

# 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.](#)

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## Snake, Love and Sexuality

Ravindra Tripathi's

## theaterama



There are a lot of stories in Indian mythology and folklores where you find the snake or the serpent as sexual motif. Some modern plays are also based upon it. For example Girish Karnad's play Nagmandala. The snake as sexual motif is not limited only to India. In 13<sup>th</sup> bharat rang mahotsav, the Japanese play ***Ugetsu Monogatari*** (directed by **Madoka okada**) also presents the snake as a charmer and lover of human being.

It is story of 10<sup>th</sup> century Japan. There is a young man, named Toyoo, son of a fisherman. He lives near seashore. A beautiful woman named Manago comes to his home in a rainy night. Toyoo is attracted towards her. He also lends his umbrella and promises to meet her again in near future. After some days he goes to her house on the pretext of going back his umbrella. During that he gets intimate with her. Manago gives him a beautiful sword as a token of their relationship. But after sometime it comes out that the sword was stolen from a shrine. Toyoo is caught by the officials on the charge of

theft. He is taken to the house of Manago and there it is discovered that actually Manago is not a woman but a serpent. She transforms herself as a woman to get Toyoo love. Now the question is what will happen of their relationship. Will Toyoo accept Manago, the serpent as his beloved or leave her?

Ugetsu monogatari is a play about coexistence of natural and supernatural in human life. We are fascinated by supernatural things but it is not always joyful. Sometime pain and sorrow also come with joyful supernatural. Are we ready to accept both of them? Or we want to enjoy one and discard the other thing? Actually ambivalence is part and parcel of life.

It is a stylized play and full of body movements. Four actresses play role of Manago one actor of Toyoo. The director of the play Madoka okada is known for his experimentation. He also assimilates the linguistic beauty of Japanese and traditional theatre of Japan. There are elements of pantomime in it also. It must be underlined that there a good plays from non-western countries in this festival. It is time to call it international bharat rang mahotsav.

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## **‘The Park’ as a metaphor**

Ravindra Tripathi's

**theaterama**



Three benches for three – yet no space –  
a scene from '*The Park*'

The 13th Bharat Rang Mahotsva has started with fanfare. Although the city of Delhi is freezing with severe cold, the theatre lovers are daring with enthusiasm to watch the plays. Even those who can't get ticket or passes, can enjoy food with fire in *The Foodhub*, which serves delicious kababs and momos . But let us talk about theatre instead of cold and food.

In Sriram Centre, on 8th of January, '*The Park*', jointly written and directed by Manav Kaul and Kumud Mishra, witnessed a houseful of appreciative audience.

'*The Park*' is a play of just four characters, mainly three, who come in a public park during daytime. of course reasons for their coming to the park are different. One wants to spend some leisure time, the second one to have a nap on a bench and the third one, to watch a woman after she has had a shower.

There are three benches in the park, so there should be no problem for separate and independent spaces for them. But the problem starts when all of them want a particular bench for themselves. No one wants to leave his preferred bench. They argue and fight over their 'rights'. The play starts as a comedy but slowly and gradually it becomes serious. Laughter disappears and serious identity issues appear. Right over the bench becomes a bone of contention between them. The burning topics of displacement and dislocation of people, the Indian adivasis, the Palestinians, the Israelis come in foreground

and in the process a comedy turns black. The play becomes a metaphor. A metaphor for struggles of indigenous people fighting for their demands in many parts of the world . Who has the right of land where Israel exists today? The Israelis, who are there today or the Palestinians, who are displaced? What is the basis of their rights? Who has the rights in Mumbai? Does the marathi speaking person have more rights there than those who don't know this language? These issues come during their arguments.

As the arguments go further, tension develops and all of them start fighting among themselves. the dialogue is broken. This shows how we, human beings, don't settle our differences amicably and democratically. This is not happening only in India, but everywhere.

*'The Park'* ends on positive note and initiates a process to think about how we bear our children. What is the state of our education system? The actors gave commendable performances.

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## **Dreams of Talim – A Tribute to Chetan Datar**

Ravindra Tripathi's

**theaterama**



Last year in BRM (the 12th Bharat Rang Mahotsav) when I saw *Sex, Morality and Censorship*, directed by **Sunil Shanbaug**, I was quite impressed. And not only me, the entire Kamani auditorium was electrified when the performance was over.

This year Sunil Shanbaug has brought another production ***Dreams Of Talim***, written by Sachin Kundalkar. But there is also a story behind it, which is essential to be told if you want to fully understand this. Actually, before the play starts, the story is told before the audience. It is about late Chetan Datar, a talented theatre person who died young in 2008. Chetan had written a monologue titled 'No I Madhavbagh' around 2004. It was never staged during his lifetime.

After Chetan's death Sunil decided to do one of Chetan's texts on stage as a tribute. Then came **Sachin Kundalkar** for his support. Sachin wrote a full length play based on Chetan's monologue. The result is ***Dreams of Talim***.

It is a play about alternative sexuality, an emerging discourse in Indian society. The problem of alternative sexuality is that it is taboo. Despite that it has won a legal battle, the society at large doesn't accept it, the family abhors it. The play deals with this 'taboo', the issues, questions and passions associated with it.

It has four characters, Anay, Yash, Sita and Sita's mother. Anay is a young theatre director. He is abandoned by all his colleagues and friends except one, Yash who still admires him. Both the boys are in special relationship (gay) with each other. Meanwhile, Sita, an actress come in their life. She showed her willingness to act in play which Anay wants to direct a play. When the rehearsal get started the problems of alternative sexuality arise on different planes. Anay is individually facing the problem and Sita is finding it difficult to come to terms with it on emotional level. Simultaneously many issues about love, theatre and relationships emerge.

The strength of *Dreams of Talim* is its acting. All the actors, Anand Tewari as Yash, Suvrat Joshi as Anay, Geetanjali Kulkarni as Aai and Divya Jaddale as Sita, give commendable performances. There is an element of fantasy also in the play which makes it a little bit surrealistic. The play was multi-lingual with a mix of Hindi and English.

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**NSD's 13th Bharat Rang Mahotsav Theatre Festival to open Festival featuring 81 productions**



**Still from Charandas Chor the Opening Play**

### **National School of Drama, 6th Jan 2010**

The National School of Drama is one of the foremost theatre training institutions in the world and the only one of its kind in India. Set up by Sangeet Natak Academy in 1959 as one of its constituent units, it became an independent entity in 1975 registered as an autonomous organization, fully financed by the Ministry of Culture, Government of India.

The school has two performing wings; Repertory and Theatre-in-Education. In 1999, the school organized its first National Theatre Festival, which was christened Bharat Rang Mahotsav, generally held during January each year. The festival, since it is hosted by a training institute such as the NSD, in fact works as training tool, by offering drama students an opportunity to view national and international performances, on one platform. Since there are very few functioning repertories in India and many productions do not enjoy long run, the festival is a rare opportunity to see so much together.



## 13<sup>th</sup> BRM

The 13<sup>th</sup> Bharat Rang Mahotsav, marks the beginning of the New Year with another milestone for the prestigious National School of Drama (NSD), as its annual national and international theatre festival opens with concurrent shows at multiple venues in Mandi House over two weeks from 7 to 22 January 2011. The BRM or Theatre Utsav, as it is popularly known, has come to be regarded as one of the largest and most important theatre festivals in Asia.

In keeping with the tradition of presenting outstanding theatre that allows for meaningful engagement, this year also the BRM will be presenting a rich fare of 81 productions selected out of nearly 450 proposals received from across India and from around the world. Taking forward the 'Young Experimenters' component of last year, BRM 13 also includes productions by graduates of the school in a synthesis of experience, new energy and vision.

### Indian Component

The 13<sup>th</sup> BRM is inaugurated this year with an energetic and lively production of Habib Tanvir's *Charandas Chor* from Assam directed by one of NSD's alumni, Anup Hazarika. The works of eminent contemporary Indian playwrights like Girish Karnad's *Bikhre Bimband* Dharamveer Bharati's *Suraj Ka Saatwan Ghoda* are presented in striking new productions, alongside classics like Ibsen's *Lady of the Sea* (*Sagara Kanyaka*) and *Some Stage Directions for Henrik Ibsen's John Gabriel Borkman*, Alexander Pushkin's *Little Big Tragedies* and Tagore's 'A Wife's Letter' and '*Bisarjan*'. Shakespearean texts are re-explored in *Macbeth and Othello* (Reshmi Rumaal) while the human predicament in times of political turmoil is seen in *Hamlet Machine*, *Samanadraba Mami*, *Gaddi Charan Di Kaahal Bari Si*, *Sharel Sha* among others. Wishing to pay respects to Shyamanand Jalan, one of the most eminent of the 70's generation of theatre

director/actors who passed away recently, we have an evening devoted to him entitled *Homage* which showcases scenes from some of Jalan's most outstanding productions produced by Padatik, Kolkata.

In dance/choreographed pieces like *Grey is Also a Colour* and *Sweet Sorrow* the focus is on inventing a movement based visual language. *Zindagi Madhur hai Kumansenu mein*, *Quality Street*, *Khatijabai of Karmali Terrace* and *Salaam India* revisit and reinterpret the received texts; While original scripts form the basis of *Before The Germination..*, *Dreams of Taleem*, *Park*, *Mathemagician* and *Tritiyo Anko* among others. From puppet plays to mime to dance/choreographed pieces to devised and experimental work in new media; the festival offers something for everyone.

### **International Dimension**

This year the Festival will be hosting 23 productions drawn from 20 countries – China, Pakistan, Chile, France, UK, Bolivia, Chile, Japan, Egypt, Argentina, London, Germany, Sri Lanka, USA, Poland, Bangladesh, Nepal, Serbia, Ukraine, Italy and Norway.

At the forefront of the international section this year we have three theatre productions from France. The classic opera by Beaumarchais, *Le Barbier de Seville*, will be seen in a spectacular adaptation with a French director, Eric Vigner, directing a group of Albanian actors of the National Theatre of Tirana. Also from France is *In Vivo*, a dance piece, "*Silent Words*" a mime performance by Laurent Decol, as well as a photographic exhibition on the Footsbarn Theatre.

It is for the first time that there is such a large component from Latin America. We have the opportunity to see some contemporary works with *Santa Maria de Iquique: Revenge of Ramon Ramon* and a puppet performance *Pueta Peralta* (Chile), *En un Sol Amarillo* (Bolivia), *Muare* (Argentina). The foreign

component like the overall festival is as eclectic as it is diverse. From China we have *"The Amorous Lotus Pan"* based on the original Sichuan opera of the same name. *My Country, Life for Remembrance & The Quest* (Egypt), *Miranda* (UK), *He who Burns, Forest* (USA), *Surprised Body Project* (Italy/Norway) are all fine examples of physical theatre. One can also find unique conceptualization in *Ugetsu Monogatari* (Japan) and *All About Love* (Ukrainian), while plays like *Songs of Euripides*, *Brecht-The Hardcore Machine* revisit received text. From the SAARC countries we have *Khariko Ghera* (Nepal), *Khwabon Ke Musafir and Dara* (Pakistan), *Makarakshaya-The Dragon* (Sri Lanka), *Aroj Charitammrito* (Bangladesh) and *Stones and Mirrors* (Afghanistan).

## **Festival in Chennai**

In keeping with the practice started four years ago of sharing the fare invited for the festival at Delhi with another city, a part of the repertoire for BRM 13 will travel to Chennai with 19 of the invited productions for the Festival slated there from January 11 to 20, 2011. BRM Chennai will be presented at two venues Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall and Museum Theatre in the city.

### **Other Allied Events**

The Festival, as a melting point of different cultures provides a unique opportunity for enjoyment of theatre as well as professional interaction. A series of synergetic wrap around programmes that have been organized around the Festival comprises 'Meet the Director' which includes talks & interactive sessions with some of the directors/designers on Performance Language/Scenography/Set & Light Design. Three Photographic exhibitions include Abhi-Vyakti, an exhibition celebrating the actor, working methodologies of Asian theatre schools (part of Asia-Pacific Bureau of Drama Schools meet); and an exhibition on the Footsbarn Company, France. There will

be other programmes like, a special performance of dance and music by Min Tanaka & Aki Takahashi, French mime by Laurant Decol, solo performances based on African themes, four improvised performances on garbage called *The Garbage Project* and a performance on *Social Gaming*. The Asia Pacific Drama Schools' Workshop and Festival will also be a part of the allied events.

## **The Scale**

The 81 performances and dozens of associated events in Delhi take place at seven venues – the Kamani Auditorium, the Shri Ram Centre, the LTG Theatre and the four venues within the premises of the NSD–Abhimanch, Sammukh, Bahumukh and Open Air besides its studio spaces like Abhikalp and TIE Space.

There are simultaneous performances and events spread over five to six venues each day during the two week run in Delhi and 18 productions at the two venues in Chennai during an eight day run there. BRM 13 will host around 3,000 theatre people from across India and the world. As in the past, the festival shows are expected to run to full houses, attracting nearly 70,000 spectators in Delhi and about 10,000 viewers in Bhopal.

To design, mount and coordinate a festival of this size in two cities involves a logistical feat that the NSD manages with élan because of its highly trained technical personnel, faculty and staff and the commitment they bring to the cause of theatre worldwide.

The mega event is an opportunity for the professionals, public and students alike to engage with the process and practice of contemporary theatre arts.

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# Complete Schedule Bharat Rang Mahotsava January 2011

13th BRM – Festival ([Click here to view schedule](#))



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## The Sense of an Audience- Keval Arora's Kolumn



Most discussions – *and* demonstrations, now that the next edition of the Bharangam is upon us – of what ails contemporary theatre rarely take into account the role of the audience. In an environment where the audience's contribution to the making of meaning is barely acknowledged, it is unlikely that its responsibility for the state of the theatre will ever be admitted. Audiences do of course get noticed, but only in the context of dwindling attendance at plays, or strategies to entice spectators back to the theatre. Such 'concern' for the audience masks a worryingly patronising attitude. It sees spectators as little more than passive receptors of other people's intention, dry vessels waiting open-mouthed for the filling. One may as well not invoke the

audience for all the insight that such invocations offer.

At first glance, it seems logical to exclude the audience from analyses of the theatre, for the audience does not concoct the brew being poured down its gullet. In fact, it often resists being bottle-fed and sometimes even resents the after-taste. So, on the face of it, no audience can be held *directly* responsible for the spectacle that theatre often makes of itself.

However, theatregoers cannot thereby wash their hands of the matter. The sense of an audience – an expectation of whom the play is being performed for – creeps into the decisions that performers make, both before and during the enactment, to such an extent that it shapes the final outcome as directly as if the audience had sat in on the creative process. This happens all the time, regardless of how accurate or credible the group's idea of its target audience may be. There is, therefore, a point beyond which audiences can no longer claim 'innocence'. Spectators cannot escape responsibility for what is performed for them. Or, put more accurately, for what they accept as passable in performance. Complicity is structured into the relation between performers and spectators, even if the relation is a silent one.

Perhaps, the fact of complicity stems from such silence. No complicity is as demeaning as that in silent acquiescence. This is especially glaring in the theatre where performers and spectators inhabit the same physical space, and where exchange is immediate, tangible and therefore possible. It can be argued that it is naïve to expect a dialogue between patrons and performers when there is so little traffic between theatre groups themselves. Some groups attempt to reach out and 'talk' to its spectators beyond the footlights, but most are content or resigned to interpret their audience through ticket-sales and applause.

Nevertheless, I'd imagine that the responsibility for creating a stimulating theatre rests equally – if not finally – on those who dole out good money to see these performances. The failure of a play is often the failure of its audience, especially when spectators are unwilling, whether through politeness or indifference, to call a spade a spade. When was the last time a Delhi audience collectively protested against the quality of a production? In silently ingesting whatever is on offer – or, in protesting quietly and privately – spectators do a great disservice to those who have stopped going to the theatre, as also to those who stay away from it.

The argument that audiences are powerless to effect change is not as reasonable as it initially appears. Accomplices do not have power handed to them on a platter. What sullen accomplices do have is unlimited opportunity to seize power for change. 'Ticket-sales' and 'applause', for instance, are two vocabularies through which spectators can register their protest. Theatre groups understand these vocabularies, for no group can afford to alienate that miniscule minority which still visits the theatre. Can you imagine any group churning out tripe, production after production, if nobody sat through it all? (As the old Sixties slogan ran: 'Suppose they gave a war and nobody came<sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub>'.) It is all very well for us high-minded types to have criticised Aamir Raza Husain and his theatre group Stagedoor for having inundated Delhi with a particular variety of prurient bedroom comedy a decade ago. The fact is that the Kamani auditorium had then run to full houses, and night after night, you couldn't get tickets half an hour before the show. Husain was merely giving the audience what it wanted; it's the spectators who turned out to be the idiots and the fools.

But Stagedoor is a soft target, one about which it is impossible to disagree. A less obvious arena of disaffection is the NSD Repertory. With most of its productions bearing the *chhap* of vintage years, several of the Repertory's productions

today seem like museum pieces that are not noticeably different from the memories of past productions enshrined in its theatre museum. Yet, the Repertory manages an audience, an army of the faithful that sees nothing wrong about being caught in a time warp. So, the NSD Repertory blithely continues on its narcissistic path of self-imitation.

In both these cases, the audience's uncritical acceptance of the plays pre-empts self-evaluation. Surely the idea that theatre ought to reflect the aspirations of the people is not intended as a re-formulation within aesthetics of the law of supply and demand. But that is precisely how so much of so little worth gets by: after all, runs the argument, how can something be bad if the audience doesn't think it so? That old argument of supply & demand turns a contingent moment into a principle, and confers virtue upon the opportunist. Whenever there is a demand, there will always be somebody willing to supply the need. As to which is the cause and which the effect, you can argue yourself blue in the face and remain none the wiser. One way out of the trap, as some do-gooders have tried, is to unilaterally decide what is beneficial for the audience, irrespective of what the audience thinks is good for itself, and sanguinely offer just that for the edification and pleasuring of a benighted public. And, in the process, move from undermining the theatre from below to corroding it from the top.

Why should a group of seemingly normal people lapse into appalling taste when assembled? What is the combustion that makes otherwise alert individuals metamorphose into an uncritical, slumbering mass that is content to be led by the nose? A common explanation is that Delhi's theatre-going fraternity is a large club; and it is difficult to be honest, even with oneself, within these spiralling circles of friendship.

But social niceties alone cannot explain an audience's generosity of spirit when confronted by a poverty of



imagination and taste. Of the other reasons, the feel-good factor is surely relevant. In the peculiar arrangements of our mainstream theatre, it is remarkable how a public that is lukewarm about the prospect of taking plays seriously, actually finds its anxieties evaporating into a careless geniality once it walks through the auditorium doors. The reasons for such geniality may vary. It could be a media-fuelled expectation of a good time, the grapevine recommendation of a place where "it's happening", or simply a forced attendance with obligatory smiles in tow. The consequence, however, is always the same: a frame of mind conditioned by expectation or habit into evading any kind of alert and critical response.

Watching a play is not an autonomous activity. Peter Brook defines an act of theatre as, "A man walks across [an] empty space while someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged". But his definition leaves out the vital dimension of community that characterises the theatrical experience. (Isn't that why watching a play all alone in an auditorium leaves you feeling so terribly lonely?) The act of collective viewing has its own rhythm, which is distinct from, say, the rhythm of watching the TV by oneself. We've all sensed, as part of an audience, how our responses have been imperceptibly but steadily shaped by the responses of others in the auditorium. This is exhilarating when you are one with everybody else, but it can become enormously repressive should you find yourself out of sync with the rest of the crowd.

In non-consensual situations, collective viewing constricts free response by jostling and eroding individual stances of resistance to the performance. The invidious push 'n' shove between people of different persuasions and profiles reduces an audience's collective potential for reading a performance against the grain. This is why the spectator, as a member of that amorphous collective, has less interpretative control

over the text than the single reader engaged in a private act of reading. Sanity is restored only when the individual spectator withdraws into looking upon his neighbours as another kind of text.

Surprisingly, spectators are often unwilling to exercise even a minimal control: witness our readiness to vocalise our appreciation of plays but not our dissent. Laughing and applauding are okay, but booing is out. By a similar compact, spectators happily exchange evaluations of the performance's technical features – acting, costumes, etc – but are far more circumspect in reacting to the meaning of the play.

Nowhere do we find a better instance of such degradation of individual spectator response than in the mass hysteria evident now when an entire nation of TV-gazers has been turned into one huge audience of the grand theatre called Mumbai 26/11. Such is the pressure of the people's response (as selectively promoted through privately-owned media channels) that the bloody, messy business of killing and revenge has been cleansed and glorified through the quavering rhetoric of patriotism and sacrifice into a superior civilisational activity. (Interestingly, the hawks talk of killing, while the doves talk of sacrifice. The distinction between the two remains blurred because for both, war as a routine response is here to stay.) There are a few sane voices that refuse to be swept up in this general feeling. But where are these to be heard in the clamour of the warmongers who glibly espouse counter-violence as a simple solution to complex problems?

Be it the larger theatre or the small play, failings in public discourse can usually be traced back to the failure of audiences – and, to our irresponsible habit of lapping up whatever is served. So much then for our audiences' ability to make sense.

An earlier version of this article was first published in FIRST CITY (July 1999)

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# Burqavaganza – Banned in Pakistan staged in BHARANGAM – Compiled by Manohar Khushalani



At the recently concluded **BHARANGAM**, the Theatre Fest organized by the National School of Drama, a Pakistani play, ***Burqavaganza***, produced by **Ajoka** Theatre Group, was staged at Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi. The play had been banned in Pakistan last year, because of its irreverence to the *Burqa*, a traditional veil and gown worn by conservative Muslim women. The play is especially relevant and contemporary because the controversy over women covering either their head with a *Hijab* or also their face and the whole body with a *Burqa* rages even in the Muslim majority countries which were known for their secular ideals.

For example, *Hijab*, an obligatory code of dress in Islam, was banned in public buildings, universities, schools and government buildings in Muslim-majority Turkey shortly after a 1980 military coup. Prime Minister of Turkey, **Recep Tayyip Erdogan** (whose wife and daughters are veiled) had promised before his first electoral victory in 2002 that the “unfair ban” would be abolished. Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) opposition party have thrashed out a deal on a compromise head-cover to be allowed on campus after decades of an all-out ban. Under the deal agreed to by the two parties, a day earlier, women at universities are permitted to cover their heads by tying the headscarf in the traditional way beneath the chin.

While the Turkish PM insists that respect for basic human rights is his sole motivation in pushing through the amendments, some believe that the move would cause immense problems and deal a blow to the separation of state and religion, one of the founding principles of the modern Turkish Republic.

Told in a rollickingly funny mode, ***Burqavaganza*** laughs at the pointless rigidity of customs and dress code and ridicules the system that upholds their sanctity. The play follows the story of the young lovers: the progress of their romance, the wedding and the birth of the first child. Meantime, the police, looking for the terrorist leader Bin Batin, and the *Burqa* Brigade who suspect that their *Burqas* are too colourful and revealing constantly bicker because of their conflicting agendas. An unveiling ceremony follows where the Minister for *Burqa* Affairs makes a passionate speech about the significance of the *Burqa* and everyone celebrates with song and dance.

The charismatic scholar Hijab Hashmi inspires her devotees to keep their eyes open for the traitors in the *Burqa* Brigade. Bin Batin carries on his bloody fight against the helmet-covered enemy. The stage action is accompanied by telecast of

'*Burqavision*' programmes which include a soap, a documentary '*Burqa* Though the Ages', News, Sports, a fashion show and 'Breaking News'. While *Burqas* of all shapes and sizes create images and situations reminding the audience of the socio-political situation in Pakistan, two *maulanas* sitting on the edges of the stage, in a TV show, respond to the questions from their viewers about apparently important questions about interpretation and application of religious teachings. The statements of the *maulanas* are in fact extracts from '*Beheshti Zaiver*', a book given to girls at the time of their marriage.

Denouncing the ban on the play **Madiha Gauhar** had then said that the ban was imposed because of pressure from the "*burqa* brigade", and that it proved that the government's enlightened moderation policies were a farce. It was in the early eighties that I had first met Madiha, when I was hanging around with Badal Sircar, Ragini Prakash and Vinod Dua at the Sri Ram Centre Canteen in New Delhi. We were told by Mrs. Acharya, the owner of the canteen, that a Pakistani actress wanted to meet us. We were accosted by this strapping young and beautiful lady who told Badal Sircar that their group had performed his play **Juloos** (Procession) in Pakistan despite the censorship. A little later, Shahid Nadeem with his Ajoka Theatre Group, performed with our group, Theatre Union, at JNU. Shahid even recorded our play **Toba Tek Singh** and took it back with him to Pakistan.

Set up by a small group of cultural activists in 1983, during **General Zia-ul-Haq's** politically and culturally repressive regime, **Ajoka** has struggled with determination against very heavy odds to produce socially meaningful art. It has addressed vital, sometimes taboo subjects through its hard-hitting and innovative productions. Committed to the ideals of peace and tolerance within Pakistan and in the neighbouring regions, it has frequently collaborated with theatre activists from other countries of South Asia particularly from India, viz. Indian directors such as **Badal Sircar, Safdar Hashmi,**

## **Anuradha Kapur and Kewal Dhaliwal.**

Founder-playwright of **Ajoka Theatre**, **Shahid Nadeem**, known for his commitment to human rights and peace, is the author of more than 35 original plays and several adaptations. His plays have been performed in Pakistan, India, USA, UK, Norway, Bangladesh, Nepal, Iran and Oman. He is currently the Director of PTV Academy; and Co-director of Panjpaani Indo-Pak Theatre Festival, a festival pioneering interaction between theatre activists of India and Pakistan. He has also worked as Communications Officer of Amnesty International, based in London and Hong Kong. He was awarded **Feuchtwanger/Getty** fellowship in 2001 and has lectured at various universities in the US.

(Sources: *Islam Online*/NSD/Reuters/ANI)

## **Cast and Credits**

Minister/ Bin Batin/ Chambeli/ Cameraman: Sarfraz Ansari

Maulana 1: Ziafat Arfat

Maulana 2: Imran-ul-Haq

Haseena: Samiya Mumtaz

Khoobroo: Furqaan Majid

Brigade Commander: Khola qurashi

Brigade 1: Asif Japani

Brigade 2: Azaan Malik

Police Officer: Usman Zia

Constable 1: Shahid Zafar

Constable 2: Shehzad

Chorus/Dancers: Taqoob Masih, Nadeem Abbas, Waseem Luka, Meena

Hijab Hashmi/ Mother: Samina Butt

Guitar Player: Vicky

Play and Direction: Shahid Nadeem

Sets and Lighting Design: Kewal Dhaliwal

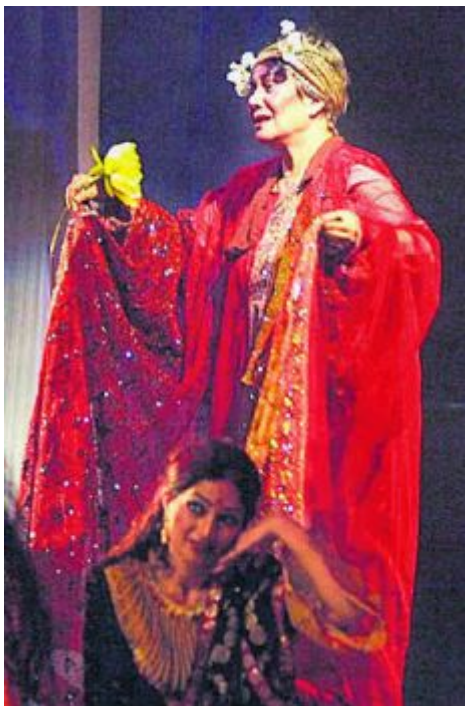
Music: M Aslam

Costume: Zahra Batool

Assistant Director: Malik Aslam  
Production Manager: Imran-ul-Haq  
Research: Ziafat Arfat  
Video recording / editing: Nadeem Mir, Shakeel Siddiqui

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## 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