Abhimanyu: The Legend of a Tragic War Hero / Manohar Khushalani



Abhimanyu, is perhaps a unique character in Mahabharata whose death brings you inspiration. Pandit Radheshyam Katahvachak's ***Veer Abhimanyu***, a play engulfed in deceit, treachery, misuse of power, and politics Directed by **Hema Singh** with **NSD's** second year students had all the elements of a professional show, despite the fact that Hema intended it to be a teaching production. Interesting thing was that for a martial play the female students were playing the roles of male soldiers. At no point did one feel that the roles should have been played by males. The performance of female actors was as aggressive and bold as was required. **Guru Salam Biswajit Singh's** Martial art training was so thorough that girls could match up to boys in the fight scenes. Also, there was rich use of elements such as dance, songs, Martial arts like *Kallari* and use of percussion and wind instruments (like nagara and dhol) to indicate the war hysteria. As the director explained, the main objective was to teach Parsi style theatre, therefore it was imperative

to expose the students to all elements of it, including the melodramatic speech patterns which are so much a part of this theatre. The real challenge was to to work in this style which has a concept of dramatic action and is different from contemporary theatre. The couplets and lyrical dialogues written in typical Parsi style required an understanding of rhyme, pitches, *natgiri*, gestures, postures, language and poetry. The source of Hema's inspiration was **B.M. Shah**, who made her realise that the Farsi theatre is an unusual blend of classical Sanskrit theatre, folk theater and Victorian theatre. She has gone on to become a foremost proponent of this form of theatre.

The production, thus, tried to create a bridge between contemporary realistic theatre and the traditional Parsi Theatre, reinterpreting it in such a way that audience could relate to it as a modern production.



Farsi as Parsi theatre is also called, had a great historical relevance because of its contribution to the freedom struggle. The playwrights created feelings of patriotism, love, renunciation, and kindness in public by writing double meaning

dialogues which only the natives understood. It raised voice against imperial rule. At that time, many Indian mythical, historical, courageous characters that fought against injustice, were featured in Parsi theatre so that self–respect and fearlessness increases in public. 'Veer Abhimauyu' is one such epic character, whom the playwright, **Pandit Radheshyam**, brought to life. Legend has it that Abhimanyu was the re-incarnation of a son of the Moon-God- Chandra. When Chandra was asked to let his son incarnate himself on earth, he made a pact that his son will only remain on earth for 16 years, as he could not bear to be separated from him any longer than that. Abhimanyu was the most loved of all sons of the Pandavas, so much so that Draupadi was said to love him more than her own sons. Draupadi once said that if the Pandavas are not willing to wage war, then her sons led by Abhimanyu will attack and get justice for her and avenge her humiliation. Abhimanyu was trained in all types of warfare by Lord Krishna and Balrama themselves, and later by Pradyumna (Sri Krishna's son). Abhimanyu learnt the art of breaking into the Chakravyuha when he was in Subhadra's womb. It was then Arjuna was narrating the art of breaking into Chakravyuha to Subhadra. But he did not know how to destroy the formation once he was inside, as Subhadra fell asleep while listening to the story and (Abhimanyu in her womb) could learn only half of the technique. This is the reason why he was only able to enter and break but not come out of the Chakravyuha

That was the tragedy of Abhimanyu. The matchless youth who won immortality by his shining heroism in the great Mahabharatha war. Pitted, against the mightiest of the mighty in the enemies' ranks, this warrior, barely sixteen, became the sheet-anchor of the Pandavas. The veterans ranged against him had to overcome him only by unfair means.

The production was ably supported by a competent team of

theatre professionals. Souti Chakraborty's lighting highlighted the dramatic elements with a blend of light and shadeow intermixed with mood lighting. Somesh PBs training of the martial Art of **Kalaripayattu** and **Kajal Ghosh's** Co-Music Design deserve mention. In the design department Kriti V. Sharma's costumes Vishala Mahale's set gave value to the production. Kudos also to Hema's blocking of the play which created the illusion of a giant battle field. It was indeed a memorable and meaningful evening laced with spirited performances of all the actors.

Of Mice and Men by

The Play & Director's Note

Of Mice and Men takes place during America's Great Depression, which lasted from the stock market crash of October 1929 until 12 years later when World War II began. One result of the depression was lack of steady jobs, which resulted in an increase in the number of itinerant workers. For the most part, these itinerant workers were men who traveled from town to town seeking short-term employment. The play addresses the real hopes and dreams of working- class America. It raises the lives of the poor and dispossessed to a higher symbolic level. *Of Mice and Men* tries to explain what it means to be human. It touches on several themes: the nature of dreams, the nature of loneliness, man's propensity for cruelty, powerlessness and economic injustices, and the uncertainty of the future. Nearly all of the characters admit, at one time or another, of having a profound sense of loneliness and isolation the characters are rendered helpless by their

isolation, and yet, even at their weakest, they seek to destroy those who are even weaker than they are. Steinbeck records a profound human truth: oppression does not come only from the hands of the strong or the powerful. The novel suggests that the most visible kind of strength—that used to oppress others—is itself born of weakness.

The farm, of which George and Lennie dream, does not exist in reality but it, is very real in their minds, where they will have self –respect and independence. It becomes a symbol of their relationship and the re-telling of the dream becomes a ritual. In opposition to this symbol is the bunkhouse which represents the cruel world of reality, where we see discrimination, cruelty, insensitivity and suspicion. This production evolved during a workshop with Rang Vinayak Theatre Group. Apart from struggling hard to portray the complex characters the young actors contributed in many other ways. They added certain hand properties, made set props, even brought suitable costumes.

The Director

Hema Singh, a well known actor, a graduate of NSD's Integrated Course, worked with NSD Repertory Company for 10 years. She has done major roles with eminent national and international directors. She was awarded with NSD's prestigious 'Manohar Singh Smriti Award' for her contribution to theatre in 2008. She has acted in tele-films and serials with directors like Shyam Benegal and M.S.Sathyu. Her portrayal of Imarti Devi in a T.V. serial has fetched her 'Indian Television Academy Award 'for Best Actress in a negative role'. She has done innovative work in the field of Parsi theatre and presentation of poetry on stage. She has assisted famous Parsi style actor Late Master Fida Hussain 'Narsi' at NSD for 6 years. Apart from 15 productions in Parsi style to her credit, she has directed plays of other genres such as *Hot Air, Gadar, Jasma*

Odhan & *Chainpur ki Dastan*.

Presently, she is an Associate Professor of Acting at NSD.

The Author

The winner of the 1962 Nobel Prize in Literature, John Steinbeck was an American author of twenty-seven books, including sixteen novels, six non-fiction books, and five collections of short stories. He is widely known for the comic novels Tortilla Flat (1935) and Cannery Row (1945), the multi-generation epic East of Eden (1952), and the novellas Of Mice and Men (1937) and The Red Pony (1937). The Pulitzer Prize-winning The Grapes of Wrath (1939) is considered Steinbeck's masterpiece. Many of his works are considered classics of Western literature.

The Group

Established in 2007 by Dr. Brijeshwar Singh, 'Rang Vinayak Rang Mandal' is a cultural wing of Daya Drishti. In 2010 Rang Vinayak formed its own Theatre Repertory which has now 30 artists. It has been hosting theatre festivals, showcasing works of eminent theatre directors . It has also been organizing Children theater workshops, giving them a cultural platform. It's widely acclaimed productions of different genres are *Adarsh Hindu Hotel* , *Jab Shaher Hamara Sotha Hai, AMidsummer Night's Dream, Mattavillas* , *Reunion*, *Saiyaan Bhaye Kotwal and Chainpur ki Dastan.*

Design & Direction Hema Singh