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8-15 March

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South Asian Women's Theatre Festival

2010



INDIAN COUNCIL FOR
CULTURAL RELATIONS



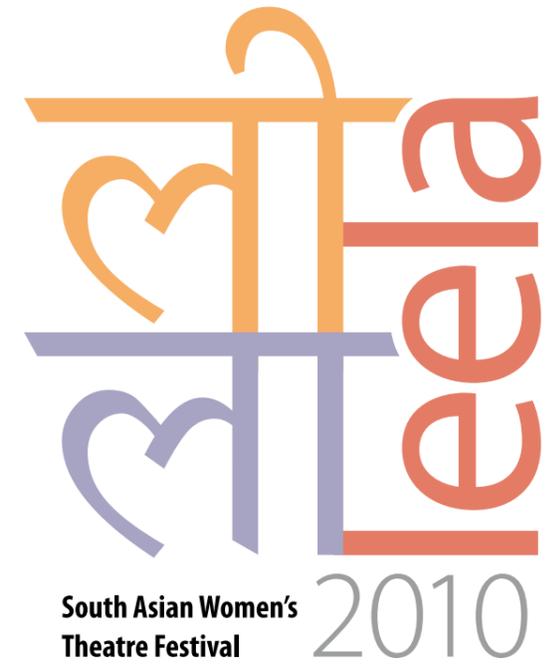
राष्ट्रीय नाट्य विद्यालय
NATIONAL SCHOOL OF DRAMA



JAMIA MILLIA ISLAMIA
UNIVERSITY



संगीत नाटक अकादेमी
Sangeet Natak Akademi
National Academy of Music, Dance & Drama



Inauguration

on Monday, 8 March 2010, 5.30 pm

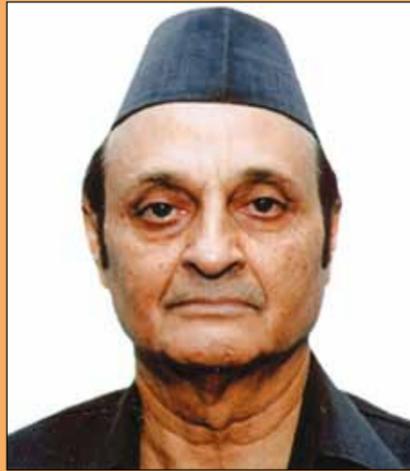
Kamani Auditorium, New Delhi

by Dr. Karan Singh, Chairperson, Indian Council for Cultural Relations
and H. Sabitri, celebrated theatre actor, Kalakshetra Manipur

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I am delighted that the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is organizing the first ever South Asian Women's Theatre Festival, in collaboration with the National School of Drama and Jamia Millia Islamia from March 8-15, 2010 in New Delhi.

The South Asian Women's Theatre Festival is a unique concept, as it focuses exclusively on women's issues and will bring together talented theatre groups from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. In addition to the 8 theatre groups from South Asian countries, we are also presenting 6 theatre groups from different parts of India who will present diverse theatre performances. I am also happy that Mini Theatre Festivals are being organized in Kolkata and Mumbai, following the event in New Delhi, which will combine foreign theatre troupes with local talent.

South Asia has a rich history of theatre, which has been facing challenges due to the overwhelming presence of films and electronic media. We need to strengthen the rich heritage of theatre in the entire South Asian region, and I am confident that this Festival will be a catalyst in encouraging and sustaining the theatre movement across the sub-continent.

Dr. Karan Singh
President
Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR)



A festival where women theatre artists showcase their work should, without hesitation, become a regular calendar event. The international women's movement goes back more than a hundred years in the West, but it is only recently that women from countries of Southeast Asia and the Arab world have begun to tell their stories from perspectives that are as startling and disturbing, as they are 'real'.

In a country that has idolized and deified the woman, as well as castigated her, we are recipients of a complex and ambivalent legacy vis-a-vis the second sex. The image of women has by and large, in all the arts, been generated and governed by men, by patriarchal norms – which is not to deny that those very norms, mainly concerning morality, have often been zealously upheld and supported by women themselves, making the task of dismantling traditional ways of viewing women an extremely stressful undertaking for those early women's liberationists.

Gender discourse in India has run parallel to the instance of an increasing number of women entering public life and laying claim to areas often considered the bastion of men. Even in soft areas, earlier considered non-contentious, such as acting, writing or painting, we begin to trace, from the nineteenth century onwards especially, a new iconography of women being calibrated by women themselves. With increasing urgency women artists seek to liberate themselves from agendas of any kind, returning to the till now marginalized self, as the area of exploration.

Much of women's work is personal, intimate and locates itself on the contested site of the female body. The body/visage/image is opened up for scrutiny, but not subjectively . . . rather it is treated as an object to be dismantled. Wrestling her body from the purview of the 'male gaze', the woman reclaims her body and thus her identity. She substitutes the gaze of power and desire with her own. She observes herself, looks at herself, examines herself. She splits herself into two – the subject and the object – she becomes both subject and object.

In laying claim to herself, the woman begins constructing a new world, a new universe, a new image and identity of herself, as she sees it. She questions her own desire, her own sexuality. And for all this the woman of today seeks to create a new language of articulation – one which she feels to be more truthful, more unbiased. She creates in the theatre, a theatre of sensual experience – not of intellectual debate, not of issues. The woman reproduces the world as she experiences it.

Amal Allana
Chairperson
National School of Drama (NSD)

South Asian Women's Theatre Festival

2010



Jamia Millia Islamia is pleased to join hands with the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and the National School of Drama in presenting LEELA : SOUTH ASIAN WOMEN'S THEATRE FESTIVAL.

The idea of organising this Theatre Festival grew out of the deliberations and decisions of the Conference on "Women of South Asia : Partners in Development" that was held at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi in March 2009.

Theatre is a powerful and intense medium for creating awareness about sensitive socio-economic issues such as gender equity, the deprivations and difficulties faced by women from all communities and the need to mainstream their livelihood and development. South Asian countries from Afghanistan to Myanmar share cultural and social traditions which can help them learn from each other's experiences and best practices. This context gives the South Asian Women's Theatre Festival particular significance and relevance.

It is our hope that the plays from across South Asia presented in this Festival will be a combined cultural, aesthetic and learning experience for audiences in Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chandigarh.

Najeeb Jung
Vice-Chancellor

Jamia Millia Islamia

South Asian Women's
Theatre Festival

2010

Excerpt from

'Refusing Erasure of Differences in Representations of Contemporary Theatre in Bangladesh'

Syed Jamil Ahmed

Professor, Department of Theatre and Music, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh

Un-erased

Let us begin with the theatre of the Marmas (a tiny Buddhist Sino-Tibetan ethnic group with a population of 157,000), who live in the southeastern hills of Chittagong. Although Theravada Buddhist by faith, their religious practice exhibits strong influence of animism. The Marmas trace their descent to the Talaings of Pegu (capital of a united Burman kingdom from 1539 to 1599) and recount their recent history as one inscribed by a series of violent displacements from Pegu to their present habitat. . . .

. . . The most important genre of theatre popular among the Marmas is known as *Jyā*, which is quite similar to the *Zat Pwe* seen mostly in central and southern Myanmar. It is performed in Buddhist temple-precincts during religious celebrations and harvest ceremonies. The function of a popular *Jyā* performance, titled *Ālarī-nābāha* (literally, 'Five Candidates'), may be seen as an attempt to resolve a question of major importance that haunts the collective consciousness of the Marma community: living with bitter memories of past displacements and fearful of similar events in the future, who can claim to be a true follower of Dharma as proclaimed by the Buddha? *Ālarī-nābāha* probes into this question by presenting the life of Mañsañkhā, the charitable prince of Ānmāchhtempā, who helps his childhood friend Ui-riā, an affluent farmer of Ujuni, after the latter loses all his possessions in a forest fire. Years later, when Mañsañkhā is married and has a three-year-old son named Mau Chhai Pau, he sets sail for trade with his companion Thailiyā. Unfortunately, his ship capsizes but he manages to survive and reaches Ujuni. When he meets Ui-riā and seeks help, the latter forces Mañsañkhā to tend his herd of goats in exchange for food and binds him in a promise never to reveal his identity. In the meanwhile, Thailiyā, who survived the shipwreck as well, returns home and intimates Mañsañkhā's wife Mesāñkhā about the loss of the ship. She sets out in search of her husband with her child, but is trapped by Ui-riā who forcibly throws the child in a river and makes her live with him. The child is saved by the grace of the Buddha and grows up to be the king of Ānmāchhtempā. After many years, one day Mañsañkhā decides to escape when he hears that a new king has been enthroned. He recognizes the new king as his son Mau Chhai Pau who was rescued from the river by divine grace. Mañsañkhā cannot restrain himself from divulging his name to his son. Because he breaks his promise, he dies. Meanwhile, Mesāñkhā escapes from Ui-riā with Thailiyā's help and returns home only to find that her husband is dead. She dreams of Mañsañkhā, who promises to be reborn if she can perform meritorious acts. Mesāñkhā fulfils her husband's wishes by begging alms and then approaches the

new king for justice. In a moving scene, the mother is reunited with her son. Enraged at Ui-riā's atrocity, Mau Chhai Pau convenes the court of justice which finds Ui-riā guilty and has him hanged. Finally, Mañsañkhā is reborn and the family is happily reunited.

The subject-agents of *Ālarī-nābāha*, the five displaced candidates who represent five distinct categories of characters facing moral dilemmas, are all elite and patriarchal constructs. Mañsañkhā is the male subject who upholds his commitment to munificence even during displacement when he is forced by his friend to forsake his freedom. However, his righteousness is flawed for he fails to honour his promise that he will never reveal his identity. Ui-riā is another male subject who is rescued from his displacement by Mañsañkhā but fails to match his friend's benevolence when his benefactor is displaced. He even falls prey to desire for the displaced Mesāñkhā. Thailiyā does not fail like Ui-riā and helps Mesāñkhā to escape from captivity, but, when faced by possible displacement, forsakes his companion Mañsañkhā to save his own life. The king, who was rescued from his displacement by the Buddha, can mete out justice by reinstating the honour of his displaced mother but cannot bring back his father, doubly displaced by life and death. Mesāñkhā fulfils the role that patriarchy demands of her as a selfless mother and a virtuous wife, but on her own she can only fall prey to the greed of other males and needs male subjects to end displacement: Thailiyā to escape from violent conditions, Mau Chhai Pau to put an end to violence, and (most importantly) the Buddha to bring back her husband to life. With these subject-agents as examples, *Ālarī-nābāha* upholds the necessity of a righteous king to ensure the continuance of Buddhist ideals and urges the laity to have faith in Dharma in times of stress.

However, if the displaced condition of Mañsañkhā is seen as a paradigm of the Marma community — displaced from Pegu and then Arakan and then from the valleys of the Chittagong Hills after the implementation of the Karnaphuli Hydroelectric Project — then *Ālarī-nābāha* can be recognized as an aesthetic document of displaced conditioning. This document identifies Ui-riā as the treacherous host community (earlier in Arakan and now in Bangladesh) who exploit the displaced by turning the men into slaves and the women into objects of sexual desire. The displaced, under pain of death, is never to reveal his/her identity. S/he must live incognito till a Buddhist king who lives by the Dharma metes out justice by annulling the displaced condition. The yearning to return 'home' at the end of displacement is at the very core of *Ālarī-nābāha*. This yearning, which nurtures a resilient refusal to be assimilated by the dominant community, is muted but never erased. The Marmas remember — refuse to erase from

their communal memory – centuries of dispossession and displacement. They nurture the unspoken hope of returning ‘home’. Here lies their silent resistance.

From a tale of the royalty, we may now move to a tale of a divine couple performed by the Manipuris, another tiny ethnic community with a population of over 325,000 of predominantly Mongoloid descent. They were formerly residents of Manipur – once a sovereign kingdom that was annexed by the British colonizers in AD 1891 and later internally colonized by the Union of India in 1949. The Manipuri diaspora began to migrate to the territory today known as Bangladesh (as well as Assam and Tripura) in 1755, during a disastrous invasion of Manipur by the Burmese king Alaungpaya. The migration continued through subsequent political strife within the ruling dynasty and another Burmese invasion in 1769, and reached its peak during the ‘seven years’ devastation’ (1819–25), which began with yet another Burmese invasion and occupation of Manipur in 1819 and ended when the invaders were driven out with the help of British forces. The last major exodus occurred in 1891 after the war with the British colonizers, which ended in victory for the latter. Most of the Manipuris in Bangladesh are farmers and weavers by profession, and are settled in the northeastern region of Sylhet. The community is composed of three sub-groups: the Meitheids (of Mongoloid ancestry), the Bishnupriyas (of Aryan ancestry) and the Pangals (born of Meitie mothers and Muslim fathers). The former two sub-groups profess their religious faith in Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism and the latter, in Islam. Of the three sub-groups, the Bishnupriyas are the most numerous in Bangladesh (with an estimated population of 231,000), followed by the Meitheids (92,000).

The most important performance of the Manipuris (more precisely, the Bishnupriyas and the Meitheids) is the *Rās Nr̥tya*, held during the Vaiṣṇav-Hindu religious festival of Mahārās in exquisitely decorated pavilions in temple precincts. The most famous *Rās Nr̥tya* of the Mahārās festival in Bangladesh is performed in Madhabpur, where it has been presented annually since 1842. All the Bishnupriyas and the Meitheids participate in these performances as a matter of religious duty – as devotee-spectators, as voluntary performers or by participating in organizational affairs. The performance is based on the *līlā* (‘play’) of *rāsa*, i.e. the ‘circular dance’ of divine love between the supreme divinity Kṛṣṇa (an incarnation of Viṣṇu) and his divine cowherd-consorts (the *gopīs*). Although Kṛṣṇa dances in the centre with the supremely loving goddess Rādhā, every *gopī* experiences his exclusive attention. Except for Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, played by a pre-puberty girl and a boy, respectively, the remaining performers are all adult females and they perform as *gopīs*. They execute exquisitely graceful movements, intricate steps and delicate hand gestures to the lyrics sung by narrators, and instrumental music rendered by a group of musicians playing double-ended drums and cymbals. . . . One may read the performance as a validation of an important frame of reference of the Bishnupriyas and the Meitheids: that life is in effect a *līlā*, in which each devotee (as Rādhā) enjoys the exclusive attention of Kṛṣṇa, the Absolute, because the relation between the former (individual devotee) and the latter (the Absolute) is inconceivably dual yet non-dual (*dvaityādvaita*).

However, the representation of life as a *līlā* that *Rās Nr̥tya* projects with extraordinary esthetic eloquence is inscribed with a muted history of resistance and appropriation, which, if taken into account, locates the performance in an indeterminate zone of unresolved ‘meanings’. Let me explain how. In 1509, when the outstanding Bengali saint Chaitanya (1486–1533) initiated Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism, his objective was a two-pronged resistance against: (i) Brahmanism that made divinity inaccessible for the subaltern classes and reinforced dominance of the elite classes; and (ii) Islam that threatened to absorb the entire indigenous population in its fold with its egalitarian promises. The movement swept Bengal with unprecedented popular support by

preaching a simple yet inspiring faith that the *līlās* of Kṛṣṇa are collectively an expedient to achieving devotion (*bhakti*), and one can access the Divine in devotional ecstasy generated out of recollection and reflection of the *līlās*. Therefore, any performance of the *līlās* that succeeds in infusing the spectators with devotional sentiment culminating in beatific ecstasy is equivalent to ritualized worship of the deity. Appropriating the passionate and sensuous love-lore of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, which was (and still is) very popular in Bengal, Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism (re)presented the love-lore as the paradigm of the relationship between the human (as Rādhā) and the Divine (as Kṛṣṇa), and devised quite a few performances as a vehicle for generating ecstasy, equivalent to ritualized worship of Kṛṣṇa.

Although various brands of Vaiṣṇavism reached Manipur before the mid-eighteenth century, it was during the reign of King Ningthou Ching-Thang Khomba (Maharaja Bhagyachandra, reigned 1763–1798), that a preacher from Bengal named Premānanda Ṭhākūr made the deepest impact on the lives of the Manipuris by initiating the king, and then, through him, the entire Bishnupriya and the Meitie population, into Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism. It was a deft political move because the country had been torn by conflict between the Bishnupriyas and the Meitheids for the past half-century. . . . After fifty years of turbulence that saw patricide, struggle between rival princes and Burmese invasions, King Ningthou Ching-Thang Khomba succeeded where his ancestors had failed. During his exile in Assam after the Burmese invasion and occupation of Manipur in 1769, he dreamt of Kṛṣṇa in his *naṭabar beś* – wearing a beautiful dress and with a top-knot of peacock feathers on his head and a flute in his hand – and dancing the most exquisite of all dances. Kṛṣṇa told the king to make an image of him from the jackfruit grown in nearby hills and worship it. The dream haunted the king so thoroughly that in 1776, after the Burmese were driven out, he established a temple in honour of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa in his capital and became a wholehearted devotee of the divine couple. After three years, the king materialized his dream of Kṛṣṇa’s dance into a live performance of *Rās Nr̥tya* with the choicest performers of his land. It is said that in the maiden performance of *Rās Nr̥tya*, held on the 11th day of Hiyanggei (November) in 1779, he played the *mṛdanga* (a double-ended drum) and had his daughter perform the role of Rādhā.

Call it a dream if you will, and believe it or not – it matters little. For our purpose what matters is that *Rās Nr̥tya* won over both the Meitheids and the Bishnupriyas, both accepted Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism as their religion, and there was an unprecedented fusion of the two people. . . . For our purpose what further matters is, once we make visible – un-erase the erased history – it becomes immediately apparent that the notion of performance-as-resistance of the subaltern classes that Gaudiya Vaiṣṇavism devised in the sixteenth century, was appropriated by the elites of Manipur in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Consequently, the representation of life as a *līlā* that *Rās Nr̥tya* projects is actually resistance appropriated for hegemony.

The hegemony extends beyond the statecraft of Manipuri kingdom into the domain of patriarchy. By the manner that *Rās Nr̥tya* is conscious of, preoccupied with and overprotective of the female body – in veiling the face, in prohibiting any exchange of glance with the spectators, in portraying Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa with children – the performance makes an implicit puritanical statement. (You may laugh at my simile but for me, the costume of the dancers is an artistic recreation of the *burkhā*.) By absences and denials, by attempted erasures, the female body is undeniably foregrounded. It is as though silences speak, the erased stand prominently ‘under erasure’ and the love-lore of Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, represented as the paradigm of the relationship between the human and the Divine cannot be completely de-linked from the material reality. . . . In *Rās Nr̥tya*, sexuality operates by sublimation.

This concern was made vocal by a Manipuri teacher during my field visit to Kamalganj, when he asked me how I resolve divine love in terms of daily life. If Kṛṣṇa can engage with dalliance with numerous *gopīs*, how does one judge illicit relationships and extra-marital amorous frolicking? I gave the scholarly answer, which I think you too are ready to offer: Kṛṣṇa and Rādhā are divine lovers who operate at a religious and metaphysical plane, and have nothing to do with earthly amoral lovers. But you and I do not live in a far-flung Manipuri village. As ‘ethnic minorities’, they stand under constant gaze and threat from their Muslim neighbours. And as we know of Islamic zealots, when enthused with the *zihadi* spirit of appropriating a piece of land or a woman (which is same to them – as property), nothing on earth can bar their way. As I was told later, among the ‘volunteers’ who join in to help the celebration of Mahārās, there are quite a few young men who stand guard to resist those of their neighbours who mix up the earthly and divine brands of love.

The performance of the *Rās Nr̥tya* today is inscribed both with a history of population movement from Manipur and concomitant diasporic attachment. Embedded in it is a communal remembering of a ‘home’ that they yearn for but will never go back to. Performing *Rās Nr̥tya* at Kamalganj since 1842 is a public statement declaring the Manipuri identity that refuses to be absorbed by the surrounding human milieu. Considering the fact that the performance explicitly disavows the Islamic worldview in a country that has known quite a few attacks by Islamic zealots, it is an act of resistance to make the performance happen each year. And here I add that the resistance may be of the Meitheids and the Bishnupriyas, perhaps not of the Pangals. . . .

. . . From a web of constructed meanings around a divine pair that the Manipuri community created, I will now lead you to a ‘politically correct’ representation of the Santals that a performance created by the dominant community gets trapped into, and contrast it with another performance that the Santals have created themselves. Descendants of the Austric-speaking Proto-Australoid race and animists by faith, the Santals are one of the oldest and largest ethnic communities in South Asia, but a people fragmented by political boundaries that demarcate the nation-states of India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and Mauritius. . . . Only a small segment of 202,162 reside in Bangladesh and 600,000 in the rest of the three countries mentioned above. . . . At present, the Santals in Bangladesh live mostly in rural areas of Rajshahi and Dinajpur regions. They were mostly farmers by profession, but social and economic exploitation by the dominant Bengali community has resulted in extensive landlessness among them. Consequently, the majority of the Santals today earn their livelihood as wage-labourers. Land encroachment, rape, murder and police brutality have become almost common incidents in the Santal areas. . . .

. . . *Jāher* is an important performance of the community that is held around a small pavilion during Santal festivals and rituals. The performance is based on the Santal myth of origin summed up as follows. In the beginning the entire earth was covered with water and in it lived the Crab, the Earthworm, the Tortoise, the Crocodile, the Sheat Fish and the Lobster. Desirous of creating humans, Jiu the Creator shaped a pair of human forms with earth but before he could give life, the sinister horse Sansadom destroyed them. Jiu was grief-stricken and so he created a drake and a duck instead. The pair floated over water and finally grew tired. So they requested Jiu to create a resting-place. He asked the Crocodile to fetch earth from under the water. The latter attempted, but before it could carry it above, all the earth dissolved in the water. Then Jiu asked the Crab and the Sheat fish, but they too failed. Finally he sent the Earthworm. The latter agreed but requested Jiu to ask the Tortoise to stay afloat above the water. The Tortoise complied and then the Earthworm anchored its end on the back of the Tortoise and descended to the bottom. There it ate the earth through its mouth

and excreted it on the back of the Tortoise. Soon, the excreted earth accumulated into a landmass. In order to coalesce the earth, Jiu planted grass and trees. The duck laid an egg and the drake went in search of food. After nine months and five days, the egg began to move, and after five more days, a man and a woman emerged from the egg. They were Pilchu Hādām (man) and Pilchu Budi (woman) – the first pair of humans on this earth.

The Santal frame of reference projected through the performance of their myth of creation disavows omnipotence of the Creator, and insists that creation is a social act where even the most insignificant needs to contribute actively. There are no heroics in the tale, no god who steals fire; instead, an unobtrusive insistence that the violence of sinister beings (such as Sansadom) can be resisted by insignificant creatures (such as the Earthworm) simply by contributing inconspicuously to the process of creation – and in spite of violence. The Santal performance reiterates Rosalind O’Hanlon’s rejection of the notion that ‘resistance itself should necessarily take the virile form of a deliberate and violent onslaught.’¹ . . . The Santal myth of creation articulates ‘resistance of a different kind: dispersed in the fields we do not conventionally associate with the political; residing . . . sometimes in what looks like cultural difference.’² By erasing it from our narrative of the contemporary theatre, we erase a difference – of the Santal representation of resistance made by the Santals.

¹ Rosalind O’Hanlon, ‘Histories of Resistance in Colonial South Asia’, in *Mapping Subaltern Studies and the Postcolonial*, edited and introduced by Vinayak Chaturvedi, Verso, London, 2000, p. 110.
² Ibid.

Excerpt from

‘Indian Theatre Today’

Kirti Jain

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Today’s market economy has thrown up a different kind of theatre – a theatre that has to be conformist, gimmicky and performed in a language able to attract the elite. Therefore English theatre, which had been relegated to the background in the 1950s by the language theatres, has made a resurgence in the metros with supper theatre, bedroom farces and extravaganzas backed by big sponsors. Unfortunately serious English theatre, like the serious language theatre, does not have much support either. So only populism prevails – whether it be the soaps on TV, or the sex and violence-ridden formula films, or fashion shows and the like. It seems that the audience no longer has the time or patience to sit through a theatre performance that is in a quieter, introspective mode. Nor do actors find it viable to spend two months in rehearsal for a play when they get paid handsomely by the day for television serials.

Theatre is a medium of debate, of ideas, of thought. In today’s scenario – where politically and socially normal norms are no longer operative, where all established values and moral codes are in question, where desire for money and more money governs the pace of life – what could be the relevance of any debate, of sharing finer emotions and experiences? And at a time of unabashed political manoeuvring all round, does a quiet protest through theatre have any role to play? . . .

. . . Do we then conclude that theatre as an expression of the hopes, aspirations and anxieties of the people, is on the verge of extinction? Is it of no value to the community at large? While most of us in theatre do face this anxiety every now and then, there is no denying the fact that over the centuries, theatre has faced many threats to its existence but has repeatedly succeeded in recovering from these with readjustments and emerging stronger. As a live form of art where performers and audiences engage in a dialogue, as a shared experience, there is nothing that can replace it. It seems that the need for it will remain – in however modified a form.

The Indian theatre tradition dates back more than two millennia with a distinguished and unique treatise on theatre practice like the *Natyashastra* as testimony to the sophistication of the tradition even at that time. With the collapse of royal patronage, Sanskrit theatre died out, only to reappear in myriad vibrant traditional forms with rich local coloring, community participation and a live relationship with its audience. Then emerged the urban theatre powered by newly acquired knowledge and exposure to the Western or British theatre traditions, and spread all over the country in the form of company theatre. With the coming of the talkies, once again Indian theatre faced the threat of extinction and company theatre received a serious setback, but theatre reasserted itself and we saw a flourishing group theatre movement in the 1960s and 70s which was more meaningful, artistic and exploratory. The current onslaught is that of globalization, the market economy and the media boom, which have certainly dampened spirits temporarily, but one can already see the theatre community trying to cope with these challenges creatively. In an otherwise seemingly bleak scenario, increased audiences for well publicized theatre is also a reason for cheer.

Today, the challenges posed by the media are being met by the creation of alternative theatrical languages. The threat created by globalization and predominance of the market is being quietly fought by more intimate and community-based theatre, and the problem of non-availability of good dramatic texts is being countered by the creation of new and unconventional texts through alternate sources. I am sure the other Asian countries are meeting the present-day challenges in a similar manner.

Indian theatre would have a lot of commonalities with Asian theatre, or, let us say, with theatre all over Asia. In the contemporary theatres of these countries, the differences would be in the details and the specific history and processes that have governed a country. The entire region has faced colonization or occupations which have impacted on the histories of its arts. The differences could also be in the varying levels of technological sophistication in various countries. But in the essentials they would be very similar. The commonalities would have to do with the Asian worldview as distinct from the Western worldview. The entire Asian region has the advantage of living traditional forms that provide continuity with the past. It is the constant interaction with our traditional forms that allows for a fresh look at our work today, when we are cut off from our roots due to rapid urbanization and industrialization. As an example I would like to point out that in India’s dramatic literature and theatre there are numerous examples of man’s interaction with nature at an equal level. This dialogue with nature includes the trees, flowers, animals, and birds where each is party to the other’s sorrows and pleasures. In today’s world when man is unthinkingly exploiting and trying to control nature for his own gains, not concerned with the environmental impact in the long run, this looking back would be of great significance.

All Asian traditions have also been very inclusive of all modes of creative expression – like music, dance, the fine arts, literature, mime, acrobatics, etc. – probably what is termed Total Theatre by western critics. To this is linked the fact that the Asian tradition has been largely performative, with a focus on the performer rather than on the written word. This probably explains why these traditions continue to replay the same stories over the centuries and hold the same attraction for the audience. For the attraction is in the ‘how’ of the performance rather than in the ‘what’ and ‘why’. Since many of these performances are largely improvisational in nature, each artist is able to bring his/her own special skills, understanding, sensibility and imagination to the performance. Most of the Asian forms are presentational in nature and do not attempt to imitate reality but to present reality. This allows for a unique theatricality and a direct relationship to the audience. Since the actors/performers are closely linked to the society where their plays are performed, they are able to bring in topical resonances either through comments or through performance, creating a special bond with the audience.

In my view, traditionally, theatre language has not just been a method to communicate a concern but has had an independent space and meaning – which means that theatre aesthetics has been as important a part of the experience as the story. This would be as true of the Beijing Opera of China as of Noh Theatre in Japan and Kutiyattam in Kerala. The *Natya Shastra* underlines *rasa* as the primary experience that a performance is meant to generate. While this is a very complex concept, very simply put, it refers to the experience of the spectator due to the beauty of portrayal of a particular emotion or emotions by the performer. So, here is a slight shift in emphasis from the emotion itself to its portrayal. Therefore the responsibility of the performer is paramount, in that he has to master his art so that he is able to portray even an emotion of disgust such that it creates *ananda* (joy) in the spectator. The beauty alluded to here clearly does not refer to decoration but to truth and depth, which reach out as a rich aesthetic experience to the spectator. All the Asian forms are thus a celebration of the actor/performer and place him centrestage.

Contemporary theatre in this entire region began as western-influenced, word-oriented theatre meant for the industrial middle class, and it has undertaken different journeys till the present day so that there is a simultaneous existence of several schools of theatre including the realistic, absurd and expressionistic. The earlier phase witnessed the creation of a large body of very exciting dramatic texts that dealt with themes like the meaning of life, the search for perfection, the meaninglessness of war, the conflict between the material and the spiritual, between the individual and society, etc. While the structures were largely influenced by Western dramaturgy, they were completely internalized and communicated the concerns of India of that time with absolute truth and immediacy. What was important was the fact that this happened at a pan-Indian level creating an unprecedented excitement and confidence. The theatre practice matched this with fitting creativity and energy.

In the 1970s and 80s the indigenous tradition asserted itself and integrated with the modern Western sensibility to create spectacular theatre with a rich and textured theatre language. At the level of content, there was a deep exploration of myths and folk tales to reinterpret them for our times. Several playwrights wrote plays that integrated the modern and the traditional in both content and form to provide texts that opened up innumerable possibilities. Vijay Tendulkar’s *Ghasiram Kotwal* and Girish Karnad’s *Hayavadana* were the most significant examples of this effort and in a way set a trend for future experimentation in this direction. But it must be pointed out that the initiative for this fusion of the modern and the traditional actually came from the directors. As early as the 1950s and 60s Habib Tanvir, Shombhu Mitra and Shanta Gandhi were experimenting with tradition to make topical comments, and each of them discovered a distinct style and approach to do this. This was continued later by several other directors in the field. B.V. Karanth seemed the most creative of the directors of this genre, as his work was always an eclectic and wild mix of the traditional, the urban, the popular and the experimental. While his work did have his characteristic signature both as director and music director, the language of his work was never fixed and varied according to the text he picked up.

The scene is therefore full of vigorous experimentation, creating very exciting theatre where each individual is responding to the influences around him, as also with the problem of identity, in different ways, thereby creating his/her own brand of theatre. Theatre has traversed a long journey to arrive at a maturity where all the influences exist in the subconscious, and a rich and varied theatre is being created by artists with their unique personal visions.

One crisis the world over is that of a shortage of good dramatic texts. This is probably so because the society is changing at a very fast pace and therefore does not allow the time and aesthetic distance to respond to a topical reality. By the time one responds to an issue the reality has already changed. The problem of shortage of good plays dealing with topical concerns is being handled by dramatizing stories, novels, poetry and letters by established literary figures, as also evolving scripts through improvisation. Whether it is Amal Allana attempting magical realism in her production based on Marquez’s story (*Erendira*), B. Jayashree examining the character of Manthara, Shaoli Mitra exploring the morality of the treatment meted out to Draupadi, Usha Ganguli dramatizing *Rudali*, or Naseeruddin Shah presenting the stories of Manto, these are all creative extensions of earlier experimentation in this direction by many directors in almost all the regions. What is comparatively new is a large body of productions that are based on unconventional text-sources – like fiction, poetry, biography and autobiography, field research, interviews, essays, etc. These are emerging from individual concerns which probably the existing dramatic texts do not address. For example, we have Anamika Haksar’s *Raj Darpan* based on the history of the Dramatic Performances Act, Anuradha Kapur’s *Sundari* based on the autobiography of the legendary Gujarati actor who played female roles, Waman Kendre’s *Jaan-e-man* based on the lives of eunuchs, Mohan Maharishi’s *Einstein* trying to find a dramatic language to talk about science, or my own production *Aur Kitne Tukre* based on interviews with survivors of the Partition. Probably such unconventional texts also push the directors to search for a new theatre language that can deal with these genres. All these contribute to extending the boundaries of theatre.

A major challenge is that of form – where theatre has to develop a language distinctly different from that of cinema or TV, it has to draw on sources that point to its unique strength. And there is already a vast range of experiments in many regions towards the creation of a culture-specific language for theatrical expression, as mentioned above. Further enrichment is sought by interaction with various arts like dance, painting and music, as also multimedia, to explore different dimensions of theatre language: the work of Anuradha Kapur where she sets up active collaboration with visual artists; Veenapani Chawla who works with an actor trained in the martial arts of Kerala and other dance forms; Maya Rao, a trained Kathakali dancer, picking up contemporary themes as an actress; and young directors like Abhilash Pillai who take bold strides by creating a complex network of multimedia, dance and narrative forms to create an extremely layered and rich performance. And then there are several dancers moving towards dance theatre, just as there are visual artists who are taking a step towards theatrical presentation with installations. We have seen some very fine productions which have resulted from these various attempts.

In this context, it is interesting to note that several Asian collaborations are being set up that further explore what we share in terms of our legacy and culture, and what defines our identity as distinct from each other. This opens up new directions and areas of exploration. I feel that such cross-cultural collaborations work well in music, dance and the fine arts, particularly when there is one-to-one interaction. It does not seem to reach much depth in theatre in most cases. This might be so, firstly, because theatre is a collective exercise and it is not easy to focus the area of search with too many people involved. Secondly, theatre involves several arts and any worthwhile collaboration would open up all these areas and demand in-depth work on all these fronts for the process to reveal new dimensions. For instance, the moment you start dealing with the words in a text to examine their context in different cultures, it will take you towards the actor’s body and the sounds of the culture, along with the distinct visual connotations. But to deal with all these areas needs a lot of time, and invariably groups are not able to work together for long periods of time. Collaborations in theatre therefore need to be thought through more carefully for them to yield new insights.

Yet another emerging trend is of solo shows by actors. Theatre is essentially a collective form or has evolved as one, even though traditionally one is aware of one-man performances in the form of ballad singing, or the Greek plays that had only one thespian. In recent times many directors and actors have taken to solo performances. These have worked or are meaningful as and when they are driven by an internal need to say something specific through this format, or by a desire to explore this format. But these raise questions when they are resorted to as a practical solution to the non-availability of time, actors and money. Nevertheless, one must reiterate that some exciting work has emerged in this format lately and it has become an independent space for the actor to say what s/he wants to say and how s/he wants to say.

In all the work that is happening the most promising and strong voice that is emerging is that of the marginalized groups of society, like women and dalits. Having been exploited and subjugated and denied public space for centuries, they are now coming forward with courage and confidence to state their point of view. As marginalized groups their theatre often has a strong political bias – a protest against inequality, which gives it a special edge. The dalit writing and women’s productions are quietly but definitely asserting a different aesthetics and approach. There are distinctly different concerns emerging in their productions – presentation in modes that are at variance with the established ones. Their work has great promise as they are providing an alternative viewpoint; they are creating a new idiom that stems from their own perception and way of looking at life. In a globalized world where individual and group identity is a matter of great concern and where postmodernism recognizes the importance of alternative narratives, these narratives are likely to occupy centrestage for some time to come. They will take centrestage for the simple reason that they have a lot to say and, being new entrants, they want to say it with a passion that makes their work exciting.

Excerpt from

'Reassembling the Modern: An Indian Theatre Map since Independence'

Anuradha Kapur

Director, National School of Drama, New Delhi, India

In the 1990s some very challenging work has been done by women directors as they have shifted the debate towards new forms, and towards new subjectivities. Though their productions are very different, a broad trajectory unites them: their bringing the question of gender on the stage, which has remained almost unaddressed in modern performance. This body of work presents two things: it considers as its *subject* a sort of experience that may have been for the most part invisible till now; and then visibilizes this experience in ways that displace some of the narrative strategies currently in use. Parenthetically, I must add that I see the articulation of such experience as not being attempted by women alone; but here I shall look at the work of women theatre practitioners working mainly in Hindi.¹

What does attempting to put a gendered language in theatre imply? Are different narratives, stories and characters sought to be produced? Are there altogether different ways of structuring event, life scripts and plot? Does that entail another way of manipulating experiential time and space, and therefore temporality, and therefore sequentiality?

Women practitioners have experimented with the process and form of dramatic writing on the one hand, and with the processes of directing or *constructing* a play on the other, and have put in place a revised set of authorial and professional relationships. For one thing, new dramatic structures that stress collective and cooperative working processes by giving precedence to *performance* rather than to the *playscript* have come into circulation. This has adjusted the perspective on both writing and on performing.

It is possible to argue that event, plot and character shade into each other, at least in theatre. And while it is self-evident that this is relevant to theatre made by men and women alike, I bring this into discussion here as all the three coordinates have engaged women practitioners one way or another.

A sequence of events is plot; provided we consider plot not just as a simple journey from one event to another: for an event can be such that it can come to pass in mental space, or it can occur in physical, material space. All events, even mental ones, are physicalized on stage, as happenings. On stage, action is only action if it is visible or physical. This physicalization takes place largely on the actor's body (which stands in, as it were, for the character's body) and through the *mise-en-scene*. If events are plotted in space (and time), as well as on the character's body, then there is no easy way to separate event from character (for the character is the carrier of event) and character from plot.

Recent work by women has sought to re-estimate the nature and meaning of 'event', that life-altering unit of time, by configuring event as related to character and not entirely to heroic action. Events may be fragmented into a series of *moments*. And these moments may not *appear* to be life-changing but may still be so; they may not appear to make ostentatious or grand revisions to our existence and yet initiate death, departure, deception and atonement. During the space of a meal or a song, during a glance held or a morsel swallowed, people may 'die', make liaisons, decide on a new

life, betray their beloveds. Because inner lives veer, falter, expand and contract, an entire story may begin and end in a simple everyday action. So while, on the one hand, there may be no 'event' to speak of, several life-changing decisions may have altered the perceptual maps of the characters.

These seemingly timid or faint manoeuvres might also be designated indirect action, where an exceptionally transfiguring moment is not conspicuous on stage. To map these loops and breaks, these meanderings and these faultlines, the plot has to be made in such a way that its joineries are kept loose to allow deflection. To rework the meaning of *development* in character as in plot — which is usually understood as being a chain of events notching one into another in a directional way, and direction as being secured to the conventional pillars of storytelling (that of beginning, middle and end) — traditional plot devices and even dependence on dialogic communication requires questioning. The plot/character configuration needs to transit towards a new set of subjectivities in order to unsettle expected portrayals. Changes in the way of drawing character result in redrawing the parameters of plot.

Consequently, in some women's theatrework plot is frequently circular and refuses resolution: character can change status, personality and even gender, crossing society's artificially maintained boundaries of roles and station; objects can induce relationships, and imaginary landscapes produce tangible attachments (as in the work of Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry and Anamika Haksar).

Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, who works in Chandigarh, runs a company of about twelve actors. They are both urban and non-urban performers. The non-urban performers are called *Naqqals*, female impersonators who sing, dance and do stand-up comedy, mimicry and balladeering. Other actors in her company have grown up in cities and have obtained a modern education, in drama schools or universities. By putting such a company together, Neelam Man Singh manages to construct before our very eyes, folk traditions in collision (and therefore in transformation) — with the 'contemporary' in Indian theatre, with contemporary Indian 'bodies'. Such collisions make 'tradition' unstable and the audience is forced to rethink it. Because Neelam puts female impersonators side by side with urban actresses, today's women so to speak, she also destabilizes gender representations.

In some senses, there is a reluctance in Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry to pin down women to any readymade interpretation; in her productions of *Yerma*,² *Madwoman*³ and *Fida*,⁴ there is an excess — costume, gesture, speech and temperament break the bounds of the permissible and expand by theatrical invention into eloquent melodrama, passion and agitation — that allows for a generosity of character. Neelam's theatricalization of *Yerma's* desire is an example. *Yerma* sings and laments, expressing her yearning for a child; while *Yerma* tosses on the ground, a rope, strung between two twigs held in the hands of two female impersonators, is set alight above her head; the female impersonators stay impassive and stolid, as if made of stone; the fire eats up the rope and a tracery of ash crumbles on to *Yerma*. The ash, the song, the longing,

bracketed between two chimerical women, unsettle many assumptions — about corporeal and illusory women (and men), about love, desire and bonding.

Destabilizing or deconstructing gender norms has been a concern in Amal Allana's work as well. Amal Allana, who works in Delhi, seeks to make gender mobile, as it were, by disturbing stereotypes. This she does by shifting and restructuring the elements of gender in her production of *Himmat Mai*,⁵ for example, where she cast the distinguished actor Manohar Singh in the part of Mother Courage/Himmat Mai. By making this exceptional casting she reallocated the attributes of femininity and masculinity — passivity, patience, nurturing, sympathy, on the one hand; aggression, courage, bravery, single-mindedness and authority, on the other — from a woman's 'role' to a man's 'body' and *vice versa*, and thus redefined them.

My work too has been concerned with upsetting sexual and gender hierarchies. Two projects that dovetailed into each other examined cross-dressing and, by allusion, androgyny. The first performance was a one-woman show along with an installation that was based on a Bertolt Brecht story, *The Job*.⁶ *The Job* is about a woman who takes over her dead husband's post, which is that of a night-watchman in a factory, and impersonates him for four years to keep her children from starving. She wins high praise for her courage and loyalty, and then, because of an accident in the factory, she is discovered to be a woman. No amount of pleading, legal or otherwise, gets her the job back. It is given to those who have 'male' stamped on their papers.

This play attempted to look at the repercussions of a woman becoming a man; its dangers and its transgressions, and, in the context of the story, its disastrous consequences. For me it was especially important to consider this subversive masquerade as the reverse, or the negative, of the concept of female impersonation, as female impersonation continues to exist in India as an honoured tradition.⁷

*Sundari: An Actor Prepares*⁸ is a performance based on the autobiography of the celebrated female impersonator, Jaishankar Sundari, who performed all over India between 1901 and 1931.⁹ Sundari became the rage of Bombay — enormously popular especially with women, for whom he became a sort of model, setting the style for everything from dress to deportment. The performance sought to investigate the enigmatic presence of the man-woman figure in the theatre, and the cross-gender fascination it has characteristically conjured in audiences. Even though the premise of female impersonation almost always rests on the idea of an essential femininity, its performance sought to emphasize that gender is actually constructed in practice, and that it is in fact encoded in demeanour, costume, manner and convention.

Consistently concerned with finding unorthodox expressive structures within the theatre, Anamika Haksar's work does not play by any standard rules of storytelling — her narratives are non-linear and non-convergent, often circular; they are baggy and meandering, not tight and conclusive. By making room for interjections, lapses in concentration and changes in direction, Anamika Haksar makes a formal subversion, as it were, and plots an unusually generous narrative, encompassing stylization and naturalism, inner and outer realities, material and spiritual worlds. *Antar Yatra*,¹⁰ a production she directed in the mid-1990s, is profoundly affected by the structure of the playing space, which was a constructed circular tent opening into a 70-foot deep field. The lives of her epic characters unfold, expand and take in the wide field, which then gets translated into becoming their mental prospect, their dreamscape. Desire, thought and longing are made visible, *manifest*, in this vast expanse, and simultaneously made contingent, *conditional*, on atmosphere and on topography.

This distribution of the attributes of the self into landscape, objects, scenery and props makes character *ephemeral* as it were, and breaks up the notion of the unified individual. It puts to question among other things, the notion of characterization itself. It foregrounds the provisionality of life scripts, which are frequently full of contradictions that are hard to resolve into any coherent representation.

In conclusion, theatre made by women directors of the 1990s attempts to undo the sutures that might have been put in place to hold together the idea of a composite Indian identity. The figural paradox of the female impersonator stages the questions of gender and identity — essences are undone through performance. The feminine then becomes a masquerade, a staging, one of many possible guises. The impermanence of such masquerades is stressed and, as a consequence, character itself becomes porous,

permeable, not yielding and predetermined. By making fragility central to structure and plot, these productions raise some crucial questions about re-historicizing narrative in ways that can animate the problematic of gender and subjectivity, of identity and Indianness, and manoeuvre the razor's edge between the 'traditional' and the 'modern' for our time.

¹For a more detailed reading of 'feminist' theatre practice in India, see Anuradha Kapur, 'A Wandering Word, an Unstable Subject', *TheatreIndia*, No. 3, May 2001, pp. 5–12.

²After Lorca's play. The production was made and extensively performed in the early 1990s.

³An adaptation of *Madwoman of Chailor* by Jean Giraudoux, produced and performed in the 1990s.

⁴Based on Racine's *Phaedra*, performed in the late 1990s.

⁵An adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*, *Himmat Mai* was produced in the early 1990s.

⁶Based on Bertolt Brecht's story 'The Job', the play was produced in the mid-1990s. It had an installation and video animation by the artist Nalini Malani, and was translated into Hindi by Atul Tiwari. See Bertolt Brecht, *Collected Stories*, edited and introduced by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, Methuen, London, 1983, 1999. Also Bertolt Brecht [1933], *Der Arbeitsplatz oder Im Schweisse Deines Angesichts sollst Du kein Brot essen*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt am Main, 1997.

⁷Female impersonation has a long and varied history in India. Among the traditional theatre forms that employ female impersonation are Krishnattam, Ramlila, Raslila, Yakshagana, Therukuttu, Bhavai, Jatra. These forms are principally devoted to enacting epic and mythological materials. Women were disallowed from the stage all the way till the late nineteenth century, and when they come into the theatre, as also into cinema, in the twentieth century, they were usually courtesans; but notwithstanding the stigma connected to acting, singing and dancing, there was an overlap between female impersonators and actresses. The smaller, walk-on parts were reserved for women and the more complicated characters, for female impersonators, some of whom achieved unrivalled success, such as Jaishankar Sundari (1889–1975) and Bai Gandharva (1888–1967).

⁸*Sundari: An Actor Prepares* was produced in the late 1990s. The design was by artists Bhupen Khakhar and Nilima Sheikh, the music design was by Vidya Rao, and the dramatization was by Geetanjali Shree and Dinesh Khanna.

⁹Sundari's autobiography was in part written and in part dictated by Sundari to his son, Dinkar Bhojak. Jaishankar Sundari / Dinkar Bhojak, *Thoda Ansu Thoda Ful*, Shivji Asher, Vora & Co., Ahmedabad, 1976; recently translated into Hindi by Dinesh Khanna as *Thode Ansu Thode Phul*, National School of Drama, Delhi, 2002.

¹⁰*Antar Yatra* was based on Ilanko Atikal's *Cilappatikaram* (*The Jewelled Anklet*), traditionally believed to have been composed in fifth century AD.



Monday, 8 March 2010, 5.30 pm
 following the inauguration of the Festival
 Kamani Auditorium, Delhi

NEW DELHI, INDIA

Nati Binodini

Hindi (supertitles in English), 100 minutes (no intermission)
 Based on the actress Binodini's autobiography, *Aamaar Katha*

Director: **Amal Allana**

Group: **Theatre & Television Associates**

CAST AND CREDITS

Binodini	Salima Raza, Swaroopa Ghosh, Natasha Rastogi, Sonam Kalra, Amita Ailawadi
Girish Ghosh	Jayanta Das
A Babu	Vijay Kashyap
Scenography & Lighting	Nissar Allana
Costumes	Amal Allana / Urvashi Bhargava
Music	Devajit Bandyopadhyay
Songs Engineering & Sound Design	Kabir Singh
Music Execution	Divya Malhotra
Choreography	Preeti Vasudevan
Production	Sukhanshu Chatterjee
Set Construction	Prem Chand
Lighting Assistant	Lal Sahab Mishra
Properties	Kamal
Supertitles	Amita Rana
Director	Amal Allana

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THE DIRECTOR

Amal Allana is currently Chairperson of the National School of Drama, New Delhi, Head of Acting at The Dramatic Art & Design Academy and Artistic Director of Theatre & Television Associates, New Delhi. She is a graduate of the National School of Drama and did a two-year apprenticeship at the Berliner Ensemble and other theatres in Germany. She has directed over 55 plays for the stage, several plays and serials for television, designed costumes for stage and film, curated exhibitions, researched and written on theatre, and engaged in various other related activities. Alongside, she has continuously taught theatre direction at prestigious institutions.

Among her recent productions for the stage are: *Erendira & Her Heartless Grandmother* (based on a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez); *Nati Binodini* (based on the autobiography of the nineteenth-century stage actress, Binodini); *Metropolis* (based on Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*, and set in Mumbai during 26/11).

THE PLAY

Nati Binodini is based on the autobiography of the actress Binodini, *Aamaar Katha* – a remarkable document as it is one of the earliest such accounts by an Indian woman, which describes her coming into public life and having the courage to assert her independence and identity. A prostitute by birth, Binodini was among the first women actors to walk the boards of the public stage in Calcutta, rising to become one of its most successful stars. Staunchly opposed by a class and caste-ridden society that was unable to tolerate a 'polluted' woman donning the garb of either *devi*/goddess or brahmin royalty on stage, Binodini was hailed and castigated in turn, making hers a dramatic and complex life, full of highs and lows.

THE PRODUCTION

Vacillating between images of herself as a 'saint' and 'sinner', the production is conceived of as a series of moments of Binodini's performances and events of her life. As an older Binodini recalls her past in the process of committing it to her diary, her memories collapse one upon another, entangling her life and art, and making them inseparable in her consciousness.

What is memory? Fragments of incidents, snatches of music, emotions re-lived. The idea of *fragmentation*, then, has guided the director of the play to piece together the life of Binodini in a form of presentation that is liquid and sensory. Scenes move seamlessly between past and present, deriving a pattern that is based on 'emotional memory' rather than an unfolding of a chronological sequence of events.

The character of Binodini is fragmented too. Played sometimes by one performer, sometimes as a duet, or sometimes chorally by all five actresses, the director has fabricated a strategy that allows the performance to levitate above reality and become part of a 'stream of consciousness'.

The text includes enactments of Binodini's performances at times. For example, we see her in rehearsal of Michael Madhusudan Dutt's *Meghnad Badh*, with Girish Ghosh instructing her how to play the scene of Chitrangada castigating her husband Ravana for sacrificing their child. While Binodini finds it difficult to grasp the enormity of the emotions she is being called upon to render by the director Ghosh, she does so in the following scene when she is betrayed by her real-life lover. Drifting away from the confrontation with her lover, Binodini re-enacts the same scene with real, felt emotion. At every juncture the performance underlines how life and art are intrinsically entwined, one feeding on the other.

The climax of the play is a re-enactment of Binodini's most famous role as the male saint, Shri Chaitanya, in *Chaitanya Leela*. This performance is regarded as a milestone in Bengali theatre history as Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa came in person to the performance, and was so taken up with it that he left blessing both Binodini and the theatre. Binodini regarded this gesture of blessing by a spiritual leader as the highlight of her life. For her it meant that she had finally been socially accepted.



THE GROUP

Theatre & Television Associates, established in 1985, is a production company specializing in the performing arts, the visual arts, television projects, and the management of cultural events on a national and international scale.

Over the last 24 years, TTA has made a consolidated attempt to explore different aspects of Indian culture, the primary aim being to project a modern indigenous sensibility in the arts, in a contemporary context. This has involved working in a number of inter-related disciplines like theatre and dance, painting, the designing of exhibitions on photography, and in television documentaries. The question of modernism that has roots in tradition, and derived from an Asian context, has played a significant part in the choice of work undertaken by TTA.

Recent theatre productions by TTA include Girish Karnad's *Nagamandala*, Satish Alekar's *Begum Barve*, Prashant Dalvi's *Char Chaughi*, Brecht's *Mother Courage*, Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Sonata*, *Erendira & Her Heartless Grandmother* (based on a short story by Gabriel Garcia Marquez), *Nati Binodini* (based on the autobiography of the nineteenth-century stage actress, Binodini), and *Metropolis* (based on Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*, *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*, and set in Mumbai during 26/11). In recent years, TTA has travelled with its theatre productions internationally, and its work has been represented at the most important theatre festivals. An offshoot of Theatre & Television Associates is The Dramatic Art & Design Academy (DADA), a training institute for acting and design, founded in the year 2000.





Monday, 8 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

SRI LANKA

Colombo Colombo

the story of your coffin

Sinhala and English, 120 minutes
Playwright and Director: **Indika Ferdinando**
Group: **Theatre Plus**

CAST AND CREDITS

Saumya Liyanage
Anasuya Subasinghe
Sarath Karunaratne
Upul Weerasinghe
Jagath Chamila
Thilanka Gamage
Atula Jayasinghe
Sanjeevani Rathnathilaka

Lights	Thushan Dias
Music Composition	Theja Buddhika Rodrigo
Lyrics	Piyal Kariyawasam
Set & Costume	Pradeep Chandrasiri
Choreography	Manubandu Vidyapathy
Make-up	Jagath Padmasiri
Production Manager	Sanjeeva Upendra
Media Coordinator	Gaya Nagahawatta
Stage Management	Himashi Thakshila Withanage
	Disna Dilantha Jayasinghe
	Anushka Withanage

Playwright & Director Indika Ferdinando

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THE PLAY

Colombo Colombo: the story of your coffin is a tragi-comic musical play. It is an experimental piece that consists of four independent episodes, and does not conform to a linear story-line. However, these episodes are linked together through the appearance of several characters and conditions that are common to all the events. The episodes take place at four different locations within the city of Colombo (the commercial capital of Sri Lanka). A man on his way home after an evening spent at a seedy bar, chances upon a diary lying on the pavement. Its pages are torn, some missing and some smeared with blood, and its author is anonymous. In four episodes, the play reveals the events that were once recorded on the missing pages of the diary.



THE PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR

Indika Ferdinando is a Sri Lankan playwright, director and actor with many accolades to his credit. He is a recipient of State Awards including Best Short Play Director and Playwright in 1997, and Best Upcoming Director in the year 2000. He has also won several Youth Awards and Children's Theatre Awards. Indika graduated from the University of Kelaniya with a BA (Hons.) in Drama and Theatre, and is currently working as a lecturer at the Drama and Theatre Department of the University of Visual and Performing Arts, Colombo.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

As a scholar, it is important for me to take the findings of my academic research into the community I live in, and, like most artists, I too long to share my feelings about and interpretations of the world and the human condition through my theatre practice. *Colombo Colombo* is an outcome of this desire to share.

In the process of writing and directing this play, I aimed to explore techniques that, I hope, reflect both my constant search for *the magic in theatre* and my identity within theatre practice.



THE GROUP

Theatre Plus is a Sri Lankan theatre group that was formed as an experimental platform for practitioners, and looks into various aspects of theatre production and related research. Its members are experienced theatre practitioners and academics, and the group works with a sound practical orientation.



Tuesday, 9 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Kamani Auditorium, Delhi

MUMBAI, INDIA

Sakubai

Hindi, 90 minutes (no intermission)
Playwright: **Nadira Zaheer Babbar**
Director: **Nadira Zaheer Babbar**
Group: **Ekjute Theatre Group**

CAST AND CREDITS

Sakubai	Sarita Joshi
Stage Manager	Hanif Patni
Set Design	Chhel-Paresh
Set In-charge	Darpan Mishra
Lights	Akbar Khan
Music Operation	Santosh Tiwari /Ankur Parekh
Properties	Mithilesh Maihar, Amit, Deepak
Costumes	Lali, Smriti
Production	Hanif Patni
Playwright & Director	Nadira Zaheer Babbar

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Ekjute Theatre Group
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THE PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR

Nadira Zaheer Babbar obtained a Diploma in Direction from the National School of Drama, New Delhi, in 1971. In 1971–72 she went to the Berliner Ensemble on a scholarship, and then to the National Theatre of Weimar in 1973. During these years she travelled extensively in the UK, Europe and the Soviet Union. She has worked with the Berliner Ensemble and Brechtian Theatre, and with world-renowned directors like Fritz Bennewitz, Grotowsky and Wolfgang Heinz. From 1973 to 1975 she taught drama at Sardar Patel Vidyalyaya, New Delhi.

Nadira Zaheer Babbar formed Ekjute Theatre Group in 1981. A theatre company with more than 50 members, Ekjute has provided a platform to several prominent theatre artistes over the years and has more than 40 productions to its credit.

Besides directing numerous theatre productions, Nadira Zaheer Babbar has acted in, written and translated several plays. As an actor, some of her prominent roles have been Desdemona in *Othello*, the Stepmother in *Tughlaq*, Mrs Peachum in *Threepenny Opera*, Dali in *Jasma Odhan*, the Mother in *Riders to the Sea*, Nani in *Sandhya Chhaya*, the Mother in *Cross Purpose*, Begum Jaan in *Begum Jaan*, Abbie in *Desire under the Elms* and Shaista Begum in *Hum Kahey Aap Suney*. She has also directed, produced and acted in television serials; directed and acted in more than 50 radio plays; and produced, acted in and written screenplays for feature films.

Among the numerous awards she has been honoured with are the Mahila Shiromani Award (1991), the Yashbharati Award (Uttar Pradesh government, 1995), Kala Samman (National School of Drama, Rang Mahotsav, 1999), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (2000), Hindi Ratna Award (2001), Samman Chinha (Bhartendu Natya Akademi, Silver Jubilee Festival), and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (Uttar Pradesh government, 2002).

THE PLAY

Women like Sakubai deal with the most trying of circumstances with great strength and endurance. They have been part of our lives for years. In Mumbai they are called *bais*, and in other parts of India they may be called *'aaya'*, *'amma'*, *'khansamin'*, nanny ... Whatever they may be called and wherever they may live, the truth is that we cannot do without them. We survive because of their often unrecognized and unsung efforts!

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

I believe that the performance of a play is the Director's Note. But since my group insists that I should write one, I am trying to write it. This (*Sakubai*) is the second play that I have written; the earlier one was *Dayashankar ki Diary*. After *Sakubai*, I have written *Suman Aur Sana*, *Ji, Jaisi Aapki Marzi*, *Operation Cloudbursts* and, last year, *Footnotes of Life*. These plays are outpourings of years of experience and sensitivity which I received as a hereditary gift from my parents. I give the entire credit for my sensibility to them. My father, Comrade Sayyed Sajjad Zaheer, and my mother, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, both were great writers and patriots. I bow my head to them.

This play deals with the story of a common working woman of modern India coming from the lowest strata of society. It is a virtuoso solo-actor performance, presenting the tale of Sakubai. The play tries to portray all shades of society through the eyes of deprived, struggling working women.

The scars of class distinction in our society put us to shame as cultured and sensitive human beings. It also raises questions like are upper-class, educated, financially independent women actually independent and stable, or is this a myth? Though the theme of the play is serious, the treatment is light and funny.

I would like to thank Sarita-ji for accepting this play and putting her best possible efforts into making *Sakubai* successful. A very big thank you to my group without whose support I would not be what I am today. Last but not the least, I really appreciate my respected audiences who have always been encouraging to us. Because of you we have survived, and have not succumbed to doing mediocre bedroom comedies.

Aap ko Ekjute ka shat shat pranaam!

THE GROUP

Ekjute Theatre Group has pioneered various forms of theatre since its formation in 1981 under the guidance of Nadira Zaheer Babbar. It has staged more than 40 musicals, social dramas, comedies, children's plays and street plays over the last 25 years, in various parts of India and abroad. Among its best known productions are *Dayashankar ki Diary*, *Sakubai* and *Yahudi ki Ladki*. The theatre productions of Ekjute include the works of Bhasa, Bertolt Brecht, Albert Camus, Agha Hashr Kashmiri, Badal Sircar, Jaywant Dalvi, John Osborne, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Shanta Gandhi and Dario Fo. Ekjute has provided a platform to several prominent theatre artistes, among whom are Anupam Kher, Kiron Kher, Alok Nath, Ashish Vidyarthi, Sarita Joshi, Anita Kanwar, Satish Kaushik, Raja Bundela, Ravi Baswani, Kavita Chaudhary, Sushmita Mukherjee, Girja Shankar, Rajesh Puri, Rajendra Gupta, Deepak Qazir, Lalit Parimoo, Zakir Hussain, Shaikh Sami, Rajendra Chawla, Rakesh Mehra, Rahul Chaudhary, Seema Kapoor, Suneel Sinha, Neha Sharad and Mandakini Goswami.

Ekjute conducts theatre workshops on a regular basis, including workshops for children, to help build talent in theatre. The Ekjute Young People's Theatre Group was established in 1990.

Ekjute's theatre productions have travelled around the world and represented India at various international theatre festivals: the ILA Theatre Festival in Bahrain, the Seventh International Fajr Theatre Festival in Iran, the Rangmanch Theatre Festival & Shopping Festival in Dubai and the Rafi Peer Theatre Workshop's Festival in Lahore, to name a few.



Tuesday, 9 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

NEPAL

Putaliko Ghar

Doll's House

Nepali, 105 minutes

Based on Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

Director & Translator: **Sunil Pokharel**

Group: **Aarohan Theatre Group**

CAST AND CREDITS

Nora	Nisha Sharma Pokharel
Hemanta	Shekhar Chapagain
Lina	Aruna Karki
Kedar	Bashanta Bhatta
Dr. Rana	Rajkumar Pudashaini
Costume	Nisha Sharma Pokharel
Costume assistance	Sarita Giri, Aruna Karki
Management	Bashanta Bhatta
Management assistance	Maniram Pokhrel, Dipesh Bhandari, Anil Pokharel, Debi Khatri
Music Operator	Kamalmani Nepal
Set Design	Rajan Khatiwada
Set Design assistance	Ramhari Dhakal
Light Design	Sunil
Stage Manager	Bholaraj Sapkota
Playwright	Henrik Ibsen
Translation, Design & Direction	Sunil Pokharel
Acknowledgements	Dr. Banira Giri, Bindu Subedi, Aavaas, Sugam Pokharel, Bentley the Leather, Communication Corner

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URL: www.aarohantheatre.org



THE DIRECTOR & TRANSLATOR

Sunil Pokharel's impact on modern Nepali theatre is remarkable. His career in theatre -- as actor, director, scene designer, choreographer and organizer -- started in 1978, even before he graduated from the National School of Drama, Delhi, in 1987. He has directed many important Nepali, Indian and European plays over these years. In 2003, Sunil Pokharel and his Aarohan Theatre Group founded a drama school, Gurukul, in Kathmandu, after the Indic tradition of apprenticeship. He has also established an eastern regional theatre centre in Biratnagar (the second largest city of Nepal). Both these have become significant alternate spaces for theatre workers in Nepal, to train in theatre and produce plays. In recognition of his dedication to the promotion of Nepali theatre, the Nepal Government recently awarded Sunil Pokharel the National Talent Honour.

THE PLAY

This play, which has seen 180 performances in Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Norway and Denmark, is a Nepali translation of *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen -- a central figure in the intellectual life of modern Europe and regarded as the father of modern drama.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

... In course of rehearsal, I found that drama is closely connected to our life. I don't know if life blends with drama or drama with life. I have imagined you as a witness to this drama (or life?). I don't know what proximity you will find between your life and this play. The space above is for you.

THE GROUP

Theatre in Nepal has evolved from the lived experience of people who cultivate fields in lush plains in the south, till terraced valleys in the hills, and keep herds in the high mountains. Buddhist, Hindu and indigenous rituals constantly provide energy to the theatre and stage. For the last 27 years, the Aarohan Theatre Group has celebrated this cultural diversity and dynamism by creating theatre for the proscenium as well as for the streets and villages. We pursue theatre as politics, as a form of resistance to the passivity induced by the globalized and consumer-oriented mass media.

Established in Kathmandu in 1982, Aarohan has brought classics from other parts of the world to Nepalese audiences, sometimes in their original form and sometimes adapted to the Nepalese cultural sensibility. Aarohan organizes international theatre festivals every two years. The Ibsen International Theatre festival organized in 2006 included 11 performances from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Norway. In the Kathmandu International Theatre Festival of 2008, 17 theatre groups from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Thailand, England, Denmark, Norway and USA participated. The next festival will be held in November 2010. Simultaneously, Aarohan has been participating in international festivals in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, South Korea, Norway, Denmark and Russia.

Since 2003 Aarohan has been running Gurukul, a school and centre of theatre in Kathmandu, and recently it established its eastern regional centre in Biratnagar. We are now working towards instituting a 4-year bachelor's degree programme in theatre.





Wednesday, 10 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Kamani Auditorium, Delhi

MALDIVES

Dhonyiyala—Alifulhu

A Love Story

English, 45 minutes

Adaptation of a Maldivian folktale by **Thoiba Saeedh** and **Ahmed Tholal**

Director: **Thoiba Saeedh**

Group: **Encore Theatre Productions**

CAST AND CREDITS

Alifulhu	Ahmed Haisham
Hawwaifulhu	Shaina Shareef
Dhonyiyala	Aishath Shahufa
Rasgefaanu	Ahmed Sam'aan Abdulla
Hawwafulhu Bappa	Mohamed Razzaan
Hassan thakuru	Ahmed Majdh
Kan'du Rasgefaanu	Mohamed Abdul Hameed
Fageeru koe	Ahmed Yaaseen
Costume Designer	Mizna Waheed
Music & Foley Work	Mohamed Shaaz
Production/Backstage	Aishath Samahath Ibrahim, Fathmath Shafaath Ibrahim
Dialogues	Ahmed Tholal
Scriptwriter & Director	Thoiba Saeedh
Acknowledgements	Mohamed Ikram (National Centre for the Arts), Ibrahim Khaleel (Maldives National Broadcasting Corporation)

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

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THE DIRECTOR

Thoiba Saeedh, 19, has always been interested in performance art and theatre. It is this interest that helped her build sufficient experience and confidence during her years in school, to stage a big theatre production like *1166* (directed by her and Fathmath Raabia) with great success. Her passion for theatre, combined with the support of a close-knit team, makes it possible to endure all the hardships that she and her theatre group have to face in a place like Maldives, where performance art is still a new concept.

THE PLAY

Based on Maldivian folklore, *Dhonyiyala—Alifulhu* is a richly evocative tale of passion, obsession, greed, jealousy, love and lust. What makes the play unique is the setting of the story, weaving elements like *fanditha* (sorcery) and other traditional aspects of Maldivian culture, but presented with elements from modern theatre. The journey of Alifulhu to find Dhonyiyala, and the challenges they face in order to be together, take you on a rollercoaster ride that leaves you exhausted by the imagery, tragedy and turmoil.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Dhonyiyala—Alifulhu is a play based on one of the most beautiful Maldivian folk stories that I have come across. Making a play out of this story has been a huge challenge — more so because of the high expectations anyone in the Maldives would have of it. Another challenge was to select and arrange the cast in such a way that it was possible to stage the play with just 8 actors. This production is not just the work of one person, but the result of the collaborative efforts of a dedicated team. We hope it will turn out to be a success.

PLAYWRIGHTS/ADAPTATION

A key person in the group, Ahmed Tholal has considerable experience in the field of theatre. Tholal is responsible for all the dialogues presented in the play, while Thoiba Saeedh is the scriptwriter.

THE GROUP

Encore Theatre Productions is made up of a group of young persons passionately involved in theatre. It is an amateur theatre group that set out to introduce the concept of live theatre performance as a new form of entertainment in the Maldives. Although the group has no qualifications on paper to vouch for the quality of their work, the success of their last performance, *1166*, amply makes up for this lack.



Wednesday, 10 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

CHANDIGARH, INDIA

Nagamandala

Punjabi, 70 minutes (no intermission)
Playwright: **Girish Karnad**
Translator: **Surjit Patar**
Director: **Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry**
Group: **The Company**

CAST AND CREDITS

Writer	Vansh Bhardwaj
Flames	Gick Grewal Bahadur Chand, Amarjit, Desraj, Ramanjit Kaur, Hitender Kumar
Story	Payal Choudhary
Shama /Naga	Vansh Bhardwaj
Rani	Ramanjit Kaur/ Payal Choudhary
Blind Woman	Gick Grewal
Kesho	Hitender Kumar
Musicians	Meher Chand, Prem Chand, Mundri Lal, Bahadur, Amarjeet, Desraj
Singers	Pamela Singh, Meher Chand
Backstage	Kabir Singh, Vajin, Desraj, Amarjeet, Hitender Kumar, Vajinder Kumar
Music Director	B.V. Karanth
Light Design	Daulat Ram Vaid
Set Design	Kabir Singh
Director	Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry
House No. 9, Sector 4
Chandigarh 160 001
India



THE DIRECTOR

Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry graduated from the National School of Drama in 1975. From 1976 to 1979 she worked in children's theatre in Mumbai. She has also worked in Bharat Bhavan, the multi-arts complex in Bhopal. She has been teaching theatre in the Department of Indian Theatre, Panjab University, since 1990, and is presently the Chairperson. In 1984 Neelam formed her own theatre group, The Company, in Chandigarh.

THE PLAY

In Girish Karnad's celebrated play *Nagamandala* (1990), the main protagonist, Rani, recognizes her world of desire and celebrates her sexuality even while functioning within a patriarchal structure. Reality is eschewed in this play as it is set in a non-realistic, non-urban space, and within the realm of folk culture.

The story revolves around an unhappy bride, Rani, who fills her loneliness by conjuring fantasies, dreams and illusions to give meaning to her life. These stories then start functioning independently of her; such is the power of the unconscious that a fantasy can take on a life of its own. The playwright uses folk structures and folk elements to set into motion a storytelling technique that allows magic, myth and metaphors to weave in and out of realistic settings.

Although the story is taken from traditional material and rooted in the folklore of the region of Karnataka, the delineation of characters and the layering of the content are modern in their psychology, interpretation and characterization. The audience is invited to look beyond the represented to an alternative world: a world where a chorus of flames speaks more eloquently than humans and where a snake takes a human form. The character of the husband, for example, is split into two. In his human form he is a coarse and boorish man who brutalizes his wife during the day, but at night he changes into a divine lover – a Naga-Raja. The two halves are unaware of each other – both exist in one another – and both are each other's divided self, contradicting and contrasting with one another in a dynamic play of fantasy and illusion. This duality is played out within all the characters of the play. The story is grounded in reality, with its daily chores of washing and cooking. But within that world the characters take flight, inhabiting a fluid and magical world where anything can happen.



DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Nagamandala was a play I first directed in 1989, and when I revisited the play in 2005 it was a difficult decision. How do I wipe the slate clean, get rid of all the baggage of the previous production? I wanted to know if the text still spoke to me or engaged my passion. It was amazing to realize that even after 15 years the play had a freshness and relevance that I could deeply connect with.

Yet I was assailed by many questions. How was I going to resolve the indefinite tension between the real and the otherworldly characters? How to communicate the philosophical and conceptual resonance inherent in the play? How to resolve the contradictions of a text that is set in reality and at the same time eschews reality?

I approached the play with playfulness: making the actors improvise without the text; nudging them into taking risks; pushing them towards developing their own personal vocabulary; and continuously urging them to explore, have fun and drop the confinement of their limits. This provoked them into exploring the ambiguous world created by Girish Karnad: a world where fictional characters and real characters intermingle, and the lines between the visible and the invisible are blurred.



THE GROUP

The Company, a group with a mix of rural actors and urban performers, was established in 1984 in Chandigarh by Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry. Over the last 25 years, it has created theatre that fuses source material with a performance style grounded in Punjabi aesthetics. The Company counts among its performers a group of *Naqqals* (female impersonators). Traditionally, the *Naqqal* performance is designed for pleasure as well as profit. It is a form without a firm or continuous tradition, and the *Naqqals* have become master adapters. Allusion, parody and comic interludes are the main ingredients of their performance. They include in their repertoire urban issues, alongside stories of gods and goddesses, legendary heroes, tales of *bhakti* and miracles, all enacted in idiomatic speech.

The collaboration between the urban actors and the *Naqqals* has led to many productions: an adaptation of *Yerma* by Federico Garcia Lorca, *The Mad Woman of Chaillot* by Jean Giraudoux, *Phaedra* by Jean Racine, *Kitchen Katha*, *Sibo in Supermarket*, *An Unposted Love Letter* and *Nagamandala* by Girish Karnad, to name a few. The Company has participated in major national and international festivals. The international festivals it has been a part of are The London International Festival of Theatre (1993, 1995, 1997), The Festival d'Avignon (1995), The Festival of Perth (1999, 2000), The Singapore Arts Festival (2002), The Laokoon Festival in Hamburg (2003), The Japan Festival of the Arts (2003) and The Zanani Festival in Lahore (2004, 2005, 2006). *Nagamandala* was staged in Japan in 2007, and at Sadler Wells, London in 2009.

All the plays produced by The Company have been translated into Punjabi by the eminent poet Surjit Patar, with music composed by B.V. Karanth.



Thursday, 11 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

KARACHI, PAKISTAN

Jang Ab Nahin Hogi

There Will Be No More Wars

Urdu, 75 minutes

Adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* by **Fahmida Riaz & Anwer Jafri**

Directors: **Sheema Kermani & Anwer Jafri**

Group: **Tehrik-e-Niswan**

CAST AND CREDITS

Females

Arjumand Rahim
Sheema Kermani
Hoori Noorani
Samrah Malik
Sehrish Mehmood
Zenat Adamjee Bayat
Zahra Shahid Hussain
Sameeha Saifee
Mehreen Rafi
Rabya Choudhry
Fizza Zehra

Males

Mehvish Javed
Paras Masroor
Saife Hasan
Mehmood Bhatti
Ali Rizvi
Abdul Wali Khan
Zeeshan Ansari
Haris Khan
Imran Bhatti
Imran Khan

Set & Light Design

Anwer Jafri

Backstage

Asma Mundrawala

Playwrights/Adaptation

Fahmida Riaz, Anwer Jafri

Directors

Sheema Kermani, Anwer Jafri

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

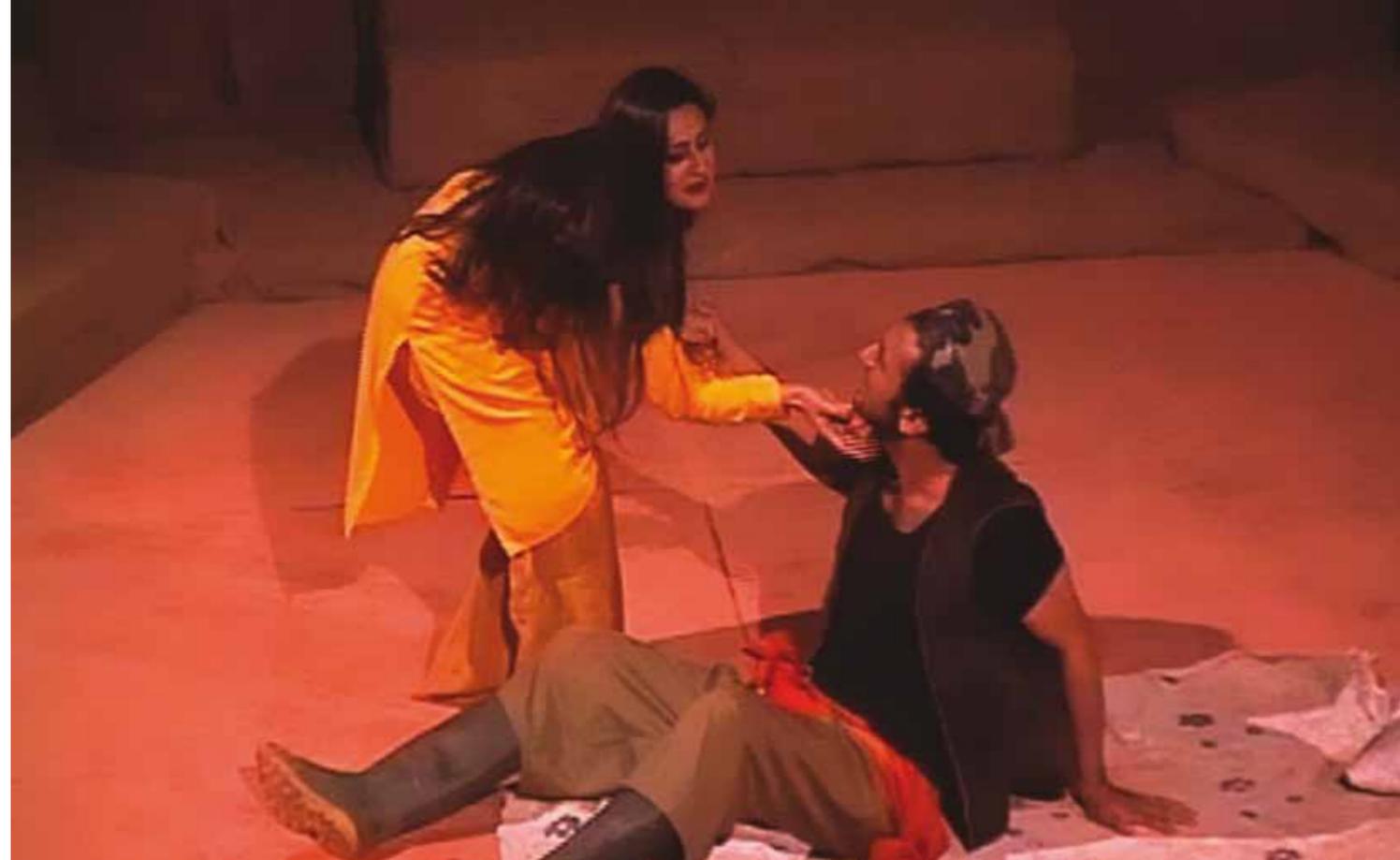
Tehrik-e-Niswan

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THE DIRECTORS

A trained classical dancer, choreographer and dance teacher, Sheema Kermani is also a well known theatre practitioner and an activist for women's rights and peace. In 1979 she formed Tehrik-e-Niswan, a cultural action group devoted to working for women's development through theatre and cultural work.



Anwer Jafri graduated in Fine Arts from Karachi University and did his postgraduation in Filmmaking from the School of Audio Visual Studies, Manchester Polytechnic, UK. His involvement in theatre began in the 1980s with designing sets for Tehrik-e-Niswan's plays. He has been writing and directing plays for theatre and television for many years.

THE PLAYWRIGHTS/ADAPTATION

Fahmida Riaz is a well-known writer and poet.

Anwer Jafri has written and adapted for theatre and television.



THE PLAY

Jang Ab Nahin Hogi (There Will Be No More Wars) is based on Aristophanes' Greek classic, *Lysistrata*, written in 411 BC. In our version, two tribes, *Khaebani* and *Phool Machhi*, after gaining their independence through joint struggle against foreign colonial rule, are kept in a constant state of strife and war among themselves by chauvinistic rulers. Fed up with the regime of war and violence perpetrated by men in the patriarchal social set-up, the women of both tribes finally decide to take action and assume control of affairs. The hilarious comedy ends with some very sobering reflections about the state of affairs in our subcontinent.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Lysistrata is a feminist play as well as an anti-war play. The comic element in it underpins a dire situation – the destructive nature of war as an extension of the destructive nature of patriarchy! In the Greek original, *Lysistrata* is a far-sighted and wise woman who decides to find a way to end war. We felt that to end war is what all women desire; therefore we introduced three women who together persuade the rest to take an oath that will force their men to give up fighting.

THE GROUP

Tehrik-e-Niswan (Women's Movement) has consistently strived to raise awareness about women's rights in Pakistan, using the medium of theatre, dance, music and video productions. Despite tremendous obstacles, Tehrik has helped to create an atmosphere of acceptability for theatre as a serious means of expression. It has staged more than 50 performances, many of which are landmarks in the history of the theatre movement in Pakistan. Tehrik has worked with many well-known guest directors from abroad, and has performed at festivals both locally and abroad.

Thursday, 11 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Meghdoot Open Air Theatre
(Sangeet Natak Akademi)

MYANMAR

Sadakainaya Jataka

Director: Win Myint

Group: Shwe Myanmar Theatre Group

THE PLAY

Sadakainaya Jataka, based on past events in the life of Queen Yathawdayar, describes one of the birth stories of the Buddha. During the reign of King Byamamad at Bayanasi, Gotama Buddha is a mythical bird of the Himalayan forests, named Kainaya. His wife Kainayi and he live on a silver mountain called Sanda. One day the king goes hunting to the forest and sees Kainayi there. He falls in love with her and decides to kill her husband. He shoots Kainaya down with an arrow and tells Kainayi that if she marries him, she would become his queen. Kainayi rejects him, saying she would rather commit suicide. The king departs for his kingdom. Overwhelmed by grief at her husband's death, Kainayi invokes the gods. Sakka, King of the Celestial Beings, is moved by her plight. He brings Kainaya back to life by pouring holy water on him. Kainayi and Kainaya pay obeisance to him and leave for their abode on the silver mountain, happy to be together again . . .





Friday, 12 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

MANIPUR, INDIA

Draupadi

Manipuri, 80 minutes
An adaptation of Mahasweta Devi's story by the same name
Director: H. Kanhailal
Group: Kalakshetra Manipur

CAST AND CREDITS

Young Dopdi	Radhika Rabha
Older Dopdi	H. Sabitri
Senanayak	A. Upendra
Sepoys	S. Brojen, Th. Muhindra, S. Bimol
Dulna	Guru Koken
Suryasahu	Bidutjit Chakorbat
Pressmen	S. Bembem
Village Boy	P. Tyson
Identifier	Dhananjoy Rabha
Music	H. Tomba
Light	Mirnal Jayoti Goshawami
Sound	N. Jadumani
Set	H. Tomba
Director	H. Kanhailal

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

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THE DIRECTOR

Heisnam Kanhailal has been active in theatre for the last 30 years as a playwright, actor and director. He is the Founder Director of Kalakshetra, which has been the vanguard of the experimental theatre movement in Manipur for the last two decades. Kanhailal has experimented widely with alternate theatre forms, using the rich traditions of Manipuri performing arts and culture as a springboard. He has written 15 plays and directed 30, and has also worked with various international theatre groups. He is a recipient of the State Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Theatre in 1982, the Kendriya Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Stage Direction in 1985 and the Padmashri in 2003.

THE PLAY

Draupadi is an adaptation of Mahesweta Devi's story about marginalized peoples in remote areas of India who are continuously oppressed by the forces in power. The protagonist Draupadi, or Dopdi as she is known in her community, is a Santhal woman who fights against the atrocities that are being committed against her tribe. The play depicts the life of this tribal community in the outskirts of Bengal.

Dopdi and her husband Dulna start their resistance out of personal need but soon it becomes a fight for the survival of their community. Tribal revolutionaries who identify themselves with the sons of the soil are now beginning to learn new combat and survival techniques. The police is on the look out for them for the killing of the master, and they go into hiding. Dulna is arrested and killed by the police. Dopdi too falls in their clutches.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

In the *Mahabharata*, Draupadi is infinitely clothed and cannot be publicly disrobed. The episode of her disrobing is yet another instance of Krishna's miracles. Dopdi in the play is also someone Draupadi could never be -- presented as she is, in the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text, as proof of male power. Dopdi is therefore at once an example and a contradiction.

In the play, we do not explore Dopdi's act as a refutation of the ancient tradition, but we analyse the spontaneous emergence of female politico-sexual exploitation.

The method used in creating a performance out of this story is deconstruction. The performance invokes natural simplicity, instead of simplification, in making art.

The play encapsulates the attempts in the post-colonial era to convey the pain of the oppressed.

THE GROUP

Established in 1969 in Imphal, Kalakshetra has evolved a distinctive theatrical style, which is predominantly non-verbal. Steeped in the Meitei culture, the group has crystallized the most crucial realities of oppression and resistance through plays like *Pebet* and *Memoirs of Africa*, making the spectators alert to the resilience of the human spirit in countering the dominant anxieties of the time.

Kalakshetra is now embarking on an experimental project on the ritual of suffering, which has been described as a turning point in both art and ideology. This is part of the group's attempt to evolve a new ideological basis for artistic, social, economic and political life, with the aim of the betterment of humanity.



Saturday, 13 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

BANGALORE, INDIA

Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni

English, 60 minutes (no intermission)
Playwright & Co-director: **Poile Sengupta**
Director: **Abhijit Sengupta**
Group: **Theatre Club, Bangalore**

CAST AND CREDITS

Woman	Poile Sengupta
Man	Aporup Acharya
Woman's Assistant	Arti Nayar
Man's Assistant	Sonali Sharma
Lights	Anish Victor
Sound & Production Management	Anil Ramachandra
Properties & Production Assistant	Lekha Naidu
Playwright and Co-director	Poile Sengupta
Director	Abhijit Sengupta

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Poile Sengupta
Chairperson, Theatre Club
G1, 160, 5th Main, Defence Colony, Indiranagar
Bangalore 560038
India



THE DIRECTOR

Abhijit Sengupta retired in 2008 as Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Government of India. This former bureaucrat has combined decades of administrative experience with close personal involvement and interest in the performing arts. He has directed a number of plays for Bangalore

Little Theatre, Playpen and Theatre Club, in Bangalore and Delhi. He is presently a member of the Central Advisory Board on Culture and of the Governing Board of Kalakshetra Foundation, Chennai.



THE PLAYWRIGHT

Poile Sengupta's first full-length play, *Mangalam*, was written in 1993. Her other important plays include *Inner Laws* (1994), *A Pretty Business* (1995), *Keats was a Tuber* (1996), *Collages* (1998), *Alipha* (2001), *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* (2001) and *Samara's Song*

(2007). *Mangalam* won a special award at The Hindu—Madras Players Playscripts Competition in 1993. *Keats was a Tuber* was shortlisted and received a special mention at the 1996 British Council International New Playwriting Competition. *Samara's Song* was one of three shortlisted plays in The Hindu Metroplus Playscripts Competition, 2008. Her book of six plays, *Women Centre Stage*, was published by Routledge in 2009. *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni* is included in that collection.

Poile Sengupta has also written several plays for children, including a full-length musical, *Yavamajakka!* A collection, *Good Heavens! One Act Plays for Children*, was published by Puffin India in 2006.

THE PLAY

The rather old-fashioned title, *Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni*, conceals the contemporary issues that are explored in the play. A man and a woman, strangers to each other, meet in a crowded airport somewhere in India, waiting for a delayed flight. Their 'conversation' takes a curious turn as they begin to tell their life stories – the stories of Shoorpanakha from the *Ramayana* and Shakuni from the *Mahabharata*. The play intermittently travels back in time to the two epics and pulls them into present-day relevance.

Traditionally, the two characters in the play are considered villains: Shoorpanakha is depicted as gross, even grotesque; Shakuni as sly and manipulative. One, in her determination to take revenge, causes the war in Lanka between Rama and Ravana. The other, the wily uncle of the Kauravas, is the cause of the tragic war between the Pandavas and the Kauravas. However, though both these 'minor' characters are crucial to the epic narrative, they are forgotten once their function is completed. Here they take centre stage and disturb our received understanding of their world.

It is possibly for the first time in Indian English theatre that stories from the two epics are merged. Innovative stage techniques, which include onstage changes in costumes and make-up, are built into the text.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

This is a remarkable play, a text that recreates and interprets ancient stories from the Indian epics in very modern language. According to Shoorpanakha, Rama is 'bowled over' by her; Shakuni speaks of his brother-in-law as 'such a dummy, an uncrowned bloody king'.

The actors straddle different worlds, with changes in costume and make-up on stage and in full view of the audience; this is built into the script. Thus the dramaturgy of the play uses elements of alienation in production design, creating an illusion and simultaneously destroying it. This production emphasizes the alienation – actors are actors only, not the characters they represent – so that we do not stir up our emotional bond with our past. The play attempts a new examination without rubbishing the original thought and faith. I do believe that our heritage can always be subjected to new thinking. It does not take away from our received wisdom; rather, it strengthens it.

The play is in English, but as Indian as any play in any of the other Indian languages. I have attempted to convey the 'Indian-ness' of this play through the music, the costumes, and the overall style and design.

The play premiered on 12 September 2001, the day after the 9/11 attack on the Twin Towers; the coincidence was chilling. Sadly, the tragedy of hatred and revenge continues forever to haunt humankind.

THE GROUP

Theatre Club was founded in Bangalore by Poile Sengupta, well-known playwright and actor, in 1995. Its first production was Poile's *Inner Laws*. Apart from full-length productions, Theatre Club also organizes evenings of readings from prose, drama and poetry. The group has performed in Delhi and Mumbai with local talent. Theatre Club is a Trust which would like to promote Indian theatre in English.



Saturday, 13 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Meghdoot Open Air Theatre
(Sangeet Natak Akademi)

HERAT, AFGHANISTAN

Salsal and Shahmaama

Dari, 75 minutes

Playwright: **Abdul Hakim Hashemi**

Director: **Monireh Hashemi**

Group: **Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art**

CAST AND CREDITS

Monireh Hashemi
Somaye Hassan Zada
Tahera Hashemi
Jamila Mohammadi
Mahdiya Hashemi
Khadija Ahamdi
Halima Hashemi
Haniya Mohammadi
Maryam Hossieni
Sayed Mustafa Hashemi
Ali Reza Alizada
Sayed Mohammad Hossieni
Hossien Rezaei

Make-up & Stage Design
Costume
Adviser for Script & Stage Design
Playwright, Light, Sound & Music

Director

Sayed Mustafa Hashemi
Ali Reza Alizada
Mohammad Reza Najafi
Abdul Hakim Hashemi

Monireh Hashemi

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

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Almahdi Town, Herat province
Afghanistan
Tel.: +93-799240824; +93-797085402
email: simorghfilm@gmail.com; simorghfilm_aca@yahoo.com



THE DIRECTOR

Monireh Hashemi started her career as an actress working in cinema in Afghanistan, in 2004. In 2005 Abdul Hakim Hashemi and she established the Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art (SFACA). She has acted in several films, as well as written and directed the short films *Dar Aghoshe Baad* (In the embrace of wind, 28 min.) and *Akharin Labkhand* (Last laugh, 5 min.). The first play she directed for the stage, *Faryaade Taarikh* (Cry of History), was performed at the Educational Theatre Festival organised in Herat in 2007, and it won the first prize.

Other theatre productions staged by Monireh Hashemi and the Simorgh Theatre group include: *Babur Shah Garden* at the 4th Afghan National Theatre Festival of Kabul, (2007); *Cry of History* at the Theatre Festival of the National School of Drama, India (2008); *Ranj Naame* (Letter of Suffering) at the 5th Afghan National Theatre Festival of Kabul (2008), and at the Theatre Festival of the National School of Drama, India (2009).

Monireh Hashemi is the Manager of the Women's Department of SFACA, where 25 girls work with her in the fields of cinema and theatre.

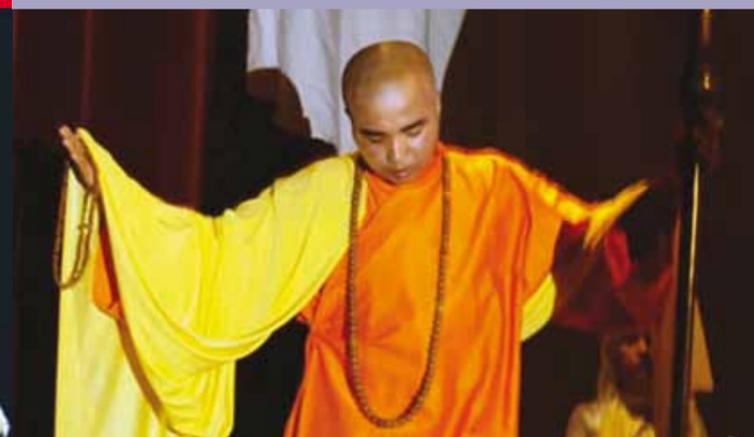
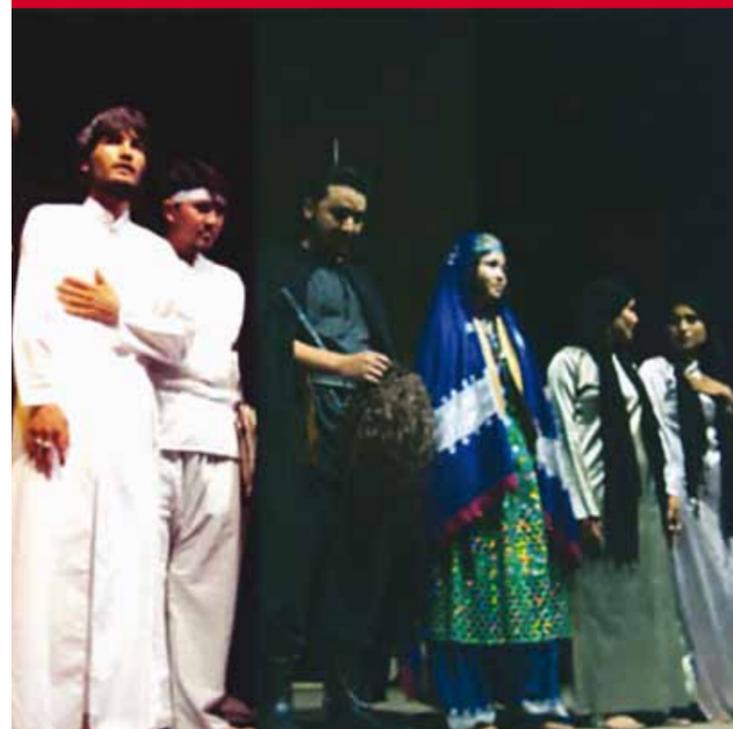


THE PLAYWRIGHT

Abdul Hakim Hashemi is the General Manager of Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art. He has directed and written several of the films and plays produced by the group.

THE PLAY

Gol Bakht and Nig Bakht are two sisters who live near the Buddha statues of Bamyan in Afghanistan. Gol Bakht is the younger sister and she always wishes to spend time speaking with the Buddha statues. One day the sisters go back in time into history, and meet with a man who tells them about the historical circumstances and legendary story of Salsal and Shahmaama. He also tells them about the statues of Bamyan, about historical events related to them, and about some traditional forms of dance and music which are nearly extinct. The two sisters suddenly find themselves witnessing the explosion and destruction of the Buddhas . . .



THE GROUP

Established in 2005, it is about five years since Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art started its activity in the cultural and artistic field. Abdul Hakim Hashemi is the General Manager of SFACA which consists of about 50 members, and of whom 20 are young girls and women. The group has so far produced 5 artistic and feature films, 22 documentaries and short films, and 4 plays for the stage.



Sunday, 14 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Behulār Bhāsān

Bengali, 100 minutes

Performance text based on the *Padmā-purāṇ* (or *Manasā-māṅgal*) by Narayan Deb, Bijay Gupta, Ketakadas Kshemananda, Bipradas Pipilai, 'Baish Kabi' and Tantra Bibhuti

Selected, edited and adapted by Biplab Bala, Farida Akhter Lima, Tania Sultana, Nadia Sultana Sati, Sydur Rahman Lipon, Apurba Kumar Roy, Rokibul Hasan and Shaman Maishan, under the supervision of Syed Jamil Ahmed

Director: Syed Jamil Ahmed

Group: Department of Theatre, University of Dhaka

CAST AND CREDITS

Lead Narrator and Behulā	Kazi Tamanna Haque
Ād Saodāgar (Behulā's father-in-law)	Nowrin Sazzad
Godā (the man with elephantiasis)	Camelia Mousumi Khan / Silvia Nowrin Hemi
Sanakā (Behulā's mother)	Meherun Nesa/ Sajia Afruj
Hari Sādhu (Behulā's brother)	Sumaiya Binta Raihan / Sajia Afruj
Bhanda Tapasvī (the false ascetic)	Sanjeeda Rahman Srabonee
Juārī (the gambler)	Silvia Nowrin Hemi
Shakun (the vulture)	Fahmida Sultana Tanjee
Nārāyaṇ Dānī (Sanakā's brother)	Nafisa Parvin
Female Chorus	Camelia Mousumi Khan, Nowrin Sazzad, Silvia Nowrin Hemi, Nafisa Parvin, Sumaiya Binta Raihan, Meherun Nesa, Sajia Afruj, Azifa Khanam, Fahmida Sultana Tanjee, Champa Talukder, Sanjeeda Rahman Srabonee
Male Chorus	Naveed Rahman, Md. Masud Rana, Tanvir Nahid Khan, Sanjeeb Kumar Dey, Atikur Rahman, Nasirul Islam, Abdul Munim Tarafdar, Sayed Muhammad Zubayer
Musicians	Nila Saha, Sayed Mamun Reza, Shiplu Chandra Sutradhar
The Bhāsān Scrolls	Raghunath Chakroborthy, Somanath Shur
Costume Design	Wahida Mollick
Dance Composition	Lubna Marium, Sydur Rahman Lipon
Set & Light Design	Syed Jamil Ahmed
Light Operation	Md. Israfil, Sudip Chakroborthy, Atiqul Islam
Costume & Set Design Assistance	Mohsina Akhter, Md. Zahid Hossain
Music Composition (rearranged from indigenous performances)	Sydur Rahman Lipon
Directorial Assistance	Sudip Chakroborthy
Production Coordination	Md. Israfil
Production Design & Direction	Syed Jamil Ahmed

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Department of Theatre
3019 Arts Faculty Building, University of Dhaka, Dhaka 1000, Bangladesh

THE DIRECTOR

Syed Jamil Ahmed is a director based in Bangladesh and Professor at the Department of Theatre, University of Dhaka. He trained in theatre at the National School of Drama (India), obtained his M.A. from the University of Warwick (England) and Ph.D. from the University of Dhaka (Bangladesh). He has taught at Antioch College, Ohio (USA), King Alfred's University, Winchester (UK) and San Francisco City College (USA), and has published essays in *Research in Drama Education*, *Asian Theatre Journal*, *TDR*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *South Asian Popular Culture* and *New Theatre Quarterly*. His book-length publications in English are *Acinpākhi Infinity: Indigenous Theatre in Bangladesh* (2000), *In Praise of Nirañjan: Islam, Theatre, and Bangladesh* (2001) and *Reading against the Orientalist Grain: Performance and Politics Entwined with a Buddhist Strain* (2008). Currently, he is working on two books, on applied theatre and the theatre of and Bangladesh.

Syed Jamil Ahmed has directed over 20 plays including *The Wheel* by Selim Al Deen (1990), an adaptation of *Biṣṭād Sindhu* by Meer Musharraf Hussein (1992), an adaptation of *A Thousand and One Nights* (1998), *Behulār Bhāsān* (2004, 2005, 2010), *Pahiye* by Selim Al Deen (2006) and *Shang Bhang Chang* (devised from the indigenous theatre form of *Shang Jātrā*, 2009). He also has set design credits for over 70 performances and light design credits for over 80 performances in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. He has received the Munir Chowdhury Award (Dhaka, 1993) and Nandikar National Theatre Award (Kolkata, 1999).

THE PLAY

Quite a few performances in Bangladesh are based on a body of texts that seek to establish the worship of Manasā, the goddess of serpents. Commonly known as the *Padmā-purāṇ* or the *Manasā-māṅgal*, these narratives in rhymed metrical verse belong to a genre of medieval literature known as the *maṅgalakābya*. Two central characters presented in these performances are Manasā, the 'illegitimate' daughter of Śiva, and Behulā, wife of Lakṣmindar. These two characters may well represent the Female Other deeply embedded in the Bengali patriarchal imagination. The Female Other can be a deity or a mortal. As a deity, she is wrathful, yet generous if propitiated. As the etymological root of her name signifies, she desires and wills that the whole world submit to her and that she win her rightful place in heaven in the company of gods. But in order to do that, she has to conspire against and wreak havoc on her arch enemy, the merchant-prince and ardent devotee of Śiva named Ād Saodāgar. In the most vicious of these schemes, she has Ād's son Lakṣmindar killed on the night of his wedding by snakebite. Where Manasā's virtue is questionable, Behulā's is not. But if Manasā can risk the existence of a single woman, Behulā cannot. If a woman is a mortal and her husband dies, her existence is indeterminate for she can neither claim a place in the household of her husband's family nor in her natal family. However Behulā does not jump on the funeral pyre of her husband Lakṣmindar. She sails down a river on a raft with his body, withstands attempted molestation by hostile men, reaches the abode of the gods, wins Śiva's favour and brings her husband back to life. Nevertheless, when she returns home, she has to pay the price with a test by fire. Ironically, despite all these accomplishments, she cannot win her rightful place among mortals and has to ascend to heaven with her husband.

The female presence that underpins the *Padmā-purāṇ* has been strongly recuperated in *Behulār Bhāsān*. The text is based on excerpts drawn from six *Padmā-purāṇ* texts and the performance incorporates techniques drawn from indigenous, rural performances of the *Padmā-purāṇ*. By (re)presenting Behulā, a popular archetype of the Bengali woman, the performance explores a central problem still unresolved in the collective unconscious of the Bengali people: the position of a (married) woman without her husband. Unable to accord her any place in the society, it throws a challenge: be a virtuous woman and die before your husband, or remain virtuous and bring your husband back to life. There is no denying that the problem is a typically patriarchal one. However, the patriarchal system is also challenged by the very representation of Behulā: it is *she*, not her husband, who is imbued with the agency of daring to embark on a journey alone to achieve the impossible.

THE PLAYWRIGHTS

The text of *Behulār Bhāsān* emerged out of a devising process led by the director in 2004. The first draft was created out of a selection of verses drawn from six texts of the *Padmā-purāṇ* (or the *Manasā-māṅgal*) by three students of the Department of Theatre -- Farida Akhter Lima, Tania Sultana and Nahida Sultana Sati -- as a part of their MA coursework on the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh. During rehearsals, the text was further revised with contributions from Sydur Rahman Lipon, Apurba Kumar Roy, Rokibul Hasan and the entire cast. The first version of the text emerged after Dr Biplab Bala added prose narration linking the seven episodes. In the recreation of *Behulār Bhāsān* in 2010 with a new group of students, the text of 2004 has been reworked by Shaman Maishan.

Dr Biplab Bala served as part-time faculty at the Department of Theatre from 1998 to 2005. He was one of the key collaborators in shaping the text of *Biṣṭād Sindhu* (a nineteenth-century prose narrative on the Karbala tragedy by Meer Musharraf Hussein) in 1992. He leads a theatre group named Jiyankāṭhi and is a renowned cultural activist. Sydur Rahman is an upcoming director and actor. Tania Sultana is currently serving Stanford University as a lecturer in the Film and Media Department; Nahida Sultana teaches drama at the Scholastica School; Farida Akhter is a Programme Producer at Desh TV; and Shaman Maishan is Editorial Assistant of *Depart*, a quarterly journal on the arts.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Performing on the proscenium stage has never been my first option. The proscenium stage allows a dream-merchant such as I, too little space to launch lines of flight to seeking the Deleuzoguattarian 'opposite dream'. Hence, reviving *Behulār Bhāsān* for the proscenium would be absurd because it was designed for the arena, in keeping with my artistic -- and hence political -- commitment to the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, performing at the South Asian Women's Theatre Festival in India left me no choice to refuse because it opened the possibility of showcasing the Department of Theatre as a representation of Bangladesh. And so, *Behulār Bhāsān* has been redesigned for the proscenium; but, at the same time, it seeks to defy and subvert the proscenium picture-fame's philosophical assumptions. It mobilizes fresh dynamics to renegotiate the Female Other deeply embedded in the patriarchal imagination of Bangladesh through an all-female cast of thirteen members, supported by nine male choral singers and stage-hands. It is also underpinned by an implicit political statement: by choosing to celebrate life by means of Hindu 'poems of well-being', *Behulār Bhāsān* asserts that Bangladesh is, must be, and should be, anything but an inhospitable Islamist domain.

The recreated *Behulār Bhāsān* (2010) is inspired by the fresh impulse of a new group of students -- an impulse they have drawn from the fractured social terrain they inhabit. Living in a globalized-colonized world fissured with violence and poverty, they realize that theatre is their only means of expression and their solitary option for survival. If that means is poor, there is hardly any alternative. Hence, *Behulār Bhāsān* is not merely their coursework, but much more. It is a result of their desperate attempt to endure, their impassioned praxis framed within a reinterpretation of a core set of principles and dreams that the Department attempts to nurture in them.

THE GROUP

The performers of *Behulār Bhāsān* are students of the Department of Theatre, University of Dhaka. The first version of the play was produced in 2004, as a part of the department's MA coursework on the indigenous theatre of Bangladesh. The performers of the current revival are Third Year and MA students of the department. The Department of Theatre, founded in 1994, offers a four-year course leading to BA (Hons) and a one-year course on MA in Theatre. The BA course is designed to introduce the basics of theatre studies and the MA to reinforce acting techniques, by attempting to 'bridge' the theatre of the 'West' and South Asia, particularly Bangladesh.



Monday, 15 March 2010, 6.30 pm
Shri Ram Centre, Delhi

KOLKATA, INDIA

Sonata

Indian English, 80 minutes (no intermission)

Playwright: **Mahesh Elkunchwar**

Director: **Sohag Sen**

Group: **Ensemble**

CAST AND CREDITS

Anashua Majumdar

Yama Shroff

Sohag Sen

Light	Debabrata Sarkar, Saibal Dutta
Sound	Jayanta Roy Chowdhury
Set	Kaushik Bose, Hakim Gazi
Make-up	Manik Banik, Anita Roy
Properties	Suman Kundu, Kajjwal Ghosh
Production Controller	Swapan Barua
Playwright	Mahesh Elkunchwar

Director	Sohag Sen
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ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Ensemble
357/2B Prince Anwar Shah Road
Kolkata 700 088
Tel.: +91-33-24175101



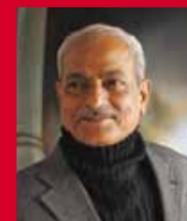
THE DIRECTOR

Sohag Sen's association with theatre and allied media spans almost 40 years. During this time, she has donned many a hat — as actor, director, trainer, etc. As an actor, she started her career under the guidance of the legendary Utpal Dutta, in the year 1969. Since

then she has performed a great variety of roles, many of them in plays of her own direction. She has also acted in films with directors of repute, like Chidananda Dasgupta, Rituparno Ghosh, Anjan Dutta and Roland Joffe.

Sohag Sen started her career as a theatre director in 1978 and formed her own group, Ensemble, in 1983. As a director, Sohag Sen has dealt with plays by dramatists as varied as Mahesh Elkunchwar and Botho Strauss. Her contribution to theatre has been recognized by many awards and accolades, including the Paschim Banga Natya Akademi Award for Theatrical Excellence and the Lebedov Award.

Sohag Sen is visiting faculty at the Satyajit Ray Film and Television Institute and Rabindra Bharati University, and Head of the Department of the Direction Course in KFTI.



THE PLAYWRIGHT

Born in 1939, Mahesh Elkunchwar is the author of 15 full-length and one-act plays. Among these, *Raktapushpa* (*Petals of Blood*, 1972), *Party* (1976), *Pratibimb* (*Reflection*, 1972), *Atmakatha* (*Autobiography*, 1988) and, especially, *Wada Chirebandi* (*Old Stone Mansion*, 1985) are established classics of the

contemporary Indian stage. In bringing his drama to the stage, Elkunchwar has collaborated actively with leading director-actors such as Vijaya Mehta, Shreeram Lagoo, Amol Palekar and Satyadev Dubey.

Elkunchwar has regularly offered playwriting workshops at India's National School of Drama (New Delhi) and other academic institutions of theatre training, and has served as writer-in-residence at the national Film and Television Institute in Pune. Among his many national honours are the Homi Bhabha Fellowship (1976–78), the Sangeet Natak Akademi annual award for Best Playwright (1989), the Maharashtra Foundation Award (1997), the Sahitya Akademi Award (2002) and the Saraswati Samman (2003).



THE PLAY

Sonata is an Indian-English play revolving round one Sunday evening in the lives of three women college friends, now in their middle age — a banker, a college professor and a journalist, all well-established in their professions and single by choice.

The play explores their position in metropolitan society. It articulates their relationships, ideals, aims, psychology and sexuality. In the peaceful environment of an apartment the play sometimes explodes into silences full of betrayal and unshed tears. Finally, it transcends the most important factor — the love and bonding that the three share despite all their differences.

The play is very well-knit, and full of wit and humour. It is punctuated by *Rabindrasangeet* and Beethoven's *Moonlight Sonata*. It is both entertaining and discerning about life.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Sonata is no doubt one of Mahesh Elkunchwar's best plays, and, like most of them, it centres on the human factor. Human relationships and their complexities have always been the ruling themes of Elkunchwar's plays, and this is something that I have always been attracted to and returned to repeatedly. *Sonata* is about one long night in the life of three friends. They are single, middle-aged, urban and financially secure. How they connect, disconnect and reconnect makes up the main theme, with their individualities, aspirations, sexualities, etc., all coming under scrutiny. Eventlessness is the most appealing part of the play, as is a great text that challenges the skills of the actors to keep it afloat.

THE GROUP

Ensemble's journey began in 1983 under the leadership of Sohag Sen, with a commitment to doing good and meaningful theatre. The group's novel approach towards and fresh insights into various aspects of stage representation have, since then, brought new life to Bengali theatre.

Ensemble has several critically acclaimed plays to its credit, including *Party*, *Uttarpurush* and *Mahanirvan*. Ensemble also claims the credit of introducing influential playwrights from Indian as well as European theatre to the Bengali stage for the first time. Among these, the names of Mahesh Elkunchwar, Nirmal Verma, Satish Alekar and Botho Strauss deserve special mention.

The concept of Theatre Workshop was integral to the system of acting followed in the group, and developed from the motive of facilitating an actor's contribution to the play. The process involved in-depth discussion of the text, subtext, characters and motivation, and not only made the productions a two-way effort (bringing together the director and the actor), but also proved indispensable in providing basic training to the actors. The concept evolved in the course of time to purely 'Workshop Productions' like *Asahay*, *Natakiya*, *Sirir Niche* and *Rog* — again a first in Bengali theatre history.



Monday, 15 March 2010, 8.30 pm
Meghdoot Open Air Theatre
(Sangeet Natak Akademi)

THIMPHU, BHUTAN

Galem gi Lu

Galem's Song

Dzongkha, 60 minutes (no intermission)

Playwrights: **Caroline Esther van Leerdam & Tshering Gyeltshen**

Director: **Caroline Esther van Leerdam**

Associate Director: **Tshering Gyeltshen**

Group: **The New Theatre Group**

CAST AND CREDITS

Namkha Lhamo (actor/singer, guest artiste)

Pabitra Rai

Tshering Eden

Ugyen Wangdi

Ugyen Dorji

Rinchen Wangchuk

Dawa Zangpo

Kinley Norbu

Kinga Younten

Udai Subba

Production Assistant

Technical Assistant

Videographer & Projectionist

Assistant Director

Production Manager

Playwrights

Sangay Phuntsho

Leki Wangdi

Kinzang Namgay

Sonam Nyendra

Yeega Wangmo Pendirika

Caroline Esther van Leerdam &

Tshering Gyeltshen

Associate Director

Director

Produced by

Tshering Gyeltshen

Caroline Esther van Leerdam

Theatre Embassy & TGMI

ADDRESS AND CONTACT DETAILS

Tshering Gyeltshen

Artistic Director, The New Theatre Group (TNTG), c/o TGMI

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Mobile: +975 17110609

email: bhutantheatre@gmail.com, teegeemi@gmail.com, tgmi@druknet.bt



PLAYWRIGHT & DIRECTOR

Caroline Esther van Leerdam graduated from the School of Arts in Amsterdam and has been an actress, theatre maker and director for 20 years. After graduation, she made several plays and worked as an actress in film and television. She soon discovered the strength of the youth as the future of society, and started to make plays for and with them. She mainly uses social issues as a

basis for her plays, and takes the youth as well as the audience through a journey of awareness, assessment and education. She uses text, movement and music with Grotowski as a base, which makes her plays dynamic and physical with stage images that are more than a décor. They become true art!

In 2003 Caroline committed herself to Theatre Embassy, and led and spearheaded many projects in the Netherlands, Asia and Latin America. Given her wide experience, Theatre Embassy deputed Caroline to work as a Theatre Ambassador in Bhutan for the project on the training of a group of Bhutanese theatre artists and production of the theatre play *Galem gi Lu*.

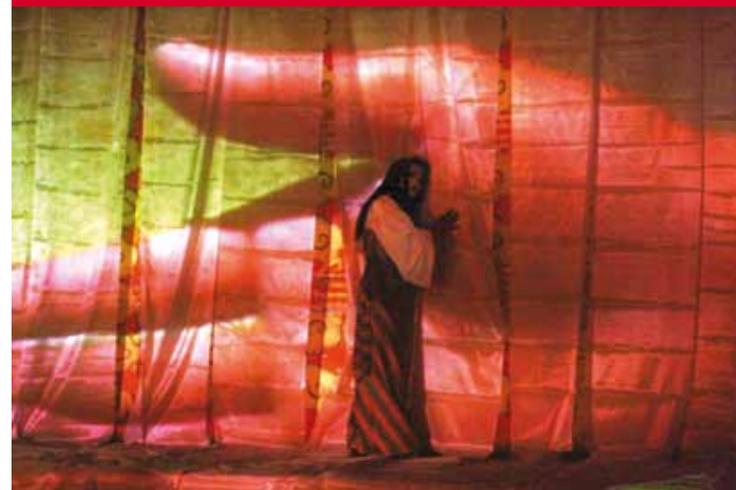


PLAYWRIGHT & ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Tshering Gyeltshen is a Bhutanese actor, writer, and film and theatre maker who manages Triple Gem Media & Infotainment (TGMI), which he established five-and-a-half years back. He has had experience in both print and broadcast journalism before plunging into a career in

films as actor, screenwriter, director and producer. He has been an active member in the emerging Bhutanese film and creative arts industry and the private media. He actively promotes youth and social causes.

Tshering Gyeltshen has won the National Best Actor Award three times. He also won the Best Writer's Award and Best Director's Award (Co-direction) for his film *Muti Thrishing – the perfect girl* in 2006.



THE PLAY

Galem gi Lu or *Galem's Song* is a Bhutanese theatrical performance based on the story of Gasa Lamai Singye, a popular Bhutanese folk romance. This inventive and path-breaking work-in-progress production is the result of seven weeks of training workshop conducted by Caroline van Leerdam, assisted by theatre designer Piia Maria and Tshering Gyeltshen.

Bhutan's rich traditions are slowly but surely fading away. The *ghos* and *kiras* have long given way to jeans, T-shirts and sneakers. Bhutanese music has become hip hop and the gap between the old and new generations of Bhutanese are getting starker and wider. Young Bhutanese appear to have an identity crisis and the 'concerned' older generation does not seem to have a workable answer or solution to withstand the onslaught of modern development. Many emerging social problems are threatening to create a malaise in the society.

Using the story of the Bhutanese equivalent of Romeo and Juliet as the canvas, *Galem gi Lu* paints myriad social pictures and images that focus primarily on issues of domestic violence and global climate change – issues that are affecting Bhutan in ways that are not easily visible or fathomable.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

While developing *Galem gi Lu* with the group the challenge for me as trainer and director was not in telling the story but in discovering different sides and aspects of the same story to look at other possible and underlying meanings and messages. Truth is not told by words alone. For that . . . there is no truth. Truth can be questioned, not only expressed through words, but through another language, one that tells another story with art as a universal instrument.

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It has been a wholly new artistic adventure for me and I certainly have grown in leaps and bounds from the training and the workshop process leading to the production. This is the first major step towards realizing a life-long passion and much-cherished dream of creating a new theatrical tradition and a dynamic theatre group in Bhutan. It is also our first serious attempt at producing a play that we can proudly present to any discerning audience anywhere in the world.

THE GROUP

The New Theatre Group (TNTG) presently functions as the theatre branch of TGMI, a media services, film and music production, event management and theatre enterprise based in Thimphu, Bhutan. Since its formation in 2006, TNTG has played a lead role in using and promoting street theatre for public education and social advocacy. In October 2005 TGMI was selected to undertake a project for the Save the Children USA Bhutan programme, to introduce street theatre as a tool for social communication. In January 2006 TGMI launched the internationally known brand of street theatre in Bhutan with TNTG and with the support of Save the Children. The medium proved to be immensely effective, and the theatrical troupe of TNTG has since been continuously engaged in promoting and advocating social causes through theatre.

In November 2009 TNTG's parent company, TGMI, partnered with Theatre Embassy, a Dutch theatre organization, to conduct a seven-week training workshop on theatre and to produce a theatrical performance based on the romantic folktale, *Gasa Lamai Singye*, the Bhutanese equivalent of Romeo and Juliet. The production, titled *Galem gi Lu*, struck an instant chord with the Bhutanese audience and played to packed houses in the capital.

Schedule

	Date	Time	Venue
Inauguration of the Festival followed by a performance of Nati Binodini Hindi, 100 minutes Based on the actress's autobiography <i>Aamaar Katha</i> Director: Amal Allana Theatre and Television Associates, New Delhi, India	8 March Monday	5.30 pm	Kamani Auditorium
Colombo Colombo Sinhala and English, 120 minutes Playwright: Indika Ferdinando Director: Indika Ferdinando Theatre Plus, Sri Lanka	8 March Monday	8.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Sakubai Hindi, 90 minutes Playwright: Nadira Zaheer Babbar Director: Nadira Zaheer Babbar Ekjute Theatre Group, Mumbai, India	9 March Tuesday	6.30 pm	Kamani Auditorium
Putaliko Ghar Nepali, 105 minutes Translation of Henrik Ibsen's <i>A Doll's House</i> Translator: Sunil Pokharel Director: Sunil Pokharel Aarohan Theatre Group, Kathmandu, Nepal	9 March Tuesday	8.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Dhonthiyala—Alifulhu: A Love Story Director: Thoiba Saeedh Maldives	10 March Wednesday	6.30 pm	Kamani Auditorium
Nagamandala Punjabi, 70 minutes Playwright: Girish Karnad Translator: Surjit Patar Director: Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry The Company, Chandigarh, India	10 March Wednesday	8.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Jang Ab Nahin Hogi Urdu, 80 minutes Based on Aristophanes' <i>Lysistrata</i> Adaptation: Fahmida Riaz and Anwer Jafri Directors: Sheema Kermani and Anwer Jafri Tehrik-e-Niswan, Karachi, Pakistan	11 March Thursday	6.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Sadakainaya Jataka Director: Win Myint Shwe Myanmar Theatre Group, Myanmar	11 March Thursday	8.30 pm	Meghdoot Open Air Theatre (Sangeet Natak Akademi)
Draupadi Manipuri, 80 minutes Adapted from Mahasweta Devi's story Director: H. Kanhailal Kalakshetra, Manipur, India	12 March Friday	6.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Thus Spake Shoorpanakha, So Said Shakuni English, 60 minutes Playwright: Poile Sengupta Director: Abhijit Sengupta Co-director: Poile Sengupta Theatre Club, Bangalore, India	13 March Saturday	6.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Salsal and Shahmaama* Dari, 75 minutes Playwright: Abdul Hakim Hashemi Director: Monireh Hashemi Simorgh Film Association of Culture and Art, Herat, Afghanistan	13 March Saturday	8.30 pm	Meghdoot Open Air Theatre (Sangeet Natak Akademi)
Behular Bhasan Bengali, 100 minutes Adapted from the <i>Padma-puran (Manasa-mangal)</i> Director: Syed Jamil Ahmed Department of Theatre, University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh	14 March Sunday	6.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Sonata Indian English, 80 minutes Playwright: Mahesh Elkunchwar Director: Sohag Sen Ensemble, Kolkata, India	15 March Monday	6.30 pm	Shri Ram Centre
Closing performance of the Festival Galem gi Lu Dzongkha, 60 minutes Playwrights: Caroline van Leerdam and Tshering Gyeltshen Director: Caroline van Leerdam Associate director: Tshering Gyeltshen The New Theatre Group, Thimphu, Bhutan	15 March Monday	8.30 pm	Meghdoot Open Air Theatre (Sangeet Natak Akademi)

* This play will also be performed at Jamia Millia Islamia on 11 March (Thursday), at 4 pm.

Credits and Acknowledgements

Steering-cum-Selection Committee

Virendra Gupta, Director General, ICCR
Anuradha Kapur, Director, NSD
Veena Sikri, Professor, Jamia Millia Islamia
Kirti Jain, Professor, NSD
Sohaila Kapur, Theatre Director
Ajit Gupte, Dy. Director General, ICCR

Festival programming (NSD)

Gargi Bharadwaj
Manpreet Sabharwal

Festival programming (ICCR)

Y.L. Rao, Programme Director, ICCR
Ranjit Raj Arora, Programme Officer, ICCR
Ramesh Narula, Programme Officer, ICCR

Artistic Advisor

Kirti Jain

Technical Director

Suresh Bhardwaj

Chief Technical Coordinator

Himanshu B Joshi

Technical Coordinators at Performance Venue

Avtar Sahni
Ramji Bali
Shiv Prasad Gond
Prasanna
Dipankar Paul

Festival Photographer

S. Thyagarajan

Publications & Print Material

Alpana Khare (Design)
Indira Chandrasekhar (Editorial)

Venue Design & Ambience

Neeraj Sahai

Chief Administrative Coordinator (NSD)

Bhanwar Singh

NSD Administrative support

Ramkishan
Geevarghese K.T.
S.P. Sharma
O.P. Sagar
A.K. Barua
Manoj Ramela
Anil Puri

ICCR Administrative support

Ramniwas

NSD Technical Support

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Gursharan Kaur
Ram Pratap
Kiran Kumar

Reception Committee

Arun Kumar Mallick
C.R. Padmashree
Gauri Deval
Dushyant

PR Consultant

Ranjan Bakshi

Acknowledgements

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Limra Set Erection
Batra Electricals
Chaman Audio Visuals



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