

Snake, Love and Sexuality

Ravindra Tripathi's



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 13th 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 10th 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.

‘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.

Begam's Pillow from India or Muare from Argentina?

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 seen '**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't say. 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.

Do you know Janusz Korczak?

Ravindra Tripathi's

theaterama



A Scene from 'Sunil Shanbaug's Play 'Dreams of Talim'

Sometime you hear a true story which is more dramatic than drama, more painful than Greek tragedies. Here is a story for you which Sunil Shanbaug, the director who presented 'Dreams of Talim' in 13th BRM (Bharat Rang Mahotsav), told before a gathering in NSD on 14th of January. We met in 'meet the director' program in BRM. I was officially asked to conduct the program by Dinesh Khanna, the coordinator. The idea of the meet is a very good concept and well organized by Dinesh and his team members' i.e. Suman Kumar Singh, Savita Rani, Vipin Bhardwaj and others. During the course of question-answer session, Sunil narrated a story which stunned the audience.

Replying to a question, Sunil said that this time (in 13th BRM) initially he wanted to bring another production based on Ravindra Nath Tagore's *Dak Ghar* (the post office) in 13th BRM. But, regarding staging of *Dak Ghar*, there is another story attached to the play, the story of Janusz Korczak. Korczak was a polish writer of children literature during the Second World War. He was also a principal of a school for orphans. It was the time when Hitler's German forces were encircling Poland. Himself a Jew, Korczak was at the receiving end of the Nazi German power, but he was continuing his work. He felt that

something unexpected might happen any day and children of his orphanage should be prepared for this. At that horrible time of history, Korczak decided to do a play with orphan students and the name of the play was *Dak Ghar*. The play was staged. After sometime, the Nazis sent all the children to a concentration camp and they were massacred there. Korczak accompanied the children in graveyards.

In Sunil's production of *Dak Ghar* this story is interwoven and it is already staged in Calcutta. The staging the Tagore's play in those circumstances and story of Korczak's integrity and commitment tells a lot about strength of literature. Korczak was himself a *littérateur* and wrote for children. But he chose Tagore's play. Those who have either read or seen *Dak Ghar* know that it a story of hope and faith of a young and innocent boy. Perhaps Korczak thought that this play will be a moral source of strength at that time of darkness. Or maybe something else was in his mind. Who knows? But one thing is certain that literature, drama or art has a moral relevance.

I am eager to see this production of Sunil.

Arunachal Pradesh on The Theatre Map of India

Ravindra Tripathi's

theaterama



No doubt, the Hindi language has many local dialects. But have you ever heard of Arunachali Hindi? Yes, it exists. You want to know where it is? It is in Arunachal Pradesh of course. But why is it Arunachali Hindi, it is difficult to say because it is just like standard *khariboli* chaste Hindi. But whatever it is, it was a nice experience to watch the play and listen to the language.

I am talking about '***Drowa Jhagmu: Ek Devi Ki Kahani***' (Drowa Jhagmu: the story of a goddess). It is a play from Arunachal Pradesh, directed by **Suk Bahadur**, a National School of Drama graduate.

'Drowa Jhagmu: Ek Devi Ki Kahani' is based upon a mythological story of Arunachal Pradesh. A king named Kalawangphu was famous for his violent nature. He loved bloodshed. One day, when he went hunting, his dog got lost somewhere in the forest. While searching for his dog, he met a beautiful woman, who was really a fairy called Drowa Jhagmu. The king wanted to marry her, but Drowa Jhagmu put a condition before him – he will have to shun violence and lead a peaceful life. The king accepts this condition and both of them got married and had two children, a son and a daughter.

Meanwhile the king's first wife returned (she had gone somewhere for a long time). Seeing the new queen and her two children she becomes furious and plots a conspiracy. The king is dethroned and arrested. The fairy returns to her world, the

two children had to hide themselves from the first queen, who acquires all the power. But at the end, all goes well. The son becomes the king with the help of his fairy mother. He rescues his father, the first queen, who is the conspirator is dethroned and killed. The daughter, who is a grown up woman, also joins her brother and father.

The director uses the local Aunachali dance forms; *yak dance*, *aji lhamu dance*, pantomimes and mask dances to weave the production. The actors did their hard work, although there is need of more refinement in the area of voice modulation. It is a good thing that Arunachal Pradesh is coming on the theatre map of India.