'The psychiatry ward became a school of acting for me.'

Mohan Agashe

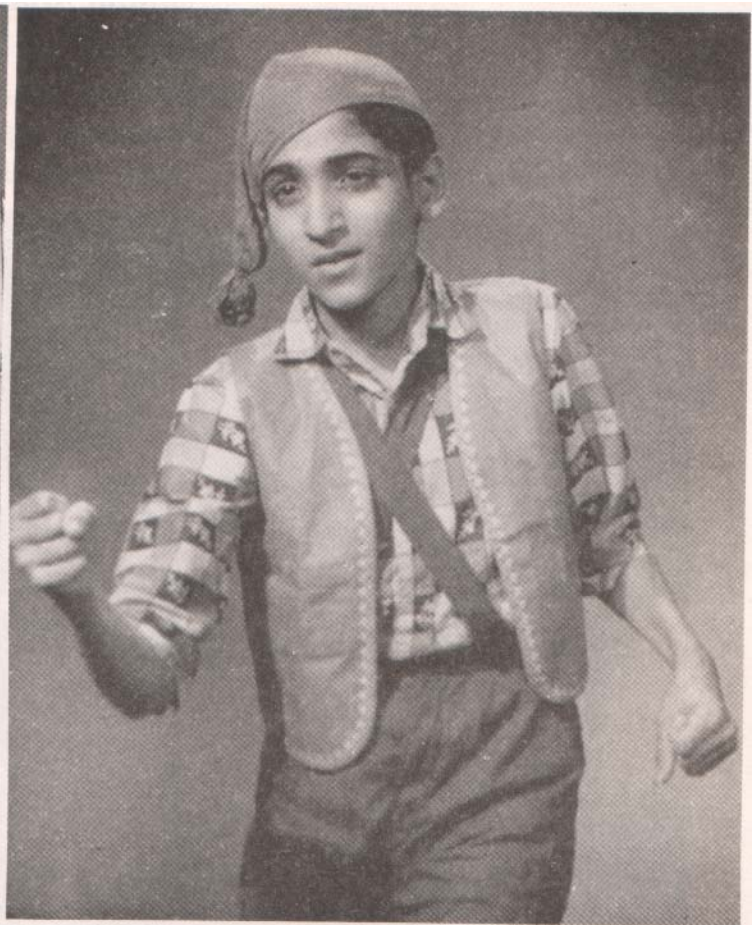
MOHAN AGASHE the reputed stage and film actor, is also a psychiatrist. This free-flowing interview for STQ, with SAMIK BANDYOPADHYAY in August 1995, captures the flavour of conversation and explores, amongst other things, the links between psychiatry and theatre.

STQ: Maybe if you start with a little bit of the Marathi theatre setting ... what theatre you first saw, or even personal stuff, growing up and that kind of thing ...

'My theatre career ... had an insidious onset'

MA: That makes sense to me, I'll tell you why, because, just as some diseases have an insidious onset, my theatre career-you could say-had an insidious onset. For a pretty long time

I did not know what I was doing or why I was doing it. Almost about 10 to 15 years later I suddenly found I had serious interest in theatre. And generally you put these questions to test when you have to make a choice. Till then you're just playing about. At each point of time, I realized, you are making a decision which is irreversible. When you reach that point, then you seriously think about it, whether it is theatre, marriage or studies, whatever it is. That's why I say it is insidious-for most of the theatre practitioners it generally starts very early in life. For me it started with school because I used to do mimicries. I loved it and I imitated most of my teachers. I was very keen to perform in Ganesh Festivals, Durga Puja festivals-I used to cry if my item was left out. So I was known as 'Radya Agashe'. And at that time Sai Paranjape used to run a fabulous children's theatre in Pune, Sai herself being writer-director. From Balodyan radio plays Sai picked me up for children's theatre. She had this play called *The World of* Cards-we personified the king and the queen of clubs or hearts-or she had this play about animals and birds called 'Conference . . .' it was a poetry conference of birds.



left Mohan Agashe and Vrinda Borgavkar in Rabindranath'tagore's *Uakghar. 1957. Rght.* Mohan Agashe in *nirupama and parirani A* Vinay Kale production. 1962.

STQ: You acted in some of these?

MA: Yes I was acting in two of them; one was made into a film, much before the Children's Film Society came into being. The first children's film was Nirupama *and* Parirani.. In this play-something like *Dakghar,* where Amol is handicapped and can't move out-she had this girl who had polio and all the characters from her books came alive to her-Peter Pan and her own shadow and Lakad dandya. It was made into a film when I was in the 10th standard. So that's why the onset of my acting career was 'insidious'. One day, my teacher came, Purushottam Vaze. The prestigious institution Purushottam Karandak of Pune is named after him. He was a very strict disciplinarian. We used to be shit scared of him, all of us, and one day he suddenly turned up at my house and told my father, 'I want your son to come tomorrow to Maharashtriya Kalopasak (a very reputed theatre group of Pune) because we are celebrating Tagore Centenary and are going to do *Dakghar.'* I was to play Amol. Till then it was only school plays, children's theatre. For the first time, as a child, I went out to a very reputed amateur theatre group. I played Amol and it's a wonderful play, I thoroughly enjoyed it. What happens in school when you have multifarious interests, is that you are allowed to do it and even appreciated for that. In fact your parents show you off when guests arrive, 'Look, my son does this' or 'does that'. But as you start approaching your school finals, matriculation, then you are warned about the same things for which you were appreciated. 'Now you better focus on your studies, no dramas, no sports'-and this gets even worse as you enter professional college. That's really when they choke your activities, even if you are good at it. You are expected, both by the family and by your peers, to focus on your primary subject and not on the so called extra-curricular activities which, in my later life I have realized, help you far better to cope with life than your curricular activities. In fact these are the things which give you a better understanding of what life is. At that point of time, in 1963 when I was in my matriculation, fortunately or unfortunately for me, my father took very ill. He was hospitalized, in Sassoon hospital. I was a kid and I remember very vividly that I used to go to the hospital with the tiffin to feed him. He was W the general ward. And I could not

stand that atmosphere. My father used to cry because of the pain, and seeing him cry I used to cry. I used to go to the doctor and say 'Why don't you. . .'

STQ: What did he have?

MA: Initially he was thought to have had a heart attack but then it turned out to be spondylytis, cervical spondylytis. So I did not have monitoring that year at all. Earlier through 10th standard he would keep on telling me to study hard, too much gallivanting around ... and that somehow or other must have created a sense of responsibility, because that's the only year when I did my studies well. Until then and after that also when my father came back home, each year, I had one friend-I used to go over to his house for studies. So today's situation is, parents of many of my friends know me as well as they know their own sons. I have access to about six different houses, who all know me from childhood and Fin almost an extended family member. Whereas, in my family my parents do not know my friends. Firstly, 1 used to go and stay there, eat there, sleep there, except this particular year. Because I was going to the hospital, I had to be home all the time. I studied and never before did I get so many awards. I got a national scholarship, I got prizes in elocution, I got prizes in theatre, I did everything that year. Elocution, games, *kho kho* and *hututu kabbadi* drama-I got prizes in all these. Plus I got 80% that time and the national scholarship. This was in '63. My position in the family improved to such a level that if anyone said anything to me, my father would ask him to shut up. I got very preferential treatment in the house, of course, which must have had an effect on my brother who was more brilliant than me and lost interest in studies because he thought I was getting preferential treatment, which both of us now talk about and I frankly admit. There are simple things, like, coming from a lower middle class family, we were very keen on saving electricity and fuel. I used to, I remember, collect cow dung, so mother could make those dry cakes you put in *chullnhs* to make water hot, because there was no gas or kerosene and there used to be one small forty watt bulb. When I would come home in the evening after the matric, my father would ask my sister to switch on the tube. She never knew why ... what difference it made.

STQ: How many brothers and sisters are you?

MA: I have one elder sister and one younger brother who is academically by far the most brilliant. After matric my father had told me that he had no money for college education, but because I got national scholarship all those worries were gone. And I was allowed to go to

college. Promptly enough, the next year I lost my scholarship because I lost my class. I got second class. I was indulging in all sorts of ... for the first time I was in a college which was mixed, coeducational-and had my share of fascination for girls. But never a word was uttered. I was allowed to do everything. And I think I had the sense and balance to realize that if I did my studies well and kept my parents happy I'd be allowed to do what I liked. And it became more so when I entered Medical College. Once you are in Medical College, generally 99.9% students turn out to be doctors. Very few drop out as such. And at least at that time for the majority of students it was compulsory that we fail. So even the failure did not bring a stigma. In fact it added to your prestige or status. That's when I met Jabbar[Patel]-in medical college.

STQ: How old were you?

MA: I was eighteen. Actually seventeen and a half, to be precise. We had this system of eleven plus two-at sixteen you normally pass your matriculation-so eighteen, nearly. Now retrospectively, 1 realize it was a good thing which happened to me and I still advise my students that if you realize too early in your life that you are bright, do not expose it early; expose it gradually. Don't stand first in the 5th standard even if you have the ability. Stand 10th. In the 6th standard stand 9th. Because the moment you shift your identity, it really prevents you from going further. Both you yourself as well as family and peers identify you much more as an academically bright student and so you have many compulsions to maintain that. Now even more so. So generally pass off as good, as above average, but not bright, even if you are bright. That's the trick, that's where theatre comes in. It happened to me accidentally; not that I did not have ability but I was distracted by other things. Father's illness, among other things, was what made me think that at least this year I should study and that's how I think I felt responsible. Since I had "all the freedom, I felt more responsible. And that year I believe I concentrated and focused on my studies, though I was doing everything else. So the mental focus shifted and doing these things basically kept me

in a state of mind where I was always very happy and this state of mind has a lot to do with your performance. Whether it is in examination or theatre' or anywhere. A bit of anxiety is always good, but if you are under pressure, you cannot perform well, unless it's your own pressure. And so my theatre career was running parallel to my academic career and my father was pleased. But even then it was just fun-I did not realize that it was something I wanted to do, I wanted to follow as a career or anything. Out of the many things which I had a choice to

do, I think I opted for that because, firstly, I enjoyed doing it; secondly, it did not require any money. We had some other classes like photography, trekking, picnics, all of which had fees. I remember in summer classes the only two things T would do were dramatics and sutkatai, because both were free. I could not afford these other hobbies. And my attitude. changed when I met Jabbar in medical college.

'My attitude changed when I met Jabbar in medical college'

STQ: Were you in the same class?

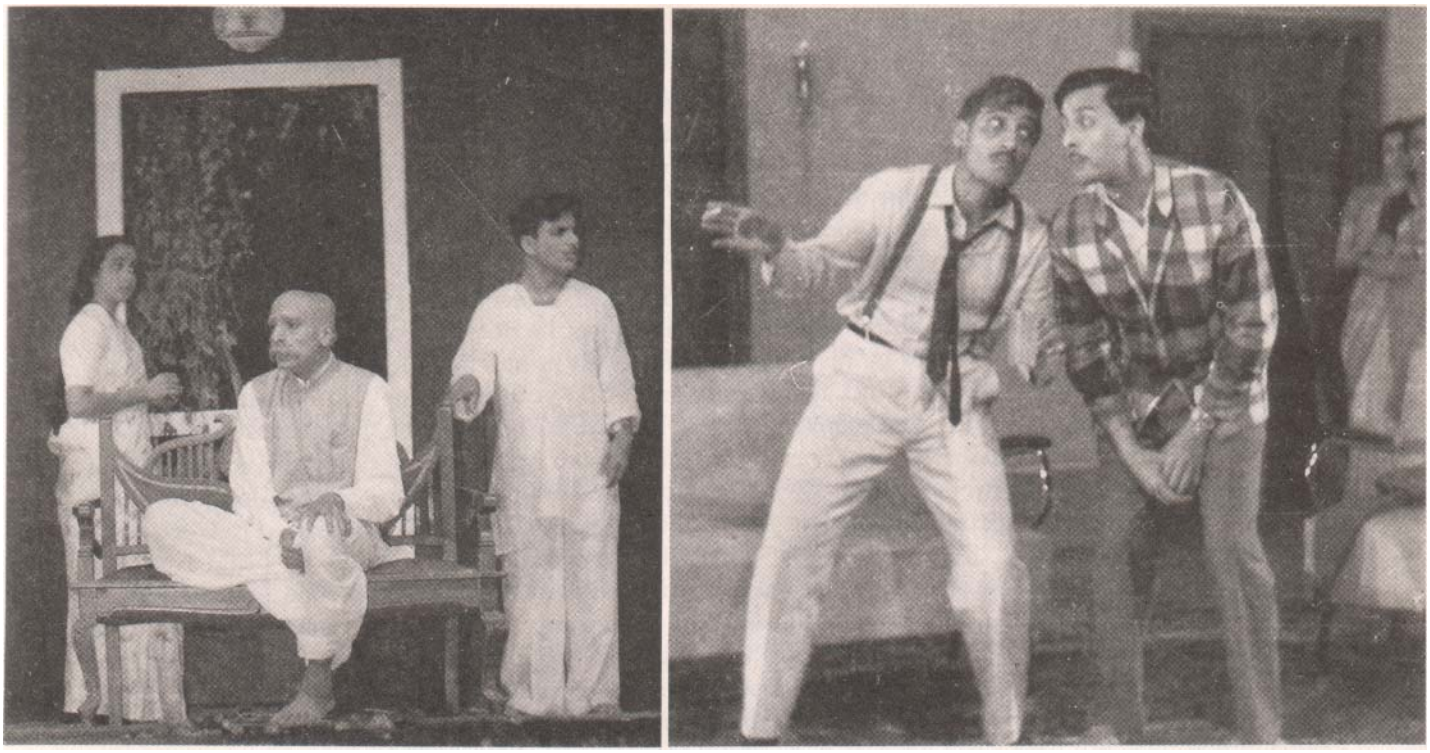
MA: No, Jabbar was four years senior to me. Generally in Medical College what happens is, when first year students are recruited, then whosoever the senior students from different fields are, like say football, cricket or dramatics, they keep on tapping, 'what is the new recruit like', 'is there anybody potentially worthwhile . . .' I remember after admission, after about three weeks, I was called to the canteen. jabba r was sitting there. He had already made his mark in Purushottam Karandak. Jabbar was a name in the college. Very prominent already. It was a year after that, that Jabbar came back. I was in the second year. Around that time not only Jabbar, but also Satish Alekar , Dr. Watwe, Dr. Mina Puranik-we were a good solid ten medicos. That's where I learnt a professional approach. Like, immediately after I passed, when jabbar had joined the Progressive Dramatic Association, and myself, Dr. Watwe, we were all formerly members of Maharashtriya Kalopasak. We were members not W an official sense, but we did act in their plays. But en masse we left and joined the PDA, because we were with Jabbar. That was our group. So we joined as a kind of junior group in the PDA.

Jabbar used to conduct classes. I used to be scared, I hated Jabbar for that. We used to meet on Tuesdays and Fridays and we started on Stanislavsky in class. Until then I was not even aware of the fact that something like this exists in theatre, there're books and there's a method and one studies it seriously; and then I came under severe pressure, actually, because if you went to see a play or a film, the next time we met Jabbar, he was sort of an authoritarian teacher, he would ask 'Yes, what did you see? You liked it? What did you like in it?' and I was sort of forced to analyse and it completely ruined my pleasure in seeing the thing. So I got so averse to it that I almost started avoiding seeing anything because he would ask me questions. I clearly remember, some other friends would say something ... I mean,

non-specific, but emotively, say 'It's got such different dimensions' and all these kinds of pseudo-intellectual words which I could not say at all. If I liked it, I liked it. I never thought I had to analyse why I liked it or i disliked it. Either I was with it or I was not with it and now I realize how I was getting aware that if one likes something or does not like something, one has to think. It made me completely ... I mean, I was shocked. I could no longer watch anything. Because before I started watching I kept on thinking now I have to know what I am seeing, whether I am liking, I am disliking, why I'm disliking. So it alienated me from my experience altogether. Then I learnt a few tricks from Dr. Watwe *(laughs).* Dr. Wa twe was very clever and he still is. Jabbar would never speak first. He would always speak at the end. But whenever lie spoke in the end, whether about a play or a film, that was the only thing I liked about him, because he could be really organized and could bring in so many points which one hadn't noticed. So he made us aware of the multifaceted aspects of both theatre and film, of which I was surprised to see that he was aware-he was just four years older than me; but then he could think like that. And I can tell you till that time, till we actually did *Sleuth in '76,* most of us were completely in awe of Jabbar. Theatre or-films, anything, I think jabbar is the last word. He knows. And he had this ability to stand for four hours on the street at the corner of Cafe Good Luck-he was a great narrator, an ability which I think he has of late lost-and he could keep you spellbound even under conditions of physical stress. Like, standing there for four hours was difficult, but I felt that if I excused myself, I'd be missing something which I didn't want to miss. And he'd tell us about various films he had seen and he was far more exposed. The only other person at that time, who showed some originality of thought, I think, was Satish Alekar. And Satish was still *attempting* to write. He was not successful, he hadn't found his niche. He had written a couple of one act plays, but he was spontaneous, which he is till today.

STQ: This is an interruption-in your medical career, when did you opt for psychiatry?

MA: After that, precisely at this point. At this point when I knew that I had to do theatre-I can't dc without it. So I had to find a way of doing it. That was soon after my MBBS, when I was doing my



Left...In Lal Phutal A one-act play performed in Medical College in 1965. *Right.* As 'Kanhayya' in the Medical College annual production, *Dinu's Mother-in-law Radha.* 1968

internship and then I knew that the only subject I liked in medicine was psychiatry. That, I think, comes from my genuine interest in human beings and life. I did not want to do surgery. In fact I had gone to the extent of thinking that if I don't get psychiatry, I would either quit medicine or just do general practice.

Around the same time, 1970, *Ashi Pakhare Yeti* was a big success; we got all the prizes in the State Competition. That was the first opportunity to go all over Maharashtra, because we performed about a hundred and twenty shows in about eighteen months. Now, out of the ten member crew eight were doctors. In the cast of six, four were doctors. Jabbar himself, myself, Dr. Watwe and Dr. Mina Puranik. Only Kalpana and bilip were non-medicos. The lighting was done by Dr. Panwalkar, sets and props were done by Dr. Marda. All in all, it was an experience which sort of turns you on. For the first time we stayed out of Pune for so long, going to Bombay, Sangli, Kolhapur, Satara, Delhi. That was an exposure. Till then we were totally over-protected. Jabbar was the only man who had access to Dr.

Lagoo. He'd talk to Mrinal Sen. All that was too much for us. Dr. Lagoo was the only Marathi actor who had a Mercedes. Other Marathi actors didn't have a cycle, and he had a Mercedes-though not from acting, but from his medical practice abroad. And because of Jabbar I travelled in that Mercedes from Bombay to Pune.

So at that point, in '72, I was not sure, frankly, if I would get a post in psychiatry. So I went and met Jagat Murari, who was then the Director of FTII, and Roshan Taneja, to ask them to find me something, like some people come to me now-actors-'I need a break' kind of thing. But that did not last long, it lasted for about two months, because they informed me that I'd got the post of registrar and residency in psychiatry, and I was on the right track. And then there was no problem for three years because during residency, you do not think of the future except finishing the~ MD. *Ghashiram* was being done when I was doing my residency in medicine. And one thing I must acknowledge-all along the line I met people who either had a weakness for theatre, music, or me. Like my co-houseman and registrar and my boss, who could have made life miserable for me, made it easier: My co-houseman used to be my locum every day from 9 in the evening till 3 in the morning, if there were any calls. Except for an emergency admission day, I did not go for calls. And when we were rehearsing *Ghashiram,* Jabbar had set up his medical practice in Dhond, a small town about 40 miles from Pune. So he used to come by evening train and we used to rehearse from 8.30,/9.00 at night till about 2/2.30 in the morning for three and a half months! And that was also the only play in my life the rehearsals of which did not bore me. Normally for an actor, I believe, when you start rehearsals, after about four weeks you're bored with the rehearsals and you want to go and perform. This is the only play which we were rehearsing for three and a half months and we did not feel like that.

STQ: You didn't feel ready?

MA: No, we enjoyed the rehearsals more. Rehearsal itself was a thrill and in fact the last fifteen to twentv minutes of the play were directed on the previous night. The deadline was put because of the State Drama Competition. We *had* to perform on the 16th of December. So I remember, the previous night, Jabbar rushing through things ... like that whole dragging

of Ghashiram, stoning him, his death danceeverything was done on the last night, and then sort of formalized later in subsequent shows.

So ... as I was doing psychiatry more and more, I realized that my primary interest was in psychology. See, this is one of the disadvantages of our over-protective system and non-exposure. It takes a long time for a person to know what he likes and what he doesn't like. Until then he presumes things which are told to him either by his peers or parents. So by the time you realize what you really like by your own experiments and so on, it is already late. After you have gone to professional collegeten years after you have passed-you realize what you like. At least in my case, before post graduation l knew one thing that I had to do and that was theatre. So I had to find a way of doing medicine in a way that allowed me to do theatre also. That was very clear to me and there were no two opinions in my mind. Once again-it was a stroke of fate-in '73 my father retired, totally. My sister used to work in the post office to support us ... now these are all facts which I realized later. That's why I said I was not even-I thought I was responsible, but that was only as far as studies were concerned. But the kind of responsibility you take as an adult, I'd not taken till I passed my MBBS. I didn't even realize that my sister was doing her college in the morning and working the whole day in the Fost office, supporting my father financially so that I could study medicine. I was granted everything. *He* never said anything. He was in debt, which I realized much later. For years on end, for twenty years, I know now, we always had outstanding bills. But because of his nature, he never came to ask or it never became a crisis and because we had a big house back home in our native place and some land, it was a moral support to my father. In spite of hardships and everything, the Agashes were rich *(langhs).*

In 1973 when I did my MBBS and started my post graduation, he retired. He had residual damage from his earlier disease. For the last ten years of service also, he was not the same person as he was before. So he retired and said 'Mohan, I've retired. Now everything is yours, including this', and he handed over the remaining sum of over ten thousand rupees-his pension and gratuity and whateverand I suddenly realized that I am the kartct (master) in the family now and I have to take care of them. From enthusiasm I opened a dispensary and started looking for a job. I had a job until then as *a* houseman, because I was doing my post graduation. But after housemanship I did not get the registrarship which should normally have been mine, because the girl who was doing medicine changed to psychiatry. She had

higher marks than me and she got that registrarship. So I was left as only a PG student without a job . My teacher advised me, don't do anything till you finish your post graduation. It was all right for him to say that. He was not aware of my responsibilities. So I ignored his advice and opened my dispensary. I spent all that money on my dispensary. Within a month I got a temporary job at the hospital as a resident medical officer-a sort of administrative post. I was in charge of all the out patients. Temporary-it was a one month assignment. I think I have a tendency to work better under stress, whether it is theatre or medicine or family situation. So on the home front this was the stress-that my father was retired and I would lose the registrar's post after a month. I had one month to prove myself, and what has helped me always, is taking the initiative. I did something that no other administrative medical officer had done in the past. I took regular rounds of the whole hospital at night. 1 used to check sterilizers, I used to check the attendance of sweepers and ward boys and every night 1 used to write out a detailed report, and two or three times I wrote that most of the sterilizers were out of order, probably because the water level was not maintained. Simple-but nobody was attending to that. So I passed a strict instruction, that I will come at any time and check the water level. And, well, for two months there was no sterilizer out of order and that impressed the Dean and he wrote out comments on my report: 'Good. Come and see me. Discuss.'-and I felt great.

At the end of one month when my post came to an end, in the final report I wrote, 'Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to work as an administrator in thP hospital and not only as a doctor, to know what are the problems of the other side', which meant I had to confront doctors. Doctors have

this habit, 'Oh, I ordered this; why hasn't it come?' He doesn't even go to find out why . . . he doesn't even know how the drugs are supplied.

STQ: So you were on the other side?

MA: Absolutely, absolutely. In fact, in one instance-I remember clearly that I was given continuation as Resident Medical Officer-so when in the last report I wrote, `Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to work as an administrator in the hospital' the Dean called me and said, 'Why didn't you tell me your post is ending?' I said, 'You only gave me an order of one month and I thought you knew it' So on Sunday he called the clerk and got my

order extended for another month and he went himself h - ¯) Mantralaya and got me one year's order. I promptly closed down the dispensary. So all the ten thousand was wasted. I was still young, though I had developed more sense of responsibility. But I closed the dispensary and continued my post graduation while working as an RMO.

The residents went on strike. As a PG student, I was one of them, but I was in an administrative post. So I was a government servant. They were stipendary residents. They went on strike-they were my friends. In fact I was sharing my room with the leader of the strike. The strike went on for months, the government took strict action -eviction. They ordered residents to quit their rooms. So one day I had to go in the capacity of an administrative medical officer, lock up their rooms, take the keys-from my friends-and no one, none of them, would trust me anymore. I had to sit with the Dean trying to find a solution. It did not last long. After three days there was some kind of settlement-at least the residents should not be evicted before the negotiations are over-there was a photograph in the papers of me coming with the keys and handing out the keys to the residents so that they could again occupy their rooms.

So that's how, actually, I started looking at any kind of situation in a more dynamic manner than in a one-sided professional manner. I think that gave me the clue. And that's when I realized what Jabbar was then talking about, that when you are acting in theatre, it's not only how you act. It's also important for you to know what the set is like, lighting, costumes. So sometimes you do not grasp what you study but you understand it later. This experience did teach me that you must look at the requirements of the other person if you want -to work jointly, together. The real good spirit, the understanding of a 'good spirit', I got there. By that time we were really in Theatre Academy.

When this was happening in the hospital, there was a crisis in the theatre group also. *Ghashiram* stopped after 19 shows and the PDA disowned it. So a split was inevitable. Bhalba Kelkar, the President of PDA, resigned.

STQ: At the same time?

MA: Yes. I was not aware, I was nowhere in the administrative side of theatre. I was just a loyal subordinate actor, I was not in the know of things. Satish had an idea. At that time I think Satish was more grown up than me-knew what was happening-and then Jabbar went to Bhalba and asked him not to resign because it was his Company, saying that we'll resign. So Jabbar and Anil Joglekar and Sridhar Rajguni, we resigned from the PDA. On 27 March, 1973 (when

my order for continuation in the hospital came) on the terrace of Satish Alekar's house. We also formed Theatre Academy. The idea was not to start *Ghashiram* again, but to do theatre which we believed in. It was quite contrary to what Kamlakar did. You see, the attack was on Tendulkar, on two plays, *Snklmram Binder* and *Gliasliiraiii Kotzunl.* As *Sakharam* was being produced commercially and professionally, Kamlakar Sarang decided to exploit the situation completely. Kamlakar was aggressive and pushy and he really made it into a big thing, court, drama, everything; he won the case and had a special show for Balasaheb Thackeray, got it cleared and *Sakharam* was on the road. Whereas we decided to let the whole thing settle down. As it is, quitting the PDA and starting the Theatre Academy needed time as we were virtually starting from scratch.

STQ: You have been through the bar

MA: No, there was no ban on *Ghashiram* as such, no official ban. It was a so-called initiated by groups-some political and some theatre groups.

STQ: So, because of public protest the Progressive Drama Association stop the play?

MA: Yes and we resigned That's also when I learnt what double standards in communication means because I was present for the meeting when the *Sakharam* show was stopped by the public at the Bal Gandharva theatre. Becoming aware of this kind of controversy, I'd gone to see it. Till that time, I was not even very keen on seeing what was happening in theatre. That was the beginning. And when I had gone, they stopped the show and there was a meeting between various protesters, Kamlakar Saran-, the producer and director of *Sakharam Binder,* and the Commissioner of Police, in the VIP room of Bal Gandharva which I attended and there, those in the protest groups whispered to me, 'Nothing like *Ghashiram I* have seen it twice'-imagine, only in the first nineteen shows! They were protesters from Hindu Maha Sabha, Youth Congress, Jan Sangh. I said, 'This is very funny. Why are you saying this? Publicly you are saying stop it and you come privately and say to me it's a wonderful play.' So I knew for sure that the resistance to *Ghashiram* was really not there, except from those few radicals like G. N. Joglekar, Daji Panashikar.

Because we had in-house problems, basically we decided to let the dust settle down. And in that period Satish wrote his first play *Miki and Memsaab* which we had to stage for the State

Drama competition and we had to take the banner of Shishu Ranjan because Theatre Academy was not yet two years old. So we had to perform under the banner of Shishu Ranjan.

STQ: So the first Theatre Academy production technically was *Miki and Memsaab?*

MA: Yes, and by the time the rehearsals ended and performance happened, I had a beard and long hair. Long, lovely hair, which I had to cut off because of the role I was doing-of the professor, which suited me very well. We had only five performances including the competition. It was not a popular play, not successful in that sense, but as an actor it was a major thing for me-unlike Nana of *Ghashiram* For Nana I got a lot of popularity: But the success of my Nana also depended on what a lot of other people did.

STQ: It was the total style of the production that made Nana .

MA: Absolutely. When I read or heard sayings like 'the king is played by the court' I knew what it. meant. When I play Nana, it's what other people do to make my character, over and above my acting ... like when I'm on stage and the brahmins don't act the way they should, but they stop and bow and show their respect for me, and that is what establishes my character and not my acting at all. In *Miki And Mentsnnb,* the professor's role really required acting. And it was tough-a major role. I was on stage constantly.

The only other play which I've done like that is *Sleuth (Khelin).* That also did another good thing to me theatrically. I'd done Nana, and the professor was totally different from what I was doing as Nana. And the shows of *Ghashirani* were not on. Earlier only nineteen shows were done. I mean, I'm sure if 100 shows of *Ghashiram* had already been done and I was doing *Miki and Mmemsaab* people would have commented that there was some carry over from my Nana role into this one. But because nobody even knew what I was doing as Nana, these kinds of preconceived ideas were not there. Some of tile damage of having a longterm relationship with a character is that it becomes practically impossible for you to perform something else in the same medium. Even if you feel you've done it differently, there are some biological limitations where certain mannerisms, certain expressions remain constant. I had to be very conscious of it later on when I did *Khella* (an adaptation of Anthony Shaffer's Sleuth) in '76. By that time *Ghashiram* was absolutely known-larger than life. That's also when Tendulkar had come to me and asked me to make a choice, between theatre and medicine. Because he thought musical theatre was a viable proposition for me, since I had a sense of rhythm and

dance movements-though I'm not a dancer. I am sorry about that, I wish I was also a dancer like Kamalahasan.. . .

So that was the beginning. On one side I was doing psychiatry. I promptly resigned from the post of RMO when I got Resident Registrar's post in the beginning of 1974. I think these are important things because in the RMO's post I had a lot more authority and power in the hospital. But in January '74 when the second registrar's post fell vacant, I promptly opted for that post and went back to a resident status rather than being the chief medical administrative officer of the hospital. I did that because I was serious about pursuing my post graduation in psychiatry.

'The best of the performances I have seen have been in my ward'

Now I started identifying why I was doing two things. There is one common theme-if you're a medical practitioner-whatever branch of medicine-surgery, gynaecology, psychiatry-and you're in films and theatre-these are both emotionally charged situations. In no other profession will you find this kind of emotionally charged situation for both the participants. You may be working with computers and at the

most you transfer your emotions to that machine. So what happens is that emotionally that becomes an important object for you. But here it's a human object who is in possession of his own emotions and there is transference and counter-transference and everything else ...

I think I'm more aware of this than most of my other colleagues. What happens in the medical profession is that because they are on one side as professionals, though in the initial stages they do respond emotionally to the situation, or at least try to understand what the emotions of the other party are, in the process they suppress consciously, their own emotions, which gives rise to a lot of conflicting situations in the hospital, in the operation theatre, in the casualty ward, everywhere. There the concern of the relatives of the patient is much more emotional than scientific. But the approach of the doctor is much more scientific, with utter disregard for the subjectivities or subjective emotions of the patient. And nowhere in the medical curriculum is this training given-how to psychologically handle a patient and his family. Be it an accident patient or a patient of acute drug intoxication or a chronic patient with something like tuberculosis, no patient walks in only as a body. And all along, you have

his psych(' affecting the outcome of the disease. The progress, the treatment compliance and everything really depends on how well you handle that patient psychologically, more so than how scientifically you handle him, which a lot of doctors learn through experience. You know, doctors often give you a long list of, do this, do that, eat half an egg or methi once a week or something-this is all rubbish scientifically, l: know. But I think it's their way of psychotherapy; the patient feels he's being attended to, a very precise prescription has been drawn for him and it helps, if judiciously used.

This is what I realized as I was doing psychiatry, because initially I used to take the patient's side and fight with my post graduate teachers. The best of the performances I have seen have been not on stage or in films, but in my ward. I had no opportunity of going to a theatre school. The psychiatry ward became a school of acting for me. An actor needs to believe in what he is doing. Patients with delusions or hallucinations believe in their respective perceptions and therefore their behaviour is dictated by these perceptions.

Somebody who wants to learn, doesn't wait for school to begin-otherwise he will never learn. In fact most of the actors with original ideas have problems with schools, because it's a rigid system. And I give the example of Shombhu-da [Shombhu Mitra], I don't think he's gone to any school; but today he's an institution by himself. Or Bhakti Barve. She never went to any theatre school. And that's how I also started thinking, seriously about the process of education: what is teaching, what is learning and where exactly it operates, what is the operational area of learning. You may have a nice teacher and still you may not learn. You may not have a teacher and still learn a lot. I was anti-school for many years till l realized for what purpose exactly schools are needed. For whom are they needed? For those people who are average, who have partial motivation, not total motivation, who get frustrated very easily from adverse circumstances. To improve their skills, they need vigorous training. Otherwise: they'd require ten years to do what they could do in three years. So schools are primarily to bridge the gap between an outstanding performer and an average performer, so that the total consistency of performance is ensured. But otherwise I'm not for schools. And I have no theatre school background, except for these exercises which Jabbar put us through, which sometimes were emotionally torturous to me-whereas it wasn't so in the hospital because nobody knew I was learning acting, so I didn't have to explain to anybody, 1 didn't have to discuss it with anybody. I sat there not as a doctor, but as a student of theatre.

When a patient in acute excitement walked in, in a state of schizophrenic or manic excitement, or a paranoid patient-the Othello syndrome: I have learned from him what the character of Othello is, one cannot learn that in theatre. One has to learn it in the psychiatry ward. The moment you get your first patient of paranoia and you are a naive lay person and not a trained professional-you tend to believe him. Not only believe him, you are willing to join him and defend his case to the world. When a true paranoid patient comes into the ward, he leaves you no choice ... it's a total performance-from the moment he enters, sits with you, you ask him a question and he takes his time deciding whether to answer you or not, gives you a suspicious look, tries to gauge whether you're on his side or on the opposition's ... and then if you succeed in establishing a rapport with him, he confides in you about a serious international intrigue which even the CID doesn't know about, but he's telling you because he trusts you. And you watch that man from the first moment-the way he enters, sits, looks, the pauses he takes-it's not performance for him, but it's performance for me. And I realize why Amitabh Bachchan in Hindi commercial films, gives such a performance-because I think he has learnt the art of believing in what he's doing, of temporarily becoming paranoid or believing that he's a superman. Because if he didn't believe it, nobody else would believe it either. There are linkages. If I'm telling you something I myself don't believe, however much I shout, that shouting is not going to help. This is communicated through linkages. We also know through linkages what your relations are with the person opposite you' you understand when you shake hands from the way the hand is being held and the pressure applied and how long it lingers.

So this theatre language is very rich in these psychiatric outpatients, cases of emotional disorders. The general misconception about a psychiatrist is that he is the doctor who treats mad people. On the contrary, mad people don't need a doctor, because they have already found a solution: to cut off from reality because it's too painful and they cannot relate to anybody there. So they've already found a solution and they're unwilling to accept any other solution.

That's why you have major problems in

100th show of Chasiram Kotwal at Shanmukhananda Hall, Bombay 1975. Also in the picture: Dilip Kumar, Shashi Kapoor and Jabbar Patel.

treating psychotics all along. The great success of Freud was because he was highly selective in choosing what kind of patients to treat. He never treated psychotics, he treated neurotics and he had very strict criteria. He observed criteria before accepting the patient. That's why his success rate is very high. And then people started using it as if they'd found the magic medicine for everything, for all kinds of disorders. You know, he says that a person of above average intellect, suffering from neurotic ailments like hysteria or phobia to an incapacitating degree can be helped through the analytical approach-only those who have no pressures of survival. Then I realized ... that's why I said I probably might have done psychology and not psychiatry-because even today I think, if I want to have a practice which satisfies me, I should be studying psychiatry and practise it by becoming a baba-because most of my potential clientele is not in the psychiatric hospitals, but in the community. They are followers of various schools of philosophy, religion or of different cults. That's the way it works. So we must train doctors to differentiate between distress and disorder: one doesn't have to wait for a distress to become a disorder before one can start treating it. . . primary prevention is most important in psychiatry.

So this was my theatre school, you can say. If you really take it as a chunk of scenes, edited, and you don't tell where it's being shot-I can quote you an example ... a patient enters with four relations, tied up and all that. I, as the treating doctor, am sitting there and when the patient enters my office, usually he's struggling to get away and his mother or uncle or whoever is pulling him in. Then I give a shout-emotionally, not quietly, 'What're you doing? Stop it. Release him'-and if necessary rush to untie him. Once untied, he doesn't even move. He stops shouting and everything. I ask him to sit and drive out all the others-'You all get out. I don't want to talk to any of you. Are you human or what?' Then I call, 'Sister, give me a glass of water.' I offer it to him. You'll find that within 5 minutes, howsoever psychotic the patient may be-unless he's intoxicated, on drugs, when it's a different condition, a biological condition-he cools down and he starts trusting me. He may not talk but he starts communicating. He thinks I'm on his side and he feels safe. With paranoids it's different, they usually don't come in excited unless something has been done to them. But maniacs-their excitement is like the spreading of an infection. On the streets one must have seen it-someone in complete rags, maybe wearing a feather and holding a stick and all excited and spreading that excitement around, I remember a patient of mine who had come ,with his relations and looked very happy. He used to spend money like anything-he would make taxis wait and then pay a hundred rupees and not take the change back and things like that. So his relatives brought him, telling me that he spent everything and he had no sense of proportion at all. So I asked him why he had come to me, and he said, 'They said I need to see a doctor, so I said fine, let's go to a doctor.' I asked him how he felt and how things were. His reply was, 'Everything is fine and so am I. There are some problems at home, but I'll take care of them. They are nervous because they are not as confident as I am.' Now, this was his second marriage. His first wife had left him, and his interpretation was that she was unfortunate as she had lost him, he hadn't lost anything. The second marriage was also on the verge of breaking down because of his behaviour. You know, in Marathi a marriage is called a bond of *sneha* (affection) and *sambandh* (sexual relations). So when I asked him about his second marriage, he smiled, came close to me and said, *'Sneha I* have, but not *sambandh'* meaning, 'No physical relations, but we are friends.' *(bursts out laughing)....* And if the identity of the place is hidden, anybody would say it's a scene from a play. So that is how it became my training ground for theatre.

And then, if you have training in theatre, it helps you to handle these situations. So, if you're doing improvisation skills and if you have come to a level where you can have spontaneous, instant improvisations, that's what you require to deal with a patient till you get time, because you're buying time. Even if'you have to resort to chemical therapy, you need to give him a sedative injection, a patient has to 6e cooperative. You cannot give an injection to an excited patient being held by eight people. So you have to buy at least that one minute when the patient is cooperative, and if you have this ability of spontaneous improvisation, how it helps is that the moment the patient walks in, it's just like theatrehe's in a different world. When we go on stage we have to do it deliberately, we have to dissociate ourselves from reality. The most exciting moment in theatre for me is that moment when I'm standing in the wings and I have to step onto the stage and in a fraction of a second I have to dissociate myself-from one real space I'm going to another real space which temporarily has become a non-real space. So the fun of theatre for me is that. It allows you to establish a totally different relationship with space and time which otherwise you do only in dreams. Here it's a real space, a real time and a psychological set of spectators who allow you to treat that space and time in a totally different relationship and they're willing to accept it. So that's the most crucial and the most exciting moment for me. When the patient enters, you know it's a character who has entered, in his own scene, where he's the script writer, he's the director and you have to choose your role to suit his world, enter his world and not make him come to vour world. So vou have to take an instant decision, whether vou're going to be aggressive or submissive, whether you're going to be fatherly or child-like or sisterly or brotherly or a religious head. And if you have these improvising skills it helps, especially group-improvisations when you have to interact with other actors, like the mirroring exercises.

'Acting for me is basically a journey from Within to without'

I learnt theatre exercises much later. But it was easier for me to understand what they meant. The mirroring exercise is not about physical imitation, it's a way to reach you through my actions. Acting, for me is basically a journey from within to without. It has to originate within and then through your body it has to travel outward. What helps, if you don't unfortunately have anything within, is to go in the reverse order; so you start from without-when you're playing the king, try wearing royal clothes, have a cap, look different-so it gives

you some crutches to help you feel different. That's how, I believe, average actors, who're not intense, after 15-20 years of their career, start being better actors. It's not because they try to find themselves, like Grotowski or Badalbabu; but it's because they imitate somebody they've seen-these ham actors-and through sheer imitation-doing it for 15-20 years-they become veterans. It grips them from within, after starting from without. So when you do these mirroring exercises, it's precisely to build up your ability for spontaneous improvisation. Here you're not allowed to talk. You're there eye to eye, one is the initiator and the other is supposed to be the mirror. And if it really hits, you'll see that both start doing actions simultaneously. Initially, it's like he lifts a hand and you lift a hand, he does this and then you do this. But as you go deeper, communication becomes so good that you start reading what the other person is going to do, so that you do it simultaneously. So that's how I think theatre has helped me in handling patients.

The first lesson which I got from psychiatry was that unless you believe in what you're doing, you'll never perform well. You have to believe as the patient believes in his world. And the same thing that he's doing in the ward, if he did on the stage, he'd be somewhere else. But not knowing what to do where, he has no sense of time, place or person. Four years ago we had this seminar on abnormal personalities and Marathi theatre. I selected five playwrights with five plays. Tendulkar's *Gidhadc* (Vultures), Satish Alekar's *Mahapur,* Jayawant Dalvi's *Barrister,* Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Vasanakand,* and Tamhane's *Savita Damodar Paranjape.* The last choice was deliberately made.

When you externally try to structure things it fails. It doesn't become a masterpiece. Writers of genius know how characters are going to behave, which a lot of academics don't know. It's like that film *Blow Hot Blow* Cold-very sexy, sensuous movie: that's why it became popular. But in that film you have this young couple on an island, and an older couple sitting; the young couple has forgotten the world, they are in love-passionately holding each other, kissing each other-and the woman of the older couple watches intently with such passion, as if this is what she has been wanting all her life! Her husband asks her, 'What are you looking at?' and she says, 'How passionately they are in love!' Her husband says, 'It's just exhibitionism', and makes a couple of remarks. She is humiliated, insulted by the husband's remarks and she says, 'What do you know about love?' And he says, 'You're asking me? I've been studying this phenomenon for the last 20 years.' That's the problem. I

think insights into psychiatry can never be achieved through textbooks. Unless you try to apply what you read, where it holds and where it doesn't, why it doesn't hold, and how it can hold, you'll never get it. Satish Alekar or Tendulkar, without a passing knowledge of psychology, have characters who from beginning to end are consistent. Consistent in abnormality.

There was a very interesting statement made by Amol Palekar. He was talking about *Vasanakand,* because he had directed it. He said, *'Vasnnakand* is a play, an artistic thing, and cannot be subjected to analysis-because it's beyond the purview of psychology.' So I kept quiet, but I asked my colleague to respond, and she said that anything which is a product of the mind, true or untrue, real or imaginary, is a subject of analysis. So even if it's a play, as a fragment of the playwright's mind-it's a subject for analysis. Though it's not to be taken pers-nally, it's not an analysis of Mahesh Elkunchwar-though it might well be! And you see, Satish is such a downright middle-class hypocrite and pragmatic individual, that it's difficult to imagine that he created these characters. And right from *Miki mid Memsaab, Maltanirvan, Mahapur, Begum Barve,* he has had a fascination for the unconscious mind. And he gets visions-like *Malzapur* opens with this boy coming up and saying, 'I saw that my father is dead in the water tank in a pool of blood.' There's tremendous hostility; the whole play, I think, deals with the repressed unconscious hostility of Satish against this 1942 generation. And he gives it away in the way he introduces the father of the protagonist; he has anger and hostility about his parents; he thinks those parents have ruined his life. There's a window and-Chandrakant Kale who plays the father comes and the protagonist is sitting here. His father comes and he introduces him, 'Look at him-this is my father. Look at him-he behaves in 84 as if he's in 42.' That's his introduction of the character. And then again he says, 'Constantly what has been hammered into my head is *sadaiva sainika pudhech* jayache-those patriotic songs of 1942.' The next moment he says, 'Where are we going? Gandhi was great, Nehru was great, my father thinks he was great-but he was not great. He was a blind follower. In fact, till he reached jail and found the bars, he didn't know that he was in jail.' And he says, `I cannot understand why there's such a high percentage of love marriages among the freedom fighters of 1942-as if they had no other business.' And you can see the repressed hostility and anger of that character. And what also comes out is his anger against his fiancee because she leaves him, as she realizes that he is too *khokla* [hollow]-and he feels

it is *their* responsibility that he is like that. And then when his father says 'You should study, this is your time' and all that, he says, 'Look, I do believe that a coolie's son shouldn't be a coolie, but what if he can't be anything else? Like I believe in hard work and everything, I also believe in genetics and heredity. And if you don't have anything, where will I get it from?' And it comes with such anger! And this is the modern, scientific approach of Satish. This you see in *Mahanirvan* also. The whole fun of *Mahanirvan is* the juxtaposition of 'tradition' against 'scientific and modern' and it's revealingeach sentence of *Mahanirvan is* a revelation and this piece he'd written at the age of twenty-five. Even that one monologue of Bhaurao when Nana, his son, insists that now that he had come alive why don't they go to the new crematorium and he'll burn him there and the father gets really angry and says, 'What shit're you talking about? Is that a crematorium? What is a crematorium?' and he gives the whole philosophy, that it's like his maternal uncle's place-there's a temple and this river in monsoon is almost full and the water touches the feet of the god. So for his final rest he must be in a place where he feels he's in his uncle's place. `There's *bhajan* going on and everything. And this-your modern silicon thing which is built by calling tenders-it's no crematorium. You don't even understand the meaning of death. This sort of a crematorium is for your generation.' And there're a number of such sentences, like the first meeting of Nana-when he comes in, which Bhaurao describes as 'the historical moment of the first meeting of my wife and my son after my death'-and the first thing he asks is 'When did this happen?'a very objective question and when she says 'This morning'-he says 'Well, then what are you waiting for?' The mother looks aghast and says 'Who's going to light the fire?', and he says 'Oh shit, I forgot.' These small examples bring out the fun of his juxtapositions. So a product of the mind has to be somewhere. The goodness of it is that he knows where to express, what to express-and that's what is called 'sublimation' in psychology-that is not to cast aspersions that the mind is evil or something.

So for any student of psychiatry, you'll find there's a tremendous interest in literature or theatre, because that's where they get the insights from. They get their techniques, though the aims are different-totally different. In Lee Strasberg's book *Development* of *n Method* there's one big chapter on emotional memory and he was accused by some people of being a quack. His own effort was how to draw from your own emotional bank and perform. When I

realized this, I came to understand what therapy has to do with theatre and why it doesn't work for professionals-it works for other people, but never for professionals. My ongoing current interest is what exactly is the nature of the relationship between an actor and a character and between a doctor and a patient. What are the similarities and dissimilarities, because here it's a fictitious character and you have to give flesh and blood to it. You have to have a relationship with it. Without interacting with that character-it's not your own play, it's a creation of somebody else. So your entire behaviour is guided by the emotional demands of that character-that's how you change, otherwise you can't change yourself in terms of acting. You lend your body to it, you lend your voice to it, but the internal emotions are totally dictated by that character. And what's a doctor supposed to do? He is supposed to get from the patient his internal language. So he has a body and flesh in front of him and he's trying to reach within. But the actor lends body and flesh to the internal character. So it's a reverse process. But the main dictum and the responsibility of both is not to be affected. Neither can the doctor afford counter transference-that's why he has to know himself, his entire emotional profile, and he must be able to resolve for himself his own emotional problems. Actors are not required to do that, because they're not in a therapeutic situation, but they also have to basically take recourse to their own emotional banks. So if a situation demands hostility or anger, he pumps out some experience from the past where he was hostile and tries to remember how he behaved. It comes not from the intellect but from feeling, because behaviour is at the sensory level. Cerebral behaviour is the most uninspiring, dull and boring behaviour, which you see in speeches, when you have people on the dais, saying things which they don't mean. For example, someone saying things like, 'We are very happy that Dr. Agashe is here with us today . . . ' and you know that he is saying that quite blankly because he doesn't know who Dr. Agashe is or what he does. It's different when you meet a close friend. So in modern rituals you know when emotions are cerebrally projected and when they are sensorily projected. For an actor the head is useless for the basic performance. To get the basic performance, he must learn to surrender his brain. But if he tries to use the brain before he gets the sense of the behaviour, he'll give a mechanical performance. And a man of severe intellect, therefore, can give above average performances, but never an outstanding performance. It's never an emotionally rich performance. It's technically calculated to the last detail. In fact, looking at American schools and everything, they have mastered this craft so

much that actually they reserve drawing on their emotions-only for performance, not in real life. An absolutely sad division. So in life. they may be uninteresting, but in performance they're great. But here in the character what happens is, if the actor doesn't know this and gets affected, then he doesn't know where to cut off and become himself. In a number of cases, serious actors don't realize this-where to cut off-and that is why they become serious victims of psychological morbidity.

STQ: Very interesting. Do you get patients like this?

MA: No, but this kind of morbidity leads to over-indulgence in drugs or alcohol, eccentric behaviour in personal relationships-they're never satisfied with their personal relationships. If you look at their personal lives, most of them are very tragic. In fact an actor like Amitabh Bachchan in one of his rare interviews where he talked seriously said, 'I don't know if I can still cry in real life. There are situations when I want to cry, but I can't cry.' And I think he meant it. Now, if a film actor says that, an intense actor who draws from his real personal emotions, who has to perform only for a shot-what must be happening to a theatre actor who has to perform every day and has to find a source of inspiration!

One of the problems that Strasberg has tackled in his book is that while initially you can reproduce real emotions. on stage, you can't do it every day. So one has to find a technique of doing this, and that's where the whole question of dichotomy comes in-do you get one with your character, or don't you? So what is happening basically to an actor? First is the abuse of emotions-because he's responding to the emotional needs of somebody else, not to his own. In the process he doesn't get an opportunity to articulate his own emotional needs. The second thing which is happening is over-use of emotions. He is performing day in and day out and that is why you find him dried out-it's a complete emotional void. Most of them don't realize this, because they've never been trained for this. The other problem is that if they learn about it, it might affect their performance. Once, Freud was asked to analyse Thomas Mann and he refused to. He said, 'It is not important to analyze this man because his creativity is far more important to us.'

So this is how it operates on the psychological level between actor and character. And with the doctor, again, if it happens, if he starts counter transference with his patient, excesses of his personal life are shared with the patient, then scandals often occur. There are

huge articles published about the illicit relationships between therapists and their clients. So relationships are an interesting phenomena, both as a psychiatrist and as a theatre person. As a theatre person I have an opportunity to cross certain limits because in theatre I don't have that kind of frame which otherwise I have to strictly observe in my medical practice. In my profession there are *lakshman rekhas* (definite restrictions sanctioned by custom), unless I belong to the new generation, there's a whole ethicality there. The same transactions happen between friends, in relationships, where this ethicality does not work because the ethicality of friendship is different. The ethicality of a friendship demands that I touch you and hold you, it is permissible. But in a therapeutic framework it is not permissible. And if a doctor does not realize this, he's likely to go overboard and make mistakes and be punished severely for it.

So coming back to my original line of thought-as I progressed, very independently, it took me a long time to realize that basically these two are not two parts, but they are just one part. And 1 always felt, why do people ask me such stupid questions, as to whether my first love is theatre or psychiatry. How can they ask such a question? Can't they see basically it is all human emotions? And then I got this incorporated into teaching psychiatry. When you have undergraduates who have utter disrespect for psychology because the whole medicine in the past thirty years has overemphasized physicality, bio-chemistry, how do you tell them that mind matters more than matter? And that's when I developed this parallel structure and function. This is essential not only for doctors to understand but for every living human being -to understand. See, you are designated healthy on the basis of the presence of a function and not a structure. So the whole concept of health is functional and not structural. You are born. You are 'born' means a physical mass is isolated from another physical mass, but it is not designated yet as a living creature till it starts functioning on its own and that sign is the first cry, which is not a cry, which is respiration; it is the taking in, independently, of fresh air, processing it and throwing it out. When you have done that, then you are designated a living creature. So that's the first independent function you have to acquire if you want to be called 'born'. The second function which you have to acquire for independent existence is circulation. That's when the umbilical cord is cut. You stop living on your mother's blood and you have your independent blood circulation supplying blood to all your organs. And this is just the visible

part. The process continues for the next twenty years, till you mature and all your systems develop, till all your functions develop. So you are designated 'born' when you respire and when you start your own circulation. That is why these two are termed vital functions, because at the cessation of these functions you are declared dead. Even that time there is presence of mass of matter, but it is meaningless and that is why you have different ways of disposing of it.

Where do I get these insights? Psychiatry text books never gave me these insights, Satish's *Mahanirvan* has given me these insights. It's Bhaurao who says to his wife, 'That Bhau which you know is no longer this Bhau. This is just the dry world of manganese, phosphorus, water', in his earliest speech when he dies. That's where I picked up this concept. Actually, that is true. What is the rest of life? The rest of life is acquisition of new functions, finer functions, complex functions and gradual loss of it till you again use only the basic functions. So it is like a game where the dictates,are given but you still play with full zest, not looking at the end, but at the process. And that's how our philosophies have come, I think. Enjoy what you are doing, without looking at the end of it. *Ma Faleslw* (don't worry about the results) must have come from that. Or the character Godbole in *Passage to India,* he was in confrontation with this English teacher-when the English teacher is totally obsessed as to what to do about Aziz who has been arrested under false charges, Godbole coolly approaches him and asks what name the school should have, and he gets very wild. `Don't you know what has happened to Aziz?' Godbole says, `1 know.' 'Then should we not do anything?' Then Godbole says, `Well, I knew it was going to happen.' 'You mean to say that because you knew, you are not going to do anything? Or one should not do anything?' Then Godbole says, `No, no-I don't mean that. I mean, do what you believe in, and you must. But don't expect that because you have done this Aziz will be released. The end and the process are independent things-they are_ not connected and life, again, is a series of independent irrelevant things. We have to find a meaning for it and attach it. That's the fun of it.' Now, in this process that is what is taught to us about vital functions, and we completely forget about telling the students and everybody that there is a third vital function which comes at the same time and the cessation of which designates that you are dead though you may be physically alive. That's emotion. The hue and cry over this film *One FlezU Over tlte Cuckoo's Nest* and the lobotomies and everything is because it

brings emotional death to a person and it leaves him in a state of vegetative existence. The ethical issues about euthanasia and everything is because living in itself is not an end. To make it meaningful is as important as living.

So when I talk about two professions, I say it is because the realities of life do not permit you to enjoy what you do mentally as well as live off it. Most of the times you have to do something for survival which you generally don't like. What you like is something else. So if you live, you must always leave scope to do something which you like so that your living becomes meaningful and that's why you have to have two professions. One for living and the other for making it worthwhile. And it is essential, like there are some elements which are essential in life and they come in twos, like two cerebral hemispheres, two eyes, two nostrils; it's basically positive, negative and the paradox is the fun of life.

Most of our behaviour is unconscious. We try to bring in alterations in that behaviour by conscious projections or interventions, like making decisions. That's how I explain the phenomena, that purely in physical scientific terms, if you see a text book of physiology which has one thousand pages, let us say,

give me one instance where a student can read a text book in a day from morning to evening with the same zest. If one does, he definitely needs a psychiatrist. Whereas, you take a novel of one thousand pages and in spite of physical torture, you feel like sleeping, mother is calling you for food, it's late at night, you cannot sleep without finishing it. Why? Because one is full of emotion and the other is completely devoid of it. Emotional people never like non-fiction, it is only cerebral people who like it. What westernization has done to us is that individual functions have been transferred to the social sphere. So collective and social emotion has a standing in the west. Individual emotion has no standing: As a group of old people the intensity of social emotions is very strong-attend to their needs and everything-but at the individual level you cannot attend to your father; it's considered an aberration. Whereas in our culture the father says, 'If you can't attend to me, you can't give me your time, what kind of a son are you? As a son you're dead to me.' There is this transference process.

So emotion, like all other functions, is a crude function; at the beginning there is only positive and negative, pleasurable and unpleasurable. And the pleasure expression is also very crude. Something pleasurable happens to the child-he is put to the nipple of the

mother's breast-he giggles. Somebody tries to snatch, he wails. Very crude emotions. And why do mothers go through all that kind of physical torture which cognitively is foolish to do? The child disturbs the biological rhythm, does not permit her any other activities, spoils everything from her clothes to her career, everything changes. But it is the amount of intense emotional satisfaction she gets, specially in a traditional culture like ours, where a woman is not recognized or acknowledged unless she becomes a mother. Sudhir Kakkar has elaborately dealt with this point in his *htner World.* In a male chauvinistic society, a woman does not have any identity even after marriage; when she gets her first child, she finds an object and her own identity. So the conversations of a mother with her baby are one of the fascinating literatures. There she expresses a whole gamut of relations towards an object which doesn't understand it, from which she gets satisfaction because it's the same object which gives her acknowledgment and a basic need, which is to be needed, to feel being needed. He will drop the most precious thing in hand to leap towards her, which gives her immense pleasure.

So emotion plays such a vital role in behaviour generally, totally. The only behaviour in which it doesn't play a role are conscious decisions. When you make conscious decisions, like choose your career, look at your prospects, you become reality oriented. And so then you have to use all your emotions or to reconcile or to come to terms with the conscious decisions. So it's a constant negotiation. And if one does not find a perfect way of counteracting one's emotional frustrations and depressions to suit one's conscious decisions, a person will always land up in trouble. So this is the interplay and funnily enough, when you know that this is what you should do, you are constantly pressurized from within to do exactly the opposite. When you know smoking is bad you just cannot resist picking up a cigarette.

I think the moment this stops we will be into a new evolutionary species and all our behaviour will be dictated by cerebral decisions, by conscious decisions, and that is why in psychiatry I am seriously thinking about this therapy which is called Rational Emotive Therapy. It is basically an attempt to rationalize emotion which by its own nature is irrational, because it is dictated by different needs. And as you know, the whole struggle of life is a constant conflict between id, ego and super ego-if one has to put it in that theoretical framework. And the advantage of childhood-and that's how I came to children's

theatre is that they always live in the present time. They never live in the past or future. That's what makes them so interesting.

When you start becoming adults, you stop living in the present, either you are thinking of the past or the future. You are never in that time, the time where you are. When you manage to be in the times in which you are, those are the happiest moments. Otherwise normally you are resolving issues between the past and the present or the present and the future. That's how behaviour is dictated. And now depending on the personal skills of an individual, the psychiatrist chooses his mode of therapy-what he is good at. Like depending on personal physical skills or group skills.

What brought me on to this topic is realizing how basically I found these two threads coming together ... so what is to me a performing art, besides aesthetics, coming to Grips, coming to meaningful theatre-as against the so-called aesthetic theatre (aesthetic theatre ceased to be interesting to me after a certain point, maybe because my interest in human life and living is far more or I am intellectually underdeveloped, cerebrally underdeveloped)-why is it that you resort to any art form, not necessarily theatre, it could be music, it could be painting, what is it that it gives you? What is entertainment? Entertainment is a very loose word, for can I say kissing is an entertainment. It's an entertainment at the biological level, a sexual act is entertainment. Gratification of our needs is entertainment; whether that modus operandi is socially approved or not approved determines what role you will take towards that. But the whole driving force of life is the generation of a need and the gratification of that need. And since the fun of life is that the psyche has been put, at least for that life, in one structural format-the needs which are generated in that psyche, the body may not have the ability to comply with, in physical terms. So like in theatre-you see, physically, if you are the host today and you've invited me for this interview and it is so boring that after half an hour, you want to leave, your conscious development dictates that you should not. But as far as psychological needs are concerned, you can mentally shut off altogether. You may be reacting to me, but you may not be here, you may be somewhere else. That's how most people find their coping mechanisms. They loosen out. So the fun of it is that you have this psyche which has a different relationship with time and space, and a body which has a different relationship with time and space. The body has to obey laws of matter, whereas the laws of the psyche

are altogether different, and putting it into harmony is a constant exercise. Performing art helps, many a times, to bring this body and mind to a harmonious level. Why are people willing to spend money on something which otherwise could be called entertainment, rather than on their food? Why do Hindi commercial films have such a drastic value in the life of the common man in India? Because a Hindi film is exactly like a dream. You never ask stupid cerebral questions, unless you want to be analysed. It's a collective treatment, as against individual treatment. And that is why it has different elements-it has superhumans, it has songs and dances. It is based totally on id gratification, instant gratification-that's what id demands. Id demands instant gratification without any thought as to how the need is satisfied. And that's how people cash in on it-whether they are making films or selling drugs. They are providing this instant gratification. And what is the function of dreams? To preserve sleep. This kind of entertainment helps us to preserve our social sleep. That is why there could be no revolution. We have had our cathartic experiences and we have accepted that life is like this. There is no need to change the reality around us. But bringing about social change is not the function of the entertainment world. This is the function also of education. This is the function also of the economy. These are all integrated approaches. Basically-how to start at all levels. The political system is organized around that.

So, that, maybe, eventually brought me to analyse these concerns of psychiatry and theatre, politically. As a Maharashtrian maybe and because of the kind of rearing I've had-I was never raised in a political atmosphere or given that background; even today I do not know exactly what Marxism or Capitalism means. I find that today's youth is more evolved. But then later on I found that these are only labels. I think practically everybody passes through this phase-the so-called world of Marxist thought, it has to be an inevitable part of growing up, whether you know it is Marxism or not, like whether you know of the Brechtian concept of theatre or not, you have to go through that experience, if you are aware of your theatre experiences. He may have invented the word 'alienation', but I found that in *Tamasha* what's being done is exactly the same. Now, how did we manage to establish such a close relationship with a god so that we can make fun of it? I think *Tamasha is* an ideal example where in Gaulan, Krishna is made fun of. He is brought on an equal platform with human beings and nobody objects to that. Today if you write a play and make fun of Krishna or Rama, you will

be killed. But it is part of tradition, Our own invention, because of the whole need to cut out the distance-because otherwise you look at our ritualistic theatre in the past which is basically meant for cathartic purposes-and it is still rampant in the south. Even in Ceylon. Why do people walk fifteen, twenty kilometres to see a Kathakali performance? What is the value of makeup, larger than life, this whole gamut of theatricality?

So performance is a world by itself, like your real world. It helps you, it's the bridge between reality and dream offered to you in real life. So it is an extension of life as well as an extension of a dream-it's a central point. And whether one is involved in doing it or watching it, you have to be involved, and this can be used at times on an individual level, though it is mostly on the collective level. There also the performance matters. But when you look at the process then you can suit the individual needs. And that's how the whole concept of Moreno's psycho drama came. It's a kind of theatre suited to individual needs, to bring down the level of disparity between his emotional life and his real life. And how well you can do it depends on the success of how well you can act. In your mind you may have big ideas but if you don't check your abilities simultaneously then there is a gap.

But one constantly felt, especially after doing ten years of theatre and *Ghasiram* being acclaimedone side it's a very positive gift to me and on the other it is a negative gift to me-because *Ghasiram* came: to me too early in my theatre career. But it provided me with an opportunity to have a longterm relationship with a character-which very few actors get.

> *'My relationship with Nana is a very* personal affair.'

STQ: For how many years did you do it?

MA: Twenty years. You are interacting with a character for twenty years-the same character-and it's like a fine work which is entirely for your personal satisfaction. To keep your own interest in the role alive, which probably means nothing to the audience-a look, or an extended pause or reduced pause or a late entry ... only the person who has been with you for twenty years may understand it. It also gave me a fear, that having used my negative emotions, especially of lechery-negative physical, sexual emotions-I don't feel confident about my sexual relationships in real life. And I pondered over it seriously at one time, about whether I should stop it. One advantage was that I was aware because of psychiatry, that you always have preconceived ideas. The good thing is that you can be aware of it and start doing something

about it. I got scared that probably at the end-if I have to perform now-instead of creating lechery, I will project affection, which biologically comes to you as you grow older and you just feel that lechery will not come from within. And how many times must I have checked in front of the mirror whether I could still do that role. There was a period of time when I had a problem with it because I would go to Govind Nihalani, Shyam Benegal as if I had a patent for that look and I was cast basically because they wanted to exploit that look and I hated the idea. I wanted to do something else, it sort of trapped me. But it also allowed me to explore the character deep within. So I think my relationship with Nana is a very personal affair. And the unfortunate part of it is that I will not be able to share it with anybody except with Nana. And these two years, and especially after starting with Grips, it has come as a great relief to me-though I am not acting and I am not involved in the capacity of an actor, it has basically developed a whole new concept of looking at things in life, not in theatre.

It's almost come to a point where now I am not even shy of saying that I truly believe that theatre is my way of searching for the truth. And it's very paradoxical. It's by being somebody else, trying to relate to something which I am not-if I understand that, I think I will be able to understand the harmony with the world around me. Some people do it through religious prayers or whatever it is. To me it has become a religion and for that I don't have to act, necessarily. Maybe an urge will come because I'll think I cannot do without it. If I don't do it for two years, three years, I am sure in about a year or two probably it w i.ll come back to me and I will become restless. Also, by the time you come to that stage you start feeling oh now you have started knowing little bit about acting and you have lost all your chances of acting.

STQ: How long since you have acted in a new role?

MA: On stage? Fifteen years. *Begum Brave* was the last. But in films, yes. And also there are reasons to that which are different. Here, in an authoritarian society, our actors are not taught that they have to think for themselves. It's the director's job. I grew up in that tradition. For a number of years I'd think I don't need to know anything, it is Jabbar who has to know everything. He will explain everything. And I have to perform to his satisfaction and not my satisfaction, which I still I hold true when I am working with a director, but then, now I know for myself what I have to do and why I have to do it. We may differ. I'll still do what he wants, but given a choice I might have liked to do it differently. But up to a point I thought that was a

crime. Even to think differently was a crime. The most common experience is our play reading sessions-at the end you ask the members of the group to react. There is complete silence and everybody is looking at somebody else. Because they have not been taught, they have not been reared up in that fashion-to hear a play from the point of view of doing it. It's only the director who has to do it. This started very, very late for me when I came out of Jabbar's influence. And I carne out of Jabbar's influence not because of theatre, but because of films. I think Manikda (Satyajit Ray) was one of my most enriching experiences. One of the reasons I had not done a new play was because nobody had cast me in 10 years in Theatre Academy. They had not done a play which could have me as an actor. And at one point of time, on one of our trips to Hungary, when with younger friends we stole a bottle of champagne and wine(they still didn't dare to drink in front of Jabbar, I did not till I rejected him) I had a glass of beer in front of Jabbar. He came and he said, 'Let's talk about Mohan's behaviour. 1 think he is drinking more and he should focus on his health'- and I said, Jabbar sit down and talk about things that matter. We came together for theatre and I have been telling you to do a piece and then you ask me "What have you done?".' I quoted him examples of Bergman and Fellinni where they did a few scripts to involve their actors. 'I feel that you have used us and now when you are doing something else you don't think of us. You think of somebody else. Why should I relate to you? If we have to talk about something between us, talk about theatre and what to do. Don't talk about my personal life.' So it had gone to that extent and I had to fight with him.

And it's only after that, that I started thinking-Okay, I can't depend on somebody, I have to look for myself. I started to look out for plays and when I found one I was still not able to perform. I wanted to do Strindberg's *Father*. My interest in *Father* comes because of my interest in interpersonal relationships-it is the politics of power between man and woman and if the man is a vulnerable person, how a vicious woman can drive him straight into insanity. How traumatic it can be! So I spoke to Mahesh Elkunchwar. I thought he would get it. Unfortunately it did not work out. He did adapt it, but he tried to keep the same atmosphere. I did not like it. He himself did not like it, fortunately. I did not know how to tell him. I waited till I went to America for *Mississipi Masala* and wrote a letter from there, thinking that there's enough physical distance-now I can be honest. He agreed that it wouldn't work out. But I would like to adapt it to a contemporary situation, keeping this essence of politics of interpersonal relationships, and play in it ... So when I was in that state, a little disillusioned with

theatre, I was fortunately getting films for that essential cathartic experience which I needed to survivemy ego's needs were being satisfied by those film roles. So I could take a secondary role in the hospital.

I developed this concept of opening an institute around '82 or '83. Mentally I was moving away from theatre. Because first I think I was a dependent theatre practitioner-dependent on a playwright, dependent on a director-and in my own case, dependent on one playwright and one director, Jabbar Patel and Satish Alekar. After *Miki ani Memsaab* the only other time I was cast by Satish was in *Begum Barve* and that too I was basically cast in the role which Satish did later. Satish didn't want to act. He was directing. In the initial sessions when he read out, and then when I started reading out, I thought myself totally inappropriate. What he was doing was fabulous and I could not have done one tenth of it. So at the end of ten days, I went to Satish and said 'Satish why don't you play that role? It doesn't matter if I am out of the play. But if you want to cast me, let me play Shyamrao. I think I can play that'. So voluntarily I opted out of that role. And Satish was phenomenal, he was superb; and reviving the play now after '79-what a difference between when you understand what you are doing and when you didn't understand it. So at that point of time when Jabbar was gradually getting into films and Satish was writing plays which were being done by others-Like Mohan Gokhale did *Mahapur*, *Mahanirvan* was without me, and *Begum Barve I* knew Satish was not writing the play. It took me a long time also to realize that actors do go to playwrights and use their own ways of conveying what they should write, which Chandrakant did, Mohan Gokhale did. So now I went after Satish, 'You needed me only in your first play. You are now writing a play-but I'm not going to do theatre, I don't want it.'

'I came across Volker.'

I'd been in that state of mind when I came across Volker [Ludwig, of Grips Theatre, Germany]. I had only heard of him before. What impressed me was not his play, because I had not seen it, I had only heard about it. In '83 Volker had come here to conduct these four day workshops and he was totally frustrated. He did not like it at all. I realized when I met him that if I tried to approach him professionally as a theatre person, he'd get more withdrawn. He doesn't open up unless he's a friend. So I approached him as a friend. -I just looked after him. When he came back from Calcutta I met him at the airport, I took him to

a hotel, I saw that he was comfortable, I didn't talk about theatre. I'd found out about his interest in Ganeshes and so I went and got a Ganesh for him. We generally talked about life, cursed theatre-he also did that, and I enjoyed doing it-and that really generated my interest because I'd heard so much about him as a playwright, but when I met him, it wasn't as a playwright, but as a human being 1 found him to be an excellent human being. I was highly impressed. Volker is an emotional kind. Just as a parting question I asked him how would it be if I were to come to Germany and spend a few months, because Max Mueller Bhavan had been asking me since '82.

By that time we'd done two short plays by Dorst which I'd organized and produced and a play by Gunter Grass. Then there was this programme of the International Theatre Institute-would I want to come and work-but I had refused ... because what will I do in Germany, what kind of theatre? I've never lived in a hostel in Poona, forget about Germany! But what generated the interest was meeting Volker, on a very individual level, not on a professional level. I wanted to know the man more. And he said, 'Fine', not because I was very special to him at all, but because it was a very common thing for them-they had people coming from all over the world, spending time and everything. And if it didn't mean any liability to Grips theatre as such, you're welcome. So it was not a very personal, warm invitation from him at all. I promptly came back and told Max Mueller, 'You'd asked me 2 years back, if it is still valid, I would like to go to Grips'-and took a language course and all that. By that time I'd also developed a few friends there. So I felt emotionally safe-I needed that-that's a personal thing, I still need that. And the guy with whom I lived twice, Gert Kruetzman, had nothing to do with theatre, his line is advertising, but he's a very fine human being. And like the upper caste brahmin reformists have feelings about dalits, I think some westerners have about people from underdeveloped countries. So it might've been probably out of that feeling for a guy from a poor underdeveloped country ... because they knew how poor I was, I couldn't afford anything in Germany, I used to be extremely stingy to survive on the money I had.

So I went there with no plans. I wanted to be away, I think. Of course, I had my morning course, which I was good at, and then the rest of the day was free for me. Then I used to go to Grips. Volker was my only friend in Grips who has still remained a good friend, I wasn't able to make any other friends and so in my article I've written that I found

it easier to make German friends in India than in Germany. Volker somehow had that sensitivity to realize that I've come from this spoilt, over-protective world and without saying a word; he did protect me for the first month. And later I actually shifted to his house. Through my personal interaction with the family as well as my interaction in the theatre, I learnt a lot about Germany. There're small instances-once, I think the third day after I moved into his house, I didn't have a button on my shirt. So Claudie, Volker's girlfriend, said that 'Mohan, haven't you stitched that button?' I said, 'It's all right, it's summer....' So she said, 'No, no. When there are buttons, you should stitch them.' And the most important thing is that I don't know how to stitch a button-it's done for me. She said, 'You spoilt-idiot.' Then she told me again in the evening. So I said, 'If you feel so much for it, why don't you stitch it?' And she got wild, how could I say it-'What do you mean? Why should 1 do it for you?' I said, 'Because it bothers you much more than it does me.' She said, '1 don't stitch buttons even for Volker.' And then I was suddenly taken aback, if she doesn't do it for him, how could she do it for me. So I sort of shut up. But after ten minutes I gathered courage and said, 'Look, whether you do it for Volker, I don't know and neither does it interest me. But since you're telling me, what's the harm-since you know how to do it, and you have the time, why don't you do it?' She said, 'No, no. You have to learn it' and I said 'Okay'. The next day, I was still without the button and then as if it was a serious matter where she needed to make a decision, she called, 'Volker, please come and sit down--I have decided to stitch a button. I want to explain to you that I'm doing it because he's a guest.' See-all that she wanted to clarify was that though she was doing it for me, she still will not do it for Volker. So later on he shouldn't tell her if she had done it for Mohan, why couldn't she do it for him. She took full five minutes to explain the entire psycho-dynamics of why she was stitching the button on my shirt. It didn't interest me at all-I was happy with the fact that someone's going to do it. So this was one instance.

Juxtaposed with that, when I was in theatre, no German actor had either the curiosity or the time to find out who this guy was who was coming every day and sitting in the rehearsals. They would du whatever the cursory formality demanded, the 'Hi, how're you' kind of thing, and they would get busy with their acting. So I had nobody to talk to in the theatre, actually. The only time I talked was when I met Volker again. And Volker was kind enough to take me everywhere with him, if he was going to a party-there were very few occasions when he went

alone, because that's how he was, '1 take my friends wherever I go. There're no formalities.' He was the only one who grasped what India means, in far fewer days, without talking or asking questions. So I felt my loneliness in Germany when I was in theatre. Back home I didn't. And then I started desperately looking to make friends-because howsoever a good friend, Volker couldn't spend all his time with me.

I had this short-time girlfriend-it wasn't a really serious affair, but it was sort of personal. It had nothing to do with theatre or anything. That's where I understood what German baseline friendships or relations are. And with another painter friend of mine and his wife. This instance I quote several times in different contexts: they had a second son, Max, after about 15 years and that son was about a year old. There was a staircase in their house with a railing which had big gaps and the child would try to go up the stairs. Every time I went there and the child was playing on the staircase, I was on guard. Automatically, that was the Indian in me. And it happened-it had to happen, it did happen. One day, Max fell off the staircase and started crying. So I promptly rushed and before I could pick Lip Max, carne the order, 'Mohan, stop. Don't pick him up.' I was aghast and looked at Max's mother-we must see if he's injured himself. 'No, no, he isn't injured. It wasn't that hard.' I said, 'But why?' 'He has to learn that if he does it, this is what happens. He won't do it again.' And we entered into a big fight. I said, 'How could you do this to a child? He may learn but he would not know how to prevent it. He doesn't yet have the required muscle co-ordination, what causes it.' And then I remembered what an Indian mother does. Not that she'd pamper him, she'd pick him up and scold him at the same time, which he won't understand in any case. But she goes through all emotions as well as the caring and fear and what she communicates to the child is the caring, more than the shit talk she's making. Except for the fact that it's communicated that she hasn't liked it much. She hasn't liked it much but she's still with him.

That's when I started differentiating between communication and whether it's achieved if you talk or not. That helped me in theatre. Nothing could've been better than that nobody made friends with me in Grips theatre and that I didn't speak German, because if I did, then probably I wouldn't have seen what I'd seen and noted what I noted.

The two plays I saw were *Media's Children* and a stupid play with a fine performance--*Heart im nehmen.* It was about a delinquent child. And so all I used to do was sit and watch Wolfgang and the actors and actresses. I understood what was taking place between the

performers and also between when Wolfgang [Kolneder] was directing the play and when a woman was directing it, how it affected the performers, why two actors had a problem-and I used to have my checklist and I used to wait. The only communication I had there was with Wolfgang and with him too, the friendship developed after he came here. My relationship with Wolfgang is much more at a professional level because it suits him and it suits me, as against my relationship with Volker which is still very much on a personal level. So watching the process as well as repeatedly seeing the shows of *Media's leider, cine linke geschichte 1* know the style by now. Like the criticism here also, if Jayati [Bose] does three plays, people would say, 'Well, they're all the same.' Grips also face that-criticism. But now it's an established style of functioning, like Vijaya's is, like Jabbar's is; so there're certain common features of a Grips play for children, though it doesn't hold true. for their youth plays. For children's plays, a style of acting, certain expressions, are bound to be the sanic, you can't help it, these are realistic limitations of the performing abilities of a human being. This disappears only when a new actor is inducted who has totally new ways of expressing himself. I was amazed that I could watch a performance for 90 minutes spellbound. So I realized that the point of contact was very high. The way children would react to things. I had no commitment to go back and write a report or anything at all.

'Max and Milli ... bowled me over.'

At the end of it, almost towards the last month, when Wolfgang's new play opened, 1 saw *Max and Milli* on a video-cassette, because the show was not on. And I was totally bowled over by that first scene. I think it's a classic in terms of theatre. You know, Volker had told me how the play came up-Volker had to write a play and he didn't have an idea what to write about-anything at all. They were on a holiday in Greece and Volker's girlfriend was trying to put her son Alex to bed and she wasn't successful at all. He came up with intriguing excuses and Volker wrote the first scene. And so it became a situational play and then the characters came and then he decided who'll meet whom and what will happen. And today, as simple as it appears, I would've never known how complex the play is unless I'd made an attempt to direct it. So directing it at NSD was personally gainful. I wouldn't have known how difficult that play is to direct, how complex it is. How at every turning point there are motives behind everything. It appears so simple and so in-a-flow, but each point of it is important. That made me think,

and the only idea I was toying with was, whether I'll be able to persuade Wolfgang Kolneder to do a play. I didn't think of a project. I thought purely out of a need, because I felt when I came that I wouldn't be able to explain it to my friends. Satish has that ability. Satish, lots of times, expresses what he hasn't experienced, because he's creative. He adds up things, which became very evident when he spoke after his China and Japan tour. Now we've known him for 20 years. So whenever he comes from Kankoli and we old friends sit together, we say, 'What did Satish say? Divide by four!' *(laughs).* That divide by four exercise is ... because Satish has his own perception and incorporates a lot of things that are missed by other people. That's where his credit lies. That's why he's a creative writer. That's what Jabbar used to do previously, I realize. That is why his narrations used to become so compulsive for us to listen to.

So I just wanted to do that play instead of telling people what I wouldn't have been able to tell, what I saw, how enchanting it could be. I was scared-shit scared. But that was also my first experience in doing independent theatre. Unlike as a dependent theatre person, I was functionally active as an independent theatre person. So now I was almost a hooker. I had to get the right people. I took a chance and I was hoping Satish would say no and he did. I was relieved because I wasn't really sure if Satish would understand what I meant. Satish is far more removed from Grips and his original theatre concepts predominate; but Satish had earlier done two German plays and so I asked him, 'Would you be interested if we're doing this Grips theatre for children?.' Actually ... at the time of Gunter Grass, there were lots of problems for Satish. And he refused, I was happy. That happiness was only limited to Satish saying no. Then there was a big question mark, what to do. By that time Ranga [Srirang Godbole] had written and directed one play. So I decided that this must be a fresh endeavour. And Wolfgang was there. So I asked Ranga if he was game. I think that was the one major decision that I had to take. Then everything fell into place. But it was my curiosity or apprehension ... not apprehension, what I was waiting for all the time, because ever since I came, 1 couldn't explain to anybody what I'd seen-because it was so experiential. So it had to be conveyed through an experience to others. Each time I would go for the rehearsals I'd try to see if the actors were getting along with Wolfgang. I'd make an effort to see if Wolfgang had understood what they're trying to say. So my basic work was to be a liaison theatre person. But since it was a virgin attempt, there was nothing to compare it with. 1 only had to see to the show, to know if it was working out. The power of the script was tremendous. *Max and Milli is* always a wise

choice for that reason, to start with. The fact which reveals this point more clearly is, after '88, when performances stopped of *Chhan Chhote Waitta Mothe* [his version of *Max and Milli* at the NSD], there were no performances for a year and a half, but by then I'd realized that it had potential. For after the first 50 shows I heard people enquiring and all that. So I had to do it again. Then I decided to do it really methodically, to add workshops to it and do it concurrently. See, if you have to do a play, you have to concurrently create awareness. So I was busy trying to organize this when suddenly six actors of *Chhan Chhote Waitta Mothe* took the initiative. They said, 'We want to do the play. So what if Max Mueller doesn't give us a project? We'll do it somehow.' They started rehearsing. And I realized how much they must have gained from that experience to motivate them to come together, find a way again. They took my consent because I was technically the godfather of the project, and they started the shows again.

The second time Wolfgang came, I had to give him a choice-Amhi *Gharche* Raja-and our motivations are not at all connected with the motivations of the original plays which were totally political, while ours are totally social, by now even practical. Theatre was going through such a bad

phase, amateur theatre groups couldn't do plays. So I found this was excellent because there was a target audience.

'I decided to focus on children.'

Then I decided to focus on children more as an audience than training them in theatre, because there are plenty of people training them in theatre-good, bad whatever it is-and I don't feel competent enough to do that. But I know for sure that in a school of 5000 children, hardly one or two are going to take theatre as a profession. But almost all of them will be spectators.

Secondly, as a medical person I found that parents are so selective about what kind of food they give to their children-they go to the extent of depriving themselves so that their children get nutritious food-and they're selective about which school they go to, whether they get private tuition or coaching,

but they totally neglect the quality of entertainment they give to their children. And to me quality of entertainment matters at that age. And why Grips? Because it's an excellent theatre, in terms of theatre talent, in terms of production, performance. In terms of its

philosophy, it is different, but theatrically it is wonderful. I thought this is quality stuff; and if at that formative age they know what the quality of entertainment could be, tomorrow they'll come for our plays, amateur theatre-they will be a committed audience, because they'll appreciate quality. So that was my motivation. Plus realistic issues-adult actors because I didn't have children actors. Here arguments for adult actors is-and it is true-that professionally a child is not capable of repeating a performance; he's still growing and is not emotionally mature enough to sustain his interest in performance which ends after the first two/three shows when his parents, relatives and all his friends have seen it. So for that requirement I had to choose grownup actors.

But as a psychiatrist I feel it is extremely important that even if we have child actors capable (if sustaining a number of performances, I'd still prefer adult actors playing children's roles for the simple reason that the plays deal in real issues in a realistic manner. My audience is children. They're not mature enough to differentiate between 'real' and 'realistic'. So if I put on a play with real kids and real parents and the performance quality is good, they are likely to think there is a family like that where it happens. Whereas, when I have an adult actor, they know it's 'like that' but it can't be the same because it's not a real five year old kid. It's a very important distancing and very interesting. So I think, psychologically, knowing your audience, it's very important, when the plays are dealing with real issues, to have adult actors playing children. And a byproduct which I realized later on, is that it's an excellent training module, in a country where you don't have actors' training. Because in order to act like a child, you have to know what to do with your inhibitions, which is a major problem of actors today-they don't know how to behave on stage unless they become uninhibited and this is the surest way of making them uninhibited. This was proved later on because those who had played children in Grips, when they worked in other regular plays, their performance was excellent. So even if we don't do a play, sometimes I recommend that as an exercise we should do scenes from some of these plays, acting as a child. So this was a byproduct-this use as a training module. .

'Developing writing as a craft and a dramaturgy...'

The other thing is that-it has happened only once, but I'd like it to develop more now because a lot of people still haven't understood the craft of writing which we have to do as professionals; so far we have entirely depended on inspirational play-writing; we do not have

unfinished efforts. So what we have to do is identify people who have writing skills, not play writing-writing skills, copy writing skills may

be-and then turn them to making an attempt at writing a play as a craft. No use giving that material to an intelligent person, because he'll write an essay. But in order to write a play, the most crucial aspectas Volker keeps on saying-is that unless you have inputs you cannot have outputs. So you have to identify the theme and you have to identify the writer and if he has. No inputs about that theme, from where will he write the play? It cannot be fantasy. So what is important is to mix with children, try to pick up their language, to get inputs from sociology, psychology-and a lot of dissimilar psychology. But at the end of it, forget all about your inputs and just sit down and write the play. That should be the process. Here we need a dramaturgy to rectify the process; and we don't have both these concepts developing writing as a craft and a dramaturgy. So the role which I really played for five years is that of a dramaturgy, also making contacts with the teachers, parents, solving internal problems among the actors and everything. And today it has a survival perspective.

Yesterday somebody was asking about a repertory. See, in the Indian context a repertory concept cannot work because this is the only country in the world which never had subsidized theatre; whereas you go to capitalistic countries or communist countries, you have subsidized professional theatre groups; they may be subsidized by industries or by the government or city or town. But their salaries come, for that they don't have to depend on the box office. Now the Russians are in trouble because they have been told that there'll be a 50% subsidy and the other 50% has to come from performance. But here you generate your own money. You can get part funding, but part funding has to come from shows. In this context if one really has to think of a repertory, I think this is a realistic concept because here you can guarantee a minimum of 20 shows every month. Here we do not have actors as a liability because nobody wants to stay permanently in this theatre for children. They want to make a career in acting. So I don't have a problem of what to do with that actor after 10 years when he can't play a child any more. This turnover of actors is a good thing for a repertory, because an asset can become a liability very soon. And then, if you're inducting new actors you tell them that it's like a hospital internship-'Look you'll be trained and as in internship, you have to perform.' So I can have them on stipends, I don't even have to have them on

salaries-because in the process they're getting trained also. And after a year in any case I want a new batch. So with four permanent members-one is basically a dramaturgy, one is a PR person and the rest are administrators, liaisoning with various writers, journalists-we can afford to run a company.

Ghashiram sustained itself not because of ideology-those are very utopian ideas, the moment there's a better chance, they'll drop it. *Ghashiram* worked for twenty years for several reasons. Chronologically, I'll tell you, it is the only play where the original group of actors has survived for 20 years. In '78 we did *Three Penny Opera* , we did it for 5 years, it was difficult; in '84 we did Padgham within 6 months we had to wind up. So the running of an amateur theatre group has become a different ball game altogether. *Ghashiram* survived because in the process everybody got addicted, including our chorus band. Besides, 'Oh, you are in *Ghashiram!'* Nobody knows whether you work in a school, or as a clerk in a bank, but everybody knows that you work in *Ghnshiram.* There was also this ego satisfaction. Plus, though we don't pay, each one has been abroad three times. These have been the factors. So, here also, because we don't pay-the way I've organized the tours, they were not like professional British or French companies coming for 7 days, performing and proceeding for the next show with hardly a feel of the place. In my tours, because we're not paying them, between each performance, there is always a 5 days' gap for them to go around. When they went to America, they saw Disney World, Universal Studios, museums in Washington-a 7 week tour with only 15 performances. So it was a combination to suit the Indian psyche of a professional and an amateur-professional hospitality mixed with home hospitality. Because from my first tour I realized that within 10 days they get sick of their food. So I had to arrange that on the tenth day they got Indian food-and it worked. Emotional appeals I've had to extend sometimes, like saying, 'Look, we have no time to linger in this place'-but unless they were interspersed with these other benefits, I don't think it would have worked. Amateur company artists join amateur theatre not to do more number of performances but to do new and experimental things. Somebody who runs a theatre group knows too well that there must be a meeting point. So in this state of theatre structure in India, if one has to think of a repertory and playwrights' training, I think Grips is an ideal model. And if it has to move towards youth theatre then we must really have people who have developed this craft of

writing and then work on identifying our themes, like caste problems or whatever-contemporary problems.

I was moved by certain things, and I wrote them.' Kee Thuan Chye

KEE THUAN CHYE a Malaysian playwright based in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, talks to ANJUM KATYAL. He belongs to the second phase of post-colonial playwrights in the English language. His early plays, written in the early 70s, were heavily influenced by Absurdist dramatists like Beckett; it was in the 80s that he began to write political plays. Situated in the Malaysian reality, they take up social and political issues like racial discrimination, political detention, Big Brotherism and freedom of expression. He is also active as an actor and director. In this interview several parallels between the Malaysian and Indian post-colonial experience begin to emerge.

The Big Purge (1988). A puppet sequence from a play that satirizes figures of authority by having them appear as shadow puppets in comic roles.

AK: Maybe we can start talking about your entry into theatre, how you started off...

KTC: I first began to get involved seriously in theatre when I was an undergraduate. This was in a university in Penang, where I come from. This was in the early 70s. At that time I was very much taken by the Absurdists, so my earliest plays were very much in the Absurd mode.

AK: Were you actually studying them as part of the syllabus?

KTC: It was part of the introduction to Theatre. One of the texts that we had to read was *Waiting for Godot*. And I remember, my first encounter with it was that I became so fascinated by it that I began to research Beckett and the Absurdists. But prior to that I had also seen a production of the *Birthday Party* by Harold Pinter, by a visiting troupe from Britain, and though I was quite puzzled at that time by what it was trying to say to me, I was nonetheless very intrigued by it. So when I went to university, and there was this library where I could research Absurd drama, I just went crazy.

AK: What appealed to you about Absurd drama as opposed to other traditions of drama?

KTC: Well, I guess that at that age, and at that time, when you question things about life and what is it all about, where you come from, and where you're going, and there doesn't seem to be much meaning in life, and we're all going to die anyway, it was very appealing to me, at that point in my life. But it was more than that, I suppose. It was also that enigmatic quality of Absurd drama, which I also found very intriguing, the mystery, to try and say something that is unsayable, you know, all that kind of thing. The inability to communicate, which I find to be true, even today. A lot of the time we seem to be communicating, but we don't quite, because each individual has his or her own reality, that's why I suppose there are so many problems in this world. Because even when we get into an argument, you have your own reality, I have mine, and no matter how I try to convince you, you still can't see my reality and you would still hold on to yours. So that was where I started.

AK: How did this fit in with the kind of theatre you were seeing around you, not from abroad, but your own tradition?

KTC: Yes, that's very interesting because there really wasn't a tradition to speak of. I was writing in English, and drama in the early 70s was a relatively young art, in Malaysia, whether written in English or Malay, the national language. The earliest writers had begun to write in the 50s. So there were no strong models to emulate or look up. There were a few fairly good plays. We used to have a very prolific playwright called Lee Joo For who was very active in the 60s and he was like a drama machine, he used to write a play like one in two months, and it would be staged and he'd go on to the next one, he didn't bother to look back on it. He never did any rewriting. He was writing in a semi-surrealist mode. At the time I was getting interested in theatre, I had never read any of his plays. I had never read the plays of the other playwrights who had come before me. Because ... I think we still suffer from this cultural cringe, you know. We tend to look at our own artists with less reverence than we do the western ones, because there's still that colonial hangover, especially in the 70s.

AK: Did you discover them later?

KTC: Yes, yes, and some of them I was impressed with, but I would say by and large it was still at a stage where it was trying to find its voice and trying to find the right ways of expression. So there was really no such tradition to speak of.

AK: What about indigenous performance that might have been popular, perhaps street performance, that you grew up with?

KTC: Well, when I was a child I was taken to see things like *bartgsazvan.* It's not really traditional in the sense of being an ancient art, it's a kind of vaudeville, actually, that began probably in the 30s and 40s and it was a popular form of entertainment. It had drama, singing and comic interludes. And I probably saw a few productions of this and that, Shakespeare, and *Lady Precious Stream if you* know that play? It's actually supposed to be a Chinese play, though it's written by someone living in America, but it became a very popular play at that time, when I was growing up, in the late 50s and early 60s. So you can understand that when I found something that I could be excited about, and that was Absurd drama, it was a natural model for me to follow. When you didn't have anything else to begin with.

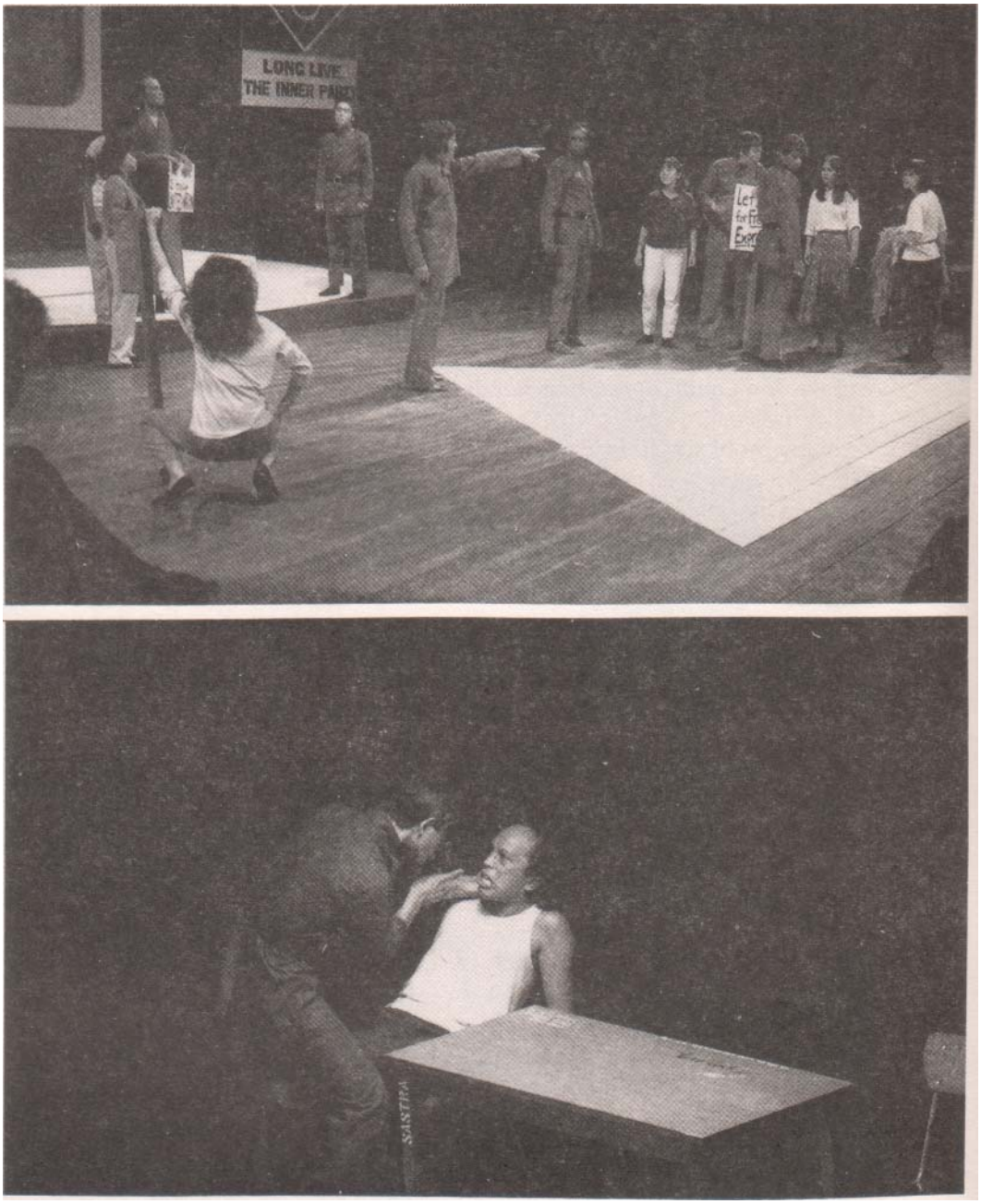
AK: Was this tied up with a politicization of yourself as a student, a feeling that this form of drama could help you express ideas about social and political things that were happening?

KTC: If there was, I was not conscious of it. In fact, at that time, I was very apolitical. I was not involved in student movements, I was not interested in demonstrations and that kind of thing, I was just very interested in theatre, and I spent most of my time doing theatre, more so than on my studies. In the late 70s I moved from Penang to Kuala Lumpur, which is the capital. In the capital you began to see the contradictions more sharply. It was also a time when there was this. 'Restructuring of society' which was going on. That began my phase of political consciousness, and from that time on I have been writing political plays. My plays, in fact, have become very, very political. A play that I wrote called *1984 Here and* Now is so politically blatant that it is almost a form of agit-prop.

AK: When you say political, what do you mean? What are the kinds of politics that the play has that you, or most of your plays, have?

KTC: Looking at Malaysian society, at what I see to be the injustices, social injustices, political transgressions, if you can call them that. *1984,* for instance, was based on Orwell's novel, but I adapted it to a kind of Malaysian milieu, and instead of looking at the discrimination between the roles and party members on a class basis, as was done in Orwell, I looked at it on the basis of race. Because racial discrimination was institutionalized at that time. My play was hitting out at that, and also hitting out at our own Big Brother, the state. It was a play that also called out for freedom of expression that had become more and more restricted at the time the play was written.

AK: Is there any theatre censorship?



Scenes from *1984 Here and Now (1985). Above 'You* extremists *will* bring the nation down,' Juan (K. K. Nair) counters the accusations of radical party members.
Below 'You are a threat to the nation's security!' The Interrogator (Keep than Chief) accuses Witan (Sale Ben Jived).

KTC: Definitely. Before you can put on a play you have to apply for a staging permit. You have to submit your script to the local authority, and one copy of the script would be sent to the

Special Branch of the Police. Perhaps because they're experts on culture! If they find the play to be objectionable, they will call you in. But invariably the producer would have to go in for an interview. They would ask questions about the play, and then they would assess it and if they found that there was anything that 'threatened the security of the state' they would ask for changes to be made, or they would just not give a permit. In fact, I have been involved in two productions that were not given permits eventually. One of them was a one-man play written by a Singaporean playwright, and I was acting in it. The permit was not given on the afternoon of the opening night. Although the play, if you look at it, there's nothing really threatening about it-and it was written by a 'Singaporean, it's not really talking about Malaysian society as such. And then there was another instance. I was directing a play called Madame *Mao's Memories*. Based on Madame Mao. We rehearsed it for about six weeks, and eventually we were told we couldn't do it. They don't have to give you a reason. You have to guess at it. My guess was that it was because it was about a figure of communism. Although the play itself had nothing to do with communist ideology, it was looking at the person as a human being.

AK: So they're anti-communist.

KTC: Yes. In fact we had the Emergency, which was imposed in 1948. This was before we gained our independence. The communists were supposed to have tried to take control of the state. The British were in power at the time, and they were against the communists getting any kind of control, so they imposed an Emergency. It went on for a few years, but the communists were perceived as a threat for many years after that. So we had other restrictive laws that came about, and one of them was the Internal Security Act, which means that a person could be detained without trial, for an indefinite period of time. That, of course, is a very powerful instrument, and it has been instrumental in keeping people in line and ensuring that people don't say whatever they feel like saying. And playwrights, of course, would be subject to the same thing.

AK: Have any of your plays been through this experience of being denied a permit, or at least being questioned, or have changes been demanded in the scripts?

KTC: Well, when we were rehearsing 1984, we were thinking it probably might not get permission, or that the police would tell us to make changes. But just about two weeks before we were due to open, miraculously we were given a permit! I can only explain it this way-the police did not read the script. They just called the producer in, asked her a few questions, she answered

to the best of her ability, playing safe, and then they said, okay. So we managed to put the play on.

AK: What about after such a play is performed? Does word get about, do they find out that it's a certain kind of play, and then do they take action afterwards, with the next play, perhaps?

KTC: That's exactly what they did, with the one-man play I was referring to earlier. Because when the producer went to ask them, so are going to get the permit for the play, they said, oh, you're from such and such theatre group! Ah, Kee Thuan Chye! Then they started telling her that they got into

trouble the last time for allowing 1984 to be staged, and to make it even worse, there was a write-up in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in which the writer suggested that perhaps the police were sleeping on the job! So they got into trouble with their superiors. And they didn't give us a permit for that one-man play at the last minute.

It's very worrying, because to apply for a permit takes a long time, two or three months, sometimes. And in the meanwhile you have to rehearse, otherwise you can't get the thing on according to the schedule. And if the permit doesn't come, you lose a lot in terms of resources, money...

AK: So the net effect of this is that people want to play safe , they want to avoid a script that could run into trouble. Also, it was almost like an unofficial ban on you, where even though you weren't the author of the next play but just acting in it, they didn't want to give the permit. So anyone associated with you then gets into trouble.

KTC: Well, they didn't stretch it that far. That was about it. That was what they did with that particular play, yes. The effect of it all is that people begin to practise self-censorship. After a while you begin to have an idea of what could be passed, and what couldn't. So you may not want to take chances. That's the insidious effect of something like this.

AK: So do you and other playwrights deal with the situation by turning to allegory and symbolism, as they do in so many other places in the world where there is censorship?

KTC: Yes, some of us do that. In fact in my most recent play, *We Could **** You, Mr Birch, I* employed a different kind of strategy. It's certainly not as blatant as 1984. Partly also because 1984 was written ten years before, and in ten years I had changed, developed different perspectives. And so, for this particular play I decided to use the strategy of comedy and irony,

and through that you could still get the message across-not with a hammer, it's more subtle, but still people could get it. So that's one way of working around it. But it was also fortunate that this play was done under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture! It's an interesting thing. They were going to have a one month festival of culture and they asked if I had something to offer.

AK: So you are not *persona non grata* with them?

KTC: I don't know about now, but at that point, no. So I said, okay, I'd contribute something, and 1 wrote this play. They read it, they submitted it to

the Special Branch, and they came back to me and said, well the Special Branch said there's no problem, but there are some things in there that we feel the press might pick up on and make an issue out of. So, you might want to do something about it. So I went back and

AK: Like what?

KTC: Probably tone it down, you know. So I looked at it and decided, if I did that, then there's no point in putting on the play at all. Because it would have lost its sting, what it was all about. So I decided not to make any changes. They were very understanding about it. It wasn't like an order, you know, that I had to do it. They left it to me, and I decided not to make any changes, and it went on. Like that. I think if I had done it on my own, without the sponsorship of the Ministry of Culture, then it would probably have been under scrutiny, and I might have been told to make the changes, or it might not have been allowed to go on, I don't know. But when I say it was under the auspices of the Ministry of Culture, it wasn't as if there was a board of people making decisions, you know. It was this one man, he was an employee of the Ministry but also the head of what they called the National Cultural Complex, and he was a very broad minded sort of person, and that was why he could approach someone like me to contribute a play for this festival. So, you still can, in a way, get in. It's just a matter of making the individual approach. I think in the long run it's the individuals you know who can let you in.

AK: Can you describe to me how this theatre functions? A sort of introductory tour of the kind of groups that there are, how they work?

KTC: Right, I think first I should set the background. We are in a sense a complex society. We're a plural society. We have many races, and multiple cultures and languages. It can get very sensitive, of course. Also, Malaysia has 60% indigenous population, the Malays, and 40% nonindigenous, of which there are over 20% Chinese, about 10% Indian and a small percentage

of what they call 'others'. We also have policies that tend to segregate. For example, in 1971 a National Culture Policy was formulated, that decreed that National Culture would be based on Malay culture, and incorporate suitable elements of immigrant cultures. What those suitable elements are, nobody knows. But the effect is that it tends to alienate people who belong to the so-called immigrant cultures. Even the term immigrant culture is ridiculous, because these people have been living here for generations, and they are full-fledged Malaysians.

So, in the society itself there is a lot of polarization, racial, cultural and so on. Even the theatre groups that work in the different languages work in their different orbits. If one were to talk about mainstream theatre, today one would talk of theatre in Malay, as well as theatre in English. But they are actually two different streams. Theatre in Malay is the sanctioned theatre, it enjoys state support and subsidies; whereas theatre in English has to fend for itself and most of the time has to look for funding from private sources. But what has happened in the last few years is that theatre in English has become very active. A lot of groups were created, and people became very interested in theatre, audiences increased. This could be attributed to the fact that a lot of people were coming back from overseas after having studied abroad. There was a growing-middle class clientele for theatre, and that helped the situation. In terms of Malay theatre, it used to be more active in the 70s and 80s and then there was a decline. Now there is an effort to revive it, and the state has pumped money into it. You get a lot of productions where film stars and pop stars are brought in to play lead roles and so on.

AK: Is the Malay theatre of a particular kind-- popular entertainment, or Proscenium, or traditional folk forms being used? Is there a pattern?

KTC: No, there is diversity. In both, actually. In fact, in Malay theatre in the last twenty years there has been a growing consciousness about creating a new theatre based on traditional forms. Or infusing traditional motifs into new plays. You still do get, I suppose, the odd naturalistic proscenium play, but there is, I must say, on the whole, an inclination to experiment, in the Malay theatre.

AK: Was this helped by the fact that there's funding available far these experiments?

KTC: No, I think it's always been there. Even in the 70s there was quite a lot of experimentation in Malay theatre. There was also experimentation in English language theatre, in the 70s and the 80s, but of late because English language theatre is doing so much

better, financially, there is a tendency to give the audiences what they want. And there is a movement; it seems to me, towards a commercial kind of theatre, in the English language. There is also the trend of dinner theatre, which of course means packaging a product for an audience that would find what they see digestible! There's also this trend W English language theatre towards gloss and glitz, putting a lot into adorning the production just for its own sake.

AK: And there's obviously money for that, because that's expensive.

KTC: Yes. You see, people are getting to be more conscious of culture, and so private corporations also want to be associated with culture. To them it's become a prestigious thing.

AK: But do they sponsor certain kinds of theatre? For example, drawing room comedies or slick western imports? Neil Simon, is he popular?

On the imagination of the people who work with that space. But to return to my earlier point, despite the emergence of new playwrights there is still a predominance of imported commercial plays, West End, Broadway ... Recently there was a production of David Mamet's Oleanua, and last year there were plays like *The* king *and 1,* though I wonder why they still want to put on a play like that at this time!

AK: Well, perhaps you have your own version of Raj nostalgia, like we do in India.

KTC: Neil Simon-we had *The Odd Coraple* staged last year, and this year there's a group putting on *The Mousetrap* of all things! Imported plays have always featured in the English language theatre in Malaysia. But in the last couple of years we see the emergence of new playwrights in the English language, and this is also because the language policy has changed. From 1970 till three years ago, the emphasis was on Malay, the national language, and English was very much put in the back seat because it also had the stigma of being the colonial language. But because of globalization nowadays, and Malaysia's desire to industrialize and find its place in the global marketplace, English is making a comeback. But we have lost twenty years in the process. Also, there are these young people coming back from overseas who have had their education abroad. Before the last five years, there were very few people writing in English, and there was a generation that was not so competent in the language, to be able to write in it. But now these ex-students coming back, and also more culture in that sense, we see them engaging in this field, it seems to be a popular trend now, every one wants to be a playwright! It's also because theatre is getting to be more popular, and people are going to the theatre, sometimes for

the wrong reasons, because it's trendy, and they want to be seen there, or to say they saw such and such a play.

AK: You're talking, I think, about an uppermiddle-class sort of audience, western educated, with good jobs and so on. Is there a particular kind of theatre they like to see, or do they attend plays at certain fashionable venues-how does it work?

KTC: Until very recently there were only certain venues where plays could be put up. Since last year there was a group that built its own space, this was the first time this happened; and five months ago another group got its own space. These have now become cultural focii, you know. They're small spaces, one is proscenium, the other is more versatile, you can do things with it, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they could only do a certain kind of play. I suppose it also depends

KTC: No, I don't think so, you know. The people involved in theatre by and large over the last three decades are not people who had this kind of inclination. They are people who had a certain consciousness about the fact that they were working and living in an independent country, and wanted to create their own national voice, if you want to put it that way. And among the young people today who are engaged in theatre, colonialism is something they don't even have an inkling of, because they were born years after independence. They may have brought back with them certain cultural preferences, because a lot of them were educated in the west-that probably explains why the staging of these imported plays is being perpetuated. And also because, let's face it, we don't have plays that are really of such high calibre, as yet. New plays. So people still would like to see what they consider good theatre, good drama, and as a result of that we put on western plays.

AK: Something you were saying sounded as if English had almost become the language of resistance against the mainstream; that people who felt themselves alienated from, or wished to protest against, the mainstream establishment culture, or cultural hegemony, were working in English. Is that so?

KTC: I'm not sure we consciously looked at it as a kind of protest, but by and large most of us wrote in English even in those years, even when it was in the fringe, because we had no alternative. Unless we took the effort to learn Malay so well that we could express ourselves in that language, with all the nuances. Because people like me, in that generation or the generation before, were brought up in a medium of instruction that was English.

AK: Was that an elite medium of instruction?

KTC: It wasn't. Up until 1970 education was in English right from primary school. There were certain types of schools-you could opt for an English medium school, or a national type school which would be in Malay, or you could opt for a Chinese or Tamil language school.

AK: But was this also related to class-so that poorer people went to the Chinese or Tamil language schools, and the more well-off could afford to go to an English language school. Was it like that?

KTC: Not necessarily, because schooling was free. I think it depended on your cultural preference. In our time it was felt that if you went into an English school you would have a better chance in life later on. At that time no one felt that Malay would play such a dominant role in our social life. And let's face it, there were a lot of non-Malays who were resistant to the Malay administration. In fact, when the British were going out, there were people who questioned the ability of the Malays to take charge of the country. Of course, now they have been proven wrong. Then again, it wasn't just the Malays who assumed political power. Throughout the last forty odd years since we achieved independence, it's always been a multi-racial coalition, of course with the Malays in dominance. But at that time, there were people who felt uneasy at seeing the British go, particularly the nonMalays.

AK: In India, English is very much the language of the elite. Anybody who was from a non-privileged background did not have access to an English language education. Therefore, all cultural production in English, whether poetry or drama, was seen as very marginal, very elitist, and not really engaged with the major issues the country was struggling with. It has taken a long time, and it has taken a new generation of writers to feel that they have a right to write in English, otherwise I think everybody felt somewhere that they wrote in English because they didn't know their own language well enough. But, for example, in South Africa, the blacks protested against being educated in Afrikaans, and English was in some ways a language of protest. I guess I'm trying to understand the politics of English as a language in your country.

KTC: When you talk about 'our language' in India, whatever it is, Marathi, Gujarati, Bengali, you still have a sense of being Indian. You have that sense of identity. But in Malaysia you have so many different races, and they each have their own cultural, racial, linguistic identity. We can't claim Malay to be our language, if we happen to be nonMalay. Of course now we say it is our national language, but that's not to say really that we don't want to learn Malay because-or that

it's embarrassing that we don't want to learn Malay because-it's our language. And a lot of people at that time were resistant towards learning Malay. In fact, when I was in school we didn't treat it with much respect, you know, we just thought, ah, it's just another language. And I think that was a mistake, on the part of the authorities. They should have, right after independence, implemented the programme whereby Malay was made to be more important from primary school onwards, but they didn't do that.

AK: Do you also feel that to be really involved with the important concerns of the country it would be better to be writing in Malay because it reaches more people ...

KTC: Oh, yes, of course. I've always felt the lack. In fact I envy the Malays because they seem to be more together. They have their own culture, their own language, an identity. Whereas for somebody like me, whose forefathers came from another culture, another country, and who now doesn't have much to inherit of that culture, who now has to find his way, not knowing what his cultural base is, what idioms he could borrow, what traditions he could assume, and therefore having to create, in a sense, his own idioms and tradition, it is a bit more daunting, I would say. Some people say it's more exciting. I used to say it was more of a curse, you know, because there're certain ways of expressing, which would have been so much heightened, or helped, if you had a cultural base. There are certain cultural signs, shorthand one could use that could be easily understood by the people. But if you didn't have that ... As a playwright what I've tried to do is take elements from the cultures of the various races in my country and use them. Now, how successful that is I don't know. I've often questioned myself as to whether in doing that I'm not just using them at a superficial level, because in the first place, it doesn't really belong to me, and Malaysia is still at that stage where it is trying to find a cultural identity for itself. For a time to come when we can say, well, this is what Malaysian culture is, this is our Malaysian identity. But I don't think we have come to that stage yet.

AK: What kind of an audience do you have? Students? For your political plays? Who is your audience?

KTC: I didn't set out to think about that. I was moved by certain things and I wrote them. But cm reflection one has to face the fact that theatre being, in a way, an elitist preoccupation, you can't expect somebody who doesn't understand English, for instance, to come and watch my plays. You can't expect someone from the rural areas-they wouldn't be interested, in the first place. And

I have no illusions about reaching out to the masses, especially in such a complex society as Malaysia. I just do what I can, what I feel I want to do, that's about it.

AK: So who is your audience?

KTC: Students, the middle class, the English educated urban population ...

AK: People with what kind of jobs?

KTC: They could be clerks or secretaries, engineers, lawyers, doctors.

AK: Do you have a recurring audience who comes regularly to see things done by you or your group?

KTC: There used to be a time before the mushrooming of the theatre groups, whenever there was a play you'd see the same faces, you know? Nowadays, of course, there are lots of new faces, which is a good sign. But as to whether you have a following is very hard to say.

AK: Do you work with a particular group?

KTC: What I've done is, I've worked with a number of groups in a sort of freelance way. But nowadays it's becoming difficult to work on your own; you have to affiliate yourself with a particular group-just the costs of putting on a play are so forbidding. They seem to keep rising all the time. A healthy development in theatre, particularly in Kuala Lumpur, is that there is more dialogue going on now between groups working in the English language. They used to work in isolation, but of late they have realized that it's important to have a kind of united front, to cooperate with one another, and even collaborate on productions. So that's happening.

AK: Are these amateur groups-people with other jobs or students who get together to form a group? Do they cluster around a particular figure? How does it work?

KTC: The groups are semi-professional, except for one or two. It's very difficult to make a living out of theatre, although some people do, now. It's been made possible. So some people, like me, for instance, have to have another job. I work in the day time and rehearse at night. Having said that, although a lot of us are not professional in the technical sense of the word, we are professional in our attitude and we make sure that we do a good show.

And recently I remember a discussion when these terms, professional and amateur, were being questioned. This young theatre director in Manipur was saying, if you're talking about your most important commitment, what you give most of your energy to, then it's theatre, so in that sense you're totally professional--

KTC: Right

AK: But where you earn your bread and butter from may be something else

KTC: Right. That's the way it is, and that's the way it's always been.

AK: Do you have long-standing groups which have been together for several years, that perform plays regularly, or is there a lot of movement between fragmented groups?

KTC: There's a group called the Five Arts Centre which celebrated its 10th anniversary. There's a group called Sutra that also does dance, which has been around for several years as well. The most successful group is one that calls itself Instant Cafe Theatre, which has been able to attain success in a short period of two years, because it also does cabaret acts at nightclubs, hotels and company functions. That pays so well that they have been able to set up their own office, employ people full time and also get their own theatre space.

AK: Do they also do serious theatre apart from cabaret? '

KTC: Yes, they do.

AK: In the Malay theatre, is there a similar structure of groups, or is it different?

KTC: In the 70s and 80s there were a lot of theatre groups in the Malay stream but they were usually very shortlived. So you don't find many Malay theatre groups of long standing. There is a group which has been doing theatre consistently, and that is centred around Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the National Language Agency. That's a government body, but the people involved in the theatre are employed there. They may use it as their base, but it doesn't necessarily mean that they also subscribe ideologically to the government line.

AK: What about protest theatre in Malay? What kinds of issues is the protest about?

KTC: Are you talking of street plays and so on?

AK: Not necessarily. Even plays like your political plays-is there any parallel to that in Malay?

AK: In fact, even in India this is common. People doing serious theatre are also usually holding

KTC: Though the Malay culture as a whole doesn't believe in direct confrontation, plays of protest and

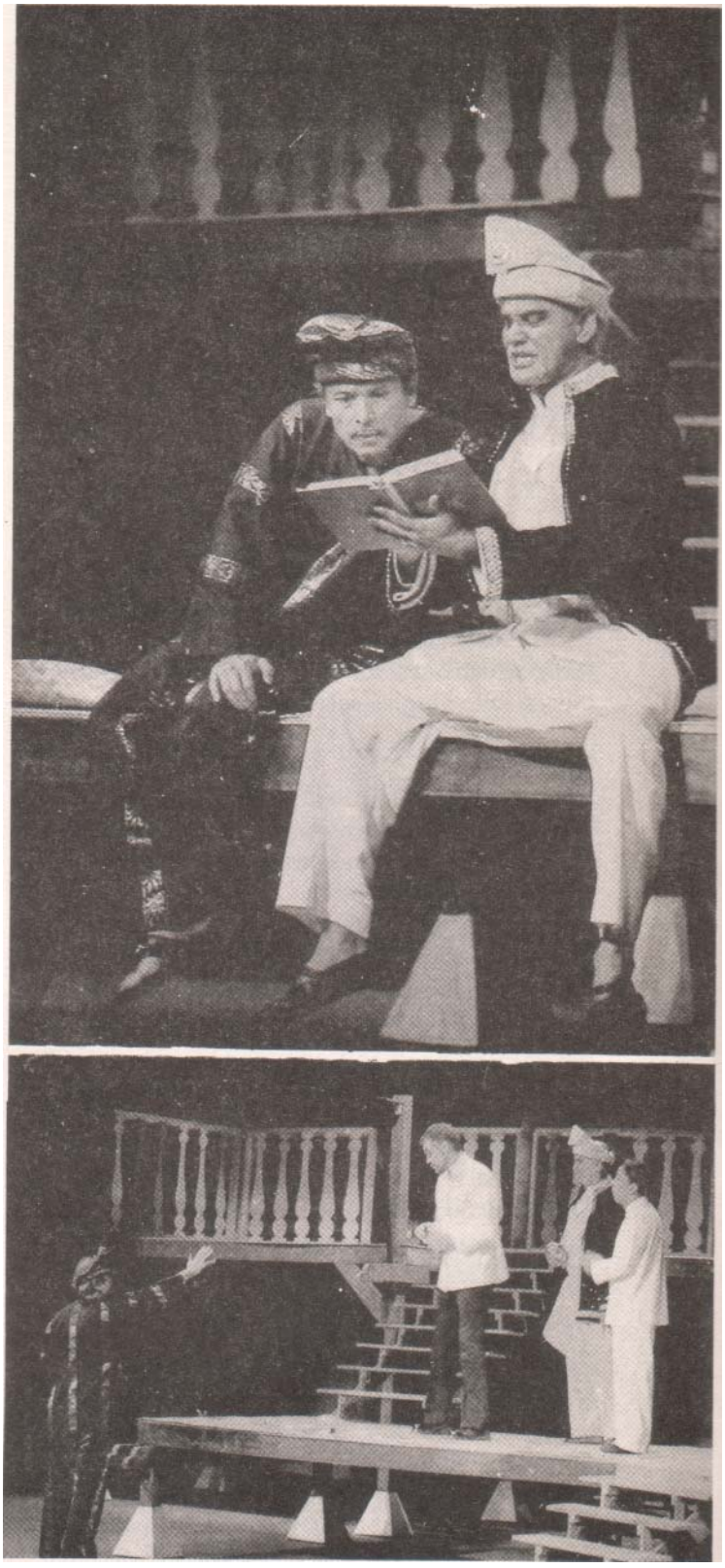
those expressing socio-political concerns in the Malay language have stemmed from playwright directors like Dinsman, Khalid Salleh and Zakaria Ariffin of the younger generation, and also from veterans like Noordin Hassan, who injects political messages into such plays as *Anak Tanjung, Cindai, Bukan Lalang Ditiup Augin*, employing allegory and symbolism.

AK: Have there been, in Malay theatre, attempts to use indigenous forms and try to modernize them and bring them into modern theatre? Do you find any interesting formal experiments going on in Malay theatre?

KTC: Oh yes! In fact, most interesting experiments were done in the 70s, and playwrights involved in this experimentation like Noordin Hassan and Syed Alwi were the ones who began to mine traditional forms for infusion into modern plays, and they were quite successful. Malay traditional forms like the *wayang kuilt* or shadow puppetry, like the *manora*, which is a kind of dance drama, the *makyong*, also a kind of dance drama, *boria*, and of course also the *bangsawan,* which is a kind of vaudeville. A lot of these are very Hindu influenced. In some forms you had rituals and incantations before you started the performance. Nowadays this is considered to be taboo in Islamic terms, and there is a debate going on as to what should be continued to be practised and what should not be. In the northeast state of Kelantan which is now under the rule of the Islamic political party, performances of *zvayang kulit* are not officially sanctioned any more.

AK: Did any of this importing of forms and tradition creep into English theatre as well?

KTC: Well, I used the *wayang Wit* form in 1984 *Here and Now* and *The Big Purge*. This was a play I wrote while I was in England, in response to what happened in October 1987 when the government detained, without trial, over 100 Malaysians. Of course, the excuse the government gave was that there was the threat of another racial riot erupting, and they had to take action to diffuse the situation. They belonged to all racial groups, but most of them were working in social reform, opposition politicians, and so on.



Scenes from *We Could **** You, Mr Birch (1994). Above* Two of the actors (Ahmad Yatim and Mano Maniam) break out of character to question the truth of a historical event:

Below 'Wait a minute!' an actor calls a halt to the play's action. 'Is this how it happened in history?'

We Could **** You, Mr Birch

Kee Thuan Chye

Voice-over comes on:

'In 1871, Sultan Ali o f Perak died, giving rise to a dispute over who would succeed him. The Mantri chose Raja Ismail over the expected successor, Raja Abdullah. To stake his claim to the throne, Raja Abdullah got himself involved in tile Chinese disputes over the mining of tin in Larut. Fighting broke out between the rival Chinese groups, threatening to hurt British interests in the Straits Settlements. Thus, when Raja Abdullah approached the British to intervene in the matter, they did not hesitate. The Governor of the Straits Settlement, Sir Andrew Clarke, called for a meeting of all the chiefs at Pangkor in 1574. Not all the Perak chiefs attended. They felt . . .'

It gets wonky and dies out. Long silence, as if there is a technical hitch and the lights are not coming on. Then, just as the audience is getting anxious, the stage lights suddenly come on to reveal the actors playing Sir Andrew Clarke, Sultan Abdullah, Tan Kim Cheng and an ensemble of chiefs including the Mantri, all dressed in period costume. The actors are caught unawares. At this point, music should start up but it doesn't. Everybody is waiting for somebody to make the first move. One actor gestures to another. Finally the actor playing Sir Andrew Clarke shouts, 'Music, please!' The music, 'Rule Britannia', comes on. But it's too loud. Actor playing Sir Andrew Clarke motions for the volume to he brought down but instead it gets even loader. Finally, he motions for the music to be cut. Music stops.

CLARKE. What this place needs is some efficiency. Right. Is everyone here? *(Looks around)* No. Raja Ismail and the upriver chiefs are not here. This must mean that Raja Ismail

MANTRI Sultan Ismail.

CLARKE. He's not here to lay claim to his title.

MANTRI Why should he? He is recognized by the Malay chiefs as Sultan. His position is beyond reproach. Why must he subject himself to this gathering called by foreigners?

CLARKE. This gathering is held at the request of Raja Abdullah. He has asked us to seek a peaceful solution to the troubles that have of late beset the state. We have succeeded in stopping the fighting between the Chinese secret societies and have only the best interests of the state at heart in wishing to henceforth see it prosper.

MANTRI We are capable of handling our own affairs.

CLARKE. To what end, Mantri? The perpetuation of chaos? Even the matter of royal succession has not been properly settled.

MANTRI It has been. We have already installed our sultan.

CLARKE. The sultan chosen by you, an old and feeble Raja Ismail who will be no threat to your machinations. Raja Abdullah has a legitimate claim to be sultan. He was Raja Muda at the time the former sultan died but he was not made successor. Instead, Raja Ismail, who was then only the Bendahara, was your choice.

MANTRI it was not my choice alone, the other chiefs sanctioned it.

CLARKE. Simply because Raja Abdullah was not present at the late sultan's funeral. MANTRI He was too cowardly to come. Such a man is not fit to be sultan.

CLARKE That is an unfair assessment, Mantri. In any case, Her Majesty the Queen considers Raja Abdullah's claim to the throne to be rightful.

MANTRI What right has this Queen to decide it for us?

CLARKE. The point is, it has been decided. As Governor of the Straits Settlements and representative of Her Majesty, I am to see that Raja Abdullah ascends the throne of Perak. A British Resident shall be appointed presently to advise the new sultan on matters pertaining to the government of the state and all matters other than Malay custom and religion.

MANTRI We protest.

CLARKE. As for you, Mantri, Her Majesty no longer recognizes your former position with regard to the district of Larut. You are hereby merely governor of Larut and will be subject to the new sultan and take advice from a British assistant resident.

The Mantri and Chiefs storm oat.

CLARKE Congratulations, Sultan Abdullah.

SULTAN. Thank you, Sir Andrew.

CLARKE And thank you, Mr Tan Kim Cheng, for advising the Sultan to approach us for help.

TAN. Not at all, Sir Andrew. It is in the best interests of everyone that order is established and maintained in these parts. Business can now proceed as usual. We look forward to closer cooperation with Her Majesty's representatives.

CLARKE We are glad to be of service. And now I shall need the signatures of all present on

Actor playing Mantri comes back in. He is not in character.

ACTOR/M. Wait a minute. Is this how it really happened in history?

Silence as everyone looks at one another. Actor playing Sultan drops out of *character.*

ACTOR/s. History? What history? We are creating fiction, Yatim. This is fiction. History is fiction. ACTOR/CLARKE. Excuse me, I have to go and prepare for my next role.

ACTOR/TAN. M2 too.

They exit.

ACTOR/M. What about historical truth, Mano?

ACTOR/S. Truth depends on who is telling the history and what he is trying to get across, who his audience are. History can even be manipulated to convey opposing truths. You can screw around with history.

ACTOR/M. So how do we tell what is the real truth?

ACTOR/S Now, you know of course that the man sent to be British Resident of Perak was James W. W. Birch.

ACTOR/M. Yes, that is historically true.

ACTOR/S. Listen to what his colleague Frank Swettenham wrote about him. *(He produces a book and reads from it)* 'In Mr Birch the British Government lost one of its most courageous, able and zealous officers.' is this absolute truth? How about this? *(He produces another book)* Written by his successor, Sir Hugh Low: 'Mr Birch was violent, drank, and did some high-handed things.' Hmm. Is this true, too?
ACTOR/S *shrugs, throws the book AWAY and exits, followed by ACTORIM.*

This extract is from We Could **** You, Mr Birch, *written and performed in 1994.*

Do They Let Us Sing Our Songs?

Few theatre lovers in India probably remember, if they were aware in the first place, that some Malayali artists were tried and imprisoned and a Malayali playwright of Kerala sentenced in absentia by a Sharjah court in the United Arab Emirates in 1992. This punishment was because of the performance of a so-called blasphemous one act play, The Corpse Eating Ants.

DR JOSE GEORGE reported on the incident in TDR (The Drama Reviezv) , bringing to light a significant area of conflict between inter-cultural performance and human rights, and analysing national and international reactions to it. We present a brief report by PARAMITA BANERJEE along with an English translation of the play script.

The economy of Kerala, like some other Indian states, is largely dependent on the income of nonresident Keralites working in the Gulf. Politicoreligious issues affecting the area have an immediate effect on the employment and welfare of these overseas Keralite workers, which is why both the Kerala press and the Malayalis normally keep up with the Gulf. As a result, on 15 October, 1992, both English and Malayali newspapers circulated in Kerala carried the news item of the arrests and condemnation.

The play *The Corpse Eating Ants* was performed on 28 May, 1992 at the Indian Association Hall, Sharjah, on the occasion of the death anniversary of Safdar Hashmi, a leftist theatre activist-director who was brutally murdered soon after a street theatre performance. Kerala Art Lovers Association (henceforth KALA) were the organizers. Initially, ten amateur theatre workers were sentenced to six years' imprisonment followed by deportation and a fine of 500 Dirham (Rs. 4000/-). Later, an appellate court in Sharjah acquitted six of these eleven theatre people, held up the punishment of two of them-the organizer of the drama competition and the president of the Surya Arts Society, which staged the play, and enhanced the punishment of two others-the director of the play and the actor who played the role of the Prophet-from six to ten years imprisonment. The convictions were on grounds of the play blaspheming both Christianity and Islam.

The punishment of the playwright was even more interesting, if one may call it so. The Malayali play written by Karthikeyan Padiyath in 1974 literally translates as *The Corpse Eaters* , but it was performed on this occasion under the changed title of *The Corpse Eating Ants.* As a result, the play was wrongly attributed to the late Safdar Hashmi, who was supposed to have

written it in English, and the Malayali playwright Vayala Vasudevan Pillai, in no way related to the play or its performance at Sharjah, was sentenced in absentia for translating it. Nobody took pains even to find out the truth,
and playwright Padiyath came forward himself to accept authorship of the play to save the innocent Mr Pillai.

What needs to be noted is that there was virtually no disturbance during the performance of the play, except for a few catcalls when a dialogue referring explicitly to the Prophet Mohammed was delivered. The incident was minor enough not to disturb the performance as such. The play has also been performed numerous times in Kerala without ever creating any tensions along communal lines either from the Muslims or the Christians of the state. But, on the day after the performance, a rumour was spread that this play had received first prize, though it was banned in India on grounds of blasphemy. It was claimed that it had been performed in Sharjah deliberately to insult the Muslim community. It is perhaps important that both the catcalls during the performance and the rumours were by Keralite Muslim youths. Also, no serious voice was really raised against the judgment. The Kerala press restricted itself to merely reporting the incident and the Congress-headed state government also remained totally silent since the Muslim League was a powerful political ally. Leftist organizations almost entirely ignored the issue. Some, however, blamed the KALA for staging this play without properly censoring it. The only voice of protest was raised by the People's Union of Civil Liberties, Thrissur, which the mass media avoided publishing.

The play is a symbolic one seeking to expose how ideologies are used to play power politics. The author, in an interview with Dr Jose George, emphatically stated that his play no way ridicules either the Prophet Mohammed or Jesus Christ, or even Marx. It satirizes those who lack real faith and pay lip service to ideologies only to play power games. To use the author's own words, 'Christ is good, Nabi is good, Marx is good, and I admire their principles, but I can't say their followers are good.'
However, while the satire is directed against manipulators of Islam and Christianity, no such reference is there to those who play power games with the Hindutva ideology. One of the reasons may be that the play was written in 1975 and Hindu fundamentalism hadn't quite assumed the political significance then that it has assumed now. Nevertheless, in his interview with Dr George the playwright admitted it to be a weak point in the play and also exclaimed that, 'Because of this,

the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) and the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) like it. There have been rumours that I'm a Hindu fundamentalist! The RSS secretly came forward to protect me when my life was in danger.'

In his article in the .*TDR* Dr George raised a few vital questions, which deserve mention, Firstly, the Sharjah incident clearly reveals that the current notion. of human rights is certainly not applicable to theocratic states. The non-response to it of the intellectual community within and outside Kerala is another matter, especially if we remember the rush to support Rushdie when he was condemned by Khomeini for his Satanic *Verses*. *Is* that because Rushdie is a major artist while the Keralite performers come from a littleknown community of a poor third world country? If so, the so-called universality of human rights is surely shown to be no more than mere farce.

Dr Jose George reports to STQ today that reaccusations and retrials, acquittals and convictions were continued a number of times in the appellate courts and high courts over the issue of blasphemy. Ultimately, however, the President granted 'clemency' and all the persons were released. They returned to Kerala 'free as birds' to vanish completely from the theatre scene. What is of significance is that, Dr George's article in the *TDR* made the western world react, while the incident got little or no publicity and attention in India. In a subsequent issue of the *TDR,* a news of a retrial that bode ill rather than good for the under-trials was published. The same issue also had a write-up by Richard Schechner on the injustice involved and an announcement from *TDR* about a special issue on Law and Performance. It is, therefore, possible to conjecture, especially given America's current crusade for ensuring human rights in the third world countries, that it was the powerful western world's concern that 'persuaded' the UAE President to grant 'clemency' to those accused in this instance. Are we, then, unable even to have our own concepts of freedom of speech, secularism/ blasphemy, justice /injustice so as to be able to rise against what we might consider a violation of human rights for our own citizens?

The Corpse Eaters

Karthikeyan Padiyath

Characters

An Old Man, A Young Man, Father Placluidden (A Clhristian Priest), Hajiyar (A Muslim Businessman) and Dezradatta Menon (A Communist of Hindu origin).

Scene

An old cave in n rocky Irilluck surrounded b$_{l}$*y thorny bushes. Sounds of a forest: flapping birds, crickets, owls, foxes etc. The stage is in darkness. When the curtain rises, an old man almost like a creature is crawling out from the cave. He has long, unkempt hair, a gray beard and is wearing only n black loin cloth. He holds n sharp axe. As the stage becomes dimly lit,* it was *seen moving to an isolated rock in the centre of the stage, on which lie sits impatiently.*

OLD MAN. I'll kill it ... I'll simply kilt it if the corpse is touched.

He returns to his sent. The stage is now finally *lit and the coffin is seen on the right side of the Hillock. The old man slowly walks to the coffin, .lifts its lid and looks inside. Satisfied, lie closes the lid and goes back to his seat. Forest sounds. He rims to the left corner zvith his axe.*

OLD MAN *(addressing someone).* Corpse eating ants! You can't eat this corpse. It's my *pupil.* It's a part of me. You can't eat it till 1 die.

Goes near the coffin again, looks iii closely and retiring to his seat.

He feels at ease seeing tluc old ruin.

YOUNG MAN. Ay, old man! What're you doing here?

OLD MAN. I live here-Fee been here

Always. *(Stands up)*

YOUNG MAN *(looks around). Is* this Africa? OLD MAN. You've seen corpse eating ants, haven't you?

YOUNG MAN. No ... no.

OLD MAN. You've seen ...

YOUNG MAN. Ay! Please tell me which place this is.

OLD MAN. This is a place beyond your imagination. Beyond space and time.

YOUNG MAN (suspiciously). Then?

OLD MAN. Guess.

YOUNG MAN *(thinking).* Utopia?

OLD MAN. No, not at all. U-t-o-p-i-a! ... There YOU only see enchanting flowers and people in ecstasy ... ha ha ha! Here ... it's full of corpse eating ants. If I manage to remove one, another comes! Oh, what a terrible nuisance! Say, young man, where are you from?

YOUNG MAN. Bharat.

OLD MAN *(happily).* Oh, Bharat! The land of real tradition and culture ... the birth place of Valmiki and Vyasa. When 1 was a child, it was so prosperous! Today ... (eagerly) is it still so prosperous?

YOUNG MAN *(dejectedly).* Only in our dreams!

OLD MAN. That's sad.. It is the birth place of culture, isn't it? Unlike other countries Jerusalem, Mecca, Germany ... History is made by individuals! The great culture of Bharat...

YOUNG MAN. Stop telling old tales! Look at me-i represent the present. *(Old Man carefully takes in the young man's shabby appearance).* Listen, I'm a graduate, I'm thirty and I've been desperately hunting for a job for ages. And not just me thousands and thousands like me. Among the country's 60 million people,l only a few eat well.

OLD MAN *(frustrated).* I'm not feeling very well.

YOUNG MAN *(angrily).* These 60 million people are controlled by just seventy two families. We are treated like monkeys in chains. We're just taught to obey orders ... *(feeling exhausted)* ... that's enough! More than enough.

OLD MAN. Have you really tried for a job?

YOUNG MAN *(with contempt).* I don't have a beautiful sister.

OLD MAN *(disgusted).* How degrading! But don't you have artists and writers who could protest?

YOUNG MAN *with heavy sarcasm).* Oh! Plenty. They are the real asses. They are the ones who deserve to be killed first.

OLD MAN. What have you all done...

YOUNG MAN. I've set fire. *(Smiles painfully) Do you* remember the outline of our country's map? Now it looks like a witch's scrawny neck, beaded with crackers. I've set fire to all those crackers *(laughs cruelly).* Now they will explode, and with them will explode the neck. *(Laughs)* Our poverty will be eradicated for ever.

OLD MAN *(embracing the young man).* That makes me happy, my boy, very happy. Time will take care of the rest.

YOUNG MAN *(in an exhausted manner).* I'm so thirsty.. . may I have a cup of water?

OLD MAN *(helplessly).* There isn't a drop to drink. (Thinks *fora moment; then eagerly)* Well, you're very thirsty-just cut this finger and drink my blood. Take this axe *(offers the axe).*

YOUNG MAN *(incredulous).* No! ... No-let me see if I can find a brook nearby.

Exits. The Old Man returns to his sent. Sounds of the forest. Enters Father Plachudden in trousers and n shirt, briefcase in hand.

FATHER *(sighing with relief).* I've been looking for a human being.

OLD MAN. Have you found one?

FATHER. Provided one can call you human, of course. *(After a pause)* Who are you, sitting near a coffin?

OLD MAN *(indifferently).* I am a gravedigger.

FATHER. I haven't even uttered a prayer in the last few days. Where's the church?

OLD MAN.I only know this graveyard.

FATHER *(annoyed). How* can there be a cemetery without a church? Why don't you know where the church is?

OLD MAN. Church . . . that's for sinners.

FATHER. And a graveyard is just for gravediggers, is it? Great!

OLD MAN. Well mister, where are you coming from?

FATHER. Don't you know? I'm from Kottayam. This briefcase of mine-I've got lots of cash in it, but there isn't a decent hotel anywhere for me to go and eat. I am really hungry. What can you offer me as food?
OLD MAN. You don't know this place. Here you get only corpses for food.
FATHER. Am I dead?

OLD MAN *(indifferently).* What else do you think? FATHER *(resolutely).* That I must live!
OLD MAN. That's impossible.

FATHER *(boldly).* I have to live. I've managed to survive everywhere. *(Looks arourrd-notices tlrc coffin)* Whose corpse is this? 1 could eat this corpse to survive.
OLD MAN *(glaring at him).* Are you a corpse eater then? *(Father moves towards the coffin; the Old* Man *blocks his way.)* Don't touch that coffin. My pupil is inside.
FATHER. Stop screaming for no reason.

Father tries to open the coffin. The old man jump (it him with his axe, seeking to restrain him. before the old man can stab him, Father manages to snatch the axe away they resort to fisticuffs. Finally, Father fells the Old Man and tries to open the coffin.
OLD MAN *(in a trembling voice).* My corpse ... for so long I've been guarding it *(breaks into* sobs)
FATHER *(opening the lid).* Whose body is it? Can't make out clearly.
OLD MAN. But you know him ... look closely. Do penance for your sins.
FATHER *(looking closely).* Can't make out.
OLD MAN. Light the candle.
Father lights the candle and look,. Light fades.
FATHER *(surprised).* Jesus Christ, my Lord! *(Kneels down and crosses himself.)*
OLD MAN *(rising from the ground).* So you must understand ...
FATHER *(sarcastically).* Who are you to keep this corpse? I am its rightful owner.
OLD MAN. You?

FATHER. I am the blessed ... 1 am the anointed priest. I am a vicar.
OLD MAN. YOU?

FATHER. Stop talking nonsense. 1 am the owner of this corpse. I'll eat it for survival.

With cruel laughter and violent gestures, Father cats up the corpse. Sounds of the forest. After a while lie stops eating. Bright light.

FATHER *(satisfied). Now* I need a glass of waterbadly *(goes out).*

OLD MAN *(going near the coffin and examining it in frustration).* I've lost one of my eyes!

Goes back to his sent. Enters Hajiyar dressed in a coloured lungi, n waistband, n banian and a cap-the typical dress of a Keralite Muslim. Looks around and notices the Old Man.

HAJIYAR Do you belong to our community? OLD MAN *(apathetically).*

HAJIYAR Yah Allah! Wherever I go 1 meet members of my community. I thought people of my community live only in Kozhikode and Dubai. But just see-my community people are here too. .

OLD MAN. Where are you from?

HAJIYAR Do you suspect me? ... Kozhikode. I am a businessman. l am the one who controls everything.

OLD MAN. You control *everything?*

HAJIYAR Don't ask silly questions. *(Counting on his fingers)* My words are inviolable in my community. I have complete control over my line of business. 1 am equally influential in politics. Nothing will happen anywhere without my approval. Whether you want to set up a government or to dismantle one, I have the key to everything.

OLD MAN. That sounds great. What made you leave that place then?

HAJIYAR That's a good question. But ... but. . . anyway, forget it. I've come here for business. OLD MAN. Business? In this desert?

HAJIYAR. This isn't a desert-there are people somewhere here, dear brother. But I'm hungry very-I'll die if I can't eat something. Can't you offer me some food?

OLD MAN. Nothing doing. Here in this forest, darkness reigns forever. You can't even hear the song of the mythical bird here.

HAJIYAR Leave it, Old Man. Look, if you can give me at least a bowl of rice, I'll give you my waistband. Do you know what's inside it? ... No? Biscuits. Gold biscuits!

OLD MAN *(indifferently).* Whether it's gold or women, I have no use for them.

HAJIYAR (suspiciously). Then?

OLD MAN. You're going to die.

HAJIYAR Forget it! A wealthy, influential person like me won't die of hunger. What would be the meaning of life if the rich had to die of hunger? Forget it . . . just forget it. *(Notices the coffin)*

Whose corpse is it?

OLD MAN. Go and see for yourself.

HAJIYAR *(looking inside the coffin).* Can't see clearly.

OLD MAN. Are you blind? Why dont' you draw near and look closely?

HAJIYAR No, can't make out.

OLD MAN. Light the candle. *HAJIYAR lights the candle. Stage lights fade.*

HAJIYAR *(quite amazed).* Yah Allah! Here-he is here. He is the Prophet, isn't he?

OLD MAN. Yes, he is Mohammed, the Prophet who is both yours and mine.

HAJIYAR When I went to Mecca, I'd thought he was there. But took-he is here! What a fool you've made of me! Do you know that I'm the real owner of this corpse? I've done my *Haj*

OLD MAN *(enraged).* Don't you dare touch it ...

HAJIYAR Just shut up! I'm hungry and I'm going to eat.

OLD MAN. Touch it, and you're dead! Can you see this axe? I'll finish you off with this.

HAJIYAR Just try that! I've got a dagger with which I've stabbed seven people.

The old man backs out HAJIYAR starts eating the corpse with cruel laughter. Terrifying sounds corne from the forest. HAJIYAR stops eating after n while Bright lights on stage again.

HAJIYAR There's some left still. You can have that.

OLD MAN. Bloody scoundrel! You just ate up your mate! *(Goes near the coffin and looks closely)* Now I've lost my sight altogether.

Dejected, he returns to his seat. Devadatta Menon enters, carrying n walking stick, wearing dark glasses *and a gold chain around his neck. Dressed in n dhoti and n kurta lie looks very much n member of the traditional Hindu elite.*

DEVADATTA *(to the old man). Any* T.B. nearby?

OLD MAN *(indifferently). T.B.?*

DEVADATTA. Meaning a tourist bungalow, or a rest house.

OLD MAN. You can sleep in this forest if you want to.

DEVADATTA. Do you think I'm a hunter?

OLD MAN. Why don't you find that out for yourself?

DEVADATTA. Haven't you heard of ex-minister Devadatta Menon?

OLD MAN. No, I don't think so.

DEVADATTA. You must have heard of him ... exminister Devadatta Menon. Though 1 was born in a bourgeois family, I fought for the proletariat.

OLD MAN. All who come here are 'ex'; no one is 'the present'.

DEVADATTA *(trying to recollect).* What I was telling you is ... oh, yah! I almost forgot ... don't interrupt me ... yes, right ... how I became a minister. It's quite a tough job, you know, for a communist to get into power-that too without shedding a drop of blood! When 1 was in power, there was such an abundance of milk, butter and honey in the state that I'm sure you must have heard my name.

OLD MAN. And the name of the state His Majesty has left behind?

DEVADATTA. Kerala.

OLD MAN. Are you Maveli?`

DEVADATTA. Pooh! *(Disdainfully)* He was a mere bourgeois. There was an abundance of milk, butter and honey at his time too ... never mind that ... but that was only for the right wing orthodox. You must know what's happening in America. Do you think we should opt for that same structure? *(Thinking)* Do you know why I'm telling you all this?

OLD MAN. No, I don't.

DEVADATTA. That's what happens when someone interrupts by speaking put of turn. What f was telling you is that you must have heard my

name.

OLD MAN. Well, why did you become an'ex'?

DEVADATTA. Come on-those are things better forgotten. You know what proletarians are likethey are just dirty illiterate scum! A treacherous and ungrateful lot of vipers. Do you know why I forfeited all my affluence and joined the communists?

OLD MAN (aside). To become a minister of course!

DEVADATTA. Look-now the dirty rogues want to be ministers themselves. What a betrayal! Who knows what could have happened had I stuck to the anti-communists! 1 could have become a leader. They claim to have a thousand allegations against me ... but the reason I'm saying all this *is* ... *(thinking* hard) ...

OLD MAN. Rest house.

DEVADATTA. Right! You must arrange a rest house for me. Tonight I'll stop here ... Then I have to go to Russia and China ... Chile too, if time permits.

OLD MAN. Why do you want to visit so many places?

DEVADATTA To get proper medical treatment. You must know that my health has broken down completely. All these years I've spent slaving for the proletariat ... now I need a thorough medical check up. If possible, I should go to America also for a brain wash... ON But I was talking about a rest house.

OLD MAN. Here, consider yourself lucky if you have enough air to breathe.

DEVADATTA (frustrated) No food? OLD MAN. None at all.

DEVADATTA. But 1 can't starve! Not even for an hour.

OLD MAN. Why are you so worried? You've fought so much for the poor, you must have starved ...

DEVADATTA. Hey Old Man, stop making fun of me! I was born in an aristocratic family with a silver spoon in my mouth. Blue blood still flows in my veins.

OLD MAN. All that will come to an end tonight. You're going to die, you see.

DEVADATTA. Me?

OLD MAN. You can't even get a drop of water here.

DEVADATTA. What?

OLD MAN. You simply *have* to die tonight. DEVADATTA. No, I won't die. There's still a lot more for me to do . . . I have to rise further up the ladder. When 1 come back from this foreign tour of mine ... *(notices the coffin) I'll* eat this corpse and survive.

OLD MAN *(dejected).* Look, that's my backbone. If you so much as touch it...

DEVADATTA. Nothing will happen. I am the one who had touched the treasury, caring two hoots for rules and regulations...

OLD MAN. Fine, I take back what I said. Just open the lid and you'll know.

DEVADATTA *(opens* the *lid).* Whose is this face with a long beard?

OLD MAN. Don't you know him?

DEVADATTA. Am I to keep in mind the names of all the vagabonds?

The old man *lights* the candle. Stage *lights fade. They* recognize *the* corpse.

DEVADATTA. Karl Marx! My teacher who wrote the proletarian Bible. You must belong to the other orthodox wing of the party ... You cheating swine ... Hiding the corpse of my teacher from me! I am the rightful owner of this corpse, who else?

OLD MAN *(disappointed).* You?

Devadatta *Menon glares* angrily (it *the* old man as lit, starts *eating the* corpse. Sounds *of the* forest. Bright lights *conic back.*

DEVADATTA. I wish I had brandy as a sauce for this carcass meal. If 1 could get some honey at least ... real wild honey ... *(exits).*

OLD MAN. My backbone has been broken ... boneless, sightless. . . I am so alone here ... completely alone on this anthill of mundane everydayness ... inundated by infinity ... waiting for the call of resurrection ... 1 am so tired ... tired ... tired . . . (faints)

Hajiyar and *Father enter* from *either* side. Father is visibly n little uneasy.

FATHER. Utter loss! I've lost my faith. I've thrown away my cassock.

HAIIYAR. So what? Take to the saffron cloth. FATHER. Don't talk silly. There's been a police raid on my counterfeit mint ... I barely managed to escape myself ... save me please. .. *(holds on* tightly to HAJIYAR

HAJIYAR. No use, really. I'm in trouble myself ... FATHER. YOU too?

HAJIYAR. I can't go back to Kozhikode. Customs officials have already killed four of my smugglers on the Kozhikode seashore.

Devadatta Menon enters.

FATHER. Here comes an ex-minister! W hy are you here? Plotting for the next elections?

DEVADATTA. I'm not taking Hajiyar as an ally any more. I did him so many favours, but it's his people who have accused me of embezzlement ... I've been dismissed from the ministry.

HAIIYAR. But that's the way 1 am. If some one takes care of me, I do the same. But if some one betrays me, I do the same too. You've taken millions of rupees as bribe. Where is my share? (Sarcastically) Oh! You are the one who initiated me into smuggling ... what happened then?

The young man *enters.* All *three look* uncomfortable YOUNG MAN. Are there three doors to hell?

FATHER. We're just trying to fit into that needlehole of yours.

DEVADATTA. You bloody traitor! You bit the hand that fed you.

YOUNG MAN. But that's natural when you poison the food.

HAJIYAR. But there is poison in my blood. If you bite me, you'll die too.

YOUNG MAN. That's fine! I've just unmasked you all. Look at this celibate priest ... I happen to be his son ... born from a nun's womb ... sired by him ... I have just ripped apart your masks.

FATHER *(voice trembling).* My son ... John!

YOUNG MAN: Holy sermons ... preaching virtue. . . teaching virtue ... prostitution... forgery ... swindling ... A whole pack of hypocrites, that's what you are! I have just revealed your real faces.

DEVADATTA *(laughing).* What a shame Mr Father Plachudden!

YOUNG MAN. A patient treating another?

DEVADATTA. I only talk about what I see.

YOUNG MAN. You are supposed to be here to liberate the poor. But you are the one who keeps them chained to the other side and uses them as scapegoats. You kept the poor hypnotized with your militant revolutionary jargon to continue selling our warm, innocent blood. But finally I've regained my class consciousness.

DEVADATTA *(baffled).* Dear Comrade ... Raghu!

YOUNG MAN. I've raised green pastures in this barren land.

DEVADATTA. Dear Comrade ... your blood is boiling hot ... remember that such blood can quench one's thirst ...

YOUNG MAN. I'll simply kill anyone who attempts to lick my blood.

HAJIYAR I really like the way you speak, Sir. It's true that this rascal *(pointing to Devadatta Menon)* has licked the blood of the poor ... But think calmly ... would you be able to singlehandedly fight all of us? Would you survive such a fight?

YOUNG MAN. Of course I will, provided I can finish you people off first.

HAJIYAR. Mr Pareeth, why are you getting so angry? We belong to the same community, same faith. Don't we?

YOUNG MAN. I know you very well. You killed my father because he objected to your smuggling racket. You deserve to be butchered.

HAJIYAR Let bygones be bygones. What's the point in digging up the past?

YOUNG MAN. The present is but a shadow of the past.

HAJIYAR. But we can think of the future.

FATHER. That's exactly what I was about to say...

DEVADATTA *(tactfully)* Dear Comrades ... today we stand face to face with an acute crisis. We have no means of surviving even in our beloved motherland. All four of us are about to die. We can only afford to think about liberation now.

HAJIYAR. Dear Brother, you lead us all with your vigour.

DEVADATTA Dear Comrade, I also accept your leadership.

FATHER. My Son, help me regain my faith in Christ.

DEVADATTA. Come, let's make a deal. Let's just go out for a confidential discussion among ourselves-this old man must not smell anything fishy.

YOUNG MAN. Yes, we must keep it a secret.

HAJIYAR Come friends, let's go out. YOUNG MAN. All right, let's go out

All exit. Seconds later, a loud scream sounds off stage. *The young man enters alone, a blood-stained knife in his hand*

YOUNG MAN *(painting)* Up with you Old Man! Get *up.*

OLD MAN *(rises up surprised). This* knife ... ?

YOUNG MAN. I've killed all of them. Each one (if them was a traitor to his own faith ... defectors.

OLD MAN. How did you manage to do that?

YOUNG MAN. I had to!

OLD MAN. You've done what I couldn't.

YOUNG MAN. I have succeeded where you had failed.

OLD MAN *(joyous)* Feels like I've regained my youth.

YOUNG MAN. Now you lead me.

OLD MAN. Where to?

YOUNG MAN. To my motherland.

OLD MAN. What's the point of going there?

YOUNG MAN. I want t<) watch the crackers burst.

OLD MAN. Do you have faith in me?

YOUNG MAN. Certainly! I have complete faith in you. That's why 1 want you to lead me.

OLD MAN. But I always follow.

YOUNG MAN. I respect you. Please walk ahead of me.

OLD MAN. I'm too old. It's much better that you lead.

YOUNG MAN. With your permission, then!

The young man leads the way with the old man close behind. Out of the blue, the old man hits the young man with his axe: The young man falls down and is soon dead. The old mail lifts the limp bod$_y$ up ill *his* arms *and faces the audience.*

OLD MAN *(very contented).* How long have I waited for a corpse! Jesus Christ, Mohammed the Prophet, Karl Marx ... Now I'll put him down in this empty coffin and begin another long wait for ages. I'll sit here waiting, guarding this body against the corpse eating ants. My dear young friend, finally we've managed to get it done between the two of us!

Translated *from the original Malayalam by Dr lose George and Ms Rina Gupta*

Notes:

1 The population of India in 1975.

2 It is believed that 72 industrial families control India's economy.

3 Hajj is a pilgrimage to the Kabana in Mecca that every Muslim is required to undertake at least once in a lifetime. Once a Hajji, it adds considerably to one's socio-religious status.

4 Marvel is Karalla’s idealized mythical king believed to come from his netherworld to visit Kerala once every year. Kerala's state festival Onam is celebrated to commemorate his annual visit.

On Acting

Anuradha Kapoor

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Debate on modern acting in India has not been vigorous, although there have been many biographies of actors and even autobiographies by them. The *Natyashastra* deals in detail with the art of the actor, but with the intervention of colonialism and the art practices that came along with it, questions about the nature of acting and the desire that it seeks to produce in the spectator have changed. Changed, too, are the ways in which acting is theorized. Just as the mechanical reproduction of images created new regimes of seeing, the coming of the proscenium arch, the use of perspectival space, the attempted verisimilitude of the painted curtains in the Parsi/Company theatres, and the arrival of early cinema companies, all these strategically altered the expectations of what a performance was envisioned to do and to be, in India.

Therefore the terrain of modern acting required a different set of routes to navigate it even though the *Natyashastra* has provided an enormously rich theory about the meaning of acting. The difficulties in writing about modern acting are compounded by the very act of writing, or of committing to paper thoughts about acting as it were: a _tone of voice has to be found. Even in traditions where there has been much work on modern acting, say, in Russia, the register with which to speak about acting moves between two notes -the one anecdotal and the other primarily constructed on personal experience.

To mark out a history of modern acting in India, especially of acting in Hindi and Urdu, I suggest that three major phases may be demarcated.

The first phase is acting in traditional theatre forms-especially those performed in the open air, and not in closed spaces or within the proscenium. These are 'open' in more ways than one: the narrative is 'open' as well. Which is to say that it is constructed in a manner that is episodic and discursive.

The second phase is the moment of the Parsi Theatre which is a form produced very much for the proscenium and the codes of seeing which it puts into effect are substantially different from those in place before it. This phase I might call the first 'modern'.

The third phase is that of the institutionalized theatre, by which I mean theatre taught and learned in institutions that see themselves as part of the educational systems of the modern world-universities, schools and other academies-and which are conceptually different from the learning processes and the guru *shishya* traditions that preceded them. This is what I should like to call the second 'modern,' which begins to come into effect with the NSD in the early 60s and which positions the concept of the 'real,' as we understand the word in the tradition of 19th century European drama, into acting discourse in India and subsequently repositions several questions that are now taken completely for granted in the vocabulary of acting. Characterization, truth, belief, individuality, and identification are clusters that make up this vocabulary.

In this paper I seek to deal with the making of the second modern and the routes that lead up to it.

II

The character written up by the second modern is one with whom we are in some senses most familiar, especially because of, and in, the modern institutions; as also because of both cinema and TV. This character has the markers of the modern individual as we understand the word today.

Uniqueness is the most significant indicator of the modern self and the most standard description of individuality. The second modern and notably institutions like the NSD reinflect the acting proposals of earlier performing traditions, especially of the Parsi Theatre, by inscribing versions of the 'unique self' into their acting methodology. The modifications are made with one major thing in mind-how is the modem individual made, in what circumstances and by what psychological moves? How is this individual different from 'others'?

The NSD begins such modifications by presenting actors with a 'new' set of tools which are in the shape of questions. These tools help analyse situations and characters. Typically these questions ask who, where, when. Or to put it another way, these are questions of class, psychology, geography, and circumstances-questions of the specificity of that individual there doing that thing.

To invent this individual the actor might think through material in this way-why does s/he say this, what does s/he want, why does s/he drink, move, shuffle a deck of cards at this precise moment? Does s/he say what is written up for her or him, or is there another different inner monologue contradicting the words and surfacing something else altogether? In the classic Stanislavskian sense, these questions try to locate desire, covert or overt, in that one special person. These questions form a grid on which to map action, and the action (which also might be called stage business-moving objects on stage, drinking tea, looking into a mirror etc.) produces a line of emotion that can be read off by the spectators to make up the wants, desires, and dreams of a character.

This line of emotion braided with a line of action produces a character which has a roundness, as E.M. Forster would have it. A round character is one who changes with circumstance or situation, unlike a flat character who does not, and who remains the same and who produces emotions according to certain available external signs-the rolling of eyes for jealousy, the pacing up and down for waiting, the lurching and falling for drunkards or for that matter the coy meeting of the eyes for lovers. All these are the signs that make up emotion. Flat characters demonstrate these emotions whatever the situation, and under every circumstance. They do not develop but are recognized by their attributes. Nobility, greed, slothfulness, rashness, hubris, as the case may be, that is what they display in every predicament.

In contrast to the way the flat character is made, the who, where and when are tools that are used to build an individual's life in such a way that the special contours of her/his existence, before and beyond the picture frame stage, on the stage, and even after s/he disappears from the frame, is suggested. The character comes from a story, enacts a part of it before us, and then continues to live it in another space, though that space (and s/he) is not visible to us.

The before and beyond, as it were, of the given text is constructed by the means of clues the text itself provides. What are clues? Clues are embedded in what the characters say about themselves, what others say about them, what they don't say, how they pause, move, handle objects. The clues are a search for truth in observable action, as manifested in behaviour, gesture, deportment, and in silence. All these methods of detecting the specificity of the truth of an individual are part, as we know, of the repertoire of the analyst as well.

The performing style initiated by these reinflections places the `real' and the experience of it at priority. The modes by which reality is constructed make it as analogous to the experience of everyday life as possible. Characters speak prose not poetry, they deliver their lines in the manner of everyday speech and not poetically or like oration. Their lives are organized around middle class and secular (as in nonreligious) problems, and there is a striking parallel between the observing subject and the performer. The everydayness of the story, the language, and that of the mise-en-scene produces a sharp new experience of reality; that which we appear to experience and articulate, and that which is experienced and articulated by the characters on stage, are recognizably similar.

Pedagogically the NSD of the early 60s took up the Stanislavskian method of building a character and made an intervention by creating actors who brought a new realism to the Hindi stage.

Speech, and I think in fact that most of all, deportment, gesture, makeup and costume, all were carefully inflected to create characters that were uniquely individualized. They were like the people one knows in ordinary life and whom one could love or hate, even at one and the same time. They were not ideal types.

Yet they also bore the impress of the personalities that played them; this on the one hand may seem no different from the earlier histories of the stage where the entire play bore the impress of the star and each role was fashioned on the star him/herself. But in fact there is a significant difference between the charismatic actors of the Parsi Theatre and the early actors produced by the NSD.

Om Shivpuri is an eminent example of one such mesmerizing actor of the NSD. Part of his enduring attraction and his reputation lay in the fact that he appeared to be working through characterization and not through the appeal of the star, the protagonist, or the leading man. In fact Om Shivpuri was protean in that he seemed to take on many selves on stage.

This, as is well known, is in the best tradition of realist acting where the specially important code written in is that 'the actor who remains him/herself in all roles is a bad actor'; in fact the very antithesis of the stuff of which stardom is made.

The actors who remain themselves at all times are actors who pull roles towards themselves rather than pushing themselves towards the roles. In popular narratives about realistic acting, actors who dissolve their features so completely as never to be recognized while acting are the very best. The most protean, the most mercurial of all. Alec Guinness is supposed .to be so much his roles that the question returns, 'who is Alec Guinness?'

It seems to me Om Shivpuri's acting falls within this narrative tradition. His performances of the role of Tughlaq; or of Lear, or of the Miser in Moliere's play are performances remembered as being exceptionally delineated as `selves', persons, and as not being ruled by the well-loved mannerisms of a celebrity. Even his rendering of the role of Kalidas was special as he pulled the character away from the legendary, and moved it toward the everyday; he made the specificities of the character visible, the why-when-where, which makes up the unique self at a unique moment; the playing was neither that of a larger-than-life type, nor was it iconic.

The question remains, however, why this is any different from the making up of the character in earlier forms of the theatre.

Notably because in the premodern forms, the inner monologue of a character is not based on the notion of the unconscious as heavily as it is now; and therefore the subtext as explained by Stanislavsky is not built up layer by layer to construct tiers of action and then of emotion. The actor does not seek to create a logical and convincing 'through line of character', as Stanislavsky would have it. The idea of the through line can be explained as meaning the governing emotion, which will drive every action, of the character; the 'I want. . .'will range from tiny physical actions or objectives to psychological ones: indeed the physical actions will contain psychological objectives or motives or driving forces. These emotions (or emotion as in the example of Othello, whose jealousy governs his actions) control most of a character's actions, thoughts, choices; his/her deeds are the result of the way this attitude configures the bits and pieces within the unconscious.

To think these ideas through it might be necessary to look at the routes by which the notion of this ideal of realistic acting is achieved.

III

For that purpose, a small vignette. Fida Husain (c. 1898-) one of the most spellbinding actors of the Parsi Theatre is known all over India as Fida Husain 'Narsi'; this name is like a tribute to his

acting: such was his performance of the role of Narsi Mehta that he became known as the character he played.

Did Fida Husain dissolve himself in the role, the person of Narsi, in order to become him? That strategy would be in the traditions of high naturalistic acting. Or did he fashion the role so much upon himself that no difference could be made out between the two: he was Narsi.

Geometrically as it were, two different sorts of diagrams of character building are set before us; the first takes on the neutralizing of the traits of the actor/person to become the character, as strategy; and the second takes the tactic of iconisizing the actor into the character; the charismatic maker of the role, the actor/person is the character.

One supposes that there are first characters and then actors; and the second supposes that there are actors first and then characters.

Consider, that in the traditions of Greek tragedy, there were ever only three speaking actors who played all the roles; the rest of the performers were in the chorus; additionally there may have been nonspeaking, or mute presences. Often seven or eight 'individual' characters were spoken by these three; it seems reasonably clear that these actors did nothing to alter their voices to simulate different people; the characters written up were not sufficiently individualized to require that. What seems entirely natural today-one actor to each role-was not in evidence then. Not as a marker of some failure, but as a marker of the limits of individuation from a collective. The separation, the very distance of actor from chorus, was enough of a sign. The actor, not as yet a character, stood in many ways as an indication of the relations between person and collective.[2] Thus it may be that there are first actors, and then characters; specially when we understand character as person, individual, singular entity.

In the above second strategy, the actor is beckoned, persuaded, waited upon to reproduce herself /himself again, in every role; the premium obviously is not on uniqueness or individuality; a unique, unexpected individual must emerge every time in the other tradition.

IV

In the Parsi Theatre, the first modern, the knowledge that comes from the stage to the viewers is knowledge based on conventions of space. The Parsi Theatre produces a hierarchy of space because of the proscenium arch and alters the manner of perception in two ways. In the first

place, it marks a difference between foreground and background; and secondly between interior and exterior space. The latter category is important to us because character then comes to be made up in a certain way, as a consequence of a changed notion of the meaning of characterization, and even of the self all this happens, in some senses, because of the proscenium arch.

Let me begin by marking this moment of the Parsi Theatre through talking about the way in which the proscenium, brought in at the time of the British and elaborated after that, altered the habits of perception of that time.

The proscenium arch is the reorganization of space in certain very distinct ways; and these ways also in fact reorganize the knowledge that comes to the spectator via that stage. The way in which the audience and the spectators are arranged makes sure that the audience-actor relationship works at a different register altogether from that of premodern forms. The new mimetic capacities of the proscenium, which are connected, as we know, to the picture frame, and to the possibilities of reproducing perspectival space, manufactured new ways of telling a story, new ways of making a character who enacted this story, and created a new observing subject.

Mimetic possibilities, or verisimilitude, is achieved in the Parsi Theatre by painted curtains; these are painted on the principles of optical convergence or perspectival illusion. We know that in the early 1920s enlarged photographs were used as grids to create illusionistic street scenes on stage curtains.[3] Fountains, forests and gardens were made to create a fiction of reality. The image receded into the distant upstage as the painting conventions of the curtains were governed by the notion of the central vanishing point. The perspectival illusion of the painted curtains,made the 'locations' appear to be more 'real' than anything produced before this moment. It located the performer in a different more physical way; s/he did not need to describe the location in words, but to manifest the effects of its atmosphere on her/his body. This might be seen as the beginning of the naturalistic tendency in acting, as it required a certain bent of mind; observation was called upon: what does this location do or how is a forest different from a garden and how does each location affect the body in terms of smell, atmosphere, light?

Because of the way the curtains were framed in the proscenium arch, as in a window, there appeared to be, for the viewer, a continuity of space and time. Some sort of space, or another part of the location-the palace, forest, street-existed before it came into the view of the audience; one

part of it existed in the proscenium arch; and another part existed beyond the proscenium arch. This continuum resembles, or is analogous to, the way time and space is experienced in ordinary life. Events follow one another, the arrow of time flies towards the future. So the sense of the 'real' is inserted into the consciousness of the spectators. This too is part of the verisimilitude established by the curtains in the proscenium arch.

Further, the picture frame stage set up a difference between foreground and background and therefore redid the relationship between that and the actors as well. Apart from this hierarchy of space, another more important one for our purposes was set up.

This was the difference between interior and exterior space; designating space like this is not describing just physical space, but indicating metaphysical space. These are not just the interiors of rooms and their outside, but the space inside of one's self, or the space of the self. The interior.

Space divisions are important in the way characters are understood today, and are a convention that, in the histories of perception, might be seen as continuous with fixed locales on the one hand, and with perspectivalism on the other hand.

In the first place, divisions of space as marked above lead to differences being perceived in the inner and the outer world, a difference that, in Europe at least, begins with the Renaissance and becomes the very way of fashioning character. Chiaroscuro, the treatment of light and shade, becomes, metaphorically, the tool with which to designate the psychological state, the inner world, of the character. That which is hidden is the secret life of the character; it needs to be interpreted and cannot be accessed directly.

The interior-or the spaces within a modern character-were theorized as being such that nobody could reach them; where the innermost and most often the truest feelings of the characters resided. The spaces outside were social spaces, where society dictated behaviour and response.

The 'world' was then modified to accommodate itself to two sorts of universes where one space was necessarily tainted by the other; the demands of the social world often did not let you remain the way you might want to be. The demand of the self was always antagonistic to that.

The characters are then, one way or another, built on the notion of a subjectivity, where private and unspoken worlds conflict with the outside explicit ones. Even conflicts within the subject herself or himself are possible. Typically these conflicts could be between love and duty,

between the `sense' of two kinds of 'right', between two kinds of love. These conflicts in early modern characters come to be conflicts with at least, in soliloquies for instance. And these come to shape and prefigure the modern driven or divided character. The world, then, was divided into two distinct abodes-the private and the public-and the characters of the Parsi Theatre resided in these two places.

Psychological realism, for indeed this is what this is, sees a separate and radically distinguishable inner world, hidden or half revealed when compared to the outer world; the outer world-within the terms of psychological realism-is of less importance than the inner world, as that is the locus where truth resides.

This truth is to be uncovered often with a struggle: a struggle between private and public realities and between contesting roles. Personality that was once an outward Sign of life and liveliness becomes internalized, and is something that can be displayed and interpreted. Personality, individuality, psychology, all belong to the same cluster of words that locate the inner world as something that can almost be understood in its own terms and which is truer than the world of nature and society.

In other words, inner life, psychological detail, interiority, become not just descriptive terms but evaluative ones. All this is in some sense initiated by the Parsi Theatre.

In the traditional theatres there was no fixed background as there was no fixed architectural enclosing device. That is, theatre was performed in open spaces, in *melas,* in a field outside the village boundary. Whatever else the performers were performing against, it was rarely a device that produced atmosphere or marked location in any material or architectural way. It might well have been a decorative device or even a functional one such as a *kanat.* Space-where the actor is, what the nature of the space s/he occupies is, whenever it is described, is through words. Physical location or scenery is not constructed. Scenery, the making of physical objects on the stage that contribute to the mise-en-scene, is the beginning of the naturalistic habit, and* comes in the main to India after the intervention of colonialism.

The laws of visuality that Parsi Theatre creates have given the characters interiors. At least an attempt to shape such interiors, however shallow they might be or for that matter however near the surface they might be, is part of the traditions of early twentieth century drama that seeks in whatever vexed way to take on the problem of manifesting such interiors. Characters in

the play think about themselves, soliloquize, speculate about their actions. They are dealing with their subjectivities.

Thus in some ways the ground, as it were, has been laid for the development of the psychologically unexpected or nuanced character that comes to the Hindi drama with the significant intervention of the NSD.

V

Within this tradition comes the acting of Uttara Baokar who has played a whole variety of roles over her rich acting career. Baokar has before her a range of tools. Rationality, chronology, logic are modernist tools that create motivation, light and shadow, a rounded character delineated as a self. The other set of tools at her command are devices that create character by formal means-gesture, costume, colour, music-which make up an iconic image and shift toward paradigmatic portrayals. These prototypical portraits, if they might be called that, indicate attributes as manifested on the bodies of the characters and not hidden, embedded within their bodies.

Baokar has used both these tools with facility and to that extent can even be seen to create a sort of bridge between the octaves of Parsi Theatre acting and that of the later high realistic traditions. How does she make this link between the two traditions? What is the nature of her ability to stylize?

This stems from her interest in music; her measured compact gesture; and her being able to free herself from the grid of motivation as it were, and see that position, the placement of persons on the space of the stage, like a (formalist) map, might also produce meaning. She is able then to move away from the classic Stanislavsky vocabulary to integrate it withother manners of building a character.

Her economy in the use of her hands, for instance; she works with gesture and uses each move with precision; so that whether it is recalling and recuperating the tilt and droop of the wrist in Indian miniature traditions for her performance in *Umrao (1993)*, or whether it is polishing glasses as Polly in *Threepenny Opera*, it amounts to working through the idea that hands can make meaning by ways other than through stage business. Her gesture then is the gist of the character at that moment. Polly's struggle, her toil, her tawdry dreams; Umrao's histories, her pasts, her longings; all this is echoed in the way the gesture is deployed.

Yet she seeks to build or to shape the contours of her character by the apparatus of the enlightenment; the unconscious, the subtext, the biographical detail of the person to be played

is constructed, layer by layer, sedimented in to a whole. The interior of such a character is filled by the answers got from the why-when-where questions; rational explanations that construct the *unconscious,* the sequentiality of emotions, and the *meaning* of action as a result of all this. This is different from constructing the *meaning* of action as the manifestation of an attribute, or a characteristic. So while her 'method' is derived from the classic Stanislavsky tool box, she has the skill and the interest to put in other inputs. Her performance in Ranjit Kapur's *Begum Ka Takiya* and also in Shanta Gandhi's *Jasma [OdITan]* point towards that. In the former, there was use of heightened gesture-for instance her leaping on the *charpai* and fanning herself in rhythm while also using the movement of the head to augment that *fanning;* the fan becomes percussion and the head movement quotes from dance conventions. In *Jasma,* of course, she sang as also danced within the traditions of Bhavai.

I had occasion to work with Uttara during the process of *Umrao* and saw her develop the character of the popular and therefore almost iconic courtesan. The character of the *tawaif* in Geetanjali Shree's script is not a coherent character in many ways. It is a character built on the assumption that the human subject is discontinuous and is inade up and moulded by several moments. The character is fashioned by memory, by desire, by loss, by habit, and by relations of power and of coercion-that is the power that the madame of the house has over her employees. A figure constituted by such moments needs a very mixed bag of tools to come alive.

Umrao's character is, in part, an aspect of the sort of work that is being done by many directors since the late 80s. *Prasanna's Fujiyama, Uftararamcharit* and *The Father;* Mohan Maharishi's *Oedipus,* and Amal Allana's *Lear* and *Himmat Mai,* Anamika Haksar's *Antar Yatra,* all indicate a similar tendency of *interrogating* the meaning of character as subject; fixed conventions of psychological realism are shifted and the direction from where the minute changes in mood occur is changed.

What does this change of direction imply? For my purposes, it means that the causes given to the actor to work in changes are articulated differently. Mood changes, nuance, delicate moments of unexpected emotion are after all very much a part of the text/subtext paradigm of Stanislavsky. But in the characterization of Umrao the mood shifts occur because of shifts in time, and in space.

Time is experienced through memory as past; this is created by recalling, by replaying, and by dreaming-the past is almost never created by flashback. This sort of past, as it is not flashback, is past with a point of view, a past that is persona I and subjective. Thus Uttara had to move from *enacting* an old and ample Umrao today, in the present that is always the stage performance, to recalling her own version of herself as she remembers it to her companions. She had to work out a way of speaking the text that enabled her to move from past to present even within the space of two lines. It was not just a mood she was seeking to create, but a sense of time: childhood, adulthood, and the 'memory' of these two, all these had to be worked out on a body that was given no external changes: that is Uttara was given no make up to make her older as the play went on. There was no simulation of ageing nor any change of costume. Only placement, the way memory is positioned in the space of the mind as it were, had to be indicated through speech.

She had to move back and forth through space as well. From her father's house, to Khanum's via the bullock cart, to Kanpur, and to Faizabad, all these physical spaces she 'went' to. But she also had to create mental spaces-those of dream, desire, and fantasy. When Faiz Ali the daku seduces Umrao with the pastoral outside, the mango groves, the canals, the sugarcane fields, she dreams up the gardens and the monsoons. This Uttara had to represent with no aid as it were, but by gesture alone. By spreading her arms to the sound of a quotation of malahar she must put us in the garden of her dreams. Uttara achieved this by her precise gesture and her willingness to deal with realist acting tangentially, as it were.

What do I mean when I say she approached the realist proposition 'tangentially'? She first constructed the character by asking questions that provided her with a framework for the character: what sort of childhood, education if any, past histories, etc. After thinking through these details, she added other images that were arrived at after discussions. Such as, how would Umrao laugh? Fulsomely, or shyly? How would she enjoy herself-would she enjoy eating, and drinking as much as she enjoyed poetry? Would she eat a great deal or just nibble her food? Would she grieve, brood, give up? Would she be regretful? Would she enjoy her old age or would she be lonely and anxious? Put another way, how would she look aged?

From such questions that detail and shape an image, a self, Uttara began to examine each line. Who is it said to; is it happening now or is it in memory; if it is in the past whose point of view is it; yourself at a certain moment, your memory of someone else at a certain

moment; yourself from the vantage point of a full, rich life or yourself seen at the end of a life that appears to be one of betrayal and of loss?

This emphasis on point of view makes a character who has dissolving contours, a character that appears, if you like, frame within frame; just as Umrao sees people in many personae, so they see her from many angles. The coherent constitution of a tawaif is dispersed, and is located in many subjectivities. This delicate balance of constructing a subject which is itself made up by the crisscross of subjectivities Uttara achieved by using many kinds of supplenesses. She left realist characterization when it was required by performing soliloquies and monologues; she used stylized gesture and posture when required in order to bring to mind figuration in miniature paintings; she made direct dialogue whenever that was the demand of the text.

These flexibilities then rework the routes by which acting traditions have come to us: the Parsi Theatre figures a vocabulary, the realist tool box of the NSD produces another differently inflected personae. What seems significant at this moment is that sometimes both can be seen as manifest in the performances of an individual, here Uttara Baokar.

Notes:

1 Stanislavsky, as we know, arrived at certain practices for the actor which we now take quite for granted. In the first place that a dialogue is situational: The meaning of the words spoken depends not only on the information given, but on the situation in which they occur; on the attitudes of the speaker; who they are spoken to; and on the relation between the two. The status of the text then is redefined. The printed words contain only a part of the meaning; and the task is not to find intonations that conform to, and confirm the features of the text; not indeed to match acting conventions with literary conventions. The task is to fill up the text with the personal, subjective creative process of the actor; this is in fact an artistic restructuring of the lines which are transformed by the experience of the performer-the text is not out there to be merely spoken, it is in the subconscious to be manifested in gaze, gesture, objects.
2 Raymond Williams, Culture (Glasgow, *1981) p. 152*
3 See Anuradha Kapur, 'The Representation of Gods and Heroes in Early Twentieth Century Drama' in *Journal of* Arts *and Ideas.*

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4 Raymond Williams, *Keywords p. 197.*

Bengali Theatre: The End of the Colonial Tradition?

Samik Bandyopadhyay

The author is a noted critic and scholar.

1. The End of the Colonial Tradition?

It needed a World War, a man-made famine that left nearly three million dead, a tide of radical nationalism, and the rise of communist politics to make a dent in the colonial theatre culture of Bengal, rooted in the mindless tradition of the British and American actor-managers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, whom George Bernard Shaw had once described as a 'tribe of empty-headed impersonators.' It was part of the enlightenment project of the colonial power in Calcutta to purge the new *city-their* city-of whatever remained of the cultural forms and modes of expression that had been part of life in the three villages of Gobindapur and Sutanuti and Kolkata before the British settled there and recast them altogether into a single city, neatly divided into the White Town and the Indian Town, privileging one culture over another in the plan of the city itself. Both the Victorian bogey of Obscenity and the valorization of a Sanskrit literary culture, meticulously sanitized and purged of its flights into sensuality, served to drive underground the indigenous popular culture of the region that struggled nonetheless to survive in the literature of Bat-tala, Calcutta's traditional printers' district, the sawng a mode of processional representation satirizing the pillars of society and in the pats and woodcut prints circulating widely.

In his first exposure to the Victorian acting tradition, Rabindranath Tagore was intrigued by die, ambivalence of his own immediate response to Henry Irving in *The Bride of Lammermoor* at the Lyceum on 27 September 1890. In a diary entry, he wrote: `Ellen Terry gave quite a good performance. Irving's performance too was quite good. But he had such mannerism, his pronunciation lacked clarity, he made such ugly gestures and movements! And yet, it was good acting-and that was what surprised me. I Tagore, however, spent most of the time at the theatre that evening watching a 'beautiful young girl' in a box close by-'a flawlessly beautiful little face, young, a long braid of hair rolling down her back, nothing meretricious in the way she was dressed, one could describe her as dainty. Once the performance is on, all the lights in the auditorium are off, it's only the stage that's lit. She sat in a box close to the stage, the stage lights lit up her face, she looked so beautiful! How graceful the beautiful lines on her face, what a beautiful bend of the neck! All along the performance I watched the play of different moods flitting across her face. She was also looking back at us through her binoculars, but Undoubted (she couldn't have felt the joy that I felt. I am revolted by the very idea of audaciously aiming binoculars at one another in the theatre. I could never bring myself to do something like that. I found it quite vulgar.' The diary entry was eventually revised when it went into publication. But what remained in the more formal version was enough to suggest that Tagore, then barely twenty-nine and brought up on a certain ideal of theatre, could not take it when he came to confront it, and found his release W watching the charming young girl 'all along the performance.'

Yet another victim of the same doubts and contradictions was Sisirkumar Bhaduri (1889-1959), who in the 1920s sought to give Bengali theatre a different direction, but all too soon succumbed to the authoritarian power of the colonial theatre aesthetic, supported and sustained by the financiers who called the shots.

When Bhaduri appeared on the scene in the early nineteen twenties, Calcutta had three regular theatres-the Star, the Minerva, and the Manomohan Theatres-all in the northern part of the city, in the traditional theatre `district' of Shyambazar, with their own permanent repertory companies, performing three to four times a week; and a number of 'amateur' theatre clubs like the Calcutta University Institute and the Old Club. While the actor-managers dominated the regular theatres, there was greater scope for experimentation in the clubs. The first generation of the 'big' actors and actresses, who had come on the scene in the

1870s (Calcutta had its first regular theatre with a permanent company in 1872), were on their way out in the early twenties, with several of them dead or dying, forcing the theatres to offer exotic dances by 'European' ladies', 'Chinese acrobatic feats, Chinese jugglery, Chinese conjuring,' and the 'bioscope' featuring items like the 'Grand Funeral Procession of Emperor Edward, attended by Nine Kings, Queens, Princes and Princesses,' the 'Royal Proclamation of H M George V,' 'The Dance of Shiva, a Hindu legend acted in France,' 'Customs of Hindu Castes,' 'Living Scenes at Kalighat, Jagannath ghat, etc.'-sometimes as curtain raisers, on other occasions even as the main bill. Not obliged to maintain a company on its pay roll and hence perform continuously, a club could afford to set for itself values and models other than those entrenched in the commercial-professional theatre.

It was in the twenties that the divide between the commercial professional theatre and the other theatre-to be variously described later as the 'non-professional,' the 'new' or the 'other' theatre-came to be recognized. While the divide has persisted over the years with audiences and critics sharply divided in their loyalties, there have been several attempts by directors in the latter mode to bridge the gulf by joining one of the regular companies as actor-director, or taking one of the theatres on lease to turn his own theatre club into a regularly performing professional company. In either case, the director hoped to bring his 'minority' theatre and its values to the 'mass' audience. In Bengali theatre, in the last eighty odd years, all such attempts have crashed. There have been cases where the actor-directors maybe not always the best ones-have been sucked up by the system, and have come to terms with it, or have remained disgruntled ever after. In other cases, the actor-director and his original club now turned professional company have split up or been forced to give up on the lease and the theatre, torn between the old ideals getting fast diluted and the demands of easy commerce.

Sisirkumar Bhaduri, the first to make a serious attempt to bridge the two theatres that constituted, for all practical purposes, two distinct cultures, had in his early college and theatre club phase shown a sense of history and a feeling for poetry in his handling of Shakespeare as well as 'mythological' and 'historical' texts in Bengali. Sunitikumar Chatterji, a classmate better known later as an outstanding linguist, was only too glad to study historical evidence to re-create scenically for Bhaduri the periods that he chose for his setting. For the 1910 *BuddITadeva* and the 1911 *Chandragupta,* Chatterji worked hard to ensure that 'the entire

setting, the costumes, the architecture, the artefacts were as close as possible to the way they must have looked in ancient India;' with the ancient Indian and Greek costumes, weaponry and armour replicated from old paintings and sculptures. Bhaduri had in his 'amateur' days restored to theatre a credibility that it had lost in its 'professional' manifestation, and drawn back to theatre a whole range of theatregoers who had moved away in disgust from a theatre dominated by 'faces as dead as masks, bodies as immobile as stone dolls, voices unrestrained, loud and distorted, and defective and erroneous articulation.'[2] Bhaduri, a popular English literature lecturer at an undergraduate college at the time threw up his job to make his first appearance in the 'professional' theatre on 10 December 1920, in *Alamgir,* Kshirodeprasad Vidyavinode's play on the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb. Throughout the twenties Bhaduri, widely recognized as the first `director' of the Bengali theatre, sought to bring to his theatre a close reading of the playtext, made visible in a setting meticulously defined in terms of stage design, lighting (he was the first to dispense with the traditional footlights), and authentic costumes; the acting growing out of a psychological analysis of the character, but centring on one or a few specific facet/s identified in the process, and highlighted throughout, with occasional flashes of bravura acting underscoring those same facets. In *Digvijayee,* for example, Bhaduri, playing Nadir Shah, used a gait modelled on that of professional jockeys, to play on the rationale that Nadir Shah, once a shepherd in the desert, shepherding his flock on horseback, seeks power and more ruthless power only to reverse his early privation and humiliation, the gait a constant reminder of that piece of prehistory and a rationalization of both his verve and rapacity. For the opening of *Digvijayee,* Bhaduri had designed a piece of spectacle that set the tone for the performance. When the curtains went up, the audience could see only the opening of a tent extreme upstage, with a sentry marching on duty beyond the opening. For a couple of minutes or so, it was only the sentry marching from left to right and from right to left, with the rest of the stage in darkness, and the mouth of the tent alone in a glow of light. The monotony, even as it seemed to settle, was broken by the sound of trumpets heralding the entrance of Bhaduri (whom I recall telling us one evening, 'God didn't give me any of those advantages an actor is born with. I am so short, and I've such tiny eyes. But it has been better that way, for I've had to fight all along with myself to draw myself up to a gigantic size, and let those puny eyes blaze to life'), who walked up downstage in slow, measured steps, that only showed up the jockey gait, framing it in the process. As he walked up, a whole row of

lights lit up, two at a time, bringing into view courtiers ranged on both sides bowing to him, one on each side at a time, and the interior of a tent so long invisible-till he had emerged at the other end of the tent, the end nearer to the stage opening, to take position on the apron, with the simple question spoken in the most everyday tone: 'How many days does it take to Delhi from here?'-almost addressing the audience.

The structuring of the ‘spectacle’ allowed for the hero *registering* his ‘character’ and the delicate transition from the ceremonial of power to the immediacy of individual initiative, and a conscious modulation of distancing in the process, the remote coming closer at the end of the sequence. It is this sense of composition, going into the making of a scene, that was immediately recognized as a departure from the theatre conventions of the actor-managerial tradition. Tagore admired Bhaduri's *prayognaipunya* (lit. 'perfection in praxis' but more generally, 'the art or skill of production', a word he had to coin for the purpose) in *Seeta.*

Bhaduri's career in theatre spanned nearly thirty-eight years; though universally recognized as the first 'director' in the modem sense in Bengali theatre, a great teacher of acting, the greatest and the last of the great actors in the older tradition, and a revolutionary in many respects, he was driven out of theatre, and forced to sit idle for long stretches throughout his career. For more than half of the thirty-eight odd years, he did not have a theatre or a regular company of his own. For too long he was, as he described himself, a *bhadatey keshto* (lit. a hired Krishna, a phrase loaded with meaning, referring at once to an actor without a company, available on hire to any company ready to take him on a short term contract and hence utterly insecure-and the legendary Krishna, who, not one of the Pandavas himself, lent his military genius, his magical power, and his skills to the Pandavas, to ensure their victory). It was barely for a decade that Bhaduri could make the best of the limited opportunities he had in terms of directorial control over a professional company. Every short spell of creative adventure followed by forced retirement left him emotionally weaker, more insecure and cynical and embittered, making him seek consolation in drink and women, too often irresponsible and selfish and cruel in his dealings with women-though only too ready to acknowledge his guilt in a kind of sentimental self-pity in his declining years!

In an interview in 1965, six years after Bhaduri's death, Sombhu Mitra, one of the pioneering figures in post-Independence Bengali theatre, told me: 'He was perhaps the first real

director that we had in our theatre, one who thought of a total theatre. We couldn't have started if he hadn't been there. It is only because Sisir-Babu created the total theatre in Bengal that we have been able to experience theatre at a level of deeper realization ... But all his tremendously beautiful theatrical works were confined to the early part of his life, to the first ten to twelve years of his career. His magical productional genius was perhaps never again in evidence at that height of excellence. That's my personal impression. It's my feeling that nature does not endow one with such powers for ever. Yet the reference for theatre is perhaps altogether different for us who profited from exposure to those productions by Sisir-Babu. And, we remain grateful to him for that alone.'3 Bengali theatre in its commercial-professional form had remained generally out of the cultural mainstream. There had been a few 'nationalist' (mostly strategically veiled) or 'social reform' plays from time to time, more in the hope of drawing on current popular sentiments than from any idealistic zeal or genuine concern. Whatever histrionic worth it had in the last three decades of the last century had declined to a deplorable state by the end of the first decade of the present century. Hemendra Kumar Roy (1888-1963), theatre critic, and a major writer in his own right, summed up the case for the large section of the potential Calcutta theatre audience that chose 'to stay away from theatre after the death of Girishchandra Ghose in 1912: 'Theatre cannot be the property of ignoramuses!'[4]

Srikumar Banerjee (1894-1970), critic and historian of literature, is more elaborate in his account of the *difference:* 'Dramatic literature and theatre clung to the past, in total contrast to the poetry of modernism; bearing no sign at all of the changing times. Both acting and scenic composition remained bound to the romantic sentimentality and fanciful absurdities of the nineteenth century. The gaudy costumes of the royal characters, all the ferment of patriotism and cheap idealism, the increasing lion roars of heroism, the sheer surfeit of pathos and lamentation, the wailing in cracked voices, the floods of tears that overflowed the auditorium, the unbridled sweep of humour and obscenity, and a portrayal of life stuck within the confines of a set of formulae, added up to a sense of hallucination, a sense of incongruity that could be compared to the discomfort+that one feels after one has had a glut of sweets, and one was left at the end of it all in a haze of the phantasmagoric. It seemed to be our life and yet not ours. There was an ill-defined feeling troubling our minds and telling us that it was all a tedious, dreamsteeped recapitulation of the past totally unrelated to the present, the illusion of an unfamiliar world under the guise of everyday reality. The unreality of the life portrayed in the

plays was turned more unreal by the exaggeration of the acting. There was not only the spatial distance between actor and spectator, there was also an insurmountable barrier in the way of a spiritual contact between the two.

The lead actor and the lead actress, shut up in the lonely glory of their egotistical greatness, remained totally cut off from the rest of the cast ... The general audience lacked taste, and their vulgar laughter, rowdiness, dirty jokes and bawdy obscenities created a foul atmosphere in the theatre. There was all the justification for the profound contempt and the unforgiving resistance that the educated and cultured section of society harboured against theatre.'

The new generation of theatre viewers that Bhaduri was instrumental in creating included the leading figures of the contemporary literary scene. The young writers loosely organized around the two periodicals, *Bharati* and *Kallol,* representing sharply contradictory aesthetic positions, took it upon themselves not only to support Bhaduri but also to help people see the worth of his work. In the twenties, Bengali literature was taking a new turn-towards realism: Tagore was more a point of reference for the various new trends to define themselves against, than a guru. Attacked by the orthodoxy and.the new writers alike, Tagore stood his ground, hitting out aggressively at times; at other times, making daring experiments, trying to beat his younger contemporaries at their own game. Both the *Bharnti* group, more Tagorean, and the *Kallol* group, more selfconsciously modernist, found in Bhaduri's work the model for a modern theatre-in his sense of productional style; his psychological reading of character; his concern for visual and scenic authenticity; his exploration of the subtler nuance,', of the verbal text and the significance of words, expressions and rhythms; his sensitivity to the potentials of poetry, both verbal and visual; and above everything else, in his recognition of the collectivity of theatric performance as a departure from the centrality of the lead actor's flamboyant presence. The new writers, who chose a strange mix of literary models-Ibsen, Hamsun, Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Gorky-and drew on Freud and Jung and Marx for their understanding of the human essence, were looking for a realistic idiom that they seemed to find in evidence in its theatric manifestation. What they saw in Bhaduri was realism. In 1924, exactly two months after he had appeared at the Alfred Theatre (now the Grace Cinema), with his first own professional company, Natyamandir, the literary community started publishing *Nachghar* (lit. the dance room), edited by Premankur Atarthi and Hemendrakumar Roy. This theatre weekly

was a gift to Bhaduri, for over the years it made it its objective to analyse every single production by Bhaduri, making a conscious effort to educate the audience of the time into appreciating the finer points and originality of his work. It was a sense of the relevance of Bhaduri's theatre that motivated the writers of the time to make the theatre its cause, for the first time in Bengal's cultural history.

The writers saw in Bhaduri's work the possibility of a theatre for the urban intelligentsia, rooted in Calcutta's middle middle class and voicing its aspirations, frustrations and contradictions alike. There was the hope that theatre would at last set itself free from its loyalty to the babus, that section of the upper middle class that had come to happy terms with the colonial authorities and their economic system, found their own place in the system, and improvised a culture for themselves-a flippant mix of the erotic, the religious, and worldly wisdom. The nationalist politicians had their hopes too-of a theatre that would take up the nationalist cause. Chittaranjan Das (1870-1925) was one of the nationalist leaders who recognized the worth of Bhaduri's theatre and even promised to take the initiative to raise funds and build a strong popular urge for a nationalist theatre. On the eve of his trip to Darjeeling in June 1925, Das had promised Bhaduri to raise funds to give him a theatre of his own. But that was not to be. For Das passed away in Darjeeling.

The hopes of both the literary community and the nationalists were belied when Bhaduri plodded along with a repertoire of insignificant texts (most of them he hated and spoke about with utter contempt in his later years, even while taking pride in what he had accomplished out of the uncongenial material). By the late thirties, the community that had rallied round him had already moved away from him. While the rival theatre companies surrendered to the older histrionics and the novelty of the revolving stagethat monstrosity that destroyed for years to come the possibilities of exploration of the space of the stage, cramping the stage into stiflingly cooped up units-Bhaduri kept drawing on mythologicals, comedies and popular hits from the repertoire of the early years of the century, in a pathetic bid to draw audiences-to little avail.

1942-44 were years of fear and horrors, with war and famine and political violence stalking the country. The World War was coming closer and closer to India (Britain surrendering Singapore to Japan on 15 February 1942, Rangoon on 8 March, the Andaman islands on 24 March). Calcutta cowered under air raid sirens, blackouts, muffled street lamps, and dug-out trenches (Bhabatosh Datta, the economist, would later joke in his memoirs: 'Of the

two hazards, dying from a Japanese bombing, and breaking your limbs from a fall into one of the Air Raid Precaution trenches in a blackout, the latter seemed more likely.'[6])-and the wolf-whistles of American GIs stationed in the city on the prowl for women. The August Rebellion that broke out on 9 August 1942 took the form of strikes and violent confrontations between the police and army on one side and the people of the other, and parallel 'national governments' or 'liberated areas' in several pockets (one of these in Tamluk, in Medinipur, in western Bengal). Official records admit 91, 836 arrests and 1060 deaths from police or army firing, in reprisal. While a Congress source listed 74 cases of rape in Tamluk subdivision, including 46 in a single village on 9 January 1943, a British district magistrate posted in northern India and removed for being too lenient, recorded in his diary instances of a 'quite unnecessary ... terreur blanche,' 'bouts of official hysteria,' and 'reprisals the rule of the day;' and how he failed to make his men see that 'you are neither out on shikar, nor on an errand of destruction.'[7]

Long before the first Japanese bombs hit Calcutta on 20 December 1942, followed by three more air raids on 21, 22 and 24 Decembers there had begun a mass exodus from the city. Bhabatosh Datta recalls in his memoirs how he 'and his colleague Nandalal Ghosh went to the Sealdah station and found people running away from Calcutta in a mad panic, We found it quite strange, for most of those who boarded the trains at Sealdah were booked for their ancestral village homes in eastern Bengal, which was still closer to Japan. They perhaps hoped that the Japanese would destroy Calcutta alone, and not touch the villages.'[9] An avid theatregoer, P.C.Gupta, the historian, recalls, 'As long as the threat of a Japanese invasion hung over our heads, tickets for the theatre went abegging."10

As the bomb scare died down famine struck. `At its widest extent ... famine can be said to have begun in December 1942 and ended in mid-1946, lasting altogether for nearly 43 months. One speaks then of the famine of 1943-44 as an expression of convenience, referring to the most intense 18 months or so of starvation and disease mortality. The impression created (by official documentation) ... of a static distribution of distress is contradicted by one of the most characteristic features of the faminemigration. Migration spread disorder and want from areas of intense distress into areas where conditions, initially at least, were not so serious. There were no restraints placed upon movement during the famine, and a variety of forces acted upon starving peasants and determined the direction ond volume of their movements. the main poles of attraction in 1943 were the towns and cities of Bengal, where relief was known

to be available, and the haven of Assam, where rice was selling at rates below those prevailing in Bengal ... Calcutta was the destination for the largest number of migrants, and they congregated particularly in the south of the city, where relief was offered from a relatively early date ... there is considerable information available about these migrants into Calcutta, most of whom came from 24 Parganas and Midnapur districts ... Between 80,000 and 150,000 destitutes, residing on the pavements and totally dependent upon free relief for their subsistence, were supposed to have flocked into the capital after July 1943 . . .'l l

The number of starving and sick destitutes in Calcutta was estimated to be 'at least 100,000' in October 1943. In October 1943 alone 3,363 unattended dead bodies had to be disposed of by relief organizations. 12

As the first shock of the dead bodies lying all over the city slowly wore off, not into callous indifference, but into caring and grappling with the reality through organized intervention in the form of fund-raising for relief and relief centres where at fixed times of the day, the destitutes were served with a quota of gruel, the famine-stricken outsiders who had poured into the city slowly assumed human faces. Bijan Bhattacharya (1915-78) told me in an interview:

> I passed the D N Mitra Square every day on my way to the office. I could see destitute families from the villages living there and carrying out their daily chores in the open. Families with men, women and children. There were days when I would pass a dead body, one of them, covered by a filthy sheet. The dead bodies looked smaller than living human beings. Dead, adults could not be distinguished from children. I saw other sights too on my way to office. Young boys, trying to snap a telegraph wire, felled like ripe fruits under police firing. I got beaten up myself by the police on College Street. On my way back from office every day, I would think of the need to put all this down on paper. But I needed to find a different way of writing. I was afraid, trying to put it into a story could produce only something whiningly sentimental. One evening on my way home, I overheard a couple seated beside the railings of the park recalling relaxedly their life in the village they have left behind, their memories of the celebrations that went with the new harvest the year before, the religious festivals and ceremonies, and trying to imagine life in the village when they were no longer there. I had found my form. In a play, they will speak for themselves.13

In yet another interview, Bhattacharya told me that when he came to Calcutta for the first time, to study, he was not interested in theatre as such, and 'did not see plays.' It was the impact of the August Rebellion and the Famine that raised the questions:

The anxiety that haunted me was how to reach this agony, this challenge of the people, to seek a medium that would carry the experience of the people back to the people themselves. At first I wanted to write stories and novels, but then I felt that my pen was not so powerful, maybe I would fail. I found myself belittled, when I came to depict it on the canvas, or in the lyrics. Even when something like a dramatic form came to me, I was sceptical. If I wrote the text, and we performed it, how could it work? For I was not one of them. This was the thought that hurt me . . . I roamed around the city ... I saw people dying like cats and dogs on the streets of Calcutta and muttering to themselves, and fumbling, all that I tried to listen to. Could I reach my ears forth to them? ... How could I gauge the depth of their suffering? ... Trying to become one of them, in the parks, in the gruel camps, on the streets, I felt all the more strongly and with a sense of sadness that the art forms were not strong enough to convey the depth of their suffering, their tragedy, their crisis. Till it came as an Eureka ... If I could let them speak for themselves, right on the stage, maybe I could talk in their own terms, for I knew my people very well, I knew how they spoke, how they laughed, how they knew, how they felt and how they conveyed things. I knew how to react like them. If I could bring all that in, that could be a way. That was the first hunch ... I had to suffer with them and fumble for a form before I could find it after a lapse of time.[14]

46, Dharmatala Street in central Calcutta was the meeting place of leftwing artists and intellectua Is, rallying around a number of loosely woven organizations like the Anti-Fascist Writers' and Artists' Association (founded March 1942), the Friends of the Soviet Union (founded July 1941), the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA, founded 1943), and the periodical Parichay all four operating from the same address. The Communist Party, surfacing into legality on 23 July 1942, after a long ban, was the real force behind all these organizations. At a time when the nationalist movement in the country was split over whether the people would be called upon to create political instability W the country, forcing a British Government, under serious military threat from the Axis Powers in different parts of the world, to concede the demand for independence or at least more democratic rights, or whether there should be a popular mobilization in support of the British Government in its

role in the international resistance to Fascism. The Communist Party of India had to face the strains of the divide within the Party before it could take a definite stand on the issue: 'After six months of hesitation and internal debate, the CPI in January 1942 lined up with the rest of the international Communist movement in calling for full support to the anti-fascist "people's war" even while reiterating the standard Congress demands for an independence pledge and immediate national government (which were now considered as valuable but no longer indispensable preconditions for support).'

In 1942-44, fascism was yet to be visible enough in its barbarity and horror to justify collaboration with a colonial power on the ground that it was engaged in the international struggle against fascism; particularly when at least part of the nationalist forces in India had already come to terms with Japanese

fascism whose support they counted on, in their bid to snatch power from the British colonial rulers. The Communists, set aside by their political position from the nationalist mainstream, had to regain their tottering base-particularly among the middle class and the intelligentsia (for their base among the industrial working class and the peasantry remained more or less intact, their militancy unimpaired in those sectors). It was left to the newly set up 'progressive', 'anti-fascist', 'people's', and USSR-friendly organizations-the 'Front' organizations, as they are known in traditional Communist Party parlance-to take on this function of creating a popular base for the Communists, taking anti-fascism for a plank, and the exploration and dissemination of a popular culture for a programme. Even as this move took on the dimensions of a movement, the first of its kind on a national scale (though not really 'national' for it was after all confined to a few pockets only, a few of the big cities and a few of those regions where the Communists had acquired some standing as leaders of men and movements, but spread throughout the country anyway, its main centres in undivided Bengal, Assam, Manipur, Maharashtra, the Punjab, Kerala and Andhra Pradesh), culture came to the fore in a way that it had never done any time before in Indian politics. Occasionally rather pretentiously and unhistorically described as a 'Marxist Cultural Movement,' the movement as such did not have much of a 'Marxist' component at the ideological or philosophical level, and was more of a strategic thrust for the Communists, who brought to the movement a few values or positions that eventually came to provide a base not only for Communist values in the cultural scene in the country, but also for a

whole range of cultural activism outside the professional sphere. While all the so-called 'Front' organizations and the periodicals they supported and sustained (like *Parichay, Arani,* and later *Natun Sahitya* played their role in the process, it was the IPTA (founded in 1943 according to some documentary evidence, but with claims for 1942 from some other sources)-that opened up several new possibilities, more specifically for the performing arts rediscovering several folk forms and traditions driven to oblivion under the valorization of colonial cultural norms and the consequent denigration of indigenous aesthetic values, and connecting them to the mainstream through fresh motivations into creativity; taking theatre beyond the colonial architecture into which it had been trapped and beyond the histrionics of the actor-managerial tradition to the development of a more realistic mode locating itself in specific regional-dialectical cultures, with a passion for authenticity; making the 'great tradition' of the classical forms in music and dance accessible and available to the people, through open air concerts to which people had free admission; critical, analytical studies and agitational critiques of conditions and situations in several areas of the reality; and, above everything else, a global understanding of political and economic forces at play, and a general leftwing orientation. It was the IPTA that drew a wedge between the professional line in the performing arts and the activist, non-professional space initially defined and dominated by the IPTA, a master body exercising control over a large number of local and regional affiliated units, most of then, with cardholding Communists organized in 'fractions' within these units, providing political and ideological leadership, under instructions and guidance from the Party. Given the sheer range in geographical spread and numbers alike, the IPTA does not have a close parallel in Communist or Communist-led cultural movements anywhere else in the world.

It was at a meeting of the Anti-Fascist Writers and Artists Association some time in early 1943, Somehow Mitra recalls, that the quest for new plays for the new values, and the continuing futility of the quest, reached a point of desperation and someone came up with the suggestion that everyone present that evening should come back on a certain day with a new short play that he had written in the mean while and give a reading. Plays would be picked up for production out of those presented. 'There was no point in blaming others. One has to take it up on one's own shoulders. On that later evening, Benoy's

Laboratory and Bijan's *Agun* ('Fire')were chosen to be produced out of all that we read.'[16] (Benoy Ghose (1917-80), was a major social historian, with his collections, annotation and analyses of material appearing in nineteenth century periodicals in undivided Bengal, in both Bengali and English, and his studies in the folk arts and crafts and monuments of Bengal).

Structurally, the short play *Agun*, a sequence of short scenes, each set in a distinctly different social milieu and class, each with a different linguistic variation even, and each closing on someone leaving the scene to join in the queue before a shop doling out cereals in 'rationed' quantities at `controlled' prices, one of the civic facilities granted to people in Calcutta and its environs, builds up to the climactic fifth scene before the 'ration shop', where the encounter of these people drawn together by the crisis of scarcity and hunger, is fraught with tensions, trading of insults, each-one-for-oneself, with the Civic Guard, representing power, asserting its authority aggressively and offensively, provoking a subtle and tense interplay of resistance, conflict and compromise, reaching at the end of it all a reconciliation of communal, provincial, religious, economic differences, with the understanding, 'To survive we have to be together, that's all that matters-this is the awareness that we need!'

Gently propagandist, *Agun* had found for itself a form that was a radical departure from the psychological, well-made, evolving narratives that dominated Bengali drama and theatre at the time. Basically non-narrative and episodic, *Agun* had its continuity in the perfect timing and rhythm of the breaks that marked its shifting perspective, looking on and into different sections-particularly the middle middle and lower middle class-as slices of life, with every slice acquiring a character of its own in the characteristic attitudes and tones of the classes within that class, registering through the scenes a slow charging of the tension, with the first eruption of domestic violence in the third scene-the working class couple-brilliantly matched, in contrast, with the middle middle class couple in the next scene, with their spirit of compromise-the violence of the kicking and screaming in the earlier scene set against the office clerk's wife pleading with her husband, 'You can't leave without raising your hands in prayer and supplication to the icon of the god!' and the husband submitting, 'You think that'll help. I don't mind!'

The staging of *Agun* at the Natyabharati Theatre (now the Grace Cinema) by the Indian People's Theatre Association, directed by Bijan Bhattacharya, in May 1943 (with the almost simultaneous publication of the play in the leftwing periodical *Arani*, on 23 April 1943) threw up and at the same time solved quite a number of new problems. Looking for a new audience beyond the confines of the more traditional theatre-going public of Calcutta-the remnants and descendants of the comprador-bourgeois of the early colonial period, the surviving babus and *bhadraloks* (the IPTA would soon adopt the logo of a drummer calling on people to assemble and rise in action, drawn by Chittaprasad, and a slogan to go with it, "The People's Theatre Stars the People')-the IPTA chose to break away from the format of the single bill long play, which was the standard one on the commercial theatre, to offer a 'variety': a repertoire of songs, including several by the new lyricist-composers of IPTA, e.g. Harindranath Chattopadhyay, Benoy Roy, jyotirindra Maitra, and Bijan Bhattacharya, followed by the short play. It was a format that served also the growing need for open air performances at public rallies organized by the Communist Party through its 'Front' or 'mass' organizations. The songs offered a familiarization/ mediation to the theatre form, which was so radically different from the familiar and the conventional that a large section of the so-called 'cultural front' of the Party remained sceptical about the 'aesthetic' validity of *Agun* and the other works by Bhattacharya that followed. Orthodoxy and unquestioning loyalty to the Anglo-American colonial-Victorian norms in matters of form still dog the official Communist response to and valuation of contemporary works. At yet another level, the songs, making use of a rich range of folk musical forms, rhythms, tunes and dialects, created in the minds of the audience a receptivity for the rural, urban and marginal experiences-slices of life-that constituted the social-cultural space of Bhattacharya's plays and the later lesser plays that they in their turn spawned, and also for the delicate, subterranean musicality of Bhattacharya's texts (in his own right, Bhattacharya was a composer and singer, with a collection of folksongs painstakingly gathered over a long period from all over the region).

Agun and Bhattacharya's next play *Jabanbandi* ('Testament'), staged at the Star Theatre on 3 January 1944, opened up yet another problem that is yet to be solved. It was the problem of and the need for a new acting style, the need for a break from the

psychological, verbal-modulatory, overtly vocal and ranting and tuned histrionics initially derived from the Anglo-American turn-of-the-century models and then indigenized with an even stronger core of melodrama vacillating between the polarities of the abnormally dried, parched coldness of the emotions gone dry and the loud, tearjerking, sentimental excess. With the episodic segmentation that will soon shape into a pre-Brechtian 'epic' mode in *Nabanna* and his concentration on potent images, sometimes as scultpuresque-visual images and at other times as exquisitely pitched variations and repetitions of a speech becoming a rich poetic elaboration /efflorescence, the speaking itself projecting a whole series of images out of a single set of words, the poetry held in the words turning and turning like a crystal, showing its many faces and edges, Bhattacharya demanded from his actors and actresses a sense of poetry above everything else. For his first three plays, culminating in *Nabanna,* premiered at the Srirangam Theatre, on 24 October 1944, he had to find his own new actors and actresses, almost all from outside the pale of theatre as it was then.

Of the first ensemble of performers that Bhattacharya gathered for *Agun* and the two plays that soon followed, Sombhu Mitra alone had had a background in the older theatre, acting with and under the direction of almost all of the surviving stars of the older theatre, already in fast decline, including the redoubtable Sisirkumar Bhaduri, Ahindra Chaudhuri, Naresh Mitra and Durgadas Banerjee, but had given it up in sheer disgust at its mindlessness, indifference to artistic and experimental values, and the crass commercialization evident in the proprietors' dealings with the artistes. Benoy Ghose and Bijan Bhattacharya would later tell me in conversation how they had been drawn to this young man-'almost an ascetic then,' closeted in his room most of the time, reciting aloud poems and playtexts, his rich bass voice booming through the neighbourhood: he was training himself and keeping ready to make a comeback to the theatre on his own terms.

With remarkable honesty and candour, Sombhu Mitra would later give his own story of his role in the situation: Bijan made me speak for one of the characters in *Agttn* and was thinking of casting me for the role. But I could see myself that I couldn't manage it. I had acted already with Sisirkumar, Ahindra Chaudhuri, Nirmalendu Lahiri, Durgadas Banerjee and others. But I just couldn't speak the words of a common clerk battered by life or those of a peasant. And yet a few young men, with no experience of acting at all, spoke the same words with perfect ease, leaving me thinking ... It was a different kind of dramatic dialogue

that had come our way for the first time ... We were then in the process of thinking of a new drama, a new mode of acting. But for our models we still fell back on the drama of the West, the stage design of the West. We did not have a clue as to how we could relate our drama and acting to a sensibility that was essentially of our country-say the way it surfaces in Jamini Roy's paintings. There were some people pressing on us to 'revive' the rural, whatever it be. There were others who strung together a few sentences, or rather crude slogans, cast in a mould that had nothing to do with any literary sensibility whatsoever, and set them all to a popular village tune, to throw a bridge across the gulf. In that time of churning, when we all struggled with ourselves to discover what Culture. or form or content could be, Bijan's play *Agun* was the first clear step beyond. [18]

One of the *new* actors and actresses found by Bhattacharya was Tripti Bhaduri, a cousin, who made her first stage appearance in Agun, and would grow; with *Jabanbajtdi* and *Nabanna,* to a stature that she would hold till her death in 1989. She would later marry Sombhu Mitra, and be better known as Tripti Mitra. Sombhu Mitra himself did not act in *Agun* and *jabanbandi,* except for occasional appearances substituting for one of the regulars, several of whom, as political activists, often got tied up with other responsibilities.

Jabnnbandi, which proved to be a seed play for the full-length *Nabamo,* which came later the same. year, was Bhattacharya's first play dealing directly with the Famine of 1943-44, centring on the futile migration of the famine-stricken rural population, and their exposure to the indifference, the cynical contempt and the sexual exploitation of the city folk, and slow death on the streets Of Calcutta. In addition to the episodic, non-narrative, loosely and yet subtly woven continuity that Bhattacharya had made into a style in his first play, *Jabanbandi* offered yet another feature that would mark his later dramaturgy-the suggestion/ presentation of a community as a cultural whole of connections, relationships and dependencies, only to be shown as cracking up and disintegrating in the course of the play under the impact of new economic and political forces and their machinations. In *Jabanbandi* the *presentation* of the community remains more on the gestural-symbolic plane, with Paran Mandal, the village elder and chief, getting all the families together under his leadership, in a scene of loud calls let loose through the village beyond the limits of the stage setting, and the answers heard, and families crowding upon the scene, unit by unit, to be part of the journey to the city. But the seeds of scepticism and discontent are already there, as, in the midst of preparation for

departure from the village, Paran calls on 'Parameshwar' (lit. God Almighty), and Benda protests, 'No, I won't let you utter that name. That name puts a fright into me. I have a feeling that you too will die like uncle. You won't live.' No longer had a source of strength and hope as it been traditionally, the name of God in its utterance has come to represent an attitude located in the pit of despair. With his very special feeling for words changing their meaning through social change and depredations; Bhattacharya plays with the word 'Parameshwar' throughout the play. Soon after Benda's first loud, emotive protest, Paran falls into the habit, and repeats, 'Alas, Parameshwar!' The stage directions comment: 'Paran pronounces the last two syllables slowly and with pauses, and looks at Benda sheepishly. Pada looks at Benda and Paran. Everyone is silent. There is only the crying child in the background.' The scene closes with Paran in semi-darkness, holding a handful of dust, and letting the dust drip through his fingers as he cries out, 'My happy home! Alas, Parameshwar!' And Benda warns, 'That name again!' The third scene, played out in the 'stark nakedness' of a setting made of 'grimy flats' in the background, 'the sets set up in reverse,' to 'show the cruelty of it all'[20]-of the life on the streets, culminates with Benda's wife's *bhadralok* seducer caught redhanded, and handed over to the security, and Benda's closing line, `The Parameshwar up there and the *bhactralok* here, between them they've brought us to ruin.'

Notes:

1 Rabindranath Thakur [Tagore], *Europe-Jatrir diary* [in Bengali] Calcutta: Visva Bharati, *1961, pp. 104-5,181*. Translation mine.

2 Hemendrakumar Roy, reviewing Bhaduri's Old Club production *of Pandaver Ajnatabas* (The Pandavas in exile) by Girishchandra Ghosh, in the Hindusthan on *25* June *1921,* quoted by Sankar Bhattacharya, *Sisirkumar* [in Bengali], Calcutta: Paschimbanga Natya Akademi, *1993, p. 28.* Translation mine.

3 Samik Bandyopadhyay, 'Sisirkumar Prasangey Sombhu Mitra' ['Sombhu Mitra on Sisirkumar'-in Bengali], *Parichay, vol. 34,* no. *6,* January *1966.* Translation mine.

4 Hemendrakumar Roy, *Bangla Ranfialay o Sisirkumar* ['The Bengali Theatre and Sisirkumar'-in Bengali]. Calcutta: Orient Book Company, *1951, p.* 4. Translation mine.

6 Bhabatosh Datta, Aat Dashak ['Eight Decades'-in Bengali], Calcutta: Pratikshan, 1988, p. 116. Translation mine.

7 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India,* Delhi: Macmillan India, 1983, p. 396.

8 Parimal Goswami, 'Kolkatay Pratham Boma' ['The First Bombing in Calcutta'] in *Smritichitran* ['Drawing on Memory'], Calcutta: Pratikshan, 1.993, p.204.

9 Datta, Ant *Dashak p.* 115.

10 Pratulchandra Gupta, *Dinguli* Mor ['Those Days of Mine'-in Bengali], Calcutta: Ananda, 1985, p. 128. Translation mine..

11 Paul R. Greenougll, Prosperity *and Misery in Modern Bengal: The Fatnine of 1943-44,* New York: OUP, 1982, pp. 141-6.

12 Amartya Sen, Poverty *and Famines: An Essay on Entitlentent and Deprivation,* Delhi: OUP, 1981, p. 57.

13 Quoted from previously unpublished interview in my Introduction to Bijan Bhattacharya, Nabanna New Harvest-in Bengali], Calcutta: Proma, 9988, pp. 14-15. Translation mine.

14 Bijan Bhattacharya, 'Janasadharaner Aami' ['The People's I'], based on a series of interviews, edited by Samik Bandyopadhyay into the form of a first person narrative; with S.B. as the interviewer for most of the interviews. *Proma vol. 1,* no. 1, October 1978. Translation mine.

15 Sumit Sarkar, *Modern India: 1585-1947.* Delhi: Macmillan India, 1983, p. 384.

16 mine.

Sombhu Mitra, 'Bijan' (1978), in Snnmnrgn Snpnrya, Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar and Sons, 1990, pp. 209-10. Translation

17 Sombhu Mitra, 'Prashner Uttarey' ['In Reply to Questions'-in Bengali], interviewed by Chittaranjan Ghosh, no. 34, June 1970.

18 Sombhu Mitra, 'Bijari', pp. 209-10.

19 Sombhu Mitra, 'Prashner Uttarey'. The 'business' with the dripping dust is not in the stage directions. 20 Sombhu Mitra, 'Prashner Uttarey'.

Invisible Theatre

Prabir Guha

PRABIR Guha is an acclaimed activist theatre director who has been experimenting with nonproscenium theatre since the late seventies. He is the director of Theatre Living Laboratory and its performing unit Alternative Living Theatre.

All over the world, two processes of theatre have started since after the world wars. India is no exception. One is visible theatre-hat which is loudly propagated through newspaper advertisements, posters and hoardings. One can reach respective theatre halls to buy tickets for these shows at pre-fixed prices and watch them. Theatre reviews in the print and electronic media are always busy discussing this form of theatre. Governmental and non-governmental awards, titles, grants, seldom percolate down to any other form of theatre. We definitely know about this theatre.

There is, however, another line of theatre going on simultaneously, which we may call the invisible theatre. Apart from literally one or two of these theatre groups, none of the others have ever been reported in newspapers, or publicized through the radio or the television. The few that do get some coverage only get that chance so as to maintain the apparent impartiality of the so-called mass medias. None of us have ever heard of the rest.

But our ignorance is certainly no indication of their non-existence, or of their theatre being insignificant. Quite on the contrary, these groups are actually involved in very serious, committed theatre that demands extremely strenuous activities. Their urge for social change acts as their incentive. While some of them are involved in things other than theatre, there are many wholetimers as well.

How many of us are familiar with names like Chorus, Reviving Theatre, Ghasphul Theatre, Jangal Mahal Theatre, Sidhu Kanho Gaonta, Open Arena Theatre, Rural Living Theatre, Mrittika, Sukanta Sanskritik Chakra, Sphulinga or Dishariall very active in the Kanksa and Aushgram blocks of Bardhaman district, West Bengal? But these names

unknown to us are very dear to the people of that region. Unemployed youths, landless peasants, daily wage agricultural labourers and workers of brick kiln centres are the organizers, members, and actors/ actresses of these groups. Most of them are tribals and Muslims. The Rural Living Theatre among these regularly puts up four shows a month and has succeeded in forming a forum of the most active and committed theatre groups of the area. These groups are always there

in all sorts of socio-political mass movements of the area-whether they be the literacy campaign, or protesting against rotten customs like dowry or witch hunting, or in support of Cuba's socialistic opposition to imperialism, or questioning the GATT agreement or condemning communalism. The plays are written and produced by the groups themselves, enacted in their own style and presented to their own audience. And dear readers, another surprise still awaits you. The mainstay behind this whole movement is Yusuf, a literate young Muslim from a peasant family, a generous, firebrand organizer devoted to theatre.

The situation was quite different even just ten years back. There were only two or three theatre groups run by local Hindu theatre enthusiasts. Theatre in Muslim villages was an impossibility then. Guardians of Islam had decreed that even listening to instrumental music was a sin.Yusuf came forward in protest and took the initiative to form Rural Living Theatre with other like-minded youths of his village. That was the beginning. Gradually this group inspired other theatre groups to emerge in the area. Bangshi Bhattacharya, another dedicated theatre activist of this region has been beside Yusuf right since the beginning, supporting him and egging him on. Rural Living Theatre has now managed to attract attention even at the district level. Continuous theatre work with the evolving groups has inspired many more young men and women to come forward. Even Muslim and tribal women are now taking part in theatre workshops and performances.Today one notices that the literacy rate has gone up in the two hundred and fifty odd villages of these two blocks and social evils like witch hunting have been totally eradicated from this locality. Orthodoxy has taken a back seat, problems of caste and communalism have virtually disappeared from public life. Theatre has definitely played a major role in achieving all this. Because these are the themes on which plays are produced, this has definitely enhanced the on-going social awareness movement in a big way.

On 8 January, 1996, Rural Living Theatre inaugurated their own rehearsal space in a unique way. At the, door of the rehearsal room stood a burkha-clad Muslim woman in chains. A lighted candle passed many women's hands before it
reached the inaugurator who had in the mean time unchained and unveiled the woman. The inaugurator gave this woman the candle, who then entered the rehearsal room to light the torch inside. 'Long live RLT. Long live theatre'-chanted the five hundred odd villagers gathered to witness the ceremony.

We all know that Patna is the capital of Bihar, that a devious and farsighted politician named Lallu Prasad Yadav is the chief minister of this state. Some of us may even know that the Patna railway station is one of the most famous among the older stations. What we do not possibly know is that about three thousand young boys and girls-all under eighteen-live in the vicinity of the Patna railway station.They are all homeless, guardianless truants from home, working as unregistered porters, shoe shiners, sometimes sweeping train coaches, or even begging. You may also find pickpockets or shop lifters among them, and sometimes sex workers too. In police parlance, they are lutttgali or destitutes. Every now and then the police pick these youngsters up to get their (the police's) office and homes cleaned, even latrines; get their washing done, use them as masseurswith no question of any payment in cash or kind of course. Starting from six year old Raju Mahammad, Pankaj, Salim or Ranjit to Akhilesh or Rakesh in their late teens-none of them is unfamiliar with police beatings or jail food. Some of these boys are also victims of the police's homosexuality.

A small voluntary organization called Bal Sakha works among these destitute kids. The organization was formed about ten years back by Sanat Sinha who had then just returned to Patna after graduating from the Institute of Social Service, Mumbai. Since then, he has toiled indefatigably to befriend these kids, to be close to them, to arrange for their food, clothing and night shelter. But nothing he did could change the behavioural pattern and attitudes of these children. $al Sakha then decided to use theatre workshops on an experimental basis to see if it could bring about the much desired change. It worked and soon developed into a regular theatre programme for the children. The objective was not just to teach them theatre or to produce plays. Theatre has been taken as a tool to initiate behavioural, social and cultural changes among the kids, help them to come to terms with problems of life and, at the same time, to give them a voice. Through their theatre workshops, these children have been able to come in touch with

school going children of their age, to become aware of things happening around them, and even to tour parts of the country. Under the banner of Bal Sakha they have now started performing plays with an irregular regularity. If you ever see a play going on at Patna's Gandhi Maidan, at the railway station, or at open spaces like a local park, know for sure that it is Bal Sakha's army of kids performing. They are now regularly covered in the English and Hindi dailies of Patna. Their plays reflect their own stories-what made them run away from home, -how they are variously victimized daily. These plays have created quite an impact not just on eminent residents of the city, but also on powerful government officials, arousing their sympathies. Mr. Ram Chandra Khan, the LG. of the railway police force, has been impressed enough by these plays to promise to definitely control his own police force. He has even promised to arrange a series of round tables between Bal Sakha activists and the police.

Just about twenty kilometres away from Patna is a filthy township called Maner situated near the Ganga. It is famous for its *laddus* and a huge royal palace. There is only one good school in the locality called the Holy Child. Behind the school is a non-governmental free medical service centre for the poor with which are connected a group of local women. Bina, Sudha, Jyotshna, Miriyam were inspired by the work of Bal Sakha and decided to take up theatre to strengthen their own awareness programme. With a small group they are touring the villages around Maner the whole year through. All their plays deal with issues topical for their own area.Their activities have inspired many school and college students of the area to join hands with them. Regular workshops, rehearsals and performances in villages have become part of the organization's daily schedule.

We know Bihar to be the poorest state of India. Among all the districts of Bihar, west Champaran remains the most neglected. Armed gangs operate freely in this locality and people from other districts rarely venture to come here even at day-time as abduction for ransom is a daily affair here. Dacoit gangs well armed with ultra modem weapons can raid any time to kidnap whoever they want to. These hostages are freed only if their peers manage to deliver the high ransom demanded; otherwise one sees just a blood smeared corpse in a jungle, or in a meadow, or may be floating down a river.There are many such gangs in west Champaran, for this provides the only profession to many residents of the district.The border of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh is covered with a dense forest and is the main hideout of most of these gangs. There are four theatre groups working in close cooperation with each other in this district despite all sorts

of problems. These four groups are spread over the four corners of the district. Sanchar is based in the district town called Betia. Another group, Shanti Sadan, works near Narkotiagunj of Raksaul. Seva Sadan is working at Ratanpurva, a place very close to the notorious forest area. The fourth group, Jana Sanskriti Parishad, is based at a place called Gounaha. These four groups work separately in their own localities, but join together to organize workshops. Among these groups, Sanchar is the most powerful and well organized. Strange though it may sound, Sanchar is mainly run by semiliterate rural housewives and women deserted by their husbands. There are very few male members in this group. Many of these women are mothers of five/six children, whom they have to look after. They get up early in the morning to take care of house chores, and then start out on their bicycles to assemble at the Betia centre. From there they pack up everything and travel on their cycles to a predetermined location, to perform. Usually they perform in two or three villages one after another and discuss the play with the audience. Sanchar also prefers to do plays on local problems. I had a chance to see one of their productions on the role of women in panchayats. The seats reserved in panchayats for women are being filled up by token representatives in the form of the gram pradhan or local political leaders' wives, so that men or male dominated organizations actually retain full control over panchayat activities. Committed women activists are always left out. How to deal with this problem was the theme of the play I saw. While Sanchar is not a supporter of any particular political party, they definitely prefer to address political issues.

Innumerable small villages like Kasmar, Khairachatar, Bagda, Khudibera, Pahartoli ... are situated about seventy kilometres from Bokaro Steel City. Elephants descend after dusk to many of these hill-enclosed villages. Collecting firewood from the jungles to sell is the main occupation of the poor villagers belonging to Dalit, Harijan or tribal communities. Almost every family has at least one deserted woman. Only a handful of rich, upper-caste Hindu families enjoy social and political power in this locality. The 'credit' for further impoverishing the poor villagers also belongs to these few families. People here are very scared of the police and the court. Thus they continue to belong to the always-defeated camp.

Believe it or not, a few 'blacksheep' of these upper caste families joined hands with lower caste youths to form a group called AINA (Association

of India for National Awareness) some eight years back.This activist group takes up themes based on local problems with their focus always on legal aspects and possible legal solutions of the problem.

'Don't be afraid of the legal system or the courts. We can use laws and courts to Our favour too'-is the slogan with which this group produces varieties of plays. The group travels to local villages, performs, and initiates discussions with the villagers around this issue. In addition to their propaganda through theatre, some members of the AINA have taken training from the Free Legal Aid Committee to be able to offer free legal counselling to poor people, especially women. They have opened a small office in one of the member's own houses for this purpose. While many of their guardians are rather displeased, they are the apple of the local poor people's eyes.

Talking about steel, however, Tata Steel definitely wit¯is over Bokaro. Tatanagar, named after the surname of the founder of that company, or Jamshedpur after his first name-Bihar's glamourous steel city is known to people by both these names. Over the years the township has grown into a sparkling cosmopolitan city populated by the upper middle class. Needless to say it is surrounded by shacks and shanties of the poor, 'the saga of black slums'-as poet Biren Chattopadhyay had said. Brick is the chief ingredient with which a city is shaped up. Naturally there are many brick kiln centres, which in turn ensures that labour is needed. Who else than tribals and harijans would supply this labour? Their presence is invariably accompanied by stifling poverty, deprivation, illiteracy. What better materials does one need for theatre? The ammunition is all ready, just a matchstick needs to be kindled. That catalyst action was done by an organization with a somewhat strange name-Adarsh Seva Sansthan, led by Ms Prabha Jaisawal. She had first started a non-formal school for the kids whose parents work in the brick kiln centers. 1 feel honoured to have been present at the inauguration ceremony of that school. This school had started with the distribution of a few slates and pencils that Prabha had managed to collect from the owners of these brickfields. Gradually a few more schools and even creches were started for the workers' kids. Finally these activists also picked up theatre as an important tool for work. Their plays are entirely for and by the labourers. The themes vary from their own everyday problems to the importance of education and social consciousness, the conflict of values between the city and the village, violence against women and women's rights, problems of

caste and communalism etc. As a group they are very keen on learning different theatre techniques. Whenever they come to know about theatre workshops for their kind of theatre, they try their best to participate and learn. Sometimes they also organize their own workshops and invite theatre experts of this line. Like their non-formal schools, their non-formal theatre has also become an indispensable weapon in their hands.

Bengalis love to go touring in winter. Their minds are forever ready to go travelling, but this wish has to be backed by money clanking in the pockets. When the clanking is somewhat subdued, Bengalis shift their destinations from south India, Delhi, Hardwar, Kashmir, Goa to Digha, Puri, Mukutmanipur, Deoghar, Madhupur. Among these, Madhupur has a nostalgic flavour. There is an area in Madhupur with the strange name 'Bahanna Bigha' (fifty two *bighn),* famous for its roses that can easily put tulips and rhododendrons to shame. At the moment, though, the Jharkhand movement has sucked up all the blood of the blood-red roses there. A group called Lok Jagriti, also indoctrinated in the Jharkhand politics, is very active in this locality. Theatre happens to be their main propaganda medium. Under the determined leadership of Arvind Kumar, this group paints and draws, writes and composes songs, prepares and performs plays, and organizes workshops. The group is so popular that any local rikshawala or tongawala will take you to the commune of the Lok Jagriti if you just utter their name. The group has its own space where one can stay and work. The only problem is that the group does not believe in any politics other than the Jharkhand movement, neither do they believe in any other form of *babu* (elite) culture.

Prerana Bharati is a women's organization in Madhupur, functioning under the leadership of Kalyani Mina. This group also is engaged in doing theatre as part of their activities. However, some of the people in this group surpassed Kalyani in their commitment and ideology, so that the group split into two. A young Santhal woman called Lily, enriched through participation in many workshops, is leading the other group that is yet to be named, though it is already producing plays regularly. Lily is primarily concerned with various problems of the Santhals.

It is heartening to see so much theatre activity going on in poverty stricken Bihar. Its neighbouring state Uttar Pradesh is probably India's most prosperous economically, but certainly not in theatre. There are many theatre workers here, but Bollywood and the idiot box have successfully driven out theatre. Government aid for theatre is higher *in* U.P. than in

any other state, but even then there is no theatre activity. In this no-theatre land, a small organization called Rangashram keeps functioning in Gorakhpur. It is really a very poor theatre group with most of the members not even owning a bicycle to travel on.

When Gorakhpur's Bir Bahadur Singh was the chief minister of U.P., he had promised to build a theatre auditorium in his home town. A few lakhs were spent to erect some pillars, but the project was later shelved by the officials and the place is now completely abandoned. A dense jungle surrounds the pillars today. Rangashram is probably the only group that could not forget the pain; the dream of the promised auditorium still cats them up. Almost as a protest, for the last three years they have been performing every Saturday morning at eight thirty under a huge tree near tile pillars. What is most remarkable about this group> is that they try to perform a new play on each Saturday, though they do repeat an old play in case a new play is not ready. So far they have produced 142 plays and have performed 200 time~. Since the urge is to show something new every Saturday, it naturally affects the quality of the productions. The group is aware of this and they are now becoming more and more concerned about the qualitative standard of their prod *LIC MS*. The Lok Natya Utsav (folk theatre festival) organized in December 1995 has influenced all the local groups very much, including Rangashram. K. P. Singh, the director of the group, has been moved to looking for quality instead of quantity in future.

Another local organization called the 1Zahul Foundation has also decided to take up theatre seriously. This organization functions under the leadership of a woman named Katyayani, and had so far been committed to working with leftist literature. Now they also want to take up theatre and want to work in close collaboration with likeminded groups including Rangashram. The new phase of theatre activity was inaugurated with a three-week long workshop in July.

I have been able to talk of all these theatre groups as I know them and have had the opportunity of working with them. But many such groups, known or unknown to me, are spread all over India. They are committed to a kind of invisible theatre that seeks to propagate social change and the movement goes on with no heed to government grants or awards. I have no idea if any drama critique or publisher will ever write about thousands of such theatre groups; but I do feel that if some concerned individual or organization could document their activities for posterity's sake,

future activists would not have to grope around in the dark to know about today's alternative theatre movement. In my personal capacity I promise all the help possible if anybody does feel so inclined.

Translated from the original Bengali by Biren Sharma and Paramita Banerjee

Tracing It Back to the Sixties: A Round Table with Playwrights and Directors

Sudeshna Banerjee

SUDESHNA BANERJEE, a research fellow at the Natya Shodh Sansthan, reports on a recent closed-door round table at the Sansthan, which brought some of the major post-Independence Indian plays into fresh focus, with the playwrights and the directors in conversation.

1

In an interesting staccato exchange between AmalBimal-Kamal in the third act of Badal Sircar's *Ebong Indrajit* (written 1963) the questions of power and power equations, independence and its aftermath are thrown open: '. . . Most people have to suffer under any system ... Our country has become the home of anarchy and corruption ... Our government can't be trusted to do anything ... Power corrupts ... Politics is dirty. . .'The scepticism and the anguish, the fate of a postworld war generation-living with hopes that have remained distant dreams, aspirations that have not materialized, emotional bonds that have been severed somewhere-built up to an overwhelming sense of waste for the enlightened middle-class youth of the 60s.

Indrajit became a point of identification for all who lived through this turbulent phase. The play became a constant source of reference and counter-reference for people who thought intensely and looked upon the problems of humdrum existence with care and concern. The discovery of *Ebong Indrajit* by directors like Satyadev Dubey in Bombay when Sombhu Mitra gave him a copy of the play published in Bengali in *Bohurupee;* the subsequent translation of the play by Pratibha Agrawal and Anamika's production of it; Girish Kamad (then a young director with the Madras Players) seeing a Bengali production in Calcutta and directing a production in English in his own translation-all those happenings

point to the immense power the play was able to radiate during that time. This also explains why another Badal Sircar play *Baki Itihas* (written two years later, in 1965) becomes so relevant to Jayoti Bose who directed it in 1992, with a revival in 1995. The thoughts and reminiscences that came up during a seminar on 'Plays in a National Perspective' organized by the Natya Shodh Sansthan (28-30 November 1996) reflected the nostalgia of sharing between playwrights and directors that makes theatre what it is and lends meaning to it.

The scope of the seminar was spelt out by Samik Bandyopadhyay who introduced the idea behind the exercise:

. . . there came a time around the 70s ... in fact, immediately after the first phase which came in the 60s, a kind of a resurgence of an `Indian' theatre ... of a new Indian theatre trying to address itself to the problems of a postindependence sensibility shaping itself or defining itself. Once the first excitement had started dwindling or dying down, it was around the mid70s that there suddenly came up this whole strange concept of an 'Indian' theatre ... looking for an 'Indian' theatre ... and strange half-baked ideas started being aired all the time. They were being imposed on our minds, on our theatre activity W a way. So rather than let theatre work it out and then ideas grow out of the theatre once the theatre was there ... rather than doing that (since the theatre movement/the theatre activity had also come to a critical situation) the theoreticians barged in, the academics barged in and even the bureaucrats barged in and they started defining an Indian theatre ... somehow these ideas did not last.
But ... we noticed while we were working at the Natya Shodh Sansthan that there were a lot of plays-Indian and foreign, old and new, classical and very modern-which happened to emerge and re-emerge again and again in different situations ... being played out in different parts of the country ... worked upon by different directors with different angles, different perspectives, different meanings coming in.

'So we thought if we could make an exploration of these particular plays ... I think more and more a lot of you would agree with me now probably that we have come back to a situation where we start feeling that we need good drama texts. Nothing can happen out of air or out of emptiness ... So, we thought, maybe, if we took a closer look at these texts, for these texts must have something in them ... Otherwise why should different people in different contexts go back to these texts and work upon them? ... These texts
have that potency, meaning and value within them and offer the challenge ...

'Let us begin with the directors who can give us their feelings as to what they found in these texts ... what they brought to bear upon these texts, where their inputs, where their notions, their visions of theatre came to work with these texts ... how they interacted to these texts ... negotiated with these texts.

'Let also the playwrights looking back in retrospect share with us what they thought to bring into the plays and what happened in the consequent history of the plays because the plays do not remain, once they are written and once they start being staged, any longer the personal property of the playwright. It becomes part of the public domain in a way. So what happened in the process ... how the playwright feels ... and I think it is also important for a playwright to feel that the directors have used his materials, have done wonderful things with his material and therefore he feels provoked, inspired, incited to do more work, or even try to do new plays where he would like to bring in things which have not been tackled, which have not been handled properly ... but these are ideas ... these are notions ... visions that he would have liked to communicate and they have not gone across. So he tries to write new plays.

'We could (a) explore the value the worth/the relevance/the meaning of these texts in terms of "text" as it was made and "text" as it grew in the productional/theatrical process and (b) open up a kind of a dialogue between the playwrights and the directors which could go forward ... just beyond the archival reconnaissance ... over to further creative interaction.'

Beginning with the two texts of Badal Sircar, *Ebong Indrajit* and *Baki Itihas,* the issues of power and its fall-outs, questions of unresolved relationships, relationships between man and woman which have achieved no concrete ground, provided a take-off point for directors like B V Karanth and Satyadev Dubey, both of whom stressed the importance of the 'text' as an entity of great literary value. Badal Sircar recalled how *Ebong Indrajit* as a play took shape much later and how the whole experience of Indrajit had been captured earlier in the poems he had written between 1957 and 1959 in London. For him, the play was actually a series of poems linked by 'bits of dialogue'. The lyrical nuances of *Ebong Indrajit* had appealed to Dubey and Karanth when they first got acquainted with the text-not the text in its original language but in translation. This brought the discussion on to another area of importance-the distinct voice of the playwright that runs through the composition of the text, into the translation and even on to the production on stage. (When Satyadev Dubey was explaining this, I noticed a rather fascinating area emerge: the voice of the playwright comes to the average theatre-goer through the performance of a play

where the spoken word or the dialogue becomes an appropriation of the written work or the text. The message conveyed through the text thus becomes a statement of tremendous power.) While *Ebong Indrajit* had started with a series of sceptical questions on the value and meaning of existence, *Baki Itilaas* carried it a step further by examining the whole gamut of history in which ordinary men must operate only to become bearers of the responsibility that `the rest of history' will entail. The rest of history-and history related rather gruesome tales sometimes. Two such issues emerge from *Baki Itihas-(a)* the faceless amorphous power that controls, executes and grinds people into submission, and (b) the woman as a victim of the internal power structure of the family in particular and the larger state machinery in general.

2

It was from here that the second phase of discussion started. This involved the examination of the `woman' as victim with the concerns of gender and its various considerations crowding in. Historically speaking, it was Henrik Ibsen who first introduced the woman as an independent being and looked into her psyche in *The Doll's House* (written 1879). So with Ibsen as our starting point, this session probed the various representations that Nora has had in Indian theatre and with this came a linking up with the women represented in Tendulkar's plays. Vijay Tendulkar's employment of an analytically objective stance lends to all his plays the rich ambivalence of an intensely aware yet impersonal study. If on one plane *As)2i Pakhare Yeti* traces the mystery and the pain of a woman as victim of the power structure in a family, *Shantala!* Court Chalu *Alte is* a severe indictment of the so-called educated society that gives rise to opportunists and perverts who close down on a single woman, probing and laying bare her past and finally brutally rejecting her. The marginalization/rejection of woman is the theme of the next play discussed-Kamala-where the innate exploitativeness of the whole mechanism of investigative journalism and the strategies of the media-barons who manipulate them are exposed.

Taking the lead in the discussion, Satyadev Dubey made a reference to Shaw's `What Happens to Nora' and linked it up with Sombhu Mitra's production of the play. Dubey pointed out that Ibsen was in all respects a pathbreaker even before Marx (Das *Kapital* was written in 1857) because he had seen the bourgeois world crumbling around him and his plays originated from this experience. jabbar Patel carried on the discussion by linking up the portrayal of women in Tendulkar's fulllength plays with that in some of his short plays like *Mee Jinkalo Mee* Harlo

Azgar *ani Gandharva* and *Madi* His analysis went on to identify Tendulkar's influence on later generation playwrights and their portrayal of women.

The violence operative in Shantala! *Court* Chalu *Ahe* comes to the fore in a more brutal way in *Kamala* The investigative journalist valorized as a demi-god by the media is encouraged to work with too much confidence encased in a shell of false security. The tragedy of the situation lies in the fact that this demi-god is far too puny to be able to realize the trap he is in. Unsure of his powers and dissatisfied with his position, Jaisingh Yadav arranges a stunt which he thinks is sure to please his boss and assure him of his status as a demi-god. As Tendulkar strips each pretension layer by layer we encounter a weak-willed, gimmickry-loving chauvinist who must have on the one hand his accomplished wife by his side to see him through the numerous parties he has to attend and also be a secretary of sorts, and on the other the woman he has bought who will be material for a first-page-news story.

In the play, this simple poor woman, whom Jaisingh has bought to expose the rampant slave trade in women in many parts of India, quite naively asks Sarita, the 'lady' of the house, the price at which she had been bought. This moment is built up by Tendulkar with the unsurpassed feeling of the situation that is so characteristically his own, and Sarita realizes she is nothing more than another Kamala, the only difference being that she was sold to Jaisingh by an establishment that maintains the sanctified ritual called 'marriage'.

Interesting insights were provided by the panelists who gave their own interpretations of certain scenes in the play, particularly the last one. The fact that one particular director chose to explain Sarita's resignation to her lot in the end by seeing it as the instinct of motherhood common to all women explains only too well the deliberate naivete of the director in judging a sensitive and complex play like Knmnln.

3

With *Kamala* exploring the faceless and amorphous power-equation in one way, the following session dealt with plays in which the questions of power and society become important. The session started with another Tendulkar play- *Catwalk* followed by two plays of Breech-The Three penny Opera and *the* Caucasian Chalk Circle. The idea behind linking the three plays originated in treating each as an exercise in critiquing the power-equation as opposed to society or critiquing the individual who wields power to oppress.

Explaining the problems of producing Brett's plays in India, Sámi Bandyopadhyay pointed out that Brecht's plays provided ample material to be used and ransacked by directors and adapters a}1 over the world-all those who wanted to make a strong socio-political statement. Quoting from a short poem for Brecht's epitaph 'He made suggestions, we carried them out', he summed up the whole experience of doing a Brecht play as one of carrying out the 'ideas' that lie at the core of a Brecht text.

The discussion that followed again saw a looking into the past and coming up with a variety of associations, new discoveries and experiments in production. For Jabbar Patel, who directed the PDA production of Ghasiram Kotwal and subsequently the Theatre Academy production of it, the production became an amalgam of various folk traditions like the Khela, the Dashavatar, the Gondhal, the Tamasha, the Bohurupee and the Waghya-Murli. When Bhaskar Chandavarkar came to work on the play, he already had had a Brecht experience (in Ajab Nyaya *Vartulacha* an adaptation of *The Caucasian Chalk* Circle in Marathi). Later on when he came to direct the music in Ghasiram Kotwal he brought in with him an entire new way of arranging and stylizing the music, experimenting with the different musical forms-and the rest of it is history.

For *Teen Paishacha* Tamasha Jabbar Patel took for his starting point another idea of Brecht's-that of simple speech and heightened speech. This provided Patel with a clue to his production of *Teen* Paisacha Tamasha (an adaptation by P L Deshpande of *The Threepenny* Opera). He decided to put to use all the variations of sound-in the talking voice, the voice speaking in rhythm, sound conveying the rhythm and sound conveying music. Now the traditional form of Marathi music gave way to a critique of it in *Teen* Paisacha What took its place was a mingling of rock and jazz (particularly the style which has come to be identified with rhythm and blues) to convey a defiance of the system on the one hand and bring out the agony and pathos so characteristic of jazz on the other.

B V Karanth in his production of *The Threepenny Opera* used *sugant sangeet* (light music) and for *The* Caucasian *Chalk Circle* used the folk form. Dwelling on the aesthetics of sound and its different manifestations, Karanth led us on to a journey of exploration of the 'swara' and the tala.

Badal Sircar stressed the value of content in his kind of theatre and went on to explain his production of *The* Caucasian Chalk Circle *(Gandi).* Being aware of the disservice music could

do to the content of Brecht's plays (something that Brecht could realize only after the immediate success of The *Threepenny* Opera!) Sircar decided against using music in his production. He now explained why he had translated all the songs in *The* Catccnsian Chalk Circle into free verse. For the songs 'spoken' would bring out more of the lyrical quality and their meaning, he explained. This also explained his stance about enriching the language of the play through a fresh insight-filled production rather than doing a play just for the sake of it. Small but important productional problems like Grusha's crossing over the bridge to the safety of her brother's home became so vital for Sircar because in his solution he could use both the concern and the tension in an individual's negotiation with a community. The human form as structure on one plane, and on another, as a theatrically effective way of communicating the other. The plight of Grusha and how she overcomes it becomes as important for the actress playing Grusha's role as for the group supporting her on their backs to let her cross. Definite and very well-rehearsed choreographic adjustments are involved in this kind of theatre and the human effort brings out the message more than any poster could convey or any song could put across.

4

The indictment of the power structure in the plays just mentioned gave way to a more philosophical yet critical way of looking at power in two plays by Mahesh Elkunchwar *Wada Chirebandi* andParty): in the house, the crumbling ruin of a house, that is at once the protagonist and a force everybody in the family must come to terms with. The power at work here is more traditional-the feudal power. With the hierarchy breaking down, the family tries desperately to cling on to values which have become like quicksand. As Elkunchwar said in on one of his interviews ... he is more interested in the mind of a human being and its workings, rather than larger social and political issues. Perhaps this is revealed all the more when one looks into how he traces the ultimate collapse through a sensitive working out of family relationships.

The collapse is more dramatically evident in Party and Pratibimb in which Elkunchwar turns to the individual alienated in a big city. In Party he ridicules the forced gregariousness of modern society, where the characters have masked entities. The masks are visible in a reflection but once they are torn away, these people will cease to have any reflection at all. The city as a coercive force emerges in the persona of the pillars of the citysometimes it is the hostess who

must host parties, sometimes it is a successful writer, sometimes it is the feminist-Marxist intellectual, or on a more diminutive scale, the landlady in *Pratibimb*.

In Manoj Mitra's Sajano *Bagan* the city comes in tangentially. The pristine surroundings of the village and the orchard guarded closely by Banchharam is broken into by his city-bred but unemployed grandson who returns to the village to grab whatever he can after the grandfather's death. The social pressures are quite evident-he is unemployed and has to provide for his wife. This perspective was suggested by Ratan Thiyam who looked at the play from this young man's point of view. It was indeed a fresh approach to the play which all of us had been accustomed to seeing from the old man's perspective.

The playwright himself dwelt on the inspiration behind writing the play and the inimitable Manoj Mitra touch came in when he said: 'If I write looking at life, it is far more faithful and genuine. I believe simplicity is one virtue my plays should contain ... Justice can only be done to my plays through this.'

Justifying the deliberate omission of stage directions in his recent plays, Manoj Mitra stressed the need of identifying with the language and feeling the visual quality in the language rather than being faithful in carrying out mundane stage directions.

5

Tughlaq and Hayavadana again introduced the initial concerns of the seminar: the questions of power and relationships. Recalling the influence of *Ebong Indrajit* on his writing, Girish Karnad acknowledged his debt to Sircar. The question of the director finding a personal equation with the play came up when Karnad and Dubey dwelt on their collaboration in the latter's production of Tughlaq. It was the director interpreting the play and the playwright re-writing parts of it to make a fresh statement. For us it was a superb experience just watching and listening to the level of sincerity

and involvement that went into the making of the play and its production.

This exercise had a limited objective-that of exploring the value of texts on the literary level and identifying them with productional transformation. So the discussions were thought of as closed-door encounters between playwrights and directors in order that several concerns, issues, ways of looking at a play at the level of a text and on the level of a production could surface and be identified.

The 15 plays discussed over a period of three days in six sessions were:

Ebong Indrajit -	Badal Sircar
Baki Itihas -	Badal Sircar
A Doll's House	Henrik Ibsen
Ashi Pakhare Yati	Vijay
Shantata! Court Chalu Ahe	Vijay
Kamala -	Vijay
The Threepenny Opera -	Bertolt Brecht
The Caucasian Chalk	Bertolt Brecht
Ghashiram Kotwal	Vijay
Wada Chirebandi	Mahesh Elkunchwar
Party	Mahesh Elkunchwar
Pratibimb	Mahesh Elkunchwar
Tughlaq	Girish Karnad
Hayavadana	Girish Karnad
Sajano Bagan	Manoj Mitra
Raj darshan	Manoj Mitra

Participants/ panelists included:

Badal Sircar, Jabbar Patel, B V Karanth, Satyadev Dubey, Rajinder Nath, Girish Karnad, Shyamanand Jalan, Sheo Kumar Jhunjhunwala, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Swaran Chaudhury, Waman Kendre, Samir Majumdar, Jayoti Bose, Bibhas Chakraborty, Gobinda Ganguly, Pratibha Agrawal, Ratan Thiyam, Manoj Mitra and Kumar Roy.

The structure for the seminar was conceived by Samik Bandyopadhyay, who also co-ordinated the discussions every day. The seminar was part of
a longer project, studying one hundred plays, fairly widely staged in post-Independence India. The Natya Shodh Sansthan has a whole research faculty engaged in the project initiated a little over a year back.

Playwrights and Productions

Badal Sircar (b. 1925)

Ebong Indrajit (written 1963): First produced 1965, Shouvanik, Calcutta, dir. Gobindo Ganguly; 1968, Anamika, Calcutta, dir. Shyamanand Jalan; 1970, Madras Players, dirs. Ammu Matthew and Girish Karnad; 1970, Theatre Unit, Bombay, dir. Satyadev Dubey.

Baki Itihas (written 1967): First produced 1967, Bohurupee, Calcutta, dir. Sombhu Mitra; 1968, Abhiyan, New Delhi, dir. Rajinder Nath; date (n k); Lakrees, Lucknow; 1970, Rangayan, Mumbai, dir. Arvind Deshpande; 1972, Yavanika, Calcutta, dir. Krishna Kumar; 1975, Anamika, Calcutta, dir. Sheokumar Jhunjhunwala; 1978, Ank, Mumbai, dir. Dinesh Thakur.

Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906)

Et Dukkehjem (A Doll's House, written 1879): First produced 1879, Royal Theatre, Copenhagen; 1884, London, adpf. Henry Herman/Henry Arthur Jones with Herbert Beerbohum as 'Dunkley, a cashier' (Krogstad); 1883, US, a free version *The Cliild* Wife with 'a happy ending'; 1889, Beatrice Cameron tour through various cities of Europe; IPTA Gujarat, *Dingli Ghar* (Dina Pathak as Nora); 1951, LTG, Calcutta, dir. Utpal Dutt; 1958, Boliurupee, Calcutta, dir. Sombhu Mitra; 1972, IPTA, Mumbai, dir. R M Singh; 1986, Nandikar, Calcutta, dir. Rudraprasad Sengupta (adpt. of Bergman's Nora); 1994, Calcutta Creative Rep., dir. Bibhas Chakrabarty; 1996, Brechtian Mirror, *Gudiyor2 ka Khel*, New Delhi., dir. Noor Zaheer.

Vijay Tendulkar (b. 1928)

Shantata! Court Cllalu Ahe (written, 1967): 1967, Rangayan, Mumbai, dir. Arvind Deshpande; 1971, Awishkar, Mumbai, dir. Arvind Deshpande; Bohurupee, Calcutta, dir. Sombhu Mitra; Madras Players, Madras, Ammu Matthew; Theatre Unit, Mumbai, dir. Sulbha Deshpande; 1972, Adakar, Calcutta, dir. Krishna Kumar; Dishantar, New Delhi, dir. Om Shivpuri; 1973, Oskar, Calcutta, dir. Swaran Chaudhury; 1974, Kala Sangam, Patna, dir. Satish Anand; 1978, NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Sudhir Kulkarni; 1983, Ank, Mumbai, dir. Dinesh Thakur.

Ashi Pakhari Yeti (written 1970): 1970, PDA, Pune, dir. Jabbar Patel; 1971, Abhiyan, New Delhi,. dir. Rajinder Nath; Anamika, Calcutta, dir. Shyamanand Jalan; 1980, Theatre Unit, Mumbai, dir. Satyadev Dubey; 1982, Padatik, Calcutta, dir. Shyamanand Jalan.

Ghashiram Kotwal (pub. 1973): 1972, Progressive Dramatic Association, Pune, dir. Jabbar Patel; 1973, Abhiyan, New Delhi, dir. Rajinder Nath; 1974, Theatre Academy, Pune, dir. Jabbar Patel; 1981, Rangmandal, Bhopal, dir. B V Karanth;1995, Trimiti, Pune, dir. Vijay Kulkarni; 1996, Samanjas, Mumbai, dir. Sanjay Godse.

Knmala (written 1982):1981, Kalarang, Mumbai, dir. Kamalakar Sarang; 1982, Abhiyan, New Delhi, dir, Rajinder Nath; Ank, Mumbai, dir. Dinesh Thakur; 1983, Anamika, Calcutta, dirs. Swaran Chaudhury, Sheokumar Jhunjhunwala.

Bertolt Brecht(1898-1956)

Die Drugrerchenoper (The Threepenrly Opera, written 1928): First produced 1928 at Theatre am Schiffbeuerdamm, Berlin; 1969, Nandikar, Calcutta, dir. Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay;1970, NSD Repertory., New Delhi, dir. Fritz Bennewitz, asst. Amal Allana;1975, Rani Balbir Group, Chandigarh, dir. Amal Allana; 1978, Theatre Academy, Pune, dir. Jabbar Patel; 1978-79, Natya Bharati (a jatra company), dir. Ajitesh Bandyopadhyay; 1994, Enact Theatre, Mumbai, & IP"I'A Maharashtra, dir. Waman Kendre.

Der Kauhasische Kreidekreis (The Caucasian Chalk Circle, written 1944-45): First produced 1954 at Theatre am Schiffbauerdamm, Berlin; 1968, NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Carl Weber; 1973, Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh, dirs. Fritz Bennewitz & Vijaya Mehta; 1977, Lakrees, Lucknow & S N A, dir. Shashank Bahuguna; 1978, Nandikar, Calcutta, dir. Rudraprasad Sengupta; Theatre Front, Calcutta, dir. Subrata Nandi; 1988, Satabdi, Calcutta, dir. Badal Sircar.

Girish Karnad (b. 1938)

Tughlaq (1964); 1996, NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Om Shivpuri; 1968, Dishantar, New Delhi, dir. Om Shivpuri; 1970, Theatre Group, Mumbai, dir. Alyque Padamsee; 1971, Awishkar, Mumbai, dir, Arvind Deshpande; 1972, Bangla Natmancha Pratishtha Samiti, Calcutta, dir. Shyamanand Jalan; NSD, New Delhi, dir. Ebrahim Alkazi;1973, Oskars, Calcutta, dir. Swaran Chaudhury; 1974, NSD, New Delhi (set at Purana Quilla), dir. Ebrahim Alkazi; 1978 & 1979, NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Ebrahim Alkazi (both these productions were revived by Manohar Singh); 1982, NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Prasanna; 1983, Theatron, Calcutta, dir. Salil Bandyopadhyay; 1989, Theatre Unit, Mumbai, dir. Satyadev Dubey; 1989-90, Ninasam, Tirugata, dir. C R Jambe; 1994, Masque, Mumbai, dir. Vikram
Kapadia; 1995, Asmita, New Delhi, dir. Arvind Gaur.

Hayavadana (1971):1972, Theatre Unit, Mumbai, dir. Satyadev Dubey; 1972, Anamika, Calcutta, dir. Rajinder Nath; Madras Players, Madras, dirs. Laxmi Krishnamurthy, Yamuna Prabhu; 1973, Benaka, Bangalore, dir. B V Karanth; 1974, Gwalior, dir. B M Shah; 1978, Abayab, Calcutta, dir. Manju Bandyopadhyay, 1983, Goa Hindu Association, Kalavibhag, dir. Vijaya Mehta.

Manoj Mitra (b. 1938)

Sajno Begum(1976): 1977, Sundaram, Calcutta, dir. Manoj Mitra; 1985, Chorus Repertory Theatre, Imphal, dir. Ratan Thiyam;1995, NSD School Production, dir. Rajinder Nath; 1996, Natrang, Jammu, dir. Adil Hussain.

Rajdarshan: 1982, Bohurupee, Calcutta, dir. Kumar Roy; 1984, Anamika, Calcutta, dir. Swaran Chaudhury, 1986, IPTA, Mumbai, dir. Waman Kendre.

Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 1939)

Wadn Chirebnndi (1985): First produced 1985, Kalavaibhav, Mumbai, dir. Vijaya Mehta; NSD Repertory, New Delhi, dir. Satyadev Dubey, 1989, Ensemble, Calcutta, dir. Sohag Sen; Anamika Kala Sangam, dir. Swaran Chaudhury; 1994, Awishkar, Mumbai, dir. Chandrakant Kulkarni.

Party (1976):1976, Aniket, Mumbai, dir. Amol Palekar; 1990, Ensemble, Calcutta, dir. Sohag Sen.

Theatrescapes

Samik Bandyopadhyay

The obvious nostalgia notwithstanding, the first round table on Plays in a National Perspective, sponsored by the Natya Shodh Sansthan at Calcutta (a report appears elsewhere in this issue of STQ), was an exploration of both history and theory. Focusing on a few particular plays, within the format of a direct interaction between the playwrights who wrote them and some of the directors who have staged these plays at different points of time in different Indian languages in different theatric/cultural situations, the round tale conjured up a decade and a half of creativity in India when a few playwrights and a few directors, scattered through the country, found a common cause, 'sharing ideas and plays with great care and respect for one another. This is perhaps the only phase in Indian theatre history when plays in different Indian languages became the common property of an Indian theatre with multiple regional voices /cultures. The same plays looked and sounded different in their different incarnations, with different emphases. Speaking at the round table, Badal Sircar reflected the attitude of the playwrights of the sixties, when he said that he had never stopped any director from re-interpreting or revising or recasting his plays, from a sense of the director's prerogative, but he had retained the right to see the play and say that it was not his play. The question of a royalty to be paid for the staging of a play has somehow never been taken seriously in India. So that was an issue that never came into

consideration-even getting a clearance from a playwright has not always been considered necessary. Whatever ethical reservations one may have on such practices, they served to facilitate the circulation/ transmission of these texts through at least a couple of generations of directors seeking to put the sixties into theatre.

After the first two general elections, and the toppling of the first Communist government in Kerala, it was quite obvious that India, in the given circumstances, especially with the state of literacy and the grinding poverty, could only have an imperfect and grossly flawed democracy. The Nehruvian Visions were already frayed, and socialism as an ideology was already too diluted to be taken seriously. The problem of unemployment seemed to be growing rather than being checked. On the other hand, an official culture system was setting itself up, through more and more institutionalization in the form of academies, awards, sponsored shows and tours, grants, subsidies, etc., and certain standards were being defined and laid down.

Issues driven underground under the impact of the nationalist project and new issues thrown up by the collapse of the democratic project came together in the outlook of the new theatre. The consistent and progressive development of a dramaturgy (i.e. the convergence of dramatic or textual and theatrical or productional-stylistic forms) has been clearest and sharpest in Badal Sircar. The story of the 'discovery' of Sircar as playwright through his *Ebory Introit* was recounted from various perspectives, including Sircar's own, at the round table.

I had been familiar with Sircar's early comedies which he wrote and produced-usually one a year-for his group of amateurs, Chakra, and had even addressed a couple of the group's weekly informal meetings on the Jatra, which I had just discovered. Sircar, a professional architect, had gathered around himself an interesting group of economists, teachers, politically alert individuals from various walks of life, and their wives, most of them between their midthirties and forties. Though I had enjoyed the intelligent company, and the sheer fun and spontaneous naivete of the performances by Chakra, I had never had a hint of what lay in store for me at the first private play reading of *Ebortg Indrnjit* one evening at the residence of Shyamal Chakravarty, a descendant of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, and a Marxist economist. When I walked up to Sircar at the end of the reading, and tried to convey the sheer thrill that had come over me, he seemed amused, and was not

quite prepared to accept the text as a play-for him it was more an extended poem, a collage as frame for a suite of poems that had been lying with him for quite a number of years.

Maybe that is how he had managed to break away from the late Victorian paradigms of drama, variations of the neat beginning-middle-end logic, with psychological consistency determining character. Obviously he was not trying to fit his 'sense' of the experience into any of the familiar theatre moulds. In the unfinished first chapter (appearing elsewhere in this issue of a book I began writing about a year ago, I have tried to re-create the point of theatric reference for the pioneers of a new Bengali theatre immediately after Independence. If for Sombhu Mitra it lay in Sisirkumar Bhaduri, and for Utpal Dutt in the new directions in Shakespearean productions in Britain and the USA in the 30s and 40s, it was Bijan Bhattacharya alone who sought to create a theatre out of the spirit of a generation-and a section of society-as it was being shaped by the times. The plays Bhattacharya wrote, barring a couple or so, offered a dramatic form original in 'its progression from a slow, relaxed, elaborate evocation/ reconstruction of a way of life loaded with conventions, and memories of myths, defined in terms of the culture of a community, to its violent disruption and collapse in a single act or event violating the old culture at its core; the subversion invariably the action of an economic force or process. In what can be described as the second post-Independence phase (when the euphoria has worn off, and democracy has taken the first nasty dents), Badal Sircar offered what Bhattacharya had offered to the first phase-a sceptical realism in dramatic terms. While Bhattacha,rya was critiquing the naivete and consequent inadequacy of older, traditional modes of belief and mores (maybe more evident in rural or suburban settings, but no less present and potent, albeit subterraneously, in the urban sensibility) in the face of the aggressive inroads of new economic forces; two decades later, Sircar would be critiquing the new culture of success and consumerism, still quite embryonic in India in the early 60s, a culture which is a product of the same economic forces that Bhattacharya had noticed seeping in surreptitiously, and upholding the acceptance/ assumption of responsibility (with shades of the priest in Hoccuth's *The Deputy,* and some of Sartre's characters, particularly Franz in *The condemned of Altona).*

If for Karnad, Dubey and Karanth (as they all so generously acknowledged at the Round Table in Calcutta), *Ebong Indrajit* served to open up an area of freedom that

allowed them to experiment with open-ended, sceptical forms, Sircar assumed the questioning /doubting Indrajit role himself, and pursued it to the point where he could identify the forces impinging on his freedom of theatric expression, and then broke away from the theatre that he had known till then to construct a different paradigm of theatre altogether. Uncomfortable with the first appelation he had chosen-the Third Theatre-he soon came to call it Free Theatre, free both economically (neither charging for entrance nor depending on nor asking for funding/ sponsorship support) and politically. The major issues that Sircar has since explored /projected in his Free Theatre plays have been those of violence, ranging from antisocial to state to nuclear; exploitation, particularly as practised in the perpetuation/ enlargement of the rural-urban divide, and the deliberate 'denial' of the village in the persistent valorization of the metropolis and the cataloguing of its ills and problems; and the evil of religious obscurantism and intolerance. Sircar, alone amongst his contemporaries, has defined for himself a total project-in which the play, the theatre,, and society in change come together in an area of conscience. Sircar, warm and sensitive as ever, still seemed an Indrajit-ebong Indrajit-at the Round Table, as he articulated his work in theatre *now* At the Round Table, he distributed his simple leaflet announcing a series of free theatre productions the following week. The list included *Raktakarabi,* Tagore's play, edited by Sircar to a tighter version for a production by Pathasena, a group in suburban Kanchrapara, where most of the actors are workers at the railway workshop.

Theatre Log

Theatre Workshop in Bankura

A theatre workshop organized by Theatre Wall and Baitalik was held in the town of Bankura, West Bengal from July 1 to 10, 1996. This workshop with 10 participants was conducted by Subrata Datta, a resident of this district and a graduate from the National School of Drama, New Delhi. The participants were not just residents of the town where it was held; there were learners from the village of Onda also. Training was given on a variety of games, composition, body movements etc. through the technique of improvisation. There was no pre-decided script, no written dialogues, not even any pre-determined ideas or thoughts. The participants themselves decided what they wanted to do and say.

Subrata wanted to concentrate on the synchronization of body movements and dialogues as well as to bring out the significance of the logic inherent in characterization.The workshop was conducted sometimes inside the Taramela school building, and sometimes in the Palashtala crematorium ground with just the sky overhead. The aim was to impart training on the correct approach to what Subrata called environ theatrea theatre that builds up in harmony with the surroundings. On July 10, some sample peformances on the basis of things learnt in the workshop were presented to the people. These included mirror acting, imitation, rhythmic

acting etc. *Dltakkn(The* Push), a monodrama enacted by Madan Das, deserves special mention. This function, formally closing the workshop, ended with a vote of thanks to the trainer and a choral song.

Pallab Roy

Workshop on Puppetry

For effective communication with their target groups as well as for general consciousness raising programmes, NGOs inevitably need to explore a variety of media and media aids. While puppetry has long been acknowledged as a cost-effective medium with exciting potential, there have been relatively few attempts to use it. Taking off from the premise that lack of skills in puppetry acts as a major constraint, Media Matters, a centre for development support communication based in Kalyan, organized a workshop to impart training in basic skills. Katta Babu from Mumbai assisted by Ramchandra, Sonia Ketkar and her team from Pune, and the Media Matters team consisting of Anju Uppal, Ganga Mukhi and Prabir Bose, acted as resource persons.

The month was July. Lonavla was the natural choice-for rains transform the 'ghats' here into an emerald expanse. A residential three-day programme in this idyllic locale was a deliberate decision to enable the participants to focus optimally on the workshop inputs, away from the routine stress of home ¯and office. On the practical level, it ensured the availability of participants on time, their regularity and punctuality. The decision was proved right when the enthusiasm and desire of the participants to learn led them to reschedule their sessions. On the very first day of the workshop, the participants decided to begin work at 8.30 in the morning instead of at 9 as prescheduled, and work they did till 11 at night with barely half-hour breaks for lunch and dinner.

Our participants, 19 in all, came from a large spectrum-from voluntary and media organizations, special schools and the corporate sector. However, they had all come with some common expectations-to learn about making and handling puppets so as to be able to use the medium for education, entertainment and communicating issues effectively. For instance, there was a social worker who wanted to use puppetry for awareness-raising among the sex workers of

his work field and felt that medium would be more effective for its novelty than other means of communication like slide shows, films, lectures etc. which have lost their impact through repeated use.

The workshop began informally in the evening of July 15 with the arrival of the Media Matters team, the resource persons and the participants, though formally the workshop began from the morning of July 16. A highly varied range of puppets and masks, most of them made from waste materials, had been put on display. The participants handled the puppets, tried out various voices on them and explored the mechanisms of operating them. For many, this was their first direct exposure to puppets. Some had never even seen a puppet show, while some others had seen them only on television. Glove puppets turned out to be the favourites with the group because of their flexibility. Stick puppets were initially viewed as decorative pieces till a demonstration from one of the resource persons proved otherwise.

The first day was entirely devoted to the craft of puppetry. The participants were divided into four groups and each group was asked to make four characters of a specific kind of puppet. This ensured that every participant had a puppet to work on. Stick puppets, sock puppets, bottle puppets, can puppets and string puppets were worked on in this session. Waste materials like paper, used cans, cartons, cut pieces, old magazines and newspapers, strings etc. were seen being transformed into puppet characters. Aided with scissors, adhesives and poster colours, the participants produced an impressive array of puppets by evening.

The string puppet group produced four princes complete with a shield and a sword each. The sock puppet group made a donkey (an angry donkey to be precise!), a deer, a frog and a crocodile. The can puppet group manifested best the amount of painstaking efforts that had to go into the making of these puppets. A five litre can was transformed into the head of an elephant. It was hard to believe that the head had been made by crushing and stringing waste paper. This elephant was named 'Gajraj'. This group also produced a demon and a *tantrik* who was unanimously named 'Jhumroo'. The stick puppet group produced four peacocks, using rolls of magazine paper as sticks. All the peacocks were decorated beautifully in a number of attractive ways. The box puppet group produced lions, donkeys and cows using medicine boxes. Another group came up with crows, hens and a curious looking bird resembling a heron.

In a brief post lunch session the participants were given an orientation on the importance of colours in characterizing the puppets. A session on voice emphasized how a voice suitable to a

puppet character was to be lent to it. It was noticed that some participants withdrew from the prospect of having to produce so many different sounds with their own voices. To tackle this, the Media Matters team in consultation with the resource persons organized a voice exercise session that evening to help participants to open up their voices. However, resistance owing to inhibitions still remained rather high.

There was another session on script writing, after which the participants went back to finishing their puppets. Soon members were reaching across groups to help each other. Work continued till 10.30 at night, when the workshop was halted by mandate so that participants could be fresh the next day also. In the Media Matters review meeting late that night, it was decided that some theatre exercises would be introduced to help participants shed their inhibitions.

Accordingly the next morning (July 17) began with a session on rhythmic movements that characterize our daily routine. Skit improvisations and mime exercises went some way in activating participants' imagination and physical movements. Then began the puppet making sessions again, but now the emphasis was shifted from the craft to bringing in the art. It was explained why imagination, visualization and characterization were necessary inputs in the process of puppet making. A conscious and deliberate visualization of a puppet character was insisted upon so that puppets could actually come alive.

Next, there was a session on the operational aspect of lending movement to the puppets. Practice, risk and experimentation emerged to be necessary factors while keeping in mind the optical range of the audience was found to be important. Puppet making sessions were resumed. Groups were realigned to facilitate overall interaction as well as to ensure that each participant learnt to make at least four different kinds of puppets through personal efforts.

The post-lunch session was a discussion on: a) why puppetry and b) puppetry as an alternative medium. It was perceived that the participants were most inclined towards learning the basic skills of puppetry, so that it was back to puppet making once again, after an intense session on theatre exercises to help participants to get more relaxed and to open up.

Since a puppet show needs much more than just puppets insofar as it must be a blend of ideas, visualization, dialogue, sound and movement that evening the groups were assigned the task of coming up with a skit each. The themes were expected issues like superstition, dowry,

literacy etc. Performance time was 15 minutes per skit. After each performance, the group was given an immediate analytic feedback.

On the third and final day (July 18) the participants were determined to make the most of the workshop. There was a general feeling that three days provided too short a span to cover the manifold aspects of puppetry in any depth. Everyone seemed eager to pick up whatever clues and hints would come in handy. This was actually a rather exciting morning as each group was to put up a puppet show. Each group was given 30 minutes to put up a show, using the puppets they had made in the last two days. There were discussions after each show to bring out the points of strength and weakness of each presentation.

In the afternoon, Sonia Ketkar arrived from Pune with her team of three. She put up three puppet plays complete with a proper stage, setting, vocal and instrumental music, and excellent use of voice. A professional puppeteer, Sonia's shows were highly entertaining and lively. her repertoire consisted largely of glove and stick puppets. She succeeded in exposing the participants to the immense efforts and labour that go into making puppetry an art. In the participants' interaction with Sonia, her able answering of their questions strengthened their faith in the effectivity of the neglected medium of puppetry.

Seema, Trupti, Ganga Mukhi and Ashwini Deo

A Performative Workshop for Women Activists

A three day long performative workshop organized by Sanhita, a Calcutta-based Gender Resource Centre, brought to light the creativity that often stays dormant and invisible within the women activists of West Bengal. The workshop was organized on the sprawling grounds of BASLI, a shortened form for the Bureau of Agro Based/Linked Industries; but also named after the lost sister of Ms Neela Sen, one of the stalwarts of this sustainable development venture. Away from the bustle of the city, 12 kilometres out of touristcrowded Santiniketan, BABLI provided the ideal atmosphere for the women activists to come out with their repertoire of songs collected and composed before, and to break out into the spontaneous creation of songs, posters, verses and skits.

The need for such a workshop had been felt by the members of Maitree, a network of women's organizations and activists of West Bengal. The idea was to generate more attractive, interesting and inspiring communication materials on gender issues in the local language, with

which to address the grassroots level. Sanhita, a member organization of Maitree, had come forward to tackle this need and this workshop was just the beginning of a process.

This residential workshop, held from October 3 to 6, 1996, had 23 participants from 11 organizations with Ms Anchita Ghatak of Swayam and Ms Kalyani Menon Sen of CAPART as facilitators. The very first session, almost immediately after arriving, was directed at every one getting activated as well as acquainted with one another. First there was a game which, apart from being extremely energizing and funny, threw a very subtle challenge to the traditional divide between 'inside/outside'. This was followed by a session of each one choosing a partner not known before, spending some half an hour together and then coming back with verses on each other to tell the others present something about one's partner. That really was a hearty way of getting all participants to know one another and begin interacting.

The next session aimed at: a) exploring issues that were to be highlighted in the communication materials to be generated; b) the process required to design these into posters; and c) the mechanism of composing these into songs or other performative materials such as skits. The various issues that surfaced could be grouped together under the dual themes of discrimination against women and protest. The rest of the workshop was devoted to developing materials on these two broad themes, concentrating on any one of the subthemes encapsulated within them.

The session on poster making generated wonderful new ideas, designs and slogans. The participants came up with a number of posters produced on a group basis, each group concentrating on one particular aspect of discrimination. By way of analysing their efforts, technicalities involved in the designing process were explored and the messages that had come across were analysed. Technically, it was decided that posters were to be: a) created with specific purpose and target viewers in mind; b) focused with clear, strong messages; c) uncluttered and not overcrowded with too many motifs/slogans; and d) visually attractive.

There were two song sessions, the first one of which was devoted to learning songs from the already existing collection of those present. Most of these songs had marriage and dowry as the theme. In the second session of songs, the participants were divided into four groups and each group was to come up with one new song. The focus was on self sufficiency, mobilization and the need for movements. Four new songs were created as a result. Each new song was

actually a rewording of well known, existing tunes. A verse that had been created during the poster session was also similarly set to tune, thereby creating a fifth new song.

For the skits session, the focal theme was gender discrimination and four different groups took up four different aspects of it. The first group decided to highlight violence against women and came up with a fifteen minute skit depicting how poor girls from the village are lured to the city under the pretext of securing jobs as house maids, only to be raped by those who have brought them and then sold as sex workers. Also dealt with was the callousness of the police in complaints relating to such matters. A skit was produced within fortyfive minutes. It definitely leaves a lot to be desired; in fact, it is just the beginning of the process of improvisation. But even within these constraints, this particular group showed a lot of innovativeness in the use of easily made paper masks to signify change of character, using strong percussion beats during the rape scene etc.

The other three specific themes highlighted were discrimination vis-a-vis education, health and role in society. What surfaced through these skits was the need to soul-search from time to time to ensure that the feminist outlook does not become clouded and allow patriarchal value frames to sneak in. It also became clear that even fifteen minute presentations need some kind of a preformulated script, and that the thought of managing with improvised dialogues at the time of performance can be counterproductive. However, each group sported a least one talented actress, who would possibly have remain undiscovered but for this session in the workshop. It also remains to be seen how well the women's movement can identify and utilize such hidden talents.

Through an analysis of the skits presented, the following points emerged as significant: a) skits are to be designed with a specific target audience in mind; b) there must be a coherent script; c) every available resource should be used to extend participation as far as possible; d) imagination, care and planning is essential regarding body movements, composition etc.; and e) the point of view must be clearly and unilaterally feminist.

In addition to these workshop sessions, there was a *baul* evening where three women baud singers performed, enthralling the participants. Gana Bishan, a well known activist cultural group of Calcutta was also invited to come and sing with an all-woman team. The workshop participants also learnt one new song dealing with role division and protest from the Gana Bishan team.

This workshop was all in all a great success both in terms of materials generated and in terms of interaction. It remains to be seen how this initiative is carried forward so that the women's movement in the state o€ West Bengal becomes much more colourful and begins to create a definitive impression on the performative scene with distinctly feminist visuals, songs, skits and plays.

Sohini Bhattacharya, Paramita Banerjee

National Festival of Street Theatre

With a slogan of Bol *Jamoore,* plays began on the streets of Mumbai, attracting passers-by, reaching out to all and sundry, getting them emotionally involved. These plays needed no props or costumes, no stage and lights-virtually nothing except the actors/ actresses who used their bodies and voices to create whatever was necessary. It was the message that was important and people stopped a while, observed the plays and reacted to the issues raised in the plays.

Street theatre is really a medium of protest, an effective weapon for raising people's consciousness. That is why the Naujawane-Hind, a street theatre group of Mumbai, organized the first ever national festival of street plays in collaboration with CRY (Child Relief and You) with a view to giving a new fillip to this oft-used medium of communication, conscientization and protest. Inspiring school and college students to use and get involved with this medium was also an aim.

The festival, held on 14 and 15 November, 1996, was divided into two parts. On the first day, street theatre groups coming from various parts of the country, 3 of them from West Bengal, performed on 16 different street corners of Mumbai, covering slums, chawls and red light areas from Colaba in south Mumbai to suburban Chembur. Plays performed focused on issues related to children, literacy, womeWand environment. On the second day, a competition was organized in Nare Park, Parel. Among the 23 groups that participated W this contest, a few were women's groups. Yuvati Sangha of Maharashtra was one of them and they performed a play dealing with various social issues. The troupe from Bishop Cotton Girls' School of Bangalore concentrated on the girl child in their play. Another women's group was Muktadhara from West Bengal, consisting largely of Muslim women who have defied purdah and family restrictions. It is no wonder that this activist group performed on the issue of women's oppression.

Subhamoy Samiti from the South 24 Paraganas, West Bengal, received the first prize for their silent play on agricultural exploitation. Sun Mitra Mondal from Latur, Maharashtra, got the

second prize for their play on child labour. Nava Nirmiti Mondal's play on AIDS was awarded the third prize. This group was also from Maharashtra. There were three consolation prizes also, one of which was given to Muktadhara. Ten year old Motin Sheikh of Naya Sitara of Maharashtra was awarded the best actor's prize. Ms Jyoti
Mhapsekar, a noted Marathi playwright, distributed the prizes.

Bol Jamoore, the traditional cry of the narrator for his assistant in street corner performances, was picked up by the organizers as the warcry for this attempt at reviving street theatre-not just as a performance form, but as a weapon for rousing public opinion on various issues. And it has been a successful attempt also, as the plays performed in the festival once again demonstrated the power and the punch of street theatre.
Rachana Ghosh

Notebook

Children's Theatre

Nirata Nirantha is a theatre group working with children in a small village called Sonageri in south Kannada which has been turned into an art village. Ranga Sanga is another Kannada group that works for and with children. Conducting theatre workshops and preparing street plays by children on children's issues are important activities of this group. The small village of Tumvi also has a theatre group that puts up children's plays all over the state of Karnataka.

Prithvi Theatre, Bombay, organized a Children's Festival from 1 to 10 November, 1996. Ten different plays were presented in this festival, ranging from earlier GRIPS Theatre productions to original plays and new productions. There was one play in English; two plays each in Bengali, Kannada and Marathi; and three plays in Hindi. DATE (Developing Awareness Through Entertainment), described by Honorary Director Mohan Agashe as the 'natural fall out of the experiences I had in doing meaningful and socially relevant realistic theatre for Children and Youth in India in collaboration with GRIPS Theatre from Berlin and Max Mueller Bhavans . . .', collaborated with the Maharashtra Cultural Centre of Pune to put up a new production in Marathi directed by Srirang Godbole.

Festivals

The India Theatre Olympiad 96 was held recently in Cuttack. This global theatre event was organized jointly by the National Institute of Performing Arts, New Delhi and the Utkal Yuva Sanskrutik Sangh, a leading theatre organization of the state, in association with the International Amateur Theatre Association based in Copenhagen, Denmark. The event included the 4th All India Multi-Lingual Drama Competition (13-31 October) and an International Theatre Festival (24

30 November). Cuttack hosted over 3000 theatre artists, directors, playwrights and critics from all over the country and the world. About a hundred new plays in different languages, with varying styles and techniques, were presented. There was also a poster and pamphlet competition, theatre elocution competition, theatre quiz, seminar, cultural exhibition, camp fire cultural programmes at night etc. As Professor Kartik Chandra Rath, a noted dramatist of Orissa and the general secretary of this festival, pointed out, this was a venture designed to develop a sense of unity among various dramatic movements within the country and outside it. The aim was to enhance national integration and international peace and friendship through cross-cultural synthesis and social assimilation.

Performances

Kalyani-based Media Matters, a centre for development support communication, are putting g up thirty performances of Chhi a Hindi one-act play, in open spaces, educational institutions and communities. It is a Conservation of Energy Campaign, the objective being reaching out to all sections of the society, highlighting urban environmental threats (specifically garbage), and raising questions on how these can be tackled both individually and collectively. The campaign is supported and funded by the Conservation Education Centre, Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai.

The script was developed in a four-day residential workshop held in Lonavla under the guidance of Prabir Bose. There are plans to initiate an informal discussion session, facilitated by an education officer fromCEC-BrvHs, with the audience groups after the performances. The organizers describe *Chhi* as an effort to bring theatre to the streets, seeking to break away from practised street theatre norms in an effort to blend activism and aesthetics.

Manoj Mitra's play Sajan *Bagan* was performed in Hindi as *Bagin Baachha Ram Ki* in September by Abhinav Theatre in Jammu. Adil Hussain was in charge of designing and

directing the play. Natrang is a theatre research and promotion organization established in 1983 and has to its credit produced 55 plays and participated in 48 major theatre festivals in the country. The interesting feature of this production was that, all the freshers enrolled in Natrang this year were involved in it.

Organizations Gayan Samaj Deval Club, based in Kolhapur, Maharashtra, is one of the oldest institutions in the

country working in the field of Indian classical music, dance and drama. A century and a decade old, this organization links up several generations of artists and audiences. The land and the expenses of the building that houses this club were donated by the Chhatrapati Shahu Rajarshi Maharaja of Kolhapur. Alladiya Khan Saheb, the father of the Jaipur gharana, Pundit Govindrao Tembe, Pundit Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale, Ustad Rahimat Khan and Pundit Jagannathbuwa Purohit are some of the great artists under whose able guidance the organization has developed. The club can proudly state that most of today's internationally famous classical artists performed in this institute in the early stages of their career. This organization is one of the pioneers in arranging classical music and dance concerts. It also provides basic education of these art forms through its 50 year old music school affiliated to the Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. The capacity today is around 300 students annually.

The drama section of this institute is noted for both its classical and experimental productions. *Vinod-a* popular satire featuring V. Shantaram, Bhalji Pendharkar, Baburao Pendhalkar and other performers-was their first dramatic production. Among its many memorable classical Marathi productions, *Ekach Pyala,* a musical classic, was a particularly unforgettable production in 1954, featuring Nanasaheb Phatak, Hirabai Badodekar and Damuana Malvankar as the lead actors. This club is recognized as one of the major theatre groups of the state. and their milestone productions include *Baki ItiJtns* (Badal Sircar), *Abhinat* (Prabhakar Patil), *Anktar* (Raju Phulkar), *Uddhwasta Dharnrrishala (G.* P. Deshpande), *Kamala* (Vijay Tendulkar) and many more that may safely be termed modem classics. It is but natural that the organization has received many awards and honours.

Now the Gayan Samaj Deval Club has taken up the construction of a new multipurpose cultural complex, on the completion of which the institution expects to extend its training facilities and other activities.

Natya Shodh Sansthan, the theatre archive based in Calcutta, held the foundation stone laying ceremony for its proposed campus in Salt Lake. Eminent playwright and actor Girish Kamad laid the first brick, at a ceremonv attended by several theatre luminaries who spoke of the archive's valuable contribution to theatre through its various activities. This was followed by a programme of theatre songs.

Condolences

The theatre world of Bengal has in the mean time lost two of its dedicated workers through untimely demise. STQ condoles the sudden and unexpected death of Bhaskar Ghosh, founder member and president of Alternative Living Theatre, Khardah, and of Dr Arundhati Banerjee,theatre scholar and actress associated with Theatron,a well-known group of Calcutta. Their contribution to the theatre scene in Bengal will be sincerely missed.

Special STQ issue

Theatre in Manipur

Not much is known about theatre in Manipur outside the state. STQ, in close collaboration with Manipuri theatre experts, scholars, writers and
theatre practitioners, has been planning and working towards a special issue on this subject for over a year. Several trips, hours of interviews, and special photographic documentation have resulted in a rich collection of original and archival material which is bound to be of interest to anyone interested in performance and theatre, as well as those whose areas of interest are cultural anthropology, cultural history or gender studies, since a major focus has been the role and contribution of women to the various aspects of Manipuri theatre and performance.

Some of the personalities represented in the issue will include G. C. Tongbra, Maharajkumari Binodini Devi, Nilkanta Singh, Somorendra Arambam, Ratan Thiyam, S. Ebotombi, H. Kanhailal, Sabitri, Lokendra Arambam, senior actresses of the professional proscenium theatre, young actresses and directors of the contemporary experimental theatre, and several Manipuri writers and scholars.

The special issue will be published in March 1997. It will contain approximately 120 pages and will be priced at Rs 50 per copy inclusive of mailing. Regular STQ subscribers can book their

copy at a subscribers discounted price of Rs 35 per copy inclusive of mailing. This pre-publication offer is open to current subscribers till 31 January 1997.