NSD Diploma Production, New Delhi

This play is a part of National School of Drama’s graduate showcase of class 2018. It aims to provide a platform to encourage emerging theatre practitioners to share their work with wider audience.

Tathagat, the play by Abhishek Majumdar



Tathagat is
A play presented by Jana Natya Manch is written and directed by Abhishek Majumdar. Music is by M.D. Pallvi

Set in an imaginary Buddhist kingdom in ancient India, Tathagat explores the ideas of caste and gender, rebellion and nationalism, freedom and courage.

Haridas, a shudra sculptor, has carved a statue of Buddha out of black stone with three missing fingers. He is sentenced to death as a traitor. On insistence of the queen, the king agrees to listen to Haridas's plea in the court.

Expanding on the idea of *tark* (reason) in Buddhist philosophy, this play through the story of a vain king, a defiant queen, the rebellious sculptor, a courageous *daasi*, and a conniving courtier, examines the difference between a 'traitorous' and a 'rebellious' act.

Hindi, approx. 35 mins

Two shows of _Tathagat_ coming up that you can catch:
– Tuesday 14 Aug, 1 pm, AUD Kashmiri Gate Campus.
– Thursday 16 Aug, 6 pm, Sabarmati Hostel, JNU.
Tathagat is Jana Natya Manch's latest production, written and directed by Abhishek Majumdar, with music by MD Pallavi.

Siesta at Charles De Gaulle Airport by Shanita Vichare

Siesta at Charles De Gaulle Airport !
Down The Memory Lane…..

(my flight was delayed)

No hurried spaces, to foot fall
I sat;
Raising my hopes, for the next flight
On Time…”Qui “……
Feeling for my dimes; I finally had a fancy……
At Cafetie’re
Had some quickbites Chargrill & Cappuccinos…..
Croissants & puffs…not forgotten my penchant
For
Caramel ! …Irresistible…..!!!!
Such ‘Delicacies’ on my palate…..!!! (I think, every thing had gone well then on the contarary)
Meal….was a Deal !

….What next ?….
I skirted on the ‘Vogue’ stands…..
Now; nothing more would I have ever wanted,
Out of The Blue ! I had Missed The Flight….(next was after 7 hours)
Now It was Calling……
Perfect ! Timing……
I made rounds at ….. ‘Christen Doir ‘ N ‘Gucci ‘Perfumes
Bought A Freaking ‘Poison’….a Duffel Bag !
Those Were The Days! My Friend….. (when you have no worries)
Sheer ! Delight …
To smoothen my ruffled feathers , I bet !!
…..The Lounge ! Was the best place…..now…. I perched On the seats,
By Jove ! I saw a beauty….
Jolie Belle femme ! …from Cypress ….
A Royal Persona…..
Picture Perfect ! Well,
We soon got …talking ….and of lands far, across the seven seas !
It was a day….Out of The Blue !
“Qui “
Princess; Treated me ……

…..Wafted scents and aroma…..Spread over
The Tableau
For a Lavish Dinner;
Holding The Long Trimmed Goblets…..
Of Chardonnay N Champagne !
Vintage And
Signature Dishes ! Well Famished .
Well,
Long after, the days have set I still …
Carry The Memories …of the day !
Some Days are Blessed !
But The Journeys are Destined !

(Scribbled at Paris Airport when I was stranded for more than 10 Hours – Shanita Vichare)

‘MAND’ folk songs of Rajasthan by Kachra Khan Mangniar

Sangeet Natak Akademi presents Special Documentation and presentation of ‘MAND’ folk songs of Rajasthan by Shri Kachra Khan Mangniar on 28th June 2017, 4:00pm onward at Meghdoot - III, Rabindra Bhawan, Copernicus Marg, New Delhi – 110001.
Entry Free

Sangeet Natak Akademi

National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi

an Autonomous Body under the Ministry of Culture, Government of India

Special Documentation and presentation of

MĀND

Folk Songs of Rajasthan
by
Shri Kachra Khan Manganiar



28 June 2017, Meghdoot III, Rabindra Bhavan, Copernicus Marg
Mandi House, New Delhi - 110001



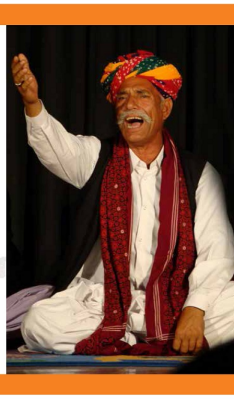
Manganiar community has represented the essence of folk music of western Rajasthan. They majorly inhabit the areas of Jaisalmer and Barmer districts of Rajasthan. Manganiar are hereditary musicians by caste common to both Rajasthan and Sindh (Pakistan). They, though Muslims, had often performed for their erstwhile Hindu patrons who spoke Marwari and Sindhi. They render life cycle songs during childbirth, wedding and other ceremonies. This interesting inter community and cultural harmony has resulted in a mesmerizing musical tradition.

An interesting string instrument which they play while singing Mānd is known as Kamaicha. The instrument is exclusively played in Rajasthan and some other parts of Sindh in Pakistan. It is accompanied by rhythmic instruments like Dholak and Khadtal. Their musical compositions are very complex and have improvisatory rules build into it. Virtuoso rhythm playing has largely added to their success in music. Their repertoire also consist of popular poetic folktales for instance the stories of Umar-Marvi, Moomal-Ranoo, Noori-Jam Saichi, Sassi-Punnu, Laila-Majnu, Leela-Chanesar, Sorath-Rao Khanghar, Heer-Ranjho, Sohni-Meher and Jasma-Odan and compositions of several great Sindhi Sufi saints like Bulleh Shah, Shah Latif, Shah Bhitai, Roial Sai, Kalander etc.

Shri Kachra Khan is an acclaimed singer of the Manganiar community of western Rajasthan. His training started at a very young age of five years under his father Shri Dhaula Khan. His repertoire includes songs based on local folklore, the Sufi songs of Rajasthan, as well as the 'Sufi Kalams' of famous poets of the Sindh region. Shri Kachra Khan has extensively worked with renowned ethnomusicologist and folklorist, Padma Bhushan Late Komal Kothari and his organization Rupayan Sansthan. He has recorded many songs, folklores that are part of the extensive and rich archives maintained by the organization. Shri Kachra Khan has performed not only throughout the country but has presented the rich musical heritage of the Manganiars in many countries abroad.

Accompanying Artists:

Safi Khan Manganiar	:	Vocalist
Dera Khan Manganiar	:	Kamaicha
Khete Khan Manganiar	:	Khadtal
Feroze Khan Manganiar	:	Dholak
Bhanwaroo Khan Langa	:	Sindhi Sarangi



Programme

28 June 2017, Meghdoot III
Rabindra Bhavan, Copernicus Marg
Mandi House

4:00 PM – 5:00 PM
Interactive Session with Shri Kachra Khan
Conducted by Shri Kuldeep Kothari

6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Folk Songs of Rajasthan
Shri Kachra Khan and Group

SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI

National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi

Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's national academy for music, dance and drama, is the first national academy of the arts set up in 1952 by the Republic of India. The first President of India, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, inaugurated it on 28 January 1953 in a special function held in the Parliament House of India. In that ceremony, India's first Education Minister of the State, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad propitiated the role and responsibility of the Akademi:

"India's precious heritage of music, drama and dance is one which we must cherish and develop. We must do so not only for our own sake but also as our contribution to the cultural heritage of mankind. Nowhere is it truer than in the field of art that to sustain means to create. Traditions cannot be preserved but can only be created afresh. It will be the aim of this Akademi to preserve our traditions by offering them an institutional form..."

Since its inception the Akademi has been functioning as the apex body for the performing arts in the country, preserving and promoting the vast intangible heritage of India's diverse culture expressed in the many forms of music, dance and drama. In furtherance of its objectives and zeal to serve the vast allied arts traditions of India covering performing forms replete with literary texts, visual arts and tangible components, the Akademi collaborates with the governments and art academies of different States and Territories of the Union of India, as also with major cultural institutions in the country. The Akademi also establishes and looks after institutions and projects of national importance in the field of performing arts. Besides organizing performances of music, dance and theatre and giving awards in recognition of individual artistic or scholarly achievement, Akademi subsidizes the work of institutions engaged in teaching, performing or promoting the diverse performing arts of India; gives grant-in-aid for research, documentation and publishing in the performing arts; organizes and subsidizes seminars and conferences of subject specialists; documents and records the performing arts for its audio-visual archives; maintains a reference library and a gallery of musical instruments; and publishes literature on relevant subjects on a small scale. The Akademi also renders advice and assistance to the Government of India in the task of formulating and implementing policies and programmes in the field. Additionally, the Akademi carries a part of responsibilities of the state for fostering cultural contacts between various regions in India and between India and the World.

Sangeet Natak Akademi is dedicated in its efforts to safeguard, preserve and promote the traditional and folk performing art forms of the country. With this aim Akademi, time and again, endeavours to conduct special documentation and presentation of intangible cultural heritage and diverse cultural traditions of Bharat. With documentation, Akademi also consolidates and enriches its archives for dissemination purpose so that art scholars and researchers may avail the resources for knowledge and research.

In this series Akademi presents a special documentation and presentation of Shri Kachra Khan Manganiar who will present a rare repertoire of Maand, the folk music of Rajasthan.

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 Juloos 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 devided 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 relation ship 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)

Begam's Pillow from India or

Muare from Argentinia?

Ravindra Tripathi's

theaterama



'Muare' – Movements and Physicality

Tuesday (11.01.2011) was not as cold as the previous days. The sun was in the sky and the earth was having a sigh of relief. The atmosphere in the food hub (In 13th Bharat Rang Mahotsav) was a little bit warmer. Theatre fans and enthusiasts were talking about the plays being staged in different auditoriums. The question before me was whether to see`***Muare'*** (an Argentinean play) or `***Begam Ka Takiya'*** (a Hindi play by Ranjit Kapoor). I was sitting with NK, Banwari Taneja and Sudesh Syal (all of them theatre personalities). There was divided opinion there about the `Muare'. NK was not enthusiastic to see it but Mr. Taneja and Mr. Syal showed their willingness. Since I had already scene `Begam Ka Takiya', I preferred to see `*Muare'* and joined Mr. Taneja and Mr. Syal. Earlier Rijhu Bajaj (actor/director) showed his willingness to watch it. But later on he declined. He wanted to do some purchasing for Shabdakar's coming production `Roop Aroop' in this festival on 17th January).

Was `***Muare***' a satisfying play? For me, it was not. For others I can'tsay. It was unlike other South American plays being shown in the festival. It was a play basically of movements and physicality. There were two characters, both of them female. They were showing movements and stillness through their bodies. The concept was that a party is happening outside and two women/girls are trapped inside, in a small room. They are reciprocating to outside world through their bodies. The brochure of the play says that the production is based upon a novel, a breath of life, written by Ukranian-Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. Lispector wrote this when she was about to die. She saw the world as someone seeing it through a magnifying glass. The actresses duo, who are directors also, Marina Quesada and Natalia Lopez, treat their bodies as containers of a multiplicity of beings that reveal the different dynamics, qualities and expressive possibilities. They tried to create forms and deformities to portray the agony of human being outside of a happening, a party or anything like it.

Of course there were claims by the directors about the experimentation, but was the play really communicable? It might be so in Argentina, but certainly not in India. One can argue that we Indians only appreciate narrative plays and are not sensitive for physical theatre. But is it really correct? Many plays of movement are appreciated here by a large audience. Perhaps the difference of culture became the obstacle. Or maybe it was not so? The question remains.

Recovering the Republic

Recovering the Republic

Anisha Shekhar Mukherji







1.Plastic Salt Container, in Urban Kitchens 2. Traditional Salt Container 3. Traditional coconut scraper

(Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri)

I would like to begin with a question. A question asked by an external juror to the first year post-graduate students of Industrial Design in the Delhi School of Planning and Architecture, at the end of their research presentations comparing a traditional craft with its modern counterpart. “Which is more important, the survival of the craft or the survival of the craftsman?”

Considering the abysmal conditions that most traditional crafts-people practice their art in, and the pittance they receive for hours of strenuous creative work, this question is entirely apt. It sums up the entire dilemma in reviving the manifest arts and crafts of India. Traditional craft is today unable to give either dignity or money to support its practitioners in our Republic. To ensure their own survival they abandon it, in favour of the most feasible employment alternative available—as road or building construction labourers, factory workers, domestic help. Such literally back-breaking unskilled work earns them some money. But it gives no surety of tenure, no provision of basic human dignity, no respect for their persons or their labour. We have all seen these labourers in our cities, their

children lying unattended in a corner of the dusty road, their habitation consisting of a few plastic sheets. It appears that while soon there may be no traditional artists, having either starved or taken on other jobs marginally better than starvation, the relics of their art will survive as museum pieces in this country and in others, such as the beautiful traditional coconut scraper, from the private collection of Sankho Chaudhuri, Courtesy: Ira Chaudhuri

What then should we do? We who praise and display the skilled products of such hands and minds, in safe and comfortable environments so different from theirs? We do not have to look too far back in space or time for the answer. It was given more than seventy years before, by none other than Mahatma Gandhi. He wrote in 1934,

'In a nutshell, of the things we use, we should restrict our purchases to the articles which villages manufacture. In other words, we should evoke the artistic talent of the villager'. [1]

We have as a country disregarded this advice. The inaction or actions of our own government has resulted in the destruction of traditional habitats and the cultures that such habitats foster. Despite the manifest artistic talent of the villager, our way of life today routinely favours 'articles produced in big cities, even if they are obviously inferior in workmanship *and* design. We have segregated things of beauty from things of utility. They reflect our own segregation of lives where we separate work and pleasure into different compartments. Thus our homes and places of work, both from the outside and the inside, use materials that degrade the environment and consume huge amounts of energy in their design, manufacture and maintenance. Most products of daily use in even the homes of the relatively well-off and well-educated are *devoid* of aesthetic form or detail. What better example to demonstrate this, than to compare the domestic container for salt, the humble but vital ingredient of food that Gandhiji chose to use as his symbol for self-reliance from the British? The photograph above depicts a salt container collected from a rural home, by Sankho Choudhuri in the course of his travels over the length and breadth of the country and beyond. Contrast this with

the usual salt container in a kitchen today.

We instill the same lack of feeling for art in our children, in the choices that we make for them. Though traditional hand-made toys, such as the wooden Benaras toy shown below, are practical objects to play with and are beautiful both as examples of craft and of design, it is the mass produced plastic toys of similar price available commercially, which most of us prefer to buy for our children today.



Traditional *Banarasi* handmade parrot



Plastic mass-produced toy dog

This is a reflection of the ‘colonization of our minds’. We have been conditioned into believing that the *only* way to progress is to imitate the cultures of the Western countries. This perception continues today, even when it is increasingly evident that the western mechanized model of development is neither congenial to individual creativity, nor sustainable for the earth’s resources. We all know that its factories occupy substantial land, and consume *quantities* of

minerals, water and electricity *only* in order to mass-produce standardized objects devoid of individual characterization, and made of energy-intensive materials. When they are thrown after use they poison the earth and irremediably harm our habitats. Contrast this with the cycle of production, use and disposal of traditional crafts. Produced in a home environment which does not require any extra investment in separate land or buildings, the natural materials that they overwhelmingly use such as clay, wood, cocoanut shells, reeds, bamboos, do not degrade the environment, but add to its fertility after they are broken or have outlived their use. Thus, the input as well as the output of small-scale craft and design activity is far more humane and superior to the 'environmental and human cost' of large-scale mechanization.

Despite this evident fact, and despite a famed artistic tradition that still continues in some measure today, our institutions give credence only to book-knowledge or machine-skills. Most designers and artists graduating from reputed national universities cannot craft anything with their own hands to equal the skill of traditional designers. This is why perhaps they produce banal work that is merely a copy of repackaged and repetitive Western ideas. Those that are in positions to do so, refuse to heed the economic potential of the vast human resource of traditional craftsmakers, which can not only support itself with practically no government investment, but can also earn the country much money through its craft and design skills. Some of our policy documents such as the revised Draft National Design Policy, do state that they would 'promote value added designs focusing on India's unique position as a country with a rich cultural heritage…'.[2]But in real terms many rare crafts-skills, far from being promoted, actually face extinction because they are even refused recognition as an economic industry. Student research shows that possibly the only remaining family in Paharganj in Delhi which practices the craft of hand-woven *chiks,* have been refused PAN numbers, since only pit-loom woven chiks are recognized by the government as a craft industry![3]

Historically, such craftsmen and artists of India have been famed over

the world since centuries. So much so, that the eighteenth-century Persian invader Nadir Shah took care to carry hundreds of craftsmen along with all the wealth that he looted from India. The crafts have often reached their pinnacle in cities, and in or around the courts of kings and noblemen. How was it that we earlier managed to develop the potential talents of our people, while we are unable to do so today despite our democracy? In earlier times, as Dharampal, the noted Gandhian historian has recorded '…the sciences and technologies…in countries like India…[were] in tune with their more **decentralist** politics and there was no seeking to make their tools or work places **unnecessarily** gigantic and grandiose. Smallness and simplicity of construction, as of the iron and steel furnaces or of the drill ploughs, was in fact due to social and political maturity as well as arising from understanding the principles and processes involved'. [4]

There was also no active discouragement to village organizations. And an important component of the economy of villages was local talent. The presence of such talent was nurtured, and the best amongst these were given patronage in the cities. Thus in the mid-seventeenth century, the imperial urban palace of the great Mughal Emperor, Shah Jahan, in his new capital of Shahjahanabad, had areas reserved within it for artists and craftsmen from the city. These *karkhanas,* surrounded by gardens and courtyards, had some of the best such artists working within them. Imagine such a situation today. That some of the many rooms within the *Rastrapati Bhawan*, are given over for master-craftsmen to practice their craft, secure in the knowledge that they are under the patronage of the President! That they will not have to beg or run from pillar to post for raw-materials for their craft, or for buyers for their finished products. It would be a wholly suitable use for the hundreds of empty rooms in the Rashtrapati Bhawan maintained at public cost, but most of us would find it unacceptable, if not downright unthinkable.



The city of **Shahjahanabad**, a mid-19th century map of which you can see above, held to be an ideal example of town-planning in its design and functioning, followed the example set by the Emperor. **Despite being the capital of one of the largest and richest empires in the medieval world, areas of governance within the city were decentralized.** Houses of noblemen and princes were surrounded by that of their dependents, artists and craftsmen. **Workplaces and homes were integrated.** *Our*cities today forcibly separate places of work from residential areas, even in the case of professions which do not pollute the environment in any way. Our law-enforcers separate poorer people into the fringes of the cities. The only end of work appears to be to make money, lots of it; that work can afford creative pleasure is a luxury most of us are afraid to even imagine.

The downfall of a local level of crafts and technology, that in turn fed a corpus at an urban level, began, really speaking with the advent of the European trading companies, three hundred years before Mahatma Gandhi campaigned for the revival of village industries. The sole purpose of these companies was to amass wealth for themselves in the name of fair trade, by deliberately undermining local craft and technical skills 'by hook or by crook'. The personal and state correspondence between British traders and British rulers and administrators, shows their active connivance to ruin this economic base while at the same time extracting economic and other benefits for

themselves from indigenous Indian knowledge. They also show that the fountain head of this knowledge has been the villages. That it still remained in sufficient amount even a hundred odd years after the start of the British operations, shows the spread and tenacity of this knowledge base.[5] Thus in the mid-eighteenth century, in the time of the renowned ruler of Jaipur and Amber, Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II, the architect and town planner *Vidyadhar*, despite hailing originally from Bengal—a land many miles east of Amber—could practice his talent with dignity and freedom in Jai Singh's court. His remarkable design of the city ofJaipur, with its feel for local needs that most of our modern architects and town planners are bereft of, continues to function well till today. The city's unique identity, unlike its faceless or facile modern counterparts, stems from an integration of local building skills as well as a response to local climate and culture. Vidyadhar could visualize and construct the city in this way because though he came from a culture, whose details and landscape were different from that of Rajasthan, the process of thinking itself was not different. It depended on an elaboration of the local building theme, which was known as much to the local users as to the local builders. The formal basis for this theme was in the Sanskrit texts and building manuals.

For most of us bred to the superiority of city learning, it would be no doubt amazing to realize that we owe the existence of the world-renowned Jantar Mantars as much to a village priest of humble origins as to the famous Maharaja of Jaipur. Jai Singh II met Pandit Jagannath, a Brahmin village priest in the Deccan, whose knowledge of astronomy and religion was so manifest that it catalysed the Maharaja to take the priest back with him to Amber. This also demonstrates that learning was not limited to cities or courts. Pandit Jagannath went on to become Jai Singh's chief aide in his astronomy researches and in the theory and practical construction of his unique masonry instruments of astronomy. It should also give us some food for thought that this is described as one of the darkest periods of Indian history, by many Western historians.

In what seems to be a perverse joke of history, the very nation that once led the race to wipe out indigenous Indian methods of living and

crafts production, has now adopted a direction of economic growth that depends to a large extent on crafts and creative industries. The merely 32,000 crafts makers of Britain surpass the earnings of its organized industries of motorcycle or sports good manufactures.[6] Ironically, despite our estimated population of 'over a crore of handloom weavers, and an equal, if not larger, number of crafts people engaged in diverse crafts from pottery, to basket-making, stone-ware, glass-ware, hand made paper products and multifarious other utility items made out of local, available materials',[7] *our* policy makers assiduously continue to court a centralized large-scale, high-investment, and polluting model of western development.

The fact that there is a global market for Indian crafts is quite evident from the quantities that are bought by visiting foreign tourists, and by the fact that China is now mass-producing objects in factories that *imitate* Indian crafts, to tap into this demand. However, the export of crafts does not always imply the preservation of the artists. Thus, despite earning huge amounts of foreign exchange, the woodcraft of Saharanpur no longer succors the traditional craftsmen. Even local demand is by itself not enough. Despite a continuing demand for gold jewellery, traditional goldsmiths in Tamil Nadu from the *Vishwakarma* community, are starving. Customers now go to showrooms owned by jewel magnates which stock machine-made jewelry instead of the custom-made designs of traditional goldsmiths. One imported jewel-making machine does a year's work of a*hundred* goldsmiths in about ten hours. From the late 1990s, this increasing mechanization in jewelry-making has led to the suicide of several goldsmiths, many with their entire families, by consuming cyanide, which every goldsmith uses to polish gold. Most of the remaining two lakh goldsmiths in the state, are in debt. About two thousand of them are now reduced to selling liquor in government run shops.[8]

Not content with wiping out indigenous craft and technology by patronizing large scale industrial investments, even the land of rural communities is being taken away. The recent Bill devised by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Rural Development, appears to be

even more exploitative than the archaic Land Acquisition Act of 1894 that it seeks to replace. The new Bill according to Medha Patkar, the veteran activist who leads the National Alliance for People's Movements, (NAPM), removes the more public-spirited provisions in the colonial government's Act. It instead, includes a clause that may be invoked to assist private companies in acquiring public land for 'any project relating to the generation, transmission and supply of electricity' and even 'mining activities'.[9]

This is why, despite protests by village groups, Gautam Adani, ranked 91 on the Forbes' World Billionares list, has been able to buy land at rates between Rs 1 and Rs 8 per square metre[10, 11] from the Gujarat government for the SEZ coming up on the northern shore of the Gulf of Kutch in and around the Mundra port. This land, including government revenue and forest land, and more than 1400 acres of *gauchar* or grazing land under panchayats, has been leased to other companies by the Adani Group at *Rs 1000* per square meter.[12] The Adani group, the new 'company bahadur' has killed fragile ecosystems including more than a crore of mangrove trees, appropriated common property resources, and displaced 'local people who since centuries earned their livelihoods based on access to the land and the sea'. 570 hectares of mangrove forests have been cleared through industrial activity, the fish-species they spawned have been destroyed, the local *Wagher* fishing community's and the traditional cattle/buffalo rearing *Rabari*community's livelihood has been permanently lost. Country-craft builders at the Old Mundra port which generates an annual income of a crore to the Maritime Board are also at risk. The smooth roads and infrastructure that the SEZ boasts as justification for all this destruction and displacement, are a stark contrast to the *kuchha* roads outside its boundaries without basic water and sanitation where its more than 10,000 migrant labourers are made to live. Despite such obvious exploitation, our obsession with foreign investments and stock markets have made us as a country blind to such usurpation of the lives and rights of village communities.[13]

How then, to return to the original question, do we ensure

the survival of crafts people and their art, against the new colonists?

First, we must understand that it is only in the village, that these craftspeople can survive with dignity, in a familiar environment that promises them the security of some level of relationship with their land and with its society. **Second**, we need to ensure that their craft brings them and their families enough to live in the villages, without fear of starvation or eviction. Third, we must place the invaluable knowledge embodied in craftsmen, on an equal footing with that of the degreed faculty who teach in our institutions at enviable salaries.

To do all of these, craft has to come out of the ambit of merely 'decorative objects' After all, how many carved elephants or statues can one display in ones homes? They must regain their status as objects of utility that are also beautiful. If all objects of daily use are designed and crafted using the manifest skills of our traditional artists—plates, glasses, spoons, knives, lamp-holders, furniture pieces, photo frames, hair-grips, there will be a real demand for such objects and they will be part of a living tradition of use. This in turn, will ensure that there is a continuous demand for such objects, which will afford craftspeople sustained employment in producing them. As Sankho Chaudhuri has said, 'The time has come to ask ourselves what we want to [do] with the potential talent of the artisans. We have to consider whether the village and tribal crafts should be used only as a means of earning foreign exchange and keeping alive otherwise meaningless, moribund forms and crafts (like gold sequins and brocade work on velvet or rose water jars) or whether we could apply their skills to evolve designs of utility, and develop simple cheap objects of daily use which every villager can afford, like clay toys, deities, oil lamps and so on, and try to create an economic base for these artisans to survive in the villages.'

It so happens that most of us are now used to certain conveniences, and if crafts objects are to replace mass-produced objects of daily use, they must have a certain convenience of use and ease of maintenance. Their appearance and detailing also needs to be in tune

with more contemporary aesthetic sensibilities. Craftspeople additionally need help with access to raw-materials as well as packaging and marketing-skills. Therefore, we must decentralize the ***practice*** of craft and technology as well as the *decisions* that govern them; and foster interaction between those taught in the present design and technology schools and those trained in traditional arts and technologies, so that there is mutual transmission of learning. This is not in the realm of the impossible. It can be done. The collaboration between traditional Bidri artists whose fine metalware craft with inlays of silver, brass or copper is now almost exclusively centred in Bidar near Hyderabad, and Vikram Sardesai-a Bangalore based designer- has produced new designs which are distinctive, beautiful and useful, like Serving Plates designed with new motifs, manufactured and embellished according to the traditional techniques of *Bidri* ware &Keychains manufactured and embellished according to traditional techniques of*Bidri*ware.[11]

The range, quality and packaging of these products has, as Vikram Sardesai says, made the corporate world look '…at indigenous solutions, rather than constantly buying from the West and China…'[15]. However, well-detailed crafts-objects suitable for daily needs of modern living, need to be stocked at neighbourhood shops within the ambit of*ordinary consumers* as well. For this, we have to generate a local demand for such products, within our own cities, towns and villages, so that there is a steady market that does not depend on huge production numbers. This will foster the necessity for local artistic talent. From this talent, those who do come to cities in the lure of fame and wealth, will like their historical counterparts be among the best practitioners, ensuring that they are not led to do downgraded jobs as today, but instead are elevated to positions of respect. And since most villagers and small-town dwellers aspire to be like the city-dwellers, this demand for village-crafts must come *from city-dwellers*. It is surely a small thing to ask, that we use objects that fill our daily life with beauty, which additionally help to keep alive in dignity those of us who have the talent to create such objects?

As Mahatma Gandhi said so many years ago:

‘Each person can examine all the articles of food, clothing and other things that he uses from day to day and replace foreign makes or city makes, by those produced by the villagers in their homes or fields with the simple inexpensive tools they can easily handle and mend. This replacement will be itself an education of great value and a solid beginning.’ [14]

Everyone present in this conference, can resolve to move beyond discussions, to use as much as possible articles produced by indigenous crafts-people in our offices, and in our homes. We need to convince as many people as we interact with daily, our families, our friends to do the same. Whichever of us are teaching in institutions, must initiate the inclusion of traditional knowledge-bearers on the staff- as visiting lecturers, as faculty, as part of special training measures. Those of us in the government can set an example to use indigenous alternatives for office décor and office stationary, such as bamboo chiks instead of plastic blinds. We also need to facilitate the making and transformation of the houses which often double as workplaces for craftspeople, into well-lit, ventilated and healthy spaces, whether through trained advice or through the promulgation of rules which legalize such multi-use dwellings. At a policy level, the Government of India needs to ban the setting up of large mechanized efforts that compete with indigenous craft and technology, and enforce laws that forbid large-scale machine production of traditional skills such as of gold-jewelry and instead propagate and practice decentralized methods of production.

. Only then can we recover the basic tenets on which our Republic was founded. Otherwise, our very existence will be a mindless copy, like the idols we worship—now being produced by machines in factories in China. I would like to end with one such Chinese machine-made idol, displaying facial features reminiscent of the land that it was manufactured in, with the hope that true to the spirit of our tradition, our gods and goddesses shall prove an auspicious omen for the revival of Indian arts and crafts and their practitioners.

References

1. *Harijan*, 30-11-1934, M.K. Gandhi, (As printed in *Village Industries*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1960)
2. National Design Draft Policy *2007*
3. Unpublished Research Paper, 2nd semester, Industrial Design, School of Planningand Architecture, New Delhi, volume 1, pp. 43-4, Keerti Dixit
4. *Indian Science and Technology in the Eighteenth Century*, *Some Contemporary Accounts*, Introduction, p. 31, Other India Press, Goa and SIDH, Uttaranchal 2007.
5. Ibid. Introduction, pp. 1-35.
6. Jaya Jaitly in *Seminar*, September 2005, Creative Industries, p. 16.
7. Ibid., p. 15.
8. *Tehelka* (17 May 2008), pp. 18-19
9. *Civil Society*; April 2008, Civil Society News,
10. S*emina*r February 2008, Issue on Special Economic Zones, p. 42. ‘land at the price of water’, as Irshad Bukhari, sarpanch of Mundra grampanchayat says.
11. *Down to Earth*, p, 30, May 16-31, 2008.
12. S*emina*r February 2008, Issue on Special Economic Zones, p. 42
13. Manshi Asher and Patrick Oskarsson, Ibid., pp. 40-43
14. *Harijan*, 25-1-1935, p. 13, M.K. Gandhi, (As printed in *Village Industries*, Navajivan Publishing House, 1960)
15. *Indian Design and Interiors*, p. 42, Vikram Sardesai
16. ibid., p. 43

Presence Perfect (Keval Arora)

Keval Arora's Kolumn





1. Barry john as Iago in 'Othello' 2. Naseeruddin Shah in 'Prophet'

Presence Perfect

Mulling over oddities that years of familiarity have lulled us into accepting as normal, one curious habit that comes to mind is the way we respond – or, to be specific, don't respond – to the physical presence of the actor in our estimation of plays and performances. It is strange that this dimension of playmaking rarely crops up in reviews and analyses. Even if it does, the enormous contribution that the actor's physical presence makes to his role or to the play's meaning is often insufficiently acknowledged. We tend instead to focus on such qualities as are amenable to correction, training and control. (This is understandable. If skill is to be celebrated, surely skills for which we can claim authorship will come higher in our estimation than will those over which we have little control.)

Yet, our immediate experience and our lasting memories of the performances we see are mediated by and interwoven with the actor's physical presence – the actor in the flesh, so to

speak. Think of Barry John's fleshy middle (he even punned on the Shakespearean word "pate" with the Hindi word for stomach) in Roysten Abel's *Othello: A Play in Black and White*, and you realise a leaner actor just couldn't have intimated that whiff of seedy corruption which Barry's Iago did. Or, remember the classic reviewer's comment about how a pimply actor in the role of Hamlet completely alters our understanding of the line that something is rotten in the state of Denmark.

Jokes apart, this last comment is suspect because it suggests the argument that the core meaning of plays needs to be freed from the tactless exigencies of their performance. To my mind, this is not simply a defensive position but also an odd one, for it leads directly to a contradiction in the practice of theatre criticism.

Theatre scores over cinema through the simple fact of corporeal presence. Its qualities of face-to-face contact and physical proximity give theatre a visceral power that the technologically disembodied cinematic image can never possess. (Does that explain the pressure on the cinema to push towards greater and greater realism?) Naseeruddin Shah often speaks of the high that actors experience when performing in front of a live audience. Audiences experience an equal if not a greater high when watching Naseeruddin Shah live on stage. This compact of physical immediacy is the true strength of the theatre. Deny it, and you dilute the medium.

How then can we speak of the physical presence of the actor as a threat to the production of meaning? Worse, how can we not speak of it at all? Theatre criticism and play reviews in Delhi tend to tread a safe path by ignoring physical and stage presence altogether. Reviewers go into all kinds of intricate details, but commenting on the physical attributes of the performers, even when it is germane to the play-text, is apparently a "no-no", and akin to an invasion of privacy. But, can one avoid commenting on the physical, in a performance art that is of the flesh? The actor's medium is his body. No

analysis of a product can ever be complete if the critic fights shy of talking about its tools.

Take Yatrik's *Harvest*. Ginni, an American who contracts the body of a poverty-stricken Third World "donor", is described in the stage directions by playwright Manjula Padmanabhan as "the blonde and white-skinned epitome of an American-style youth goddess. Her voice is sweet and sexy". The actress cast in the role, Monsoon Bissel, did a competent job of emoting her role. But even with only a close-up to go by (we see only her face on television monitors), it was apparent to all that the director had taken liberties with the playwright's vision of a cellophane-packaged desirability.

Surprisingly, not a peep about this was heard from the critics who otherwise tore up the production. Probably because any comment on the actress's appearance would inevitably imply, no matter however politely hedged, that she isn't the type to fuel a fantasy ride. Such comments, though valid as a response to the production, could appear as a personal and therefore an unwarranted attack on an individual. The fear of appearing tasteless makes cowards of us all.

Considerations of taste and tact prevent issues from being tackled head-on, even when facts stare you in the face and remaining silent becomes a sign of professional ineptitude. No one, to the best of my knowledge, has yet pointed out that much of the popularity of the English-language 'Musical' theatre rests upon its flagrant display of nubile bodies dancing in gay abandon. That this is an unstated premise of the musical was unwittingly revealed by Delhi Music Theatre when it advertised its *Fiddler on the Roof*by plastering Bengali Market with posters which read in effect that 5 broad-minded girls were on the look-out for men!

Such blurring of the critical gaze becomes evident in those cases where comments on physical presence would in fact be appropriate. For instance, in the English language comedy that

came to be known as the Sex Comedy in the shorthand of the print media. In a script where the male roles are envisaged as dogs on a leash, the female leash, sorry lead, usually went to an actress in whom acting talent was a bonus but the requirement of "oomph" was non-negotiable. The reviews, however, treated these productions like any other. When talking about body parts would have been far more attuned to the aesthetics of the show(ing), their focus on acting skills seemed perversely cruel to the audience, the director and the 'act'ress. Especially as (like in *Harvest*) the gap between intention and fact was often embarrassingly acute.

What is ironical about such silence is the fact that everybody on the other side of the curtain trades extensively on the physical in shaping textual meaning and audience response. After all, playwrights, directors and performers don't go through casting auditions with their eyes closed. But, when it comes to concluding the pact from this side of the curtain, the protocols of viewing shift from the aesthetic to the social. Decency and propriety suddenly stake a claim as aesthetic criteria. Comments on physical presence are derided as "nasty" reviewing, and banished to gossip boudoirs. What better proof does one need of Delhi's theatre community being a large club (of course there's much heartburn amongst its members, but which club is free of squabbling?) than the fact that even its reviewers observe the social protocols?

I can understand analyses being circumspect if the actor's physical attributes are, as seen from a mainstream perspective, socially disadvantaged. Saying that an actor has too thin a voice to play the swaggering bully is a 'no-no'. But laudatory descriptions bring other problems. For example, there's no denying the fizz in Rahul Bose's stage presence. But, in *Seascapes with Sharks and Dancer*, this strength militated against his role as a reclusive writer. Bose thus seemed to play a man who was quiet by choice rather than situation, cool rather than conservative, and sexy rather than

scared stiff. Much praise was heaped on Bose as if stage presence is a talent in its own right, regardless of the way it mangles the script.

The real complications in critical response occur when a production does not fit neatly into the black and white categories of convention. When normative perceptions of the physical are inverted, when what is conventionally regarded as 'inferior' is celebrated and the 'superior' is destabilised, the degree of difficulty gets too much for polite reviewers to handle.

Maya Rao, for instance, wouldn't win anybody's vote at a beauty contest (I say this with all the presumption of a friend), and it is this absence of the 'media'ted sense of the feminine that imparts a hypnotic quality to her stage presence. Whether it is Maya cupping her belly and speaking of the distinctive female muscles of the underbelly and the thigh in the course of her stage performance of Bertolt Brecht's short story *The Job*, or Ritu Talwar similarly challenging cultural codes of the feminine by physically emphasising the masculine aspect of her presence (in Anuradha Kapur's production of the same Brecht short story), the principle is the same. Both refuse to conform to picture-frame ideals of the feminine as endlessly replicated by the media and internalised by a whole generation of anorexic feel-gooders, (This feminine icon is seen best in our younger film heroines. They are such clones – physically, mentally: who can tell – of each other that like quality assembly line products, it is difficult to tell them apart.) Maya and Ritu's refusal to conform marks the primary source of these actresses' challenging, transgressive power.

How can any discussion of such performances be complete if the critical discourse makes no accommodation for the body as a site of meaning? Obviously, the body is not just fair but necessary game in the business of reviewing. If sociality and its norms are allowed to thus infect the critical will,

reviews may end up displaying the very symptoms that such productions seek to challenge.

Not that this solves the problem, for there is another side to the tale. Steven Berkoff explains why actors will forever be sensitive to criticism that accommodates discussions of the body: “The actor’s working material is his own body. With painters, sculptors, etc, your work is separate and distinct from you. Criticism is therefore far more personally wounding to the actor that it is for other kinds of artists.” In fact, in talking so carelessly of the actor’s physical presence, I too may have presumed upon the insurance of friendship. It’s another matter that Maya may cancel the insurance. Or, she may insist as a well-known director had declared at a workshop, that there can never ever be friendship between performer and critic.

Which simply begs the question: Why in that case should protocols of the public and the personal be so religiously observed? The actor’s medium is the body. The critic must factor that into the analysis. Amen.