

Chapter – 5

Production Work

5.1 Production of Habib Tanvir

What makes Habib Tanvir's Contribution so invaluable and irreplaceable in his intervention in the most fundamental discourse of theatre in independent India- the whole question of direction and its form. Sudhanava Deshpande mentions that Habib Tanvir has fashioned as popular modern theatre, borrowing elements from rural dramatics tradition that has more often than not been utopia rather than revolutionary.

Habib Tanvir was making his own course of performance by blending folktale with folklore and his poetry frequently. As Javed Malik also mentioned, that Habib fits and blends his poetry with the traditional folk and tribal. Apart from this we can also see the use of three unities– the unity of Time, Space and action in his production like *Charandas Chor*, *Duryodhan*, *Bahadur Klarin* etc.¹

Here after we will discuss his most famous play *Agra Bazar* and his masterpiece *Charandas Chor* in detail with some other plays in brief. We will start with *Agra Bazar* which gave him a new dimension in his career and proven as path breaking for him in theatre world. Before that let's just understand the *Nacha* and *Pandavani* used by him.

¹Habib Tanvir – Towards an Inclusive Theatre by Anjum Katyal Page no. xxi.

5.1.1 Nacha:

theatre found in the entire state of Chhattisgarh in Sarguja region. Although there are four different forms of *Nacha*, Khare Saaj *Nacha*; Gandawa *Nacha*; Dewar *Nacha* and Baithe Saaj *Nacha*, the troupes performing Khare Saaj, Dewar or Gandawa *Nacha* are very few. The most popular form today is Baithe Saaj *Nacha*. Comedy is an essential and a most entertaining aspect of the *Nacha* folk theatre. The humorous skits of *Nacha* also incorporate themes on social issues to create awareness.

It revolves round small dramatic stories and “*vyang*” on any subject, which the spectators are interested including social, political. In *Nacha* Joker plays an important role. ‘Gammat’ in *Nacha* has a special importance, which attracts thousands of people throughout the night. *Nacha* Actors do not give importance to the Dress. They use Khadi & Geru in their make - up. *Harmonium*, *Duff*, *Tabla*, *Khanjeera* etc. are used for Musical accompaniment during the performance.

5.1.2 Pandavani:

Pandavani (Songs of Pandavas) is a folk ballad form performed predominantly in Chhattisgarh. It depicts the story of the Pandavas, the leading characters in the epic *Mahabharata* with musical accompaniment and Bhima as hero. This form of folk theatre is popular in the State of Chhattisgarh and in the few neighbouring tribal areas of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. The artists in the *Pandavani* narration consist of a lead artist and some supporting singers and musicians. There are two styles of narration in *Pandavani*, Vedamati and Kapalik. In the Vedamati style the lead artist narrates in a simple manner by sitting on the floor throughout the performance. The Kapalik style is livelier, where the narrator actually enacts the scenes and characters.

ns stories or songs of Pandavas, the legendary
ta and involves the lead singer, enacting and
singing with an *ektara* or a *tambura* (stringed musical instrument),
decorated with small bells and peacock feathers in one hand and
sometimes *kartal* (a pair of cymbals) on another.

It is part of the tradition of the tellers-of-tales present in every culture or
tradition (like Baul singers of Bengal and Kathak performers), where
ancient epics, anecdotes and stories are recounted, or re-enacted to
educate and entertain the masses. Without the use of any stage props or
settings, just by the use to mimicry and rousing theatrical movements,
and in between the singer-narrator break into an impromptu dance, at the
completion of an episode or to celebrate a victory with the story being
retold, yet in its truest sense *Pandavani* remains an accomplished theatre
form.

The singer is usually supported by a group of performers on Harmonium,
Tabla, Dholka, Majira and two or three singers who sing the refrain and
provide backing vocals.

Each singer adds his or her unique style to the singing, sometimes adding
local words, improvising and offering critique on current happenings and
an insight through the story. Gradually as the story progresses the
performance becomes more intense and experiential with added dance
movements, an element of surprise often used.

The lead singer continuously interacts with the accompanying singers,
who ask questions, give commentary, interject thus enhancing the
dramatic effect of the performance, which can last for several hours on a

harata. Eventually what starts out as a simple full-fledged ballad.

Influences of Pandanavi can be clearly seen in the plays of Habib Tanvir who used folk singers of Chhattisgarh in his plays, creating a free-style story narration format, typical of *Pandavani*.

5.1.3 *Agra Bazar*

"*Agra Bazar*", based on the life of plebeian poet Nazir Akbarabadi, is located in the heart of Agra's marketplace. Staged by Tanvir, *Agra Bazar* became a brilliant spectacle, gently stressing that literature and poetry are the prerogative of the masses, not just a rarefied few.

The first urdu edition of the play published in 1954 originally 50-minute version that was staged in Jamia. In that version the plot was entirely cantered on the Kakri-seller who finds it difficult to sell his Kakri until he gets Nazir to write a poem on it. He sings this poem and does brisk business. Gradually, another strand added to the play which concerned a prostitute and Police Constable. This also produces 3 other characters - the two cops and the Rake. The character of the Horse-Trader Manzoor Hussain survived but all his dialogues were jettisoned. He became dramatically more effective as minute figure who has lost his mental balance after being robbed by highway man and who was passionately in love with the courtesan.² However a new character, Beni Prasad, was needed to tell Manzoor Hussain's tale. The two eunuchs, Kariman and Chameli, were also added later. They arrive at the Potter's door to sing

² Habib Tanvir Towards an Inclusive Theatre by Anjum Katyal Page no.31

the birth of his son. This becomes the excuse for about lord Krishna's childhood days. New and appropriate dialogues had to be written for the two eunuchs which perhaps made the scene even more interesting.

The third strand of the plot is located in the conversations at the book-seller. It relates to major changes that were taking place in the 19th century in printing and publishing, and in the language of public and literary discourse.

It also focuses on the implications of these changes for the material conditions of the urdu and persian poets, writers and publishers. A new character Ganga Prasad , was added to represent these changes more fully. This hectic activity of the market place forms the backdrop against which Nazir wrote. His poetry, his life, the source of his livelihood, namely tutoring, was closely connected with this environment and his poetry reflects this. The play is nothing but a portrait of all those aspects of that market place. My purpose was to provide a comprehensive picture of Nazir's work.

Tanvir shares on *Agra Bazar* that he wanted to show the contrast to the plebeian sections, that the educated elite of Nazi's time praised him as a person but totally ignored him as a poet. And this was the point which gave him an idea of the book-seller who help the play move forward and whose shops become the two opposing poles of the market place.

The play is fictional, with regard to the plot. It revolves around invented, brief and simple story. As the street vendors wait for people to buy their ware, we see them engaged in the ordinary business of every day: talking, grumbling, bickering, slowly fanning their wares with grimy towels to

and even, on occasion, breaking into a fist-fight. brings the troublesome *daroga* to their street, and it is, of course, the *kakdiwala* who is blamed for instigating it.

Certain changes were made in the selection and the location of some poem, during a second reading of the play. Nazir's opus is full of good poetry. It is one thing to make a selection of his poems on the bases of their poetic merit but quite another to select them in keeping with the plays requirements and the limitations of the performance time. At the same time, it was also necessary to ensure that Nazir's most significant poems do not get left out. So his "*Banjarnama*", which was not included in the first version, was brought in. "*Shahar Ashob*", has always been the opening poem of *Agra Bazar* because of its connection with the plays central theme of white spread unemployment.

Originally act 2 used to open with Nazir's "*Akbarabad*". It was later replaced with "*Banjarnama*" which deals with the theme of man's mortality. One cannot find another poem of such power on the topic of death in any language. The play ends with "*Aadaminama*" as before because the one message that comes across powerfully through Nazir's poetry is his humanism, love and goodwill for the common people. In later production he changed the order of his poems.³

The biggest weakness of the 1954 production was that the poems of the Kakri, watermelon, laddoo were followed by the poems on the Potter's wares, the kite, a bear cub and Holi, with "*Aadaminama*" coming at the

³ *Agra Bazar*- Habib Tanvir Trans. By Javed Malick page no. 17

However demanded that nothing should intercede poems listed above and “*Aadaminama*”. The play starts with the difficulties faced by the street vendors because of lack of business. The Kakri seller hits upon the idea that he will be able to sell his wares if he has an appropriate song to go with it. This makes him run after every person who seems to him to have the potential to write verses on his Kakri. After repeated disappointment, he finally hears about Nazir, goes to him and gets the poem written by him. As he sings it to hawk his kakris, people start to approach him and buy them. The watermelon and laddoo seller also follow his example. Before the kakri seller completes his song they enter one after another with their song. Since its very simple and fragile story line is the basis of the play, this was the best point at which to end the play. If in 1954, the play was successful even without this arrangement of songs, the credit goes to Nazir. His writing has such power that if one was to merely present his poems on stage that too would be received well by the spectators.

The first version did not have the erotic triangle involving the Courtesan, the Police Constable, and his rival. And as already mentioned this was added in the revised version. It was necessary to take this story to its logical climax. Yet another difficulty got sorted out which had to do with the aesthetic and semantic impact of the music, In the course of working out this problem. As Habib Tanvir mentioned “I had already arranged the vendors’ songs into one sequence. The three songs are sung one after another in quick succession. Each has a different tune. To make the transition from one tune to another dramatically effective, a musical bridge was needed. I obtained this bridge by using a Chhattisgarhi folk song as a recurrent orchestra. The problem now was that these songs were

by the ‘*Aadminama*’ which had an entirely
could not be shifted any-where”⁴

The poem could not be shifted any-where else because it provided a perfect ending for the play. What helped was the scene that I had written as the culmination of the story of the rivalry between the Police Constable and the Rake which shows how through duplicity, falsehood, brute force and misuse of his position, the Police Constable has the Rake arrested on trumped-up charges and thus achieves a victory over him.

Tanvir placed this brief scene between the vendors’ songs and the last chorus. As he solved his problem regarding the musical transition as well as completed the story. In fact the scene helped to deepen the impact of the last chorus on the subject of ‘Man’. The arrogantly victorious Police Constable cannot even abide Manzoor Hussain’s quiet and selfless love for the Courtesan and, after rudely driving him away from her chamber, lets out a loud guffaw. Just at that point the fakirs enter singing Nazir’s ‘*Aadminama*’.

The songs in the play were mostly set to the tunes that he had either heard during his childhood or had composed for his own poetry. Only the tune of ‘*Banjaranama*’ was composed by Khalili of Bhatinda. During a visit to Agra, my old friend from the IPTA days Rajendra Raghuvanshi, pointed out that Holi was traditionally sung differently in the region of Agra and

⁴ *Agra Bazar- Habib Tanvir Trans. By Javed Malick page no. 18*

s from Agra and his play is set in Agra, it was
he should employ authentic local tunes

As he accepted and said that “I have fashioned the hawkers’ speech from Delhi’s language. I could not find any reliable source for the kind of language that was spoken in Agra. I said nothing of this to Raghuvanshi and instead expressed a desire to hear the traditional Agra tunes of Holi. I found the tunes very appealing and, later, on receiving an audio cassette of them from him. I selected a couple and wove them into my Holi scene without altering the basic tune of Nazir’s song. Since, it was difficult to fit Nazir’s lines to those tunes. I accommodated them together with their traditional words alongside my original tune with some alteration in the sequence of its words.

5.1.4 Nazir’s Poetry in *Agra Bazar*

In India, a large variety of festivals are observed. Apart from Nazir, no Urdu poet ever paid attention to this fact. Similarly, no poet except Nazir and the classical Sanskrit poets have written about the distinct Indian seasons and their specific qualities. In Urdu prose we do find praises of various seasons in the writings of Farhatullah Beg. Not only has Nazir written about the seasons, but each of his poems is also distinct in quality and full of artistic appeal and interest. Every rhyme has impact and every couplet is well constructed. Nazir tried his skill on every poetic form whether it is be the ghazal, the na’at, the quata, the musaddas, the geet, or the bhajan, except the quasida. Nazir also wrote about various religious communities and about the sacred icons of their creed. He wrote about Guru Nanak, Baldevji, Mahadev, and Lord Krishna and so on. He wrote

at respect. Each poem carries a sense of its
y and yet each is rich and imaginative in poetic
terms.⁵

Take, for example, the poem on the kakri; the kakri which is curved is like Heer's bangle and the one that is straight is like Ranjha's flute. What is more, these beautiful similes pour into the poem with complete ease and seemingly without any effort:

फ़रहाद की नशीली आँखें , शिरीन का नाजुक बदन
लैला की तराशी हुई बाँहें , मजनू की ठण्डी आँहें।

How passionately Nazir must have loved his town! This poet was remarkably close to the life and concerns of the common people. He not only wrote poems on subjects like money, poverty, sycophancy and food but also wrote in a simple and spontaneous style without compromising on poetic quality. Nazir's vocabulary is full of words that are either very common or humble or traditional but rarely used by poets. The names of food grains, spices, condiments, etc. are traditionally regarded as unpoetic. But Nazir uses these very words with a dexterity and skill in his masterpiece '*Banjaranama*' on the theme of life's transience, that it is unparalleled in world literature. As we have seen in the *Agra Bazar* he created a bazaar on the stage and the Urdu poetry of the Nazir is been used by Tanvir in his famous play. Now will see how he transformed a small folktale of Rajasthan written by Vijay Dehtha in to a full-fledged comical satire with his creativity.

⁵ *Agra Bazar- Habib Tanvir Trans. By Javed Malick page no. 22*

5.1.5 Charandas Chor

As Tanvir discussed in his director note he say “I took up Charandas towards the end of the workshop in Bhilai, around the end of 1974. The crowd was full of Satnamis. When I was showing skits on the open stage and the Satnamis were coming up on the stage again and again, I was inspired by them. I thought that this play about a thief who does not abandon truth was very much up their street. I was inspired by these people, the central article of whose faith is satya hi ishwar hai, ishwar hi satya hai which was later on used by tanvir as his one of the song of the play. That’s why Charandas grew in Chhattisgarh and not in Rajasthan. For songs he had the Satnami book with him and he just improvised by singing and asking them to repeat. And there was a big response for this rough, kachcha thing. It ran for about 40 minutes. We called it Chor Chor. He worked further on it, got the panthi dance party and choreographed them. He also included their flag, their dance, rearranged it, and got them to write his type of songs. He gave them the sthayi of the song – Yama se chori mat kariyo – so that there will be a stamp of Yama. Death is imminent, so that it works in the mind of the audience subconsciously. The song worked. Charandas died. Total silence. Strange silence. People got up, thinking, when will the next line come? Disturbed. The restive, urban, Delhi audience was moved. And then, before going out, they stopped, turned, and then stood for several minutes because the anticlimax goes on for a long time, watching from the door, uncomfortably. Then they returned for a standing ovation for a long time.⁶

⁶ Charandas Chor- Habib Tanvir Trans. By Javed Malick page no. 39

ir's most well-known production, is a play about
through the perspective of the thief of the play's
title, *Charandas Chor*. Not only a clever and benevolent thief, a la Robin
Hood, but also a man of his word, ready to pay any price to retain his
integrity.

⁷As Javed Mallick has observed in his excellent introduction to Anjum
Katyal's translation of "*Charandas Chor*", Charandas is "a figure of the
common man who is capable of virtues rare in an unjust, class-based
society...truthful and a man of his word," a man who lives up to and dies
for his word.

⁸As Mallick points out, the original story, from writer-folklorist Vijaydan
Detha, has a far bleaker ending, with the thief being killed and the guru
becoming the king instead; but in Tanvir's more hopeful version, the thief
is put to death, but lives on in the hearts and minds of people, revered by
them for his integrity. It is this optimism, this faith in the goodness of
ordinary people that shines through the work of Naya Theatre.

The play, *Charandas Chor*, is steeped in paradox. In fact, it is built
around the contraries. To quote Javed Malik, "*Charandas Chor* is
conceived in terms of paradoxes and contradictions". ³Habib Tanvir
during his conversation with Anjum Katyal, the translator of the play,
suggested the same when he said, "Habits are hard to shake off. So I'd
like you to say that just as a drunkard cannot leave drinking, a liar cannot
leave lying and a thief cannot

⁷⁻⁸ Habib Tanvir – *Towards an Inclusive Theatre* by Anjum Katyal Page no. xxi.

en cannot leave telling the truth. If habit is vice a habit, then that too is a vice”. And if a truthful man happens to be thief, then things become more complex and interesting.

5.1.5.1 Transforming *Charandas Chor*

The play does not follow any specific folk narrative or ritual, and it does not contain the conventional outer frame in which a Sutradhar or Bhagavata presents the inner action to the audience. Instead, Charandas is a synthetic and largely oral text assembled piecemeal to suit the specific needs and talents of Tanvir’s company of tribal performers from the Chattisgarh region. It was also the first play by Tanvir to be performed entirely by the tribal actors in their own dialect, making it a turning point in the playwright’s career-both because it excluded urban actors and because it introduced Chattisgarhi as the language for a contemporary play. Here one thing is to be noted that the language of theatre is not only depend upon the literature it more depend upon the expression. The structure and content of the play emerged gradually in the improvisatory workshops and rehearsals of the illiterate tribal performers, who created the dialogue they would be most comfortable with. Tanvir wrote some of the songs himself and commissioned two poets from the region- Swarna Kumar Sahu and Gangaram Seeket- to create the rest. Tanvir accommodated within his premodern narrative the forms of oppression and corruption that belong in the Indian political present. As Tanvir’s actors are not literate so he used to explain them a situation and leave them free in the rehearsal. Their actors improvise the situation and during this Tanvir sits and write a performance text according to his actor. After

ng the movement and other important aspect of

As a folk play actually performed by folk players, *Charandas Chor* evokes village culture even more vividly and “authentically” especially in the abundant individual and collective singing and dancing that punctuates and sometimes constitutes the action. As a deliberately assembled text, the play proceeds not through the dual outer/inner structure of formalized folk performance but through the conjuncture of disparate structural elements and a succession of episodes held together by the central figure of Charandas. The *Gamant Nacha* which is so effective is creatively used by him.

Anjum Katyal during a short conversation said that she could not conceive the play, *Charandas Chor*, in any other terms than seeing it as a putting together of truth and lie simultaneously in a man. The entire theme of the play is constructed around contradictions. There are liars, scoundrels, thieves, but they are men of principles as well. There are custodians of law, but they are breakers of it too. There are saints and sanyasis, but they run after money as well. There are men of intellect, but it is very easy to deceive them. There are rich, affluent people, but at heart, they are the poorest. There are paupers, but at heart, they are very rich. Thus, the theme of the entire play is embedded in a remarkable juxtaposition of opposites, one after another. In the play, truth and lie go hand in hand, as has been pointed out. People who deceive and cheat others turn out to be humanitarian as well. This paradox is well worked out through the portrayal of the central character, Charandas.

song and then an overwhelmingly male world, to establish Charandas's mercurial personae as amoral thief, trickster, disciple of a truth-seeking guru, and protector of the oppressed. During this act Charandas came across the two important; so called pillar of the society- two antithetical male figures- the foolish havaldar(constable), who is a type of defunct authority, and the Satnami guru, a charismatic yet ambivalent male ideal. Dressed in a policeman's Khaki uniform and carrying a nightstick, the constable is the stock gull who provides vicarious release for the villagers' pent-up emotions against the governmental machinery of "law and order." Belonging to an older world of ascetic discipline, the religious guru imposes his own code of conduct and makes uncompromising demands on a succession of dysfunctional males- a thief, a drunk, a gambler, a drug addict- who stumbles across his path. But he succeeds in "reforming" no one except Charandas and seems to be motivated largely by a callow interest in guru-dakshina, the disciple's traditional material tribute to his master.

In performance, the effective demarcation of this male world depends on the differentiation of the three main figures from the ragtag company of men as well as the crowds of villagers and dancers surrounding them. In contrast with the relative ambiguity of performers in urban folk drama, the actors in these three roles have therefore gained unusual celebrity. The comedic and political effect of the thief- constable rivalry also depends on the spectators' willingness to suspend mistrust and see Charandas as ever-present but uncatchable, even when he is face to face with his arch-rival; the occasions when he eludes the constable by posing as a cripple and as the god Hanuman represent climactic moments of physical comedy on the stage.

...ant's wife, he is expected to run away with all this, Charandas cannot see her weep. He returns immediately whatever he has snatched. Actually, he inadvertently takes five vows before the Guru, according to them, he will never eat in golden plate, never presides an elephant procession, never marry a queen and never be a king. He also says that he will never lie in future. Now, on the one hand, he is not ready to abjure stealing, which he calls as his "Dharma" on the other hand, he pledges to remain truthful. No doubt, he does not give up stealing, but he also adheres to his oath of becoming a truthful man. A thief is generally supposed to be selfish, mean and egocentric. But, Charandas is of a helping nature. He robs the landlord not for his own sake, but for the sake of the entire village. He robs the Queen not to enhance his fortunes, but to make his presence felt. Later on, time tests him. He is given opportunity of leading a procession, marrying a queen, eating in a golden plate and becoming a king. But, he refuses to do any of the things. Had there been any other common man, he could have pounced upon this golden opportunity without caring for future consequences. The Queen happens to be young and pretty, and she also offers to pay off all penances: "Do penance, if necessary. We can hold an atonement ceremony and gather all the ascetics and holy men and fulfill all the rituals necessary to absolve you"

He is expected to surrender, but no, he is very firm. This explains the nature of paradox. Here we have a man who is immoral, thief yet he is a man of noble principles and promises. He took vows in a joking way and yet he adheres to them in a serious manner. He prefers to die rather than succumbing to all pressures. Another paradox dealt within the play is: Spiritualism V/s Materialism. This is evident from the conduct of the Guru and the Priest. On the one hand, there is religion represented by the

Guru is supposed to be a man of restraint, a man of worldly considerations, a man who is selfless and benevolent. The Guru in the play also asks his followers to give up their vices, and yet he is a man of this world, he is more concerned with money than with salvation. The song which he sings constantly proves this: That's all you have to do, just give the guru his due. Is it salvation you want? Just give the guru his due. The Priest is also supposed to be a man of pious nature. He is expected to be well versed in the Vedas. Now, the priest in the play does perform ceremonies yet reading of many religious scripts fail to turn him into a man of wisdom. He is not able to penetrate beneath the mask which Charandas is wearing. His heart leaps when he sees a basket full of golden ornaments. He is not here motivated by any humanitarian instinct. His eyes are set simply upon the precious booty which forces him to make Charandas stay there.

Affluence vis-a-vis Poverty and Poverty vis-a-vis Affluence is yet another set of contraries that one encounters in the play. Here one meets people who are rich yet poor, and poor who are paradoxically rich. The landlord in the play is a rich man. He has fields in various villages. His fields are full of crops. He also possesses a tube well and electricity connection. He is expected to share his fortune with the suffering lot in the time of crisis. But, he turns out to be too mean and miserly. He may be rich, but only in the worldly sense. From humanitarian perspective, he is the poorest of all. Then, there are poor peasants who have nothing to eat. When they get food, they are expected to fill their bellies first. But, instead of that, they distribute the entire food in the village first. Thus, the poor turn out to be rich than the so called rich. The contrastive interplay of the oppositions like: Defending and Offending, Making and Breaking, Preserving and Violating, however, constitute another interesting

are central to the character of the Havaladar. He is supposed to preserve the law, punish the offenders and maintain peace in the town. He enters the stage chasing Charandas, he threatens him at his mischief, and he even warns him against going astray. But, he also violates the law.

He instead of catching the thieves takes commission from them and lets them go. He befriends them and aids them in their unlawful deeds. For example, he says to Charandas, "If you have, just tell me and I won't report. We'll share the booty". Yet another set of oppositions that captures attention and is a source of delight lies in the counter play of the oppositions such as: Sublimity and Pettiness, intellectuality and foolishness, Wisdom and Buffoonery. The case of the Munim and the Minister can be cited to substantiate these paradoxes. First there is the Minister, who is expected to have some integrity in him. He is also supposed to be a worldly wise man, since he is next to the Queen. So, one expects in him an amount of dignity and intellect to see through the pranks of unsocial elements. He enters the stage with his head high, as if he will never be trapped. But, how easily he is trapped and is fooled by the Guru and the Havaladar. A man who is supposed to run the country along with the Queen is reduced to an easily manipulate fool. He condemns the Munim at his incapability of differentiating between a Chor and a Minister. But, ironically enough, he himself is not able to dissect beneath the incognito of the tricksters. Then there is the Munim, an accountant, who is expected to be again an intelligent person, that's why, he is hired to maintain the accounts. But, ironically, he also turns out to be a good for nothing fellow. His wisdom and intellect never enables him to see whether he is talking to a minister or a Chor. On the other hand, he is hired to preserve the accounts, but he himself steals five golden mohurs

The contrast between the dominator and the ruled, the commander and the commanded is yet another set of contraries that is enacted in the play.

In the second act we can see that *Charandas Chor* is doubly unusual in that it grants women both sexual and political power but portrays the male and female worlds as fundamentally incompatible because of the clash between male chastity and a predatory female sexuality. Beautiful, unmarried, and autocratic, the rani exercises her authority effortlessly over a feudal kingdom- the antithesis to the disorderly society of act I- in which feminized men defer to her authority while fulfilling the conventional roles of minister, treasurer, priest, soldier, and so on. Charandas erupts into this world of reversed gender roles because he wants to reach the pinnacle of his career as a thief and flout the Rani's authority at the same time by committing a symbolic theft from her treasury. Hereafter the encounter between Charandas and the Rani deviates in almost every respect from the usual logic of transgressive unions in folk narratives. He succeeds in arousing her interest and then her passion as she comes to regard him as an exceptional male rather than as an imperfect mate who needs to be supplanted.⁹ This unexpected capitulation leads her to abdicate her own nature in two ways:

⁹ *Theatre of Independence by Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar Page no.347.*

to revert to the usual role of the submissive lover. Her embarrassment at her passion creates the desire to conceal her emotions from her male courtiers and subjects. She then encounters frustration rather than fulfillment in her quest, not because Charandas is indifferent toward her, but because his idiosyncratic oaths stand in the way: the woman desires but is not desired in turn because of the irrationality of male codes. Perhaps the most enduring image from the play's early productions is that of splendidly dressed Fida Bai as the rani, looking in perplexity at Govind Ram in peasant dress as he prepares to refuse the food she has offered him on a gold platter. Charandas's transgression becomes more serious when the rani offers marriage, because even the female servant at court considers it unimaginable that any man would refuse a queen.

But not only does Charandas refuse the queen's hand, he wants to announce his refusal to the world because he cannot lie. Significantly, throughout the period of brief but intense courtship Charandas addresses the queen as "rani dai" – "dai" is a term of respect for an older woman, but also the word for "midwife." At the point of no return, as the rani reverts from paramour to queen, from the "*feminine*" back to the "*masculine*" role, she can restore order and her own self-respect only by destroying Charandas. Like Basanna, Charandas is thus a sacrificial victim, but he dies for wanting to guard his chastity in the face of female desire, not for the sin of sexual transgression. In this contest between a fellowship of ascetic males and the sovereign authority of women, patriarchy becomes curiously irrelevant.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Theatre of Independence by Aparna Bhargava Dharwadkar Page no.348*

est example for this kind of paradox. On the one
een, ruler, commander, authoritative, dominator
of the country. And yet she is ruled, controlled, dominated by not only
physical passions but her personal concerns as well. She is supposed to
command everyone, but see the irony, she herself falls down at the feet of
Charandas.

The constitutive features of folk theatre, embodied variously in this play,
counteract such rigidity and conformity in every respect. The
improvisatory nature of the performance implies a rejection of textual
authority, analogous to the rejection of social and political codes. The
absence of a linear coherent structure challenges notions of hierarchy and
order. The entire form is a symbolic gesture of protest and a rejection of
authority, unlike elite theatre, which does not allow the violation of
established tenets.

In *Charandas Chor* Tanvir embeds his folk narrative in a recognizably
contemporary world of social inequality and political corruption. The
social meanings of act I of the play coexist with the mythic and
psychosexual meanings of act 2, placed on an equal footing by a bare
stage that can signify any place. The singular story of Charandas belongs
to folklore and myth, but the character created by Tanvir and his
company of performers does not.

5.1.5.2 **Modernity in *Charandas Chor***

This view of folk theatre as a resistant form deepens the paradox that folk cultures in India are a product of pre modern modes of socio-economic organization and undergo inevitable atrophy as the rural regions adapt to modern urbanization, industrialization, and development. Certainly, folk theatre and its urban derivations cannot have the transparent contemporaneity of realist forms set in the urban present. But in their resistance to authority, folk-based forms- however primal their appeal in other respects – mount a socio-political critique that is thoroughly accessible to the urban spectator, and the clear hand of an author self-consciously shaping his material for urban consumption enhances this accessibility.

To conclude, it can be said that *Charandas Chor* is a remarkable play steeped in paradox. These paradoxes not only make the play interesting, but make it complex as well. What Tanvir is trying to prove is that, perhaps, nothing is final and nothing is absolute. Truth becomes lie and lie becomes truth. Preserve becomes offender and offender becomes preserver. Meaning is never fixed. It is determined by the context. Secondly, these paradoxes also surprise and amuse the readers because of the innate irony which they carry in them. One expects one thing, but something quite different and surprising happens. This constant shifting from one meaning to the other makes the play a delightful and illuminating reading.

Finally, the versatility of the urban folk form is evident in play provides a theatrical experience antithetical to that of the realist drama of urban domesticity but does not relinquish its hold on the social and political

locations. With respect to gender, however, the realist drama are striking and significant.

Whatever the audience's aesthetic and ideological leanings, contemporary Indian practice offers compelling reasons to deexoticize folk theatre and attend to the ways in which it participates in the politics of gender, class, and community in the present.

After in detail study of the play *Agra Bazar* and *Charandas Chor* let us just take an overview of the other play directed by the Habib Tanivr.

5.1.6 Others Plays in Brief

5.1.6.1 *Bahadur Kalarin*

The story was very different, a tragedy, and he was stuck for two years on how to tell the story, how to dramatize it, there is wine-seller girl called *Bahadur Kalarin* and she has a son from a king who passes through and meets her, promises to marry her, takes her and doesn't return. And the son marries one hundred and twenty six girls. One hundred and twenty six is a magical figure in folklore; in Chhattisgarhi language it's called *chhe agar chhe kori*, which means six plus six times twenty, which is one hundred and twenty six. Their counting goes from twenty to twenty, not hundred. This motif enters many legends and folktales-*chhe agar chhe kori*, one hundred and twenty six. So he married one hundred and twenty six girls, before he declared to his mother that there was no woman he had known as beautiful as her. And the mother was appalled, but she hide the fact that she was shocked and cooked him a very spicy meal, very greasy, so that he became thirsty. She didn't let him drink water under the excuse that there's no water today in the house, and forbade the village to

When he came back thirsty, she asked him to go to the well and draw some water. When he went, very weak, to draw the water, she pushed him into the well and threw a rock on him, and killed him. That is the story. And there're *murtis* in that village saying that this is the *Kalarin*.

In the play he made the king return after the son had grown up and made them fight, with the boy not knowing that it is his father, and killing him. But Habib Tanvir made some changes in the original story to make it effective stage performance. In a play the boy married one hundred and twenty six times. After each marriage he express that the women is not good for him. Supposing he was sick, he went to bed with his first wife and in bed she failed to rouse him and he wanted to marry again. He thought the girl was to blame. And the same thing happened, again he blamed the girl because, knowing his body, he knew that he was all right as a man. But he fails with these girls. It happened one hundred and twenty six times. But each time he looked at his mother or the mother touched him as a mother would touch a child; he was roused as a man.¹¹

He felt his body rise, like a man. So he discovers his fixation with the mother. What is wrong with that? It is his discovery, it is his problem. Suppose the boy, being the only son, is pampered by the mother right from childhood, the only male companion, so she sleeps with the child till age twelve, fourteen, fifteen and he sleeps in the same bed and he wets the bed and she tends to him, she gives him a bath, she puts oil in his hair, combs his hair and there's this bodily relationship up to an advanced age.

¹¹ *It Must Flow A Life in Theatre , Habib Tanvir, Interactions with Anjum Katyal and Biren Das Sharma page no 40*

Now if this is the connection and this is the sickness, then why should you blame the boy? And then Fida Bai brought such sensitivity to the oiling of the hair and to the feeding of the meal to the boy, the sensitivity of the touching, the delicate way she did it and the reaction of the boy when she touched his hair, and his eyes full of desire, before he discovers himself. And after his discovery, when she pretends, then again she gives him the meal and does the same things so that he remains deceived and feels happy and he's happy without sex, even when she's touching and being loving to him, he is satisfied. After this long process Habib express that "I got the wealth and the richness of the play and the texture which I wanted".

After this Habib Tanvir mentioned that the biggest challenge was for him was the one hundred and twenty six women. He then solved that through a tribal dance and one song in two minutes. The dance is going on and they're sleeping one after the other, two or three girls, and then just declaring one hundred and twenty six marriages. So it got simply done because by now he had solved the problem of time and space and action easily. *Bahadur Kalarin* took, in the thinking and the conceiving of it, not less than two years. In the actual doing of it, it took much less. He marries one woman and they go to bed on the stage, they sleep on a *chatai* and suddenly he gets up and there's a fight. And the mother comes to find out and he says that this woman is no good, I want to marry again. The mother tries to talk in favour of the girl, but the boy is stubborn and he won't hear of anything but a second marriage. Being the mother who has always pampered him, she says, 'Alright, alright, never mind. We'll find you another bride.' And she finds another bride. That ceremony is shown. With the second girl the same thing happens, in a different form. They're

law, *Kalarin*, is talking to the girl's mother, each child. It's quite a witty scene and in the middle of the praise there are sounds of beating and screaming inside and the boy comes out beating her. They begin to blame one another, the girl's mother blaming the boy, the boy's mother defending her son. After this scene she calls a priest.

Habib Mentioned about this scene as “I've shown that the son had already briefed the priest about the fact that he wants a third marriage, but I don't show that right away, it begins to show as the priest begins to say—*chawal isme yeh toota hua hai, do seedhe hue hain, teesri shadi to karna hai*. This means that there has to be a third marriage. The boy says, that's what I told you, and the priest pretends, what, what did you say? The hints come again and again, but *Kalarin* is shown to be naive enough to believe that the priest thinks he must have a third marriage. Then I show the ritual, several marriages taking place, till the last marriage. By this time the whole village is rebelling against *Kalarin* and her son and they come to the house of the girl's father saying, 'We'll not let you get her married. All our girls are suffering.' In the legend all the girls were given the pestle by *Kalarin*. There's a song about that. She told them to husk the paddy.¹²

As the story progress the boy ask his mother and said I had never seen a women like you. That was shocking for Klarin and she plans to kill her and make some sweets which the boy like and ask give me one more.' She feeds him with her own hands and he eats, *til ka laddu* made in ghee and the rest

¹² *It Must Flow A Life in Theatre*, Habib Tanvir,. *Interactions with Anjum Katyal and Biren Das Sharma* page no 42

hot and spicy. And then he becomes thirsty and qualitatively I've shown the villagers condemning him, no water, not one drop to drink and he's becoming thirstier, in the middle of their circular dance and he's in agony. And then he comes, half exhausted, half dead and asks for water, and *Kalarin* says, I've asked all the women of the household, one hundred and twenty six of them, they didn't fill any water today; so go ahead and do it yourself, now you're a man. She's changed her attitude to him, she almost scolds him, you're a man now, not a child, go get the bucket yourself, go to the well and help yourself. He looks at her, amazed, and then somehow manages to get up the platform, up the ladder to get the bucket, they'd kept it hanging there, and almost falls down because of his weakness and somehow stumbles across to the top of the well, drops the bucket and is about to bring out the water with difficulty, he's too weak to resist and she goes quietly behind him and throws him in, and comes back miming a huge stone and throws it and comes back again, agonized and sings the last song and whirls in a dance and at the end, on the *sama*, produces a dagger—the song is just a mother singing for the loss of her only son, only child-and she dies.

We can see the impact of Greek tragedy on the plot of the play. As he describe this as “⁵I was greatly moved by the Oedipal impulse—Oedipus had no alternative except to put out his eyes and Jocasta to kill herself. So that expiation was one classical feature of the end. Secondly, Freud helped me in understanding the fixation. So the Freudian complex was injected into the oral tale—it already existed, but I sort of uncovered it for the actors to fully understand and confront. And the villagers' opposition to *Kalarin*, first her love in the beginning and many wooers wooing her because she was an attractive woman and she remaining aloof and alone and not succumbing and yet running her wine—shop beautifully and

ness to great advantage for her business but tight control because she never wanted to have another lover after her one lover. I showed the lover's death on the stage and the *arti* taken out and as soon as the body is taken out and *Kalarin* follows her lover's body, her son stops her. The moment he stops her, she turns and beats him on the chest and he puts his arms around her and takes her away. This the first time such close, bodily love is shown between them, before he realizes that he loves his mother in that way. This was followed by a very fast, vigorous tribal dance and a quick short dance and song. So it was unsentimental— just the death and a song suggesting come, have a *bidi* before you carry on with your journey, somehow, in my mind relating it to death, but obliquely, acquiring other meanings—the pity of life and death. So the treatment made it what it was”.

5.1.6.2 Good Woman of Schezuan

In *Good Woman of Schezuan*, he only tried out one scene as an improvisation and that was in the tobacco shop—one after the other a family of nine or perhaps eleven, including the little child and the grandfather, just comes and starts sponging off them, a cup of tea, no harm in one cup of tea, oh, one cigarette wouldn't make a difference, and helping themselves. They did it so effortlessly, so naturally—they are used to so much poverty and to sponging, they understand all about greed. The instinct to survive makes them sly and clever. They don't have to be taught how to behave like greedy people who are parasites on the family.

5.1.6.3 **Raj-Rakta**

Tagore's *Visarjan* is one of his most powerful and most flawed plays, based on a clash between the priest of a kingdom and his king over whether animal sacrifice should be banned. Tanvir's instinct was to go back to the far stronger novel, *Rajarshi* on which *Visarjan* was based, and meld the play and the novel. Unfortunately, *Raj-Rakta* works better in text form—it remained awkward on stage in the Naya Theatre production—but Tanvir's script, if you can get it, remains a classic example of how to write an adaptation.

5.1.6.4 **Ponga Pundit**

Ponga Pundit is identified so strongly with Naya Theatre and Tanvir that many assume he was the author. It was written, as he often pointed out, by two folk artists, Sukhram and Sitaram, as a takedown of organised religion (and corrupt priests) and works best as improvisational theatre.

Perhaps Tanvir sahib's more esoteric plays—such as the one on the Greek mathematician Hypatia—will fade into obscurity. But his brand of folk theatre has proved surprisingly robust and though we'll miss that lean figure with the mobile expressions on stage, his plays will survive his passing.

5.1.6.5 **Mudra Rakshas**

In '*Mudraraksas*' there is a flowing stress in Habib Tanvir's presentation. Not only in the sequence of the incidences but also in the psychological condition of the characters is the stress constantly prevailing. There is no space for relaxation. It was difficult to that stress at the places where there was no dialogues, and the actors had to express only through their

language. The artists of Chhattisghar who had
age due to their humour and sarcastic and
spontaneous abhinaya, created the atmosphere of that stress with minute
detail with extremely controlled body language. This specific eye
movements and precise use of hands and *chari* gives new heights to this
play. Specifically Ramchandra in role of chanakya has use d his *chari* in a
very impressive manner. At maximum places there is a aggressive power
like leopard in his speed. He is unsettled due to the ups & down going on
his mind and at most places he is seen walking on his forefeet. His body
language does not depend on his dialogues. The words & dialogues do
not express his inner disturbances as effectively as his body language &
mudras does.

From the conversation with Ramchandra we get introduced to the training
style of Habibji. He does not enforce his style on the actor; he knows how
to take out the proper attitude from within the artist. So in his
presentation, through the plays might be of various levels, his artists look
to natural and at ease.

It is said about '*Veni Samhar*' that its frame work is week. It is also
blamed that its 4th and 5th act are unnecessary. I did not feel so. I rather
saw that it is a big thing in itself to describe all stories of *Mahabharata* in
six acts. And about the unnecessary long dialogues, this week point is
there in fourth act, where Sundarak constantly keeps telling beautiful
stories. But according to me due to this the frame work of play cannot be
doubted. And director always does some changes and few additions and
deletions according to the requirement. Specifically in classical plays this
has to be done. Whether it is Shakesphere or Kalidas, Shudedrak or

ated many portions from the play specifically I
ation of sundrak.

In the play ‘*Bhagavadjjuka*’ of Mahendra Vikram, (It is not the which
written by the Bodhayan) Habib also wrote songs by himself. This is also
marvellous in its storyline. On one hand highly knowledgeable saint and
on other hand extremely beautiful Aajuki.

Till now whichever Sanskrit plays Habib has presented, all of them
reflects his social side and his social understanding. These artists of
Bhāsa, Bhavabhutti, Shudrak, Vishakhduitt, Mahendra Vikram etc were
all different. Their supporters will also be considered having bad
character. These characters only become helpful in bringing end to
politics, exploitation, cunningness, tracheal etc. at the end. In these plays
the sutras described in *Natyashastra* were not followed strongly. Though
he agreed to shashtra he was found violating the rules of shashtraas.



A scene from Agra Bazar by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Bhadur Klarin by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Charandas Chor by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Charandas Chor by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Charandas Chor by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Charandas Chor of Habib Tanvir



A scene from Charandas Chor by Habib Tanvir used a Nacha Folk form



Original Performance Photo of Nacha used in the above Charandas Chor by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Agra Bazar by Habib Tanvir



Original Performance of Nacha Folk which reflect in Agra Bazar



A scene from Bahadur Klarin by Habib Tanvir



A scene from Original Nacha Performance

5.2 Productions of K.N.Pannikar

As we discussed in the previous chapter about Kavalam Naryan Panikkar's journey in the field of theatre. Panikkar spent his childhood in Kavalam where he was exposed to various performing traditions of Kerala like *Kathakali*, *Kuttiyattam*, *Mudiyattu*, etc. From young age he started absorbing the pleasure and spirit of these arts so much so that they almost became part of his being. We have seen that the impact of traditional songs and forms are engrossed right from the childhood due to this he made so many classics of *Bhāsa*. *Urubhangam*, *Karnabharam* & *Madhyamvyayog* etc. let's discuss different aspects of his production where he used traditional elements and gave a new dimension to his production. In his production of *Urubhangam* the highlighting point was using the *Theyyam* of Duryodhana which was appreciated by all theatre legends of that time and applauded by the audience too. Before discussing the *Urubhangam* let's understand what *Theyyam* is.

5.2.1 Traditional Theatre form used in Production

5.2.1.1 *Theyyam*

In *Theyyam* there are two types of transformation. First every human being is transformed into a *Theyyam* after death. This type of transformation is a metaphysical one: from death to deification, from human to the divine. The social rationale behind the transformation after death is that persons who suffered untimely deaths or who suffered injustice in an unequal society also achieve deification.

As the origins of the cult: any object inspiring was made into *Theyyam* by the folk and tribal communities and worshipped with appropriate rituals which included dance, drama, music and poetry. The *Theyyam* deities were propitiated for the welfare of the community, village or individual and they in turn appeared before the devotees through the medium who may be a priest or a chosen person and granted their wishes. The *Theyyam*, then can also be a functional tool for a society to assuage its guilt and the dancing, an act of contrition as well as attempt at appeasement.¹³

The second type of *Theyyam* is of gods whose different reincarnations are enacted as *Theyyams*. These gods are Dravidian, the protectors of humanity from natural disasters. They do not sit in judgment over humanity in a shroud of morality, but actively participate in the day-to-day life of humankind. Demon gods such as Ravana are included in this list. The rationale is that there is no distinction between hero and demon gods. On the human side, too, it is not just the heroes and protagonists who are made *Theyyams*, it is also the antiheroes and antagonists. The result is a flattening out of a hierarchical value system in the human and godhead, which leads to the humanization of god and the deification of humans.

¹³ *History of Indian Theatre – Lok Ranga – Panorama of Indian Folk Theatre* by M.L.Varadpande. Page no 57-58.

Kuttiyattam, the mode of Sanskrit theatre from Kerala, is the oldest performing art form in India and is the oldest extant form of theatre in the world today. This art form's antiquity could be traced back to about two millennia.

The word Koothu used as a generic term for dance appears for the first time in Sangam literature (in the Dravidian language Tamil) dating back to the first century C.E. The flourishing of a mature theatre tradition in South India is testified to by its mention in the Tamil classic *Silappadikaram* by Ilango Adigal, composed in the 5th century C.E. The reference is to Parayur Koothachakyyar, identified as Chakyyar, a member of the Chakyyar community, whose members took to acting in *Kuttiyattam*. At that time, Koothachakyyar staged the story of *Tripuradahanam* before the king. This has become the textual evidence to surmise the antiquity of *Kuttiyattam*.

Kuttiyattam became codified and sophisticated during the time of Kulasekhara, the ruler of Kerala from 978 to 1036 C.E. The big boost, especially in the aesthetic sense was given to the art by Kulasekhara, perhaps, the greatest among scholars / choreographers / actors, all rolled into one. Kulasekhara extended the repertoire of *Kuttiyattam* to include more Sanskrit plays.

The first family of actors called Chakyyars appears to have come with the chieftains; serving them as storytellers (soothas). The descendants of these Chakyyars, together with the other caste - Nambiars and their women

familial hierarchy in *Kuttiyattam*. This was the
the 20th Century.

At a time when *Kuttiyattam* was confined to the temples, the performances were held in specially raised theatre structures called Koothambalams, forming part of the temple complex. These stage halls have exquisite carvings and intricate art works, besides having excellent acoustics. The important Koothambalams are at the Vadukumnathan temple Thrissur, Koodalmanikkam temple Irinjalakuda, Lakshmana temple Muzhikulam and the Subrahmanya temples at Harippad and Kidangoor. The one at Kidangoor is outstanding for its artwork.

Kuttiyattam had to wait longer for its liberation from the temple-based cloisters, till the arrival of Guru Painkulam Rama Chakyar, who first ventured to stage *Kuttiyattam* in a Brahmin household in 1949. And in its modern day course, *Kuttiyattam* caught the world's attention when it was proclaimed as one of the 'Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Mankind' in May 2001, by the UNESCO.

Kuttiyattam is perhaps the most structured among theatre arts anywhere in the world. Its primary sources are the dramatic texts - the Sanskrit plays, namely by *Bhāsa*, Kulasekhara Varman, Mahendra Vikrama, Harsha, and Neelakanta.

In the beginning, training in *Kuttiyattam* was done at the temple-based Chakyar Gurukulams. Training in different aspects of *Kuttiyattam* was imparted thus till the middle of the 20th Century C.E. From that time, it changed with institutional training and the first among such centres was the Kerala Kalamandalam.

undergo training in recitation of slokas (Sanskrit stanzas, training in movements of the eyes and facial muscles, expressions and practice of mudra or stylized hand gestures, which are the alphabets of acting with the hands.

And the drummers practiced beats on the *Mizhavu* in different tempos i.e., from the slowest through middle to very fast tempos. Artistes also were trained in playing other instruments like Edakka (percussion); Kurum Kuzhal (wind instrument); Thimila (percussion) and Kuzhithalam (cymbals).

The stage presentation of *Kuttiyattam* is a highly structured affair and is governed by strict theatre conventions. It starts with the make-up process and a red cloth band is tied over the forehead of the actors, which is taken off only after completion of the performance.

In *Kuttiyattam*, the noble characters don the pacha or green make-up. The villainous heroes go for the kathi make-up and characters with demon traits wear dark painted make-up known as kari.

An act of a play is the established norm of stage presentation. (It takes several days to complete an Act). The opening day starts with the sounding of the *Mizhavu*, the main percussion support, followed by prayer to Lord

g of Ghoshti or opening drumbeats on the
rinkling of water on the stage with incantations
by the *Mizhavu* player. This is followed by other stages like the
Nityakriya, exquisite dance steps, Chandanavalli and Dikpalavandanam,
which marks the conclusion of first day.¹⁴

The second day of performance starts with Nirvahanam, and may last for several days. Nirvahanam is the most important section from the point of view of histrionics and aesthetics of *Kuttiyattam*. The most beautiful part of the art lies here. One actor takes on the roles of several characters by recourse to the technique known as Pakarnattam or extended acting. Also, the four-fold acting concept in *Kuttiyattam* comes into full play here viz. *Angika* (or gestural acting), *Vachika* (oral), *Aharya* (dress and makeup) and *Sathvika* (exploring the innermost recesses of the human mind).

The last section is *Kuttiyattam* (literally combined acting) in which more than one character appears on the stage and interacts much in the same way as in ordinary play acting by means of dialogues. But, here also the presentation is different being just stylized and structured.

At the end of the act is a ritual known as Mudiakkitha - removal of the headgear by the main actor, placing it on the stage floor and offering prayers and prostrations before making a ceremonial exit, after extinguishing the lamp wicks.

¹⁴ <http://www.keralatourism.org/kerala-article/206/Kuttiyattam-theatre-art.php>

several acts is completed in the above manner what is known as *Bharatavakya* or grand finale wherein the entire happenings of the play are re-enacted in a nutshell.

Temple theatres called *Kuttambalams* are permanent theatre structures attached to some of the major temples of Kerala. Considered as one of 'panchaprasada', one of the five structures inside the temple complex, these were presumably constructed between the twelfth and the seventeenth centuries. There are *Kuttambalams* in the temples in Trissur, Guruvayoor, Irinjalakkuda, Kidangur, Thrippunithura, Chengannur and Harippad. During recent times, a new one was added in the premises of Kerala Kalamandalam, a major art institution devoted to classical arts in Kerala. The design of *Kuttambalam* is in keeping with the architectural heritage of Kerala.

5.2.1.3 Mohiniattam

This classical dance form of Kerala was first performed by women in temples, over a thousand years ago, as an offering to God, their beloved. The movements may appear simple, but effort is required to capture the grace, suggestive of ocean waves, as seen in goddess Mohini, the Enchantress. This dance form exudes enchantment grace and passion. *Mohiniyattam* is a fusion of ' *Bharathanatyam* ' and ' *Kathakali* ', as it combines the graceful elegance of *Bharatanatyam* and dynamism and vigour of *Kathakali*. The performances are done only by women. In *Mohiniyattam*, the *Lasya* element of dancing is predominant, and the mood created is *Sringaram* (erotic) *Mohiniyattam* literally means the 'Dance of the Temptress'.

look shape in the tradition of Devadasi dance and classical status. The word '*Mohini*' literally means a maiden who excites desire or steals the heart of the on looker. It is a solo female dance (in a single costume) in which the striking features is the musical melody and rhythmical swaying of the dancer from side to side and the smooth and unbroken flow of the body movement. The dance is focused essentially on feminine moods and emotions.

5.2.1.4 Kalaripayattu

Kalaripayattu is the oldest existing martial art form, dating back more than 2000 years and said to be the forerunner of popularly known Chinese martial arts, as the Buddhist monk Bodhidharma took this knowledge from India to China.

The practice of *Kalaripayattu* is said to originate from the Dhanur Vedic texts encompassing all fighting arts and described by the Vishnu Purana as one of the eighteen traditional branches of knowledge. *Kalaris* are the schools where training in this martial art form is imparted by Gurukals or masters.

This martial art form is indigenous to the Southern Indian state of Kerala which, legend has it, was created by the warrior saint Parasurama, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, by throwing his axe into the sea which receded till the point where it fell. Parasurama then established forty-two *Kalaris* and taught twenty-one masters of these *Kalaris* to protect the land he created.

onal psycho-physiological discipline emanating
ytha-historical heritage as well as a scientific
system of physical culture training. The historical antecedents of this
martial art form combines indigenous Dravidian systems of martial
practice such as 'varma ati' or 'marma adi' with an influence of Aryan
brahman culture which migrated southwards down the west coast of India
into Kerala. There are two distinct traditions in *Kalaripayattu*-the
Northern and the Southern schools.

In the Northern tradition the emphasis is laid on progressing from body
exercises to combat with weapons and last of all to unarmed combat. In
the Southern tradition the patron saint of *Kalaripayattu* is the sage
Agastya whose strength and powers of meditation are legendary. It is said
that when the Lord Shiva married the Goddess Parvati at Kailasa in the
North, all gods and goddesses went to attend the wedding and with this
shift in weight the world tilted, so much so, that Agastya was sent to the
South to restore the balance.

Lord Rama, legend has it, was mentored by Agastya to acquire the
weapons, which defeated the demon king Ravana. In the southern
tradition the emphasis is primarily on footwork, movement and the ability
to strike at vital points or 'marmas' in the opponents body of which 108
points are considered lethally vulnerable.

Kalaripayattu training is given free to every student. Those who are
interested must first register, and then places will be issued according to
availability. Spiritual Guidance can be received through Satsangs on
Thursday evenings, or by personal appointment with our Guru. There is
no charge, but appointments must be made in advance.

5.2.1.5. *Kathakali*

Kathakali is one of the oldest theatre forms in the world. It originated in the area of southwestern India now known as the state of Kerala. *Kathakali* is a group presentation, in which dancers take various roles in performances traditionally based on themes from Hindu mythology, especially the two epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Kathakali* is its elaborate make-up code. Characters are categorized according to their nature. This determines the colours used in the make-up. The faces of noble male characters, such as virtuous kings, the divine hero Rama, etc., are predominantly green. Characters of high birth who have an evil streak, such as the demon king Ravana, are allotted a similar green make-up, slashed with red marks on the cheeks. Extremely angry or excessively evil characters wear predominantly red make-up and a flowing red beard. Forest dwellers such as hunters are represented with a predominantly black make-up base. Women and ascetics have lustrous, yellowish faces. The technique of *Kathakali* includes a highly developed language of gesture, through which the artist can convey whole sentences and stories. The body movements and footwork are very rigorous. To attain the high degree of flexibility and muscle control required for this art, a *Kathakali* dancer undergoes a strenuous course of training, and special periods of body massage.

The dancers wear large head dresses, and the contours of the face are extended with moulded lime. The extraordinary costumes and make-up serve to raise the participants above the level of mere mortals, so that they may transport the audience to a world of wonders.

Kathakali performance includes two drums known as *maddalam*, along with cymbals and another percussion instrument, the *ela taalam*. Normally, two singers provide the vocal accompaniment. The style of singing particular to *Kathakali* is called *Sopaanam*. The orchestra of a *Kathakali* troupe is unique and provides not only the background to the dancing, but also serves as a highly expressive special effects team. In the traditional village ambiance, the percussionists also provide publicity for the event by playing outside the venue for some hours before the start of the show.

A traditional *Kathakali* performance begins in the evening and continues throughout the night, culminating at the auspicious hour of dawn, when Good finally conquers Evil. Today, however, it has been modified for the proscenium stage, and urban audiences can participate in this ritualistic theatre experience in the comfort of a plush auditorium, within the span of a couple of hours.

5.2.2 *Urubhangam*

Urubhangam, noted for its pathos, fury and heroism is a rare specimen of tragedy in the Indian concept. Set on one of the most poignant scenes from *Mahabharata*, it depicts the final fall of a Kaurava King Duryodhana, who decidedly stood for *adharma* all through his life. He realizes that his belief was wrong, suddenly, at the end of his life. When he faces the inevitable finale of his life, he looks back. Even in him the feelings of *dharma* dawn. The war continues to be fought in and around Duryodhana, he realizes its futility. But how can he spell it out? He himself has unleashed the evil forces. Now it is too late. He succumbs to

Durjaya and his retinue march on to the goal he

As Aparna Dharwadkar discussed in her book *Theatre of Independence* Panikkar's *Urubhnagam* – his version of *Bhāsa's* version of Vyasa's version of *Mahabharata* – is a palimpsest meeting of the classic and the contemporary on the ground of the relation between narration and action. Indeed, Panikkar identifies Vyasa's epic as the ur-score of these two major modes of Indian culture expression, with Vyasa functioning as the "archetypal narrator" and *Bhāsa* as the "archetypal playwright" The correspondence between their respective genres lies in a series of oppositions that in Aristotelian term would characterize the "manners of imitation. "According to Panikkar, the "nearer to Vyasa is more of narration, and the more of action nearer to *Bhāsa*. The macro-text versus micro text, *sahitya* (literature) vs *abinaya*(Acting) . Narration vs action, event vs character, and *vacya* (what is worth narrating) vs *sucya* (what is worth enacting) – this scheme is applicable for the evaluation of any dramatized text, whether it is from oral or from written source material. The "microtext" of Pannikkar's production is the same as *Bhāsa's* play, which evokes the atmosphere of the devastation at the end of the Mahaharata war, records the final great battle between Bhima and Dyurodhana, and demoralizes the chief Kaurava prince in the moments leading up to his death. However, Panikkar uses the text as an occasion to explore the full range of possibilities of "nontextual" staging and communicates philosophical meaning through physical devices of enactment, thus both elaboration and reinterpreting the original.¹⁵

¹⁵ *Theatre of Independence* by Aparna Dharwadkar Page No 203-210

the meaninglessness of war, but also related it to Duryodhana, in his production of Urubhang in Hindi with the students of the National School of Drama at Delhi. The duel with maces begins in the middle of this act and is again reported by the soldiers, not shown directly. After Bhima shatters Duryodhana's thighs in violation of the rules of the combat, act two of the play move rapidly through to the climax. Enraged by the Bhima's illicit action, Krishnas older brother Balarama, pledges vengeance against the Pandavas, but Duryodhana urges restraint because he feels that further enmity would achieve nothing. He created three different images of Suyodhana – as a representative of the Kaurava might, as an ordinary human being tormented at the moment of his death by his own ego and failures in life, and the third, as his conscience or soul in the form of a *Theyyam* realizing and contemplating the pointlessness of war. The significance of the renaming is that the prefix “dur” in Sanskrit has the same meaning as the French prefix “mal” while “su” stands for “good” or “fair”. Speaking through his composite virtuous person, Su(Dur)yodhana accepts the defeat of the Kauravas as apt punishment for their unjust treatment of the Pandavas.

It is attempted to recreate the fury, pathos and tragedy by creating two Duryodhanas, in this production. One the warmonger and the other his *Theyyam*, which we may call Suyodhana, suggesting the good qualities in him which spring out from him at the moment his thighs, are fatally broken by Bhimasena.

ing narrative *Vishkumbhaka*. To some of its
kar gave an inventive visual form. As a result,
the various individual and group combats, divine nymphs welcoming the
dead heroes, or vultures descending upon their dead bodies, and above
all, the final duel between Suyodhana and Bhima became theatrically
very vibrant, exciting and gripping.” Observers noted critic *Nemi*
Chandra Jain.¹⁶

Of the two – fold aspect of the hero, the mundane one is the mortal
existence of Duryodhana struggling under the pangs of death. The other
is his spirit, which unveils a supernatural dimension and is projected in
his *Theyyam*. It is the spirit half-released from the wounded Duryodhana;
his own conscience advocating all his higher qualities.

The elements of traditional Indian Theatre are studied, examined and
employed in the performances, keeping in mind the modern sensibilities
of today’s audiences. Thorough training in traditional dance, music and
body dynamics has been a part of theatre training of the actors, which has
enabled them to interpret this Sanskrit masterpiece. In *Urubhangam*,
Kavalam used the huge masks and costumes of *Theyyam* with sensitivity
and imagination which made the character of Duryodhana acquire a new
dimension.

Commenting on the production, critic Kironmory Raha said:”What
impressed me most was the absence of super fluity in the different
components of the production, of a near-austerity in Panikkar’s
directional control.”

¹⁶*Indian Theatre: Tradition, Continuity and Change by Nemichandra Jain*

images in the texts he created visual images often
The play *Urubhanga* has a long *viskambhaka* in which
three soldiers of the Kaurava camp give a vivid and gruesome description
of the battlefield. This is given a visual form while Duryodhana struggles
with his inner better self, Suyodhana, like a mortal in his final moments
of repentance for his evil deeds. He asks Asvatthama not to wreak
vengeance on Pandavas. But Asvatthama vows to do his worst and, thus,
he reminds us of the modern war-mongering political trend. “Observes
Goverdhan Panchal.¹⁷

The long final scene involves Duryodhana’s parent, Dhritrashtra and
Gandhari, his two principal wives, and his young son, Durjaya, an
invented character who deepens the poignancy of dynastic and family
failure. The play ends ambivalently: although the dying Duryodhana tries
to dissuade Ashwathama from pursuing vengeance, Balrama describes
the attack of the Pandava as a certainty, and the final line shows
Ashwathama “weapon in hand, ready to kill those who sleep tonight”

5.2.2.1 Technique used in *Urubhanga*

Panikkar amplifies this spare text into a full-length performance by
choosing to show what *Bhāsa* only describes and by embedding the
dramatic action in an elaborate, largely nonverbal structure of dance,
recitation, song, percussion, and stylized movement. The *mise-en-scene*
and dramatics pace in his *Urubhanga* seek to selectively recreate the
elements of classical Sanskrit performance, with an almost ostentatiously

¹⁷ *The Theatres of Bharata And Some Aspects of Sanskrit Play-Production by,*
Goverdhan Panchal

Painted half curtain to conceal painful sights and the play: and a slow, deliberate, incantatory style of dialogue delivery appropriate to the elite medium of Sanskrit. The distinctive experiences of Panikkars production, however comes from extra textual elements of which *Bhāsa*'s words provide an occasion, not a source. The crucial concept, defined in the *Natyashastra* and well known in Sanskrit aesthetics, is that *Thooriyatrika*, the triple combination of *geet* (Song), *nritya* (Dance) and *Vadya*(Instrumental Music), which Panikkar describes as the foundation of his innovative stagecraft. A substantial portion of stage time is occupied by the male and female dancers who group and regroup constantly to evoke the war, to offer choric commentary on unfolding events, and to make up an internal audience for the main dramatic action. The music draws on “traditional” but not specifically “classical” regional style and complements nearly all movement and speech in the play, ranging from solo singing to collective recitation. Some recitations also simply vocalize rhythmic consonant clusters that have no linguistic “meaning” but that constitute the oral accompaniment to dance movement. With the flute, small hand-held brass cymbals called *manjiras*, and the *mridangam* as the principal instrument. Panikkar uses change in musical orchestration and tempo as the primary signal of change in dramatic mood or circumstances.

Unlike the simple two part structure of *Bhāsa*'s written text for *Urubhangam*, Panikkars acting text consist of a succession of more or less self contained performative units that coalesce into three major movements as described by Aparna Dharwadkar : the scene on the battlefield, the duel and its immediate aftermath, and Duryodhana's death in the presence of his family. The method throughout is that of selective, suggestive elaboration. In the first movement dancers in varying

scenes, warriors on horseback, elephants on the
death between two soldiers, and vultures
devouring the dead. This segment reaches a climax when the two outer
dancers in a group of ten metaphors into Bhima and Duryodhana, and the
others remain on stage to witness their confrontation. During the duel, the
two principal characters freeze in their poses after every major gesture of
assault, while one or more “observe” provide comment. All these scenes
of combat employ modified and improved version of *Kalaripayattu*, the
martial art form particular to Kerala. The second movement in the play,
which is the most innovative and philosophically the most complex, has
no equivalent in *Bhāsa*. To make the idea of Duryodhana’s emergent alter
ego concrete, Panikkar invents a second character – a *Theyyam*.

The scene obviously has crucial dramatic function: it places Duryodhana
at the centre and creates a space for his ethical transformation through the
agency character that is “visible” only to him. But it is also visually
spectacular, presenting the *Theyyam* as larger than life figure on slits,
with an enormous headdress and a red-and-gold costume. The yellow
costume and normal appearance of Balarama then contrasts with both the
imposing figure of the *Theyyam* and the prone figure of the wounded
Duryodhana.

The third movement, which begins with the entry of blind Dhritrashtra
and his entourage, is textually close to *Bhāsa* but again unpredictable and
intricate in its method of elaboration. The dramatics dialogue in this scene
is interspersed with choreographic patterns that focus attention on the key
relationship among the Kaurava: Duryodhana and Gandhari: Duryodhana
and his two wives: Duryodhana and Durjaya. Again, emphatic and
sorrowful enunciation of the word *putra* (son) and *maharaj* (lord king,

the performance connotes both the strength of the Kaurava house and their inseparability from political relations. As Duryodhana approaches the moment of death, the *Theyyam* return to prepare him for the after world, while young Durjaya become another parallel self: father and son appear seated together on the floor with their backs to each other, while the half curtain gradually conceals them. The myth of Duryodhana itself undergoes a “structural variation” to accommodate *Bhāsa*’s unconventional reading of his character and Panikkar’s even more novel theatrical interpretation of it. The play ends, however, by superimposing the public on the private once again: the chorus of dancers’ returns to witness Duryodhan’s exit and Ashwathama’s unappeased rage shatters the elegiac mood of the final scene.

Urubhangam is a treat for the senses. The colour, the music, the choreographed movements all add to the majesty of *Bhāsa*’s classic. The emotions are all reined in and kept under control. The most poignant moment in the play is actual moment of Duryodhan’s death. Another very charged moment is the scene between Duryodhana and his son, Durjayyan. A true ensemble performance, all the actors were true to their roles.

5.2.3 Karnabharam

K.N. Panikkar in his Director’s note and subsequently in one of his articles has discussed his directorial approach at length. This story is based on the Kunti who gave birth to Karna when she was a virgin, which was taken from the *Mahabharata*. His father is the Sun God. Kunti abandoned Karna immediately after his birth and a charioteer Atiradha and his wife Radha brought him up as their own son. Karna grew up

hood. The five sons of Kunti, the Pandavas and
Karna grew up as enemies from their boyhood.

When the Pandavas and their teacher insulted Karna as a lowborn who has no right to compete among royal children in archery, Duryodhana, the eldest of the Kouravas made him the King of Anga country. From that day onwards there was an intimate bond between Karna and the Kouravas. The grudge between the Kouravas and the Pandavas ultimately developed into a full-fledged war for the right to govern the kingdom. In this war, Karna became one of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Kourava army. Just as Karna was to take up his command of the battle, his mother Kunti revealed to him his actual lineage and pleaded with him that he should not kill his own brother Arjuna in the battle. This put Karna in an embarrassing situation, being unable to neither accept nor reject her request.

Karna the son of Surya was born with luminous earrings and protective armor over his chest. As long as he possessed these, nobody could kill him. Knowing this, Indra the father of Arjuna comes in the guise of a Brahmin and asks for the armor and earrings of Karna as a gift, Karna, famous for his benevolence, willingly part with them. And this leads to his fall.

According to Panikkar, as mentioned in his director note *Bhāsa's Karnabharam* evidently portrays the experience of danavira – a hero who gives away his life to the enemy to uphold his cherished values. This is the only one way to presenting the theme of the play. There are many other dimensions to the myth which the text itself suggests. *Bhāsa* himself has re-created the *Mahabharata* myth on Karna and given it an interpretative twist to make a remarkable play of it. While doing the stage

er could be conceived as that of a tragic hero in the term. This, of course, is a comprehension contrary to the established conventions. But from the clues available in the text itself, it could be imagined that Karna is made to suffer because of the spite between the celestials, Indra and Surya, Indra plotting for the downfall of Karna in order that his son Arjuna wins the battle and Surya blessing his son Karna to stand the mortal test such a scene is not present in the text, but the presence of Surya is felt in the context. Such embellishments in a stage version never cut across the message of the myth. They only add to its inner strength. In the gift-giving scene Karna offers many riches to Indra, his arch-enemy appearing in the guise of a Brahman. Karna knows well that Indra will not be satisfied with any gift other than his armour and earrings which are the repository of his life itself. The problem here is to conceive a convincing situation in which Karna's inner conflict gains such intensity that he makes the great gift. In spite of Salya's warning about the inimical design of Indra, Karna decides to opt for his self-destruction. This abnormal behavior, even in the name of justifying the demeanor of a hero of the dana-vir variety, cannot easily evoke convinced reactions in a contemporary mind. Knowing fully well that the myth belongs to a totally different age having a different approach to mortal values, the director will realize that in the theatre of today the presentation of the play should assume the make-believe quality. The mythical vitality alone can provide the tool to overcome the time-bound obsessions.

3.1 Technique used in Play *Karnabharam*

In the beginning we find the mighty warrior entering the battlefield with Salya as his charioteer to wage the crucial battle with the Pandavas. Here the use of *Kalaripayttu* is seen. The movement of the soldier fighting is the example of use of *Kalaripayttu*. Even at the beginning when two sutradhar explaining about the play the hand gesture used is from *Natyashastra*. He looks back at his past and experiences intense agony and remorse. He musters all his strength and tries his arrow; but fails miserably. He realizes that this was due to his mother Kunti who, on the eve of the battle, revealed to him his unknown identity and appealed to him to rethink and alter his allegiance in the battle. He has only two options open; either to own his mother and give up serving his cause or disown his mother by rejecting all legacies inherited from her and depend solely on his merit and might. He ponders over the truth at this crucial moment of his life, whether or not it is possible to succeed by cutting oneself off from one's natural links. In Karna's case providence has it that he is to fall back on his own; but there again a strong rebuff from the past overtakes him, the painful experience which he had to encounter from his guru, Parsurama. A man endowed with supreme qualities, made out of the best elements of nature, is failing for no fault of his own. When you probe the reason, you may have to land at the primordial sources of a cosmic human microcosm which involves an interruption of the very elements which constitute the inner and outer being of an individual, which has to respond readily to the inevitable dictates that come from above. Here, two major components of the ingredients of nature can be located, one owning zealously and the other disowning strongly the poor man who is ultimately the victim of a universal conspiracy of the celestials, the consequences of which could not be borne by the man's

the eternal interaction of the elements of nature is the downfall of man – an endless story in which the indomitable will of man struggles for ultimate liberation. The *chari* of *Kathakali* used by Panikkar for the entry exit of the character in the play which gave an additional advantage to the actor. Even music in the play is *sopansangeet* and the *Shivaranjini* raag used in the play. At the end of the play when Karna gave gift of his armor and earrings to Indra, here he used a Tribal ritual to make the scene more appealing.

While directing *Karanabharam* Panikkar explains “I wanted the main actor, Kaladharan, to bring out the strength of the whole gift-giving situation with a clear understanding of the philosophy which the character was to represent. The build-up of the ascending emotion could be made possible and convincing only if Karna gets possessed in the end. The actor did not get his point in the beginning. He was a little reluctant to get possessed. But he was slowly drawn into a ritualistic mood while experimenting with the visual possibilities and when he once experienced the possessed state he started believing there could be no better way. A possessed dance may not seemingly have any bearing on a dramatic situation like the one in which Karna makes a gift of his armor and earrings to Indra. But in the circumstances in which Karna is caught up, this cannot be communicated through normal behaviour on the actor’s part. Offering one’s life as a gift demands quite an abnormal demeanour for the actor, which he has to invoke from the unknown realm within him. A man endowed with supreme qualities made out of the best elements of nature failing for no fault of his own. When you probe into the reason you may have to land at the primordial sources of a cosmic microcosm which involves an interruption of the very elements which constitute the inner and the outer being of the individual which readily has to respond to

come from above. Surya the father of Karna and
a represent the basic sources of the conflict, a
phenomenon of universal dimension, reflecting and directing on a single
individual, whose destiny is put to a rigorous test, the consequences of
which could not be borne by the fragile mortal frame of the man.

According to Nemichandra Jain “In *Karnabharam*, Panikkar created from
a very short text of the play, a two – hour absorbing theatre, showing a
great warrior, endowed with supreme human qualities, torn by a
shattering inner conflict right at the battle-field. It was a unique
enactment of, to use his own words, ‘the eternal interactions of the
elements of Nature’, an endless story in which the indomitable will of
man struggles for his ultimate liberation.”¹⁸ A classic, thus, became truly
contemporary. Visually, the miming of animals in the flashback
sequences with Indra disguised as a Brahmin, the use of small cymbals
as weapons in the battlefield scene and many other elements were
handled with a fascinating theatrical imagination.”¹⁸

5.2.4 Other Play in Brief

5.2.4.1 *Madhyam Vyayoga*

Madhyam Vyayoga, We can see the same kind of treatment with fresh
approach is made by the Panikkar. According Goverdhan Panchal K.N,
Panikkar in the production of *Madhyam Vyayoga*, in which the elements
from *Kathakali*, such as, dance, movements, postures and hand-gestures
were effectively used. But the speech borrowed from *Kuttiyattam*

¹⁸Asides : Themes in Contemporary Indian Theatre by Nemichandra Jain

many which reminded one of the four forms of Bharata to be spoken by different types of characters. This kind of speech orchestration has been used in *Kuttiyattam* for different types of characters, such as, divine heroes who speak in a remote-sounding recitative intonation, demoness Surpanakha speaking in characteristic babble, and so on, using different swaras to suit different characters and moods. Panikkar's characters in all his plays use the same recitative intonation irrespective of different types such as Bhima, Ghatotkaca, and the Brahmin family.

The *Attaprakarams* – the 'actors' manual of *Kuttiyattam*, give detailed guidance to them through elaborate explanations, interpretations, allusions, etc., of each word of a verse of a play. Panikkar once mentioned that one must work out some sort of *Attaprakaram* for each play, which meant that he had worked out an *Attaprakaram* for himself as the director in every detail of the production to be able to probe deeper beyond the façade of words to bring out the inner meaning of the text.

5.2.4.2 *Swapnavasavdatha*

Swapnavasavdatha a remarkable Indian concept of dream, with its subtle and philosophic contours is unveiled in the play. This production uses the technique of '*Kakshya Vibhga*' – a territorial division of the geographic of the acting area. This spatial dichotomy is also present in the forces that dominate the two worlds of the play namely dream and reality. The journey of the play is from the indolence of the king to his responsibility when forced to confront the enemy. This production also gains contemporary significance because it deals with the great suffering and sacrifice of a woman (Vasavadatha) for the sake of her country.



Karnabharam by K N Paniikar performed by Mohanlal



Karnabharam by K N Paniikar performed by Mohanlal



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Karnabharam by K N Paniikar



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Karnabharam by K N Paniikar performed by Mohanlal



Karnabharam by K N Paniikar performed by Mohanlal



Urubhangam by K N Panikkar



Urubhangam by K N Panikkar – use of Theyyam



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A scene from Urubhangam by K N Panikkar use of Mohiniattam



Original performance of Mohiniattam use in Urubhangam by K N Panikkar



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A scene from Urubhangam by K N Panikkar use of Mohiniattam



Original performance of Mohiniattam use in Urubhangam by K N Panikkar



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A scene from Urubhangam by K N Panikkar use of Kalaripayttu



Original performance of Kalaripayttu used in Urubhangam by K N Panikkar



A scene from Urubhangam by K N Panikkar use of Theyyam



Original Theyyam used in Urubhangam by K N Panikkar



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A scene from Urubhangam by K N Panikkar use of Kalaripayattu



Original performance of Kalaripayattu used in Urubhangam by K N Panikkar

5.3 Production of Ratan Thiyam

Considering the study regarding the form and style used by Ratan Thiyam in his play and practiced at Chorus Repertory, let us discuss his own style used in his play by reviewing his work which may lead us towards the Thiyam's own traditional style.

“Rituals and traditions! They are mine. Ratan's rituals and traditions. Neither do they have any direct bearing to any particular Manipuri tradition nor to the *Natyashastra*. I am creating my own tradition.”¹⁹ And this tradition of his 'own' stands apart from the traditions that he has used. He has used older traditions through subversion and reversion in order to convert them into his own.

Ratan Thiyam's *Mahabharata* plays are inseparable from the crisis of cultural and political identity that has marked the colonial and postcolonial history of Manipur since the late nineteenth century, and has dominated day-to-day existence in this remote North-eastern region for more than a generation. The roots of the crisis lie in the conflicting trajectories of political and cultural development.

The *Mahabharata* appears in this Manipuri context as the ambivalent epic of war and violence that offers no clear moral categories or resolutions,

¹⁹ *Personal Interviews with Ratan Thiyam at Udaipur 25th May 2011*

ction of both “good” and “evil” by the relentless resistance to hegemonic structures- whether religious, political, or familial- also explains the appeal of complex antiheroes, such as Duryodhana and Karna, so sacrificial victims, such as Abhimanyu, whose portrayal in contemporary Manipuri theatre obviates any certitude about justice, virtue, or identity.

Thiyam’s interest in the *Mahabharata*, in *Bhāsa*, and in his older contemporary, Panikkar, as resources for a theatre of political and moral critique can thus be linked to multiple contexts and purposes. In one perspective, his *Mahabharata* plays are part of an ongoing engagement with myths and histories of violence that has led him to produce

Both from the viewpoints of its thematic modulation and technical representation of the same, Thiyam’s widely reviewed drama *Chakravyuha* could be seen as a confluence of various dramatic traditions,. Here a contemporary socio-political condition has been portrayed by subtly knitting into the theme of the play, *Wari Leeba*, a Manipuri folk narrative-tradition with the story of the *Drona Parva* from the pan-Indian epic, the *Mahabharata*. On the front of the technique of enactment, the *Angikabhinaya* as formulated by the ancient texts, the *Natyaśāstra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*, has been diffused with the indigenous Manipuri martial art form *Thang-Ta* and the dance form *Nata Sankirtana*.

During conversation with him I asked how you decided which elements is suitable to the Script or text, he smiled and firmly said that Text is always mine even in *Chakravyuha* a the text is Thiyam’s own, he also talked about the *Chakravyuha*’s Duryodhana according to him Duryodhan

opportunity to assess himself as modern man
tions and protests, and is always aggressively
materialist. He explain why he like Duryodhana because he swears by
and ideology, remains committed to it, whatever he does and think is
correct in his point of view. He also performs the right duties within a
system he lives. In casting Abhimanyu as the protagonist in *Chakravyuha*
a, Thiyam also shifts attention away from the mature anti-heroes to a
young scapegoat who is betrayed by “power grabbers” in both the
Kaurava and Pandava camps. Thus, *Chakravyuha* has become a
testimony of Thiyam’s ‘own’ dramatic tradition, which uses other
correlated traditions, both classical and folk and retains their traces only
to reach a new level of semiotic by transforming them as he always says
rituals and tradition are mine.

5.3.1 Traditional Theatre Forms Used by Ratan Thiyam

5.3.1.1. Thang Ta

‘Thang’ means sword and ‘Ta’ is the spear. ‘Thang’ also stands for a
dexterous and tactical use of hands with footwork. It epitomizes the
ritual, spiritual and philosophical psyche of the Meitei people. it is
considered the soul of all the arts as it brings into balance and sharpens
the activities of all the vital limbs of the body.

‘Ta’ means spear, which in the rhythmic movements becomes Ta-
Khousaba. Spear battles reflect the chivalrous past where a single warrior
battled many enemies. There are many techniques of this art like Maram
Nungsetpa, a glimpse of which is evident in *Chakravyuhaa*. In this basic
Ta exercise the spear is held high up in the right hand. The right leg is

the sole of the foot inwards; the other leg is

From this position the actor jump up to four directions on his toes, stretches the spear forward and then back, lifts the left leg in a semi-circular motion, crouches firmly on his feet and jumps up with the feet hitting the rump to land on his toes.

5.3.1.2 Wari Leeba

Wari Leeba is a traditional form of narrative art articulating the Hindu Puranas, the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, and the Manipuri chronicle. The *Wari Leeba* narrates, sitting with one or two bolsters as his props. His gestures are small and limited, and the emphasis is on the speech pattern through which he creates visual pictures. The language is Manipuri with a fair sprinkling of Sanskrit and Bengali for embellishment.

There are several traditional performing art forms that represent the *Mahabharata*. In Manipur the *Wari Leeba* narrative form is the most important carrier of the *Mahabharata*, and also a fascinating performance text. It would not be wrong to say that without the *Wari Leeba* the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* may not have become known as scriptures in this region. Ratan has sought out regional variations in characterization and imagery.

For instance when the *Wari Leeba* describes Bheema he will name the types of food a big strong man would eat in Manipur. 'Bheema will eat hot chili food with plenty of dry fish and raw vegetables. Dishes like Uti, Shingju, Chagempomba, Iromba. In Karnataka he may eat idli sambhar. When the narrator places characters in certain surroundings he makes

associate with each feature of the locale he has

On the level of style the most important dramatic element is the speech pattern. This has been impressionistically adopted by Ratan in various scenes for different effects. The *Wari Leeba* paints pictures with words. An important input for Ratan was to draw the essence of the visual word pictures. A physical visualization of that image came later.

Ratan uses the *Wari Leeba* tradition of painting pictures through speech most effectively in the prologue where the Sutradhara describes first the essence of the *Natyashastra*, the aesthetic of performance.

5.3.2 Chakravyuha

Thiyam's Manipur is eternally present in Ratan's dramas, even those based on stories from the *Mahabharata*. His concern for the youth and its continuous betrayal by the older generation is predominant in the depiction of Abhimanyu in *Chakravyuha* the play that shot Ratan into international limelight. The 15 year –old son of Arjuna trustingly enters the *Chakravyuha* created by Drona. His uncles Yudhishtir and Bhima are aware that he does not know how to get out of the martial configuration, but they provoke his sense of daredevil courage and Abhimanyu succumbs. Does he, as the Epic portrays, die a martyr or is Abimanyu a scapegoat? Ratan is pointing to the political power in Manipur that, to further their own ambition, incite youth to suicidal acts in the name of heroism.

The story is important, but the aesthetics of the story is important in the prologue”. The Sutradhara likens the *Mahabharata* to Kamadhenu, the heavenly cow; its milk the rasas (sentiments); Vyasa the writer is the milkman, and Krishna his helper in the drawing process; and the audience is the calf. Then the Sutradhar comes to the myth of Parikshit and Janmejaya.²⁰ He continues “Through them I point to the younger generation. They represent the calf that will help to draw forth the rasas to be shared. The Sutradhara has to graphically explain this in the poorvaranga and for this I go to the precise and concise style of narration in the *Wari Leeba*, Thang-Ta apparently may seem to be a mere physical exercise”; however, as far as its Tantric origin is concerned, its main objective is to bring an end to the incessant struggle between the body and the soul and dissolve them to form a new entity. In Thiyam’s own words, “We are not doing this as part of martial art per se. What we are trying to gain from these exercises are the power that controls the distribution of energy to different parts of the body, and the powers of concentration and meditation. The establishment of a deep relationship between body and mind is essential *Chakravyuhaa* does not display merely the Thang-Ta martial art; rather it succeeds in projecting the subtle introvert feelings through intricate body movements – Angikabhinaya. By performing different Mudras and gestures, the artists present the underlying motive of the play to ‘*Sahridaya Darshka* (Keen Audience)” This also incorporates Nandi. ‘*Nandi*: so called because by invoking the blessings of gods, Brahmans and kings these latter three are propitiated.

²⁰ Personal Interview with Ratan Thiyam at Udaipur 2011

Shahstra, is followed by *Prarochana* in which to the audience and invites them to cooperate (Upanimantrana) for the success of the play and mentions the name and the plot of the play.’ Ratan does not give the names of the play in the prologue but makes it known that Abhimanyu will be a victim through Abhinaya and the speech pattern as the Sutradhara describes Abhimanyu’s flag and his antecedents. He also combines the roles of the Sutradhara and the *Sthapaka*.

The play incorporates the various gestures representing the heroic sentiments (*Vira Rasa*) through the Manipuri martial art *Thang-Ta*. The delicate movements of the body parts which are used to express the dialogues more comprehensively are imitations of the gestures dictated by the *Natyashastra* and the *Abhinaya Darpana*. But in some places Thiyam has reduced the frequency of the *Natyasastric* body gestures and has stressed upon the use of dialogues. The *Prologue* of this play follows the *Ankur* pattern of *Angikabhinaya*, where the inner feeling of a character is first expressed by gestures. Thus, in order to exemplify Lord Brahma, one Pariparshvika signifies the lotus with his combined-hand-gesture – *Udvestita* and the naval with his single-hand-gesture – *Sanketa*. The two Pariparshvikas and the Sutradhara, with a combined-hand-gesture called *Sankha* represent the conch-shell. Even the Sutradhara's greeting the audience with a combined-hand-gesture *Anjali*, and the mime of the monkey-god performed by the Pariparshvikas and the Sutradhara's enacting and explaining the 'milking process' through a mime – are all according to the gestures mentioned in the *Natyashastra*²¹.

²¹ *Bharata Natyashastra* by Dr. Manmohan Ghosh—Chapter—“*Hastabhinaya*” page 132

mention that one hand gesture Ratan thiyam gave he was saying to Yudhisthir he will break the *Chakravyuha* that point Abhimanyu brushing the both hand with charged energy like clapping and pronounce “*chhaakkrravyuha*” with given more stress on word, now this is not the *Natyashashtric* gesture it is creatively invented by the Thiyam which proves his statement that “I create my own tradition and classic”.

The parallel between this narrative and the violence in the contemporary Manipur is established in the prologue itself through an invocation of the political symbolism of the (coercive) modern nation state: as the Sutradhar says, “national flags conceptualize politics...This is a war of flags...This is a war of power grabbers” . Indeed, Thiyam’s topicality becomes heavy-handed when Shakuni talks about the deceptive art of “politics” and refers to one of the cornerstones of Jawaharlal Nehru’s national policy, the economic five-year plans, as “colorful dreams heralding a bright future” that are never implemented but that enable a politician to “become a leader, a king”.

He not only transforms the rituals and tradition but his day to day affairs and experience in to his production here in this play the flag dance was choreographed before the prologue was also the modern concept. In his own words: ‘My concept of the flags emerged from the Olympic Games, where too there are two super powers. Under their flags are the warriors who will battle for them. On the side of the Kauravas will be Drona, Karna, Jayadratha and on the Pandava side Ghatotkacha and others. Each warrior has his own banner which proclaims his special prowess. So the

oose their horses for the Ashwamedha sacrifices
h small country.²²

Ratan thiyam as he said using the tradition with his own perceptive, in *Chakravyuha* after the exit of Sutradhara the first scene of the play begins with the arrival of Duryodhana and his comrades at Dronacharya's camp where Dhrona performs the ritual remembering Keshava here the shloka was sung by the chorus from the back stage. After Duryodhana comes with Shakuni, Jyadrath and Dushashan they confront with Drona and which ends with the latter's vow to construct the *Chakravyuhaa*. This scene depicts a unique amalgamation of *Thang-Ta* and *Natyasastric* gestures. The two soldiers salute the king which shows the *Thengou* pattern of *Thang-Ta*, with a *Thang* and a *Chungoi*. The entry of the Kauravas in Drona's camp while dancing in *meiti pung tala*, which "is charged with energy, bursting with the lust of power", presents the *Thang - Ta* tradition. The exchange of meaningful glance which is known as *Jihma*(crooked) is reflected through the gestures between Dushshana and Jayadratha who are attempting to provoke Drona to construct *Chakravyuhaa*. The dependence of Drona upon the Kauravas and leading a life with royal favours are portrayed through various *Natyasastric* gestures. On being unable to avoid defeat in the hands of the Pandavas, Duryodhana blames Dronacharya and condemns him too. But Drona could not provide a definite answer to it. The psychological despair of both the characters is expressed through their glances.

²² Issue 14/15: Special issue on Theatre in Manipur The New Karnas of Manipur Samik Bandyopadhyay June/September97, Editorial by Anjum Katyal

Duryodhana upon Drona and the helpless glance respectively known as *Vitarkita* (conjecturing) and *Sunya* glance. The scene culminates with Drona's vow to construct the *Chakravyuh* and accordingly his combined hand gesture (*Samyuta Hasta Mudra*) *Cakra* conveys the context to the audience effectively.

Shakuni's monologue, also spoken in the kneeling position, is an anguished cry to Krishna to save Abhimanyu from certain death. Here Ratan uses the Wari Leela tradition speech, swift and indicative.

‘ I use traditional speech for shakuni because his graph will gradually go down and Duryodhana's will rise. They are very different people and should be noticed thus by the audience. Shakuni is a narrator of the war, so I employed the Wari Leela. This pattern is broken when duryodhana use the Indian realistic style! Shakuni has pangs of conscience but he is also very clever. He follows the streams.’²³

The second scene of the play has depicted the incidents at Abhimanyu's camp. At the beginning of this scene Abhimanyu is sleeping with his head resting upon the lap of his charioteer Sumitra. Here in the beginning of the scene Sumitra sings a song based on the Manipuri song based on the folk tune, which I feel the gives audience to a sympathetic feel and also create seriousness of the coming scene. Here Abhimanyu was seeing something fussy in his dream and missing his mother, this incident indicate the emotion of Abhimanyu towards his mother and dramatically creates the atmosphere of his important dream sequence next to come. The use

²³ Article by Pinak Sankar Bhattacharya – Ratan Thiyams *Chakravyuh* Scripting through Body - Downloaded from website : <http://www.museindia.com/index.asp>

ive in this scene the cymbals and gong are very
Thiyam. The middle part of this scene delineates
the discussions between Abhimanyu and the two elderly Pandavas
Yudhishtira and Bheemasena regarding the strategy to penetrate
the *Chakravyuha* and accordingly provoking Abhimanyu for the same,
thus thrusting him towards his inevitable demise. The scene fades out to
the very effective scene of Arjuna-Subhadra.

In this scene he used another Manipuri narrative style of singing called
Pena. There is a special portion in the Pena called leirol where several
types of flowers are described. Here Shubhadra describe the night
comparing with silvery moonbeams and further with the different flowers
like Mallika, Jati and Pushpa. To make it more meaningful presentation
Ratan refereed the Sanskrit literature-Meghadootam, Ritu-Samharam,
portions of Shishupalavadham, where literature featuring the description
of beautiful flowers. Further to describe the intimacy of Arjun-Shubhdra
the atmosphere of *Shringarrasa* created through the music ,
choreography and movement was used. To describe this Ratan also
reefer the erotic literature like the *Amaru-Shataka* to be able to portray
shringara rasa in its sublime serenity. The scene has to be erotic without
losing sight of the fact that we are dealing with Arjuna and Krishna's
sister and their child Abhimanyu who was born to die.

In the 'Flashback' part of the second scene, Thiyam brilliantly projects the
prenatal stage of Abhimanyu by placing him amidst his assassins,
the *Saptarathis*.⁷ According to Thiyam's description, "Abhimanyu goes
down in a foetal position in the centre of the red circle of light. The seven
actors holding large tasselled cymbals kneel around him. These are the
seven who will become the attacking charioteers in the *Chakravyuha*."

perspective, Abhimanyu's vain effort to break a is representative of an individual's unfortunate submission to the system after failing to cope up with it.

In the 'Flashback' part, the intimate moment between Subhadra and Arjuna depicts the erotic sentiment (*Shringar Rasa*) by the composure of their eyes, faces and graceful movements of limbs. In this part the body movement of Abhimanyu in the '*womb scene*' exemplifies the *Sarit Sarak*, the unarmed variety of *Thang-Ta*. Where the seven soldiers were kneeling down with large tasselled in his hand and who is going to form a *Chakravyuha* and will be the attacking charioteers in the *Chakravyuha*. Abhimanyu sits in the middle the circle formed by theses seven called *Saptarathi*. The movement of the here by Abhimanyu is the example of the *Sarit Sarak*.

Through the flashback technique, the scene also incorporates the affectionate conversation between Arjuna and Subhadra prior to Abhimanyu's birth, where Arjuna reveals the strategy to invade the *Chakravyuha* to Subhadra. Coincidentally, Abhimanyu came to know of it since he was lying in the womb of his mother, Subhadra. In this part of the scene Abhimanyu has been presented upon the stage in his pre-natal state. The scene ends with Abhimanyu's advancing towards the battlefield. In this scene, the guards of Abhimanyu's camp present the *Ta-Khousarol* part of the *Thang-Ta* tradition by decorating themselves with *Ta* (Spear) and *Chung* (shield). In the discussion between Yudhishtira, Bheemasena and Abhimanyu, the actors employ different gestures to signify the features of other characters. Abhimanyu's adaptation of the *Mrga-Sirsa* mudra to signify Krishna, Yudhishtira's acquiring of the *Suci* mudra to imply the *Chakravyuha* and

aya (the used of *Smayukta Hast Mudra* mention
Bheemasena by lifting a mace and Nakul-
Sahadeva by taking up the bow and arrows are exclusively according to
the tenets of the *Natyasastra*. It starts when the singers, at the beginning
and on stage, sing the benediction.’

In the next scene again the Drone camp shown where the formation of the
Chakravyuha is about to begin. *Chakravyuhaa* starts with the rendering
of the Guru Vanda. Here the flag dance is shown again where the entire
seven Charioteer was present this dance in the folk of Holi Cholan. In
this the movement is such; they are moving backward, forward in
rhythmically.

Another important source material for speech is *Lairik Haiba Thiba*, a
narrative form performed by two characters. One actor narrates the
original text and the other interprets it. The modulating of speech and the
use of different pitch patterns create its own drama. In following scene of
Chakravyuha formation the Jaydrath who are the first Charioteer perform
the ritual Siva-Stuti which is the adaptation of the *Larik Habathiba*
narrative tradition.

After this Abhimanyu enters and fight begins between them. At this
juncture in the background chorus sings a song and that is drawn from the
Nat Sankeertana. In the next four scenes, the actions primarily revolve
around the battle of Abhimanyu with the *Saptarathis*. The fights are
basically representative of the *Thengou* and the *Ta Khousarol* categories
of Thang-Ta martial art. However, the martial art employed in the play is
much more structured, systematic and elegantly choreographed than the
original.

ments in the play actually add contemporaneity
the play, the questions related to *Dharma* and its
ideals have been presented through the 66th *Shloka in Astadash Adhyaya*
(chapter 18) of the Gita:

सर्वधर्मन परित्याज्य मामेकमशरणम् ब्रज।
अहंत्वं सर्वपापेभ्यः मोक्षायिष्यामी मा सोचन।

[Abandoning all obligations whatsoever, take refuge in me alone: I shall
liberate thee from all sins; grieve not.]”

Duryodhana questions this assertion of Krishna to his followers and accuses him for adopting *Adharama* to kill Vishma. He further questions the ability of an *Adharmika* to redeem the distressed mass. Naturally, Duryodhana's *Dharmika* faith seems to sway and stagger and this dilemma is expressed through a unique body movement. According to the stage direction, "*As he speaks the shloka, Duryodhana kneels down and sweeps the floor with the palms of his hand like a blind man searching for a needle. There is a poignant irony in the movement.*" From the contemporary perspective, we can deduce from these body movements the perpetual corrupt administration and the equally corrupt political situation. The leaders placed in the authoritative hierarchy, just as Krishna, are frequently seen to be engaged in *Adharmika* practices while conducting lessons of *Dharma*, humanism and idealism on the common mass. Duryodhana's search for *Dharma* indicated by his floor sweeping posture is an ironic representation of the search for greatness in a representative of the highest stratum of the society. This body movement has been repeatedly used as a leitmotif in the play.

the dead Abhimanyu wonders in his moment of scapegoat or martyr and heralds the arrival of kaliyug (echoing Bharati's Andha yug, which Thiyam had already produced in Manipuri), the umbrellas that have been ubiquitous on stage are re-symbolized as "canopies of power," which were given to the "great Kings and emperors of this world....as shields to protect truth from the blistering acid of sinful lies.

This fusion of the verbal-thematic with the visual-aural in Thiyam's theatre craft sets him apart from other contemporary Indian directors and has made *Chakravyuha* the most successful and well-documented of his *Mahabharata* plays.

One of the highlights of the play, the Kauravas' entry is a superb example of Ratan's sense of dramatic alienation. Shakuni's cunning design culminates in Duryodhana's question on truth and loyalty.

The music is composed in terms of the spatial content. The basic beat is from Laiharaoba, which is a festival conducted by priestesses called maibis to propitiate the sylvan gods who are the preservers and creators of the world after invoking the gods the maibis dance the Laiching jogai (laiching dance). The beat goes "*dhan tang tang, dhan tang tang, dhantrika, dhantrika, dhan tang tang*". The audience associates it with the joyous laihaoba and Ratan keeping the basic changes the "*boles*" to express the cunning plans with which the Kauravas "propitiate" Drona.

Apart from the music bits he explains that "speech is not enough to portray this inner excitement. So he adds the *taal* or rhythm to the words. Then come the steps and torso movements. Now there is no tradition of

this manner. It is my tradition evolved for this

‘I am trying to relate to tradition, not as a dead artefact but a living throbbing beautiful part of my heritage’ as discuss during the personal interview.

Ratan Thiyam further explains that “In a realistic play you have a sequence of small reactions. But in this dialogue the issue is *dharma*, Duryothana’s inner turmoil enhances his speech pattern, enlarges the alphabets and expands gestures accordingly, you may call it stylization, but for me it is an answer to a dramatic demand “.

In Samanya Abhinaya the *Natyashastra* details six kinds of acting through the body. Almost all styles are used variably in *Chakravyuhaa*. 1. *Vakya*: Speaking or reciting Sanskrit or *Prakrit* sentences expressing various rasas and bhavas (prologue). 2. *Shucha*: When the meaning of a sentence or sentences is first acted through emotions and gestures and then the sentence uttered. 3. *Ankura* : When the inner feeling is first cleverly expressed by gestures as in *Shucha*. 4. *Shakha* : When the expression is made (first) by (in that order) the head, face, shanks, thighs, hands and feet as if they (the movements) are branches. 5. *Natyayita* : When, at the entrance of characters, gesture acting is done to entertain the audience.....6. *Nivrttyankura* : When words of another person are acted by *Shucha*.’

All these styles of abhinaya are present in the performances. In the Drona Camp scene you will find *Shucha*, *Ankura* and *Shakha*; *Natyayita* is in their entry and what else is Sumitra but a spokesperson for Subhadra?

amount importance is the fact that the abhinaya is in every situation it is superbly *abhyantara* (internal). The movements and gestures are neither hurried, nor clumsy. They are in tune with the laya and tala of the play.

In the other plays of Thiyam as well, the underlying statement has been conveyed through bodily gestures adopted from different traditions. This blending has facilitated Thiyam in originating a new language which can communicate the theme of his plays with the audience. Thiyam completely relies on the 'Natyasastric' *Angikabhinaya* to project the entangled condition of the common mass within a political system. Ratan believes that *Natyashastra* is the base of all tradition and folk form of India. It gives you roadmap to run and jump to find your own way to reach towards your goal and also to create your own source for your tradition and rituals. The identity crisis, alienation and the pursuit of honour, that batters the contemporary man have been presented through a collage of classical body gestures and the *Pung Cholan* dancing style in *Karnabharam*. Thus, through the application of unique bodily gestures, Thiyam promulgates a movement in Indian drama where the gestures untying themselves from the orthodox *Laxman-rekhas* are able to delineate the contemporary socio-political situation of the world and thus formulates a new language for the future generation of playwrights.

5.3.3 When We Dead Awaken

As we have seen that how Ratan created his own tradition in the play *Chakravyuha*. It is not only that Indian story he transforms on the stage with the use of *Natyashastra* Gesture and tradition but he has successfully transcended the western play into Indian context. He selected Ibsen, which I believe is the biggest challenge for any director. But Ratan Thiyam challenged himself and challenged a creator lies in him.

Material on Ibsen, however, was easily available. Instead of staging the play in a conventional manner, he chose to focus on the theme. The play is suffused by an intense desire for life, but whether it can be achieved is left problematic, given the play's ironic conclusion.

The story of the *When We Dead Awaken* is in an around the four character Rubek, Maja, Ulfheim and Irene. The relationship between these characters is unique blend of happiness and sorrow. Arnold Rubek is now old but a celebrated sculptor. He has achieved great height and international fame with his sculpture "The Day of the Resurrection" where his model for this masterpiece of sculpture was Irene, who earlier had considered it her lifework to accompany Rubek and help him in his work. They had a strong binding as an artist and also appear to have had strong feelings for each other at that time. As Rubek was fully focused on his work so he refused to consider Irene as anything more than his model. This lead Irene disappointed and angry and she left him. The downfall of Rubek start from here the day she left him, Rubek's creative power has diminished, and since then Rubek had a feeling that now he can no longer create art of any significance. He also believes Irene alone, holds the key to his creativity and now he is no more have creativity for his art.

Due course of time he has married Maja, a considerably younger woman, and the two of them have lived abroad in a marriage that has gradually become somewhat cool. The play opens with Rubek and Maja staying at a seaside hotel in Norway. Where Rubek is playing with an old song on Gramophone and Maja making dolls. During the stay in Norway they meet Ulfheim, a landowner and bear-hunter, who invites Maja to get up into the mountains with him. One of the guests at the hotel is a mysterious woman dressed in white and accompanied by a nurse. This turns out to be Irene. She has been married twice, and has been in a mental hospital. She seems to be in the grip of a "living death", and in a painful confrontation she accuses Rubek of having ruined her life and stolen her soul.

Here Rubek is keenly waiting for her to come back and begs her for that, so that he can regain his creative power. Due course of time, they meet again and go up into the mountains to become lovers again. The dramatic moment comes here when on the same mountain near the top they meet Maja and Ulfheim.

The atmosphere there was stormy and winds blows up, for safety Maja and Ulfheim go down the mountain, and while Irene and Rubek go on towards the peak remembering olden days, where they die in an avalanche. A western dramatic text or epic can be blended with a specific traditional theatrical form of a non-Western country. A western text can be blended with elements and techniques from one or more non western traditional theatrical forms or other traditional living art forms like music, movements, dance, etc. Ratan Thiyam proves in through this production that any text can be transformed into any traditional

the form; which is important and how you

During interaction with him he describes the traditional forms as Water. He explains his view “there is one water, which we use for drinking, for bath, for washing cloths and cleaning floor etc... but the water is common in all but we use it according to our needs and requirement. The same way I use the traditional elements which are traditional in a sense but I convert into my own tradition and use according the need of my text.”²⁴

A western text can be blended with elements, materials and techniques etc. from a non-Western art form as well as with elements and techniques of modern western art forms. Thiyam does thus not make use of a particular traditional theatrical or ritual convention but picks elements. Materials and techniques from his own culture and place them within a proscenium theatre frame along with Ibsen’s text and western elements. In the play there was a sweet marriage song at the begging and starting of on a very low sweet and evacuative note, and rising. Rubek was present. And then there was the funny moment when the gramophone collapsed. He went back to the gramophone and then we heard the first dialogue of Maja. Maja was the one who spoke out and interestingly, did so with line from the second act.

The dolls Maja is working on consist of a man and a woman in wedding costumes. Here Ratan uses these dolls as symbolic representation of their relationship in the play. There are three finished dolls in the process of

²⁴ *Personal Interviews with Ratan Thiyam at Goa 23rd October 2012*

ests a fundamental man and woman relationship
the same time group of three dolls represents the
present situation with the triangular relationship between Rubek, Maja
and Irene. It is also interesting to note that up-stage there is a big image of
a bird along with deformed human images. The symbolic representation
of this dolls and gramophone gives a clear idea to understand the situation
to the audience.

However, despite all these structural changes Thiyam maintains a concept
of three step progression in terms of space as the locale is changed from
studio to waterway to a spiritual space. It should be noted that according
to Indian conceptions, the spiritual space is infinite and exists above
reality that is at the highest elevation. Thiyam connects the persistence of
memory in the production to the Hindu and Bhuddist concepts of the
wheel of death and rebirth. Simultaneously there is a movement from a
realistic to a surrealistic atmosphere.

Ratan Thiyam has been inspired by transformations in Hindu mythology
in which gods and goddesses appear both as creative and destructive
powers as is especially the case with Shiva and Durga. He himself is
preoccupied with the transformation from life to death. The other
reflection is that Thiyam's emphasis on freedom as represented through
Maja's relationship to Ulfheim within an Indian setting requires that
Ulfheim appears as a positive and sympathetic character. On the contrary,
does not make use of any specific time concept.

Let us discuss that there are few thing in this play that need discuss.
Firstly, the self-confined episode is replaced by what Thiyam calls a
“unit” which may not necessarily tell a complete story. The story may

than one unit. An illustrative example is that he “painting” to the next in the middle of what in this production emerges as one continuous dialogue between Rubek and Irene and one unit taking place in the boat.

Thiyam’s love for painting can be seen in his most of the production. His paint stroke is thicker and stronger than typical for traditional theatre in the sense that the visuals are more prominent and shift frequently. He used his visuals so creatively as moving frames. As he explain me during the personal conversation that he take the scene like a painting on canvas, one he creates then wash it and recreate again. Whereas visuals in traditional theatre are fixed and created only with the help of a multi-purpose prop which for most traditional theatrical forms typically remain on the stage throughout the entire performance.

A hero acquiring superhuman qualities and becoming a measuring stick for behaviour and morals has Indian parallels in the myth of Karan and the related conversation between Krishna and Arjuna described in the scripture *Bhagavad Gita*. Moreover, swans are central in Hindu myths. The “swan boat” in Thiyam’s production, inspired by Ibsen’s text, is thus a symbol which the local audience can connect with their own myth. In this way, Thiyam connects human existence and spiritual conceptions of cosmos.

Modern Techniques used in Production

Flying birds. The technique used to present these symbols is traditional, each object being fixed to a stick which is carried by stage hands crossing at the back of the performance space. Especially the flying fishes also serve to give a surrealistic impression and might also be seen as a way of preparing the audience for the spiritual space at the end of the production. It is symbolic play, as a symbol being constitutively unlimited. Every interpretation of a symbol would in a sense, not simply explain the symbol, but force you to restore the symbol to its purity. The second observation by Ratan Thiyam is about the first tune we all heard on the musical accompaniment – a tune that keeps coming back at different level of resonance. Ratan said that this tune is from an old Manipuri marriage song, which he knew from childhood. He suddenly remembered it and picked it up as the take of tune, which had to be played at different levels and registers. He further said “In the song there is an element of remembrance – the time of play, time of love. But we must also recall that the choreography is not going to follow the raas”. Let us accept though that this is an old song with evacuation of the raasleela but be clear that this is not the principal of its design. That is a very simple but very important distinction.

On the right down stage there is a big gramophone and Rubek playing something on the while Maja, his wife, sits on the floor in a corner on the same side of the stage. She is working stitching in fact. With many little dolls, little figure, around she. To construct this situation Ratan recalled interesting truth he said “ this situation remind me all the way all our friends in Delhi, old NSD friends, friends in general, used to get together and just sit and talk, have party or something and listen to old Hindi film

with the old film sing that made me creates the

He does not speak of Manipuri or of any indigenous cultural form, though of course that is there too. Art and love are not separate but when they are separated, it is neither love nor art happened at all. He explain “ the artist is also liar” the context is that Irene and Maja, both of them, the two women in the play, constantly tell him : you are poet Or she will laugh at him kindly and jest” you are nearly a poet. And he goes along with that, he laughs himself. But Ratan Thiyam says “ let us not take it so literary, let’s not take the artist figure so literary and believe that pathos, his guilt-ridden , sentimental, romantic statement are the real mirror to his desires and situations. They need not be. May be in everything he says, he is also building certain defence for himself, for his present state. For all the unhappiness that he’s caused around him, so let’s not take the artist, merely because he is great artist, literary.

Very interesting point explain by Ratan Thiyam that “everything which appears in the play – props, sets, fish, flowers, birds, promises, dream, plans, love, the plan to go up to the mountain to see the glory of the world from the top – all of it also disappear in the play itself. So it appears and disappears; the great tides come and ebb away. It is not that the play happens and then there is a gap after it, in which we speculate” . He further says “No, all of that is included in play”. So the play does not work on a rigid, fixed premise. That there are characters and they have a story among themselves, a plot of their own, in which certain effects are generated. He says” the character themselves appear and disappear in the play” so in that sense the principal is the play itself, not its thematic or structural or hidden truth. Everything happens in the course of the play.

very important as a principal of scenography. In effect, I will use different kinds of foreground and background, none of it must stay behind on stage. None of it remains as motif. In several sequence you have motif, a kind of central axis around which everything else will happen. In my play the motif will appear and disappear, and a new one will appear and disappear, and at the end what will remain, is metaphysics what will remain is a question.

He says about the mountain shown in the play. According to *Mahabharata* or Indian Myth the *Mahaprasthan* of the Pandavas in the Himalay. This is to be considered pandavas last journey. And that is the idea behind to take them on the mountain for their last journey. The meaning of the last journey is clear, both in a very contextual referential sense to Rubek and Irene's last journey, and also in an epic and mythological sense, from the *Mahabharata* context. So he takes that somewhere, but again it does not become a principal. It's just a field of associations. Ratan took it as Indian myth but used it creatively in the western text for Rubek and Maja, but nowhere has it seemed like a western presentation.

In the discussion with Soumyabrata Choudhary he reveals that during the rehearsal the one of his main actor Bhogen and Maja hardly ever face each other when they talk to each other. They always do so at angles, at intersection in the movement but very rarely while facing each other. And he keeps saying he has to forget Ibsen to do Ibsen. What is the meaning of that? He says "I have to forget the dialogic structure of the Ibsen, the Ibsen of conversation. The Ibsen of face on face dialogue. Even if there is a extreme conflict between the two, I have to find a principle which is not tow by two. I have to find a principle again which moves into multiples".

Ibsen in this play when we dead awaken, there
characters watching at the play, in the play “he says

that his production just has four characters but there are several invisible characters always watching the play within the play. And they are my method not he two by two inter-action between Irene and Rubek and Maja. The invisible characters are my method and they must be the once to move my play along, they are the one who come and go all the time.

You will remember the presence of the figures in the black costume. They are not just stage hands, they are invisible characters who cum into a bare visibility in the play, according to Ratan Thyiam’s own conceptualization. This method employed in two by two situations that is in the character situation, in dialogic situation, in the first appearance of Rubek and Maja. Now if you remember Rubek appearance in the play and you read the play, Ibsens play, in terms of costume you would find great discrepancy. Rubek is a successful sculptor who has sold his work and become famous and rich and has bought a villa. He has the money now to do all this things. And in the play, it is implied that he is dressed in expensive, tasteful leisure wear. Rubek in this production wearing a long coat, a dhoti pulled up and a wig, with long white hair looks absolutely ravaged. In the first appearance he is already ravaged by whatever he has been through his failure, weather in art or in love. And the fact that he fails every time. His appearance itself gave us a sense of his real existence. So in other word Rubek and even Maja bring “existence” to the scene and this is something Ratan Thiya discussed himself that Maja has the potential of Nora no because she consciously takes decisive action but because she does so spontaneously. The reference point is song, Nora’s song, rather than Nora’s declaration that she is going away. “There is a prosaic free, I am free” at the end.

e and of Ulfheim on to the stage that was the problem with the structure. Because if you have broken the structure of *When We Dead Awaken* and started with the second act, how do you introduce Irene? We know in Ibsen, Irene comes in as a lady, as a shadow of lady who is somewhere there. Maja has seen her and Rubek who also sees her and says “who is she?.” And Ibsen used the word “the lady” first, he didn’t give her the name straightaway, we know all that. But if Ratan has already changed the structure of the text, then how did he actually bring in these characters? Because he is not going by the plot, he is not going by locale. So what he does paradigmatic on his approach to the play itself? What he does is and we all saw is that he gets into a non-dialogic, non-two by two space and externalize the image in their head with bubbles. So the bubbles are thoughts according to Ratan Thiyam’s quote. They are thoughts, but thoughts are specific so again it is a thought of desire. What is desire? Desire is to think about one thing. That’s it ; desire is simple. Not think about anything but that, that’s desire.

So we have two characters Maja and Rubek, thinking a common thought that is exchanged in space. So Irene, the one thing Rubek is thinking about, comes to Rubek. And the bear hunter the fine figure, the squire figure comes to Maja. So that becomes the principle of topological image.

Process of Making *When We Dead Awaken*

According to Ratan Thiyam there were several things came across during this production, first was the European atmosphere or environment. The western concept of life and death juxtaposed with our own concept of life and death, our own metaphors, our own things, elements and materials. The most important thing for him was how to get acceptable this play in Indian atmosphere and environment. He further describe that tradition is not separate from us so how can Ibsen fit into our tradition. It's a challenging task to present Ibsen in front of our audience. But then he came out with the thought that anything that is universal, anything written by genius or painted by a painter who is genius doesn't make any difference whether it is Ibsen, Shakesphere, Tagore, or Kalidas all these will carry a universal message.

In India we have different customs different traditions, different languages even we don't know how many languages we speak in India but we all also have the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. Ratan describes these with the example that Bhīma of *Mahabharata* is glutton, really a great eater. If the narrator is narrating the story of the *Mahabharata* in south then Bhīma as an eater will eat Sāmbhar dhosa idli, utappam etc, and if the narrator is from the Punjab then Bhīma will naturally eat sarson ka saag, makki ki roti and so on, and if he is form Manipur he will be eating an entirely different cuisine. But Bhīma is Bhīma he is an eater. And Ibson is Ibson. We can interpret him in our own way but he remains Ibson.

He further discussed about our belief of rebirth. According to the Indian philosophy rebirth occurs only when a person has accumulated a lot of

whole life. If we don't have good karma we won't
as a human being that is the Indian concept.

Resurrection is a very western.

During the process of this production the important for him was working
process, was the realization that this was not the realistic play as Ibsens
work may have been considered earlier. This play has no realistic or
naturalistic writing, no portrait like characters which is why; even though
there is an Ibsenite structure of the three act play the development of
character is not as it was in earlier work.

He clearly stated that "I tried to discover a language of expression
specifically to this play and make the actors work towards it because It is
neither a realistic play nor a highly stylized Indian classical play. It is
something in between, by placing it in a modern context I tried to make
the contemporary acceptable to myself, because at the end, it is I who I
am trying to satisfy.

In the play performance there was a clock used in one scene at actors left,
which has very important story itself described by Ratan Thiyam in his
own word during the personal conversation "on day while I was writing I
fell asleep and, suddenly when I got up I felt like asking Salvador Dali,
what do I do, can I borrow your cloth? So he told me – I felt that he told
me well if it is for a play by Ibsen, then you can borrow it. So I felt very
happy because all this is about memory about time and about coming
close to Rrubek. And I was thinking of time – where time itself is the
juxtaposition of the physical body and how Iren could express this with
the help of hanging clock of Dali. This idea goes back again to Manipuri
tradition of the rituals, like Liaharoba, where the human being meets the

ings come together in my head again and again in a very physical way and sometime in a completely nonphysical manner.

5.3.4 Other Plays in Brief

5.3.4.1 Uttar Priydarshi (The Final Beatitude)

The claret robed monks each hand the youth his staff. As each one is relinquished the monk spreads his shawl until nothing can be seen except four joined oblongs of cloth, feet and the central poles, circling slowly off stage, a stunning image. The ritual chanting has been continuous.

As the play progress Ashoka's rage is like a wounded animal, bereft of reason for caution. Despite pleas by the folk, he summons Ghor, appointing him the Lord of Hell. Ghor proclaims himself Mahakali, the Lord of Destruction, summoning his partners in devastation, witches and henchmen. The witches with long white tresses pivot from side to side, arms and hands ominous filigree, the henchmen with wooden clogs slapped rhythmically. Ghor has made the kingdom into hell.

There is not a bit of religious piety here. Thiyam is giving us a parable about war and peace, about the power that corrupts absolutely, and the struggle against evil, within as well as around us.

The priests are lured into hell where they are tempted by the witches who assume the guise of attractive women in festive Manipuri garments. The abuse is accomplished with the priests in the front, which maidens along the dias. The torture is of a higher order, invasive of mind and spirit.

where the witches, reverting to tresses and robes, operate death weapons for criminals. The scene comprises the sole aesthetic clash for the literal nature of these weapons scrapes against the strength of the witches and the archetypal force the other symbols in the production provide.

A mendicant monk enters, conical hat adorned with cascades of beads. Ghor taunts him, but he manages to secure a place to meditate. Ghor sends his henchmen to destroy him, but are instead overcome. Ashoka describes with wonder the aura around the monk as "sweet fragrance."

Aided by the monk, Ashoka confronts his own inner dark side and Ghor is banished. The voices are amazing: this is carefully pitched, highly rhetorical speech. The actors chant, orate and sing like old Shakespeareans, with multiple rhythm changes and a range from high soprano to bass.

The movement, too, is hieratic, and gorgeously rhetorical. Certain gestures and stances from Indian art or dance: the turned-out legs and feet that form one vertical triangle; the arms that form another, moving between vertical and horizontal; the hands with their snakelike ease. But again, there is no one technique or style -- these actor-dancers crouch, crawl, contort, or move with smooth, legato steps. Their limbs can do anything and their backs are strong enough to have been carved from obsidian.

Thiyam has studied Eastern and Western forms, but there is no sense of pastiche here, only of integration and invention. He also wrote the music: his drums, gongs, bells and wind instruments enfold the work; they anticipate, underscore and embody the actions and emotions.

g-ta martial art form in the battle scene and other forms like WariLeeba. But it was not in its original shape, he created new space and pattern for the play. Apart from this he also highlighted the surrounded problems of Manipur in his play like Nine Hill One Valley.

5.3.4.2 Nine Hills One Valley

Time doesn't just move slowly in *"Nine Hills One Valley*, Portrayed by a demon named Matam, Time wields a sword and pantomimes chopping down four gesturing figures dressed in colorful costumes, as a drum beats propulsive. Nearby, disembodied arms flail on a mound, hauntingly. It's one of several striking, streamlined and ritualized images dreamed up by the Ratan Thiyam.

With a stilted translation -- the play is spoken in Manipuri with English subtitles -- the episodic plot begins with seven puttering women who guard the cultural traditions of their mystical land, calling upon seven wise men to awake from their slumber. While they were dozing, apparently, the world had gone to hell -- violence, poverty, injustice. Seeing this, these men -- sitting side by side under crisp cylinders of light -- drive out the evil spirits and write a book of knowledge that's a bit like a collection of New Age slogans just vague enough not to stir up any debate.

In another scene four actors in suits read newspaper headlines in English about recent terrorism around the world. It's an incongruous and unnecessary vignette, and Thiyam generally steers clear of any specific

a solemn universalism that can come off as a bit

Apart from the Socio-economic context of the Manipur in the above play he also created a classic play like *Ritusamharam* where he further created a visual of war like situation of his state round the clock.

5.3.4.3 **Ritusamharam**

There are no reminders of army atrocities in a State that has repeatedly cried out for the withdrawal of the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act); an Act the playwright too decries. Instead, "*Ritusamharam*" is almost magically removed from the conflict Thiyam describes painfully as routine.

Thiyam's art in "*Ritusamharam*" seeks solace and sanity amidst the violence erupting around him. His attack is tempered by the metaphors and colours of Nature "from whom I get energy... I lean on the shoulder of Mother Nature"; the play confronts the daily realities lived by its cast and director by introducing antonymous elements to these exigencies.

"*Ritusamaharam*" often appeals to audiences far removed from Thiyam's own realities, suggesting that his confrontations of existential crises rather than realist ones have removed the need for the subtitles which he occasionally allowed, on a screen above the play.

During the process of creating the social awareness and political scenario of the state of Manipur he never forgot the nature. As we mentioned in the beginning the nature and surround atmosphere during his child hood

created his first trilogy based on the myth where
er land in his play Wahoudok.

5.3.4.5 Wahoudok

Wahoudok (Prologue) is the first play of Thiyam's Manipur Trilogy- *Chinglon Mapan Tampak Ama* (Nine Hills One Valley) and *Hey Nungshibi Prithibi* (My Earth, My Love) being the other two. *Wahoudok* links myth with reality as it encompasses a wide spectrum of human evolution right from birth of the universe to the modern times. Colourful visual designs of costume and light highlighted the magic of the Manipuri play and enthralled the audience. Ratan Thiyam who had been yearning for a beautiful and peaceful life, tries to bring back the past golden days of beautiful life, in his play.

5.4 Ebrahim Alkazi :

It was at St Xavier's College in Bombay in the 1940s that Alkazi took his first strides in theatre. According to him, Sultan Padamsee, his friend and later brother-in-law, was a director on the scale of Orson Welles. "He started the Theatre Group, but died tragically young and a great deal of responsibility fell on my shoulders." Alkazi flung himself into acting and directing, and subsequently spent three years at the Royal Academy of Theatre in England, which gave him plenty of exposure to the possibilities of theatre. "But I wanted to come back and work in India, I wasn't interested in plays that had been successful on Broadway or the West End," he says. "Instead I wanted to encourage Indian playwrights and deal with subjects that were relevant to the Indian scenario."

and interest in a number of different forms
SD under his supervision primarily represented

Indian theatre, it was also open to traditions from other countries - for instance, he once got a Japanese director to stage a production in the classical Noh tradition. "We designed the stage in the style of the Noh," he says, showing us an old photograph. "The form is not very different from *Kathakali*, and we were able to explore that connection."

Alkazi was conscious that the direction in which he took the School would fundamentally affect the nature and course of the theatre movement in the future. Assessing the theatre scene, Alkazi saw that traditional theatre, though rich and vibrant, had no immediate relevance for the present. On the other hand, Alkazi's post-Independence generation had already debunked the commercial aesthetics of Parsi theatre and was searching for a new idiom.

Also, since Hindi had been declared the national language, but did not have a sufficient body of dramatic literature, Alkazi began to help develop Hindi as a stage language. Closely associated with translations of classical works from the Western canon into Hindi, Alkazi's effort was to build up a supporting archive from which contemporary playwrights, actors and directors could access world dramatic literature in their own language and at the same time enrich themselves and become sensitized to the potential of the medium.

Alkazi decided to stage the work of new, young Hindi playwrights, earlier dismissed as being unworthy of performance. An example was Mohan Rakesh's *Aashad ka Ek Din* (1962), which spoke of the artist in contemporary society. Another was Dharamvir Bharati's poetic *Andha Yug* (The Blind Age), which was based on the last days of the great war

Alkazi's production of *Andha Yug* drew attention to justifying war. This theme, contextualized within the post-Partition bloodbath, as well as the looming Vietnam War, made for a monumental and powerful production that was staged in the ruins of a historical monument, the Feroz Shah Kotla, in Delhi.

In 1972 Alkazi directed *Tughlaq*. Written by Girish Karnad, a young Kannada playwright, the play was staged against the battlements of yet another fortress in Delhi, the Purana Quila. The events in the play closely paralleled contemporary reality, with *Tughlaq* resembling Nehru, the dreamer who so earnestly wished to take the country forward but were at each step thwarted in his efforts.

These plays, along with others from the classical Sanskrit canon, such as *Shakuntalam* and *Mrichkattikam*, or the adaptation of Premchand's novel *Godaan*, an epic tale of the struggle of the Indian peasant, represented Alkazi's attempt to draw from ancient, historical or contemporary material and to link contemporary Hindi theatre to Indian history, philosophy and thought.

5.5 B V Karanth

The significance of Karanth's work in Kannada theatre lies in three areas. First, he rescued the arid amateur theatre by bringing celebration and theatricality back into it. Second, he invented an intuitive synthesis of the best of Company Nataka, amateur experimentation, and folk forms like *Yakshagana* and that too inspiring a fashion for nativism. Third, in theatre

inimitable balance between song and speech,

To B V Karanth theatre was not a profession; it was his very lifeblood. If he seriously reflected on the possibilities of the Theatre during day, he dreamed of the same during night. And, his life was as theatrical and tumultuous as the plays he directed. His autobiography reveals such a life, in a simple, honest, and straight-forward manner. It is both a gripping story of an extraordinary individual and also an authentic chronicle of the Theatre in post-independence India – a chronicle of great playwrights, imaginative directors, talented actors and actresses, and of the varied theatres in our multi-lingual country.

Karanth was a man who found it impossible to sit in one place and register systematically his thoughts or his memories. However, despite Karanth's immense admiration for AlKazi, he stood at the other extreme in terms of stage-craft and production. Karanth's Theatre was the native folk-theatre; and he had been much influenced in his childhood itself by *Yakshagana*, *Harikatha*, and such other folk-traditions. In the place of well-knit structure, order and discipline of AlKazi, he depended more on intuition and improvisation; and he gave importance to 'movement' on the stage, dynamism and overall ambience. More importantly, he never accepted the idea of one 'national theatre'; and he argued that each linguistic region had and should have its own distinct theatre, based on the traditions of that region: "Whichever language is spoken at a particular region, a dramatic performance should be only in that language." In another context, he says: "But, from the very beginning I have been an advocate of what is local and of the soil. I oppose the concept of 'national theatre.' However, what Karanth attempted to do in

and succeeded most of the times, was a dynamic and experimental modern theatre.

Owing to the genius of many directors, playwrights, actors-actresses, and other theatre-technicians, Indian Theatre took a new and meaningful turn in the 70's of the last century; and, surely, B V Karanth played a major role in such resurgence of the New Theatre.

He gently describe “Basically, I am a selfish man; and I interpret everything from a self-centred point of view. Be it a play or a film, I don't do it because it is my duty; I do it from the view-point of a seeker of truth. I mean, this is what I aim at. However, I have never been able to control either success or failure of my venture: they are beyond me.”

From childhood itself, drama has been a part of his nature; it has never been a vocation. His field of work also is one that has spread out – not vertically but horizontally. He said “Mine aren't the dreams of an ivory tower. I have never thought of earning for a livelihood. But I have always followed one dictum: giving up what cannot be achieved is a virtue. For instance, I cannot make money; therefore, giving up the idea of making money is a virtue. If I say that I sacrificed much for my studies, immediately my heart pricks me that I didn't serve my parents at all. My younger brother did everything. What mother said at the time of father's 'tithi' or annual ceremony hurt me much. She said: “Consider that these expenses cover what you have to do for me also. Don't spend much on funeral rites when I die.” Perversely, this comment forced me to do her rites on a grand scale even if it meant going for loans. Funeral rites, annual ceremonies – it is not a question of whether or not I have faith in them; they have a meaning in that they bridge two generations. Even if

...t, his son may conduct all those rites with the
...ce to the dead man's soul. In the end, what it
amounts to is that we cannot give up anything. Either way, there is no
total freedom, or everything remains a mystery. This is the reason why I
like plays which depict such mystery in life.

On his directorial he explain that “After I finish reading any play, what
stands before my eyes is an 'image,' a dynamic image, the fact that even
the entry and exit of a play become a part of the play. This image needn't
be always visual; it can be auditory also”. The broken pieces of a chariot's
wheels, hung from a cracked wall in a waste land, in the play Andha Yug
are unforgettable. If the central image, central point is strong, that itself
can provide a commentary on the whole play. He further describe that “I
have always felt that the director's major responsibility lies in exploring
the polysemic aspects of a play. As a supplementary exercise to this
multi-level exploration, I have developed a habit of carefully reading
morning newspapers. Such a reading enables me to understand the
different interpretations of and perspectives on the same issue or event
the papers provide.

This basic principle of the possibility of multiple interpretations and
perspectives in a play has always stood him in good stead. He never
stood hard on his theories.

He always insists that there is nothing greater than language. It is said that
music is the base for everything. But, for him, the basis of all is language.
The sound created by a big stone to indicate time for lunch, the sound of
another stone to indicate dinner, a totally different sound to proclaim the
marching time of an army in this manner, sound was in the beginning a

...later it transformed itself into music he strongly
...the drama depends on language, an artist has to
have exceptional control over language. Whether he gets this control
through poetry or through any other source, all his efforts are going to be
in vain unless he has this control over language. Once he focuses all his
attention on language, other aspects do automatically come to him and
training also becomes meaningful. In training, usually, we emphasize
physical training, which doesn't require language. Martial arts in Kerala
are different from martial arts in Manipur. But that is not the point.

Think of language first and achieve mastery over it. Drama alone has the
ability to keep a language living; and no other medium can carry out this
function. Language establishes a living bond among the players, audience
and society; and thus united, we go about exploring meaning and life.
Coining new words and phrases is the job of journalists and University
professors; the job of theatre-people is to explore new meanings of
existing words and to give those words a semantic dignity.

5.6. Neelam Mansing Chowdhry

First performed of *Naagamandala* in 1989, this legendary play by Girish
Karnad was revived, or rather revisited, as a new production by Neelam
Mansingh in 2005. *Naagamandala* is a theatrical delight in any language
and the rural flavour bestowed on it by Mansingh and her incredible team
of actors only adds to the drama.

Girish Karnad's *Naagamandala* was Neelam's first major work. For the
first time, speech, narration, recitation, songs, dances, costumes, props,
movements, stood unified. In a sense, she did not just direct the play; she

that earned full approval from the playwright.
who has really understood my play,’

It was a remarkable play by Karnad in which two Kannada folk tales were woven together. The first tale commented on the paradoxical nature of oral tales that have an existence of their own independent of the narrator and yet they live on only when they are passed on from one to the other. Within this tale is the story of Rani who flowers in the fantastic rather than the realistic.

Neelam had got an exquisite translation, songs and all from Punjabi. As a director this play helped her weave together her traditional *Naqals*, many of them female impersonators, in a cohesive manner with her urban contemporary actors. It was the play that received many rave reviews at the national level and remained a favourite with Karnad. Although reluctant to locate himself at the helm of any movement, Karnad has been identified with the emergence of ‘semi-classical’ drama: the use of folk forms in urban theatre.

Common to both Karnad and Mansingh Chowdhry are the prioritization of the indigenous and the rural and the readiness to experiment in order to find a distinct idiom to express their art. Karnad speaks of forging a tradition of his own making and central to Mansingh Chowdhry’s art seems to be the belief that the performance of serious theatre that infuses the rural spirit of Punjab into classical forms would go a long way in the recovery of the language and also of self-esteem. The successful performance of *Naagamandala* brought these concerns significantly closer to their realization.

extremely evocative play about desire and longing. The play is a clash in a dance of changing identities. The woman's body, hemmed in by tradition, is the site of the ageless battle of the sexes. The play has a long and illustrious history of performance even though it is by no means easy to put it on stage. Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry responds to the challenge both lustily and playfully. The chorus sings powerfully in a rural dialect of Punjabi; the Naga-lover cavorts energetically with his beloved Rani; there is a running thread of comedy that touches slapstick in incidents like the blind mother being thrown off the shoulders of her son when he stumbles. The Director's feminist sensibility is evident. The rejected wife and the beloved of the Naga--after he accidentally consumes the love-portion intended for the husband and goes on to assume his form triumphs over both her husband and the Naga-lover by ultimately being anointed as a goddess by the villagers. It is indeed true that you can't keep a good woman down! Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry's women are brilliantly strong and wacky. The same, however, cannot be said of the man.

The personification of the story is another woman character, just like Rani, and if the audience is reminded that it is "just a play," it is more in the tradition of the story teller pausing to take a breath rather than the play compelling the audience to think.

In the Girish Karnad play '*Naagamandala*', music helps in unfolding the narrative and also underscores the sub-text, by extending its meaning through musical notations.

She explains about forms " I started trying to explore the forms that existed in Punjab and I came across a group of performers called the

They had an amazing repertoire of music, of skills. They do not come under what you call high art, classical art, it was more a basic populous kind of art. So I did workshops with them and through that, I did a production based on one of their folklore. Then I started picking up more contemporary plays and they just became part of my extended family of actors. So today I have in my company, a mixture of urban and rural actors, both in their separate disciplines and separate worlds and today I think that line of division has been totally dissolved. It's like theatre never was."

She explains about the idea used mirror in a play *Naagmandala* that "To me a mirror is like a dual image, the whole image of maya. You see what you want to see. It also shows you what you are. So it's illusion and it's reality and the whole ambiguity of shifting from the world of reality to the world of make believe. Of course, the mirror is an integral part of an actress' life. So, I wanted it to be surrounded by mirrors, to create a multiple kind of reflection. I would have preferred more mirrors but it's difficult to transport. I actually use four mirrors."

Mansingh's other contribution has been to adapt the best of world literature to the Indian milieu, setting it in a contemporary context, in a way that makes it her own. *Little Eyolf*, for example, is virtually unrecognizable from Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen's original, and if you didn't know it was Ibsen, you would have thought it was a Punjabi folk tale. Her preference for classics has even been panned, but Mansingh does not agree with such criticism. "I don't think of it that way. I may like the work of Dorris Lessing, but I should be able to relate to it personally. For example, *The Suit* is adapted from a very short story by South African writer Can Themba. We improvised on that. The story

ents of apartheid. But that doesn't work in the relationship like marriage in the story seemed powerful for me to develop, so we made that the core of the play," Mansingh explains.

Adapting literary works to theatre is a training Mansingh attributes to the two great influences on her life — B V Karanth, with whom she worked on his repertory theatre Rang Mandal in Bhopal for a long time, and Ebrahim Alkazi, who was her teacher at NSD.

"Their teachings altered the way I looked at text." Speaking of the very different approaches of the two thespians, she says, "Karanth was a complete anarchist, working within themes of folk culture. Alkazi was more of a Renaissance man, an epic teacher and a completely hands-on person. He would teach you every little aspect of a performance, right from cleaning the stage. He broke the myth of being just an actor. He was a one man institution." It was Karanth who encouraged Mansingh to revive local theatre in Punjab when she moved back to the north Indian city where she grew up. Mansingh was hesitant at first, but once she brushed up her Punjabi, she felt more confident.

Elkazi, of course, was the one who inspired her to take up theatre. "I enjoyed reading books on art when I was young, but it was all very peripheral. Then I saw Alkazi's *Othello* and I couldn't imagine that this kind of theatre was possible. Alkazi spoke a language that I hadn't heard before. He represented a world which was unfamiliar yet fascinating. But theatre wasn't seen as a career option, especially coming from small town," she says. Her mother was a housewife, father a doctor, and after college, Mansingh had to choose between settling for an arranged marriage and studying further. Mansingh chose the NSD.

5.7 Conclusion

After discussion of the main play of these all directors we can see that these directors are legend by their thought, legend by their work and can say that legend by their own. Habib uses the folk blend with poetry in the *Agara Bazar* at the same time Panikkar uses the myth and transforms classic into indigenous with his tradition and lokdharmi style of presentation. Here Ratan Thiyam uses tradition blending with canvas. Habibji's work lies in the common man of Chhattisgarh. Whereas Panikkar, help modern audience to understand the *Natyashastra* with ease. Ratan express the emotion through bodily gesture and expressive visual with blending the folk music. Tanvir's soft-spoken instructions and aggressive approach to the production was made him legend of the Indian Theatre.

In Panikkar's theatre many folk forms of Kerala are in fact creatively conserved and allowed to realize their potential. This becomes possible because in his theatre Panikkar is able to connect the vitality of the folk elements with the refinement of the classical ones. This connection gives Panikkar an enormous amount of freedom to create and yet remain rooted into the collective memory of the civilization. Let it be said again and again that Deshi or folk elements are not at all decorative for Panikkar's theatre. They are most creatively and philosophically used.

As Udayn Vajpai rightly mentioned that, Panikkar's theatre decolonizes the theatrical practices of India. It opens various ways of relating to the Margi and Deshi traditions of India, not only for itself, but also for other directors. Our tradition believes and practices the continuity between *Nritta*, *Nritya* and *Natya*. Perhaps Panikkar's theatre is the only contemporary urban theatre where such continuity is most beautifully

it possible for him to create many textures of
ke immense pleasure in.

About his production, Ratan Thiyam said, "The innumerable versions of the creation myth have always held a tremendous fascination for me because of the cultural specificities one can discover in each of these. While the creation of man and the formation of societies have been built into one part of history, the gradual destruction and collapse of civilization forms another, with speculative assessments on how a civilization came to an end."

He shows the pain of Abhmanyu through the creative elements of the tradition as well as through the *Natyshastric Angik abhinay* very effectively. Ratan uses the *Nandi* of Sanskrit theatre but at it looks as his own creation of *Natyashastra*. Manipuri raas and Dalis clock in the same play which keeps him on the mountain where he put his character Rebuk and Irene. He was not taken up only Indian play but at the same time he adopted the Ibsen in his own tradition and moulded the western in to Indian form. Ibsen's play attracted Thiyam because while the context has changed, the central theme remains relevant. Europe of Ibsen's time might differ from the India of today, but Thiyam believes that Ibsen's concerns find a resonance in Hinduism. Themes such as resurrection, rebirth and karma are common and timeless concerns.

We have also discussed in brief about the Ebrahim Alkazi , B.V.Karant anr Neelam Mansingh and their work. I took up particularly these directors with my work of study because they all are related to each other; their work and their process are complimenting each other. It's not only that but Alkazi is the Banyan tree and all others are the branches of it. It

the Indian theatre in their veins. Alkazi sets an example of the Tughlaq at Quila. He always puts emphasis on traditional Indian theatre though he got the training from RADA but loved the Indian tradition. Habibji is connected in this terms he also took a training form the RADA but his heart lies at India. They are both common in this sense Alkazi works at NSD, Delhi and continue giving his best while Habib went to Chattisgarh and took a challenge to train the *Nacha* artist who even does not know reading the script.

B.V.Karant created a new language of theatre. His music was always like a back bone of the play, he invented it as one of the language of expression in theatre. His most of the directorial works is in south Indian language but his contribution to evolve a indigenous theatre of India is not less than any other legend. It was only a B.V.Karant who guided to Neelam Mansing to work at her own native Punjab. She always praises him for this. Neelam's landmark play *Naagmandala* was the masterpiece. She uses dance, music and song of Punjabi folk in such way that even Girish Karnad's Kannad play looks like Punjabi original script. She uses the *Naqqal* of Punjab in her play who sung most of her production which create a indigenous feeling.

We must say, this director's contribution in the field of the theatre will never be forgotten by any theatre practitioner. They have evolved a New Indian Theatre which definitely going to be torch bearer for the future generation.

After studying work of this all director I will discuss the actual outcome of this study in next chapter. I will try to make some outcomes which surely are useful for the theatre students.



Composition of play “When We Dead Awaken “ when they go to heaven by Ratan Thiyam



This is the original photograph of Manipuri Raas. In above photo of Play When we Dead Awaken has the same looks as in original.



Composition of play “When We Dead Awaken “ when they go to heaven by Ratan Thiyam



This is the original photograph of Manipuri Raas. In above photo of Play When we Dead Awaken has the same movement and Hand gesture and posture.



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Example of the use of modern technology in play *When We Dead Awaken* by Ratan Thiyam. The bubbles of thought.



Example of the use of modern technology in play *When We Dead Awaken* by Ratan Thiyam. Boat in the river.



Manipuri Raas costume and posture with the use of lights and colors in the Play When we Dead Awaken.



Example of the use of modern technology in play When We Dead Awaken by Ratan Thiyam. Boat in the river passing through different places.



Symbolic Representation of the three doll reflect the Triangle of their relations in play When We Dead Awaken by Ratan Thiyam



Natyashastri Hand Gesture's use in a play When We dead Awaken by Ratan Thiyam



Natyashashtric Hand Gesture's and movement of Than Ta use in a play Chakravyuh
by Ratan Thiyam



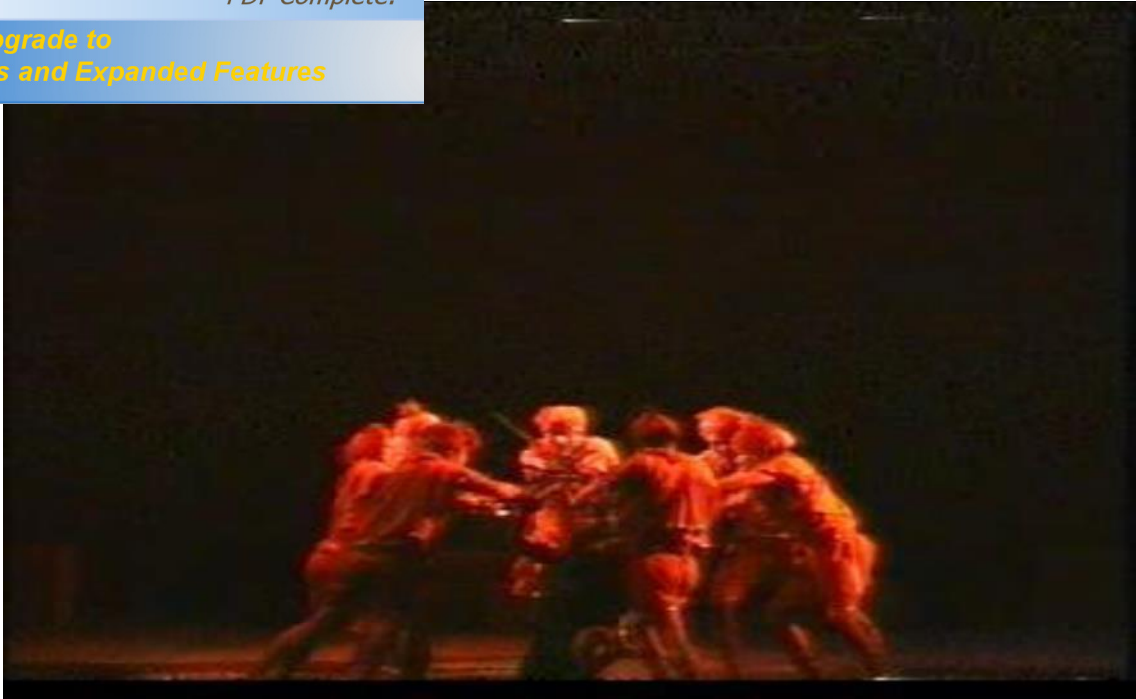
Natyashashtric Hand Gesture's and movement of Than Ta use in a play Chakravyuh
by Ratan Thiyam



Thang Ta movement used in a play Chakravuyh by Ratan Thiyam



Original Thang Ta Movement which is reflect in the above play Chakaravuyh 's **photo**.



Thang Ta movement used in a play Chakravuyh by Ratan Thiyam



Original Thang Ta performance Movement which is reflect in the above play Chakaravuyh 's photo.



Thang Ta movement used in a play Chakravyuh by Ratan Thiyam



Use of Manipuri Laik Hareeba where Jaydrath perform rituals and the portion of the Laik Hareeba used in play Chakravuyh by Ratan thiyam.



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The aesthetical use of light and posture in a play Chakravuyh by Raan Thiyam



Scene from Chakrvuyh where Yudhisthir convincing Abhiminyu to break the Charavuyh.



A scene from the play Uterpriyadarshi by Ratan Thiyam



A scene from the play Uterpriyadarshi by Ratan Thiyam