes or ornaments. Surely, there is grace and even beauty of its own in simplicity match the mood and the atmosphere. Manohar Khushalani agrees ~ thinks about it before the play is on boards again.

ABSURD THEATRE AND FANTASIA

BORIS VIAN'S Play

EMPIRE BUILDERS

Directed by

MANOHAR KHUSHLANI

LINK WEEKLY

Absurd Theatre And Fantasia

"THEATRE OF THE ABSURD is no more a crazethe three main characters of the play evolve under Manohar Khushalani's directionKhushalani's atmospheric for the play is a

product of a combination of two strong stimuli...”

NNS Link July 6, 1980



Evening News

Three short plays of different genres

“The evening began with Boris Vian’s The Empire Builders translated by Manohar Khushalani...directed by Manohar Khushalani.....Brilliantly acted, the production created an atmosphere pessimism depicting the pathology of modern society.”

Diwan Singh Bajeli

The Evening News June 17, 1980



HINDUSTAN TIMES

Well balanced production

“You have to hand it to them. Ruchika (theatre group) never fails in the department of new talent..

.....A well balanced production designed by Manohar Khushalani”

