

## Chapter – 6

### Conclusion

#### 6.1 Directors Interlink between their productions

As Aparna Dharwadkar Mentions in Theatre of Independence The foremost contemporary theorists of theatre who conceive of performance as a physical discipline and form a visual poetry-K.N. Panikkar and Ratan Thiyam-have recast the *Mahabharata* plays to develop distinctive but overlapping epic performance sequences for their respective groups, *Sopanam* in Trivendrum (Kerala) and the Chorus Repertory Theatre in Imphal (Manipur) setting up tensions between the classical and the modern both in the conception and reception of their works. Tanvir, Panikkar, and Thiyam, who synthesize more or less well-known source materials into highly individualized and distinctive performance texts of their own and accommodate them to the cultural matrices of an Indian language as well as indigenous styles of presentation,.

Habib Tanvir also took up *Charandas Chor*, *Gaon naam Sasural more Naam Damad*, *Bahadur Klarin & Panchratram-Dutvakyam-Urubhangam* rendered them as ‘*Duryodhan*’ in the Chhatisgarhi folk style ‘*Nacha*’ that is his hallmark as a director. The performances of K.N. Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam and Habib Tanvir focus on antiheroes, outsiders and victims of the society.

K. N. PANIKKAR is India's premier director of classic Sanskrit plays of *Bhāsa*, Kalidasa, and Mahendra Vikram Varman. His presentation style is influenced in part by the studied, stylized antirealism of Sanskrit theatre, which distances performer and spectator alike from spontaneous overflows of powerful emotion. But to an equally important extent he draws on the regional musical, dance, ritual, and martial art forms particular to Kerala like *Sopana Sangeetam*, *Mohiniattam*, *Theyyam*, *Padayani*, and *Kalaripayattu*, among others to create a modern theatrical "idiom" that is compatible with the cultural heritage of the region and the nation. Panikkar thus brings a distinctively late twentieth-century sensibility to bear on a range of postclassical, "traditional" regional forms, serving as "a non-exploitative bridge between the past and the present, between the rich indigenous traditions, and the modern urban world". Three concepts are especially pertinent to a discussion of his method – his interest in a "universal language of theatre," his classically derived definition of theatre as "visual poetry" and his understanding of the theatrical "text" as an occasion for "nontextual" staging.

<sup>1</sup> For Panikkar, the universality of theatre inheres in its capacity for nonverbal communication. The body of the actor creates the "alphabet" of this signifying system, and bodily movements constitute the "language of expression" The concept of visual poetry implies a strong sense of structure, rhythm, and measured movement, as well as the integration of elements such as lighting, set design, costume, and makeup into the nonverbal *sapratext*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Theatre of Independence* by Aparna Dharwardkar Page no.103

The noted dance critic Dr. Sunil Kothari has rightly observed that two major directors' attempts to use regional traditions with which they are familiar have indeed shown a commendable and remarkable combination of dance, martial arts, music and theatre: those of Kavalam Narayana Panikkar and Ratan Thiyam. Kavalam, as he is popularly known, has a thorough grasp of southern dance-drama forms like *Kathakali*, *Kuttiyattam*, *Mutiyyettu*, *Theyyam* and also the typical music school of Kerala, *Sopanam*, including various talas. His acquaintance with Kerala's folk theatre and folk dances is also sound. Therefore, when he turned to the Sanskrit play like *Madhyamavyayoga* and *Urubhangam*, he used elements of *Kuttiyattam* and the dance technique and hastas of *Kathakali*, as these forms lend themselves to the theme, without violating the basic aesthetics<sup>2</sup>. The rendering of Sanskrit text in the way that *Kuttiyattam* actors/dancers speak, and the use of their typical hand gestures, body movements, stances and postures looked perfect as they derived their strength from the regional dance and theatre forms. Under his direction the actors trained themselves to use their bodies for the movement. Whereas no attempt was made to make these productions like a dance-drama, the *Angikabhinaya* neither jarred nor looked superimposed. To diehard dance buffs they might have seemed watered-down versions of the thorough and exacting dance techniques. But since the aim was not to produce the plays as complete dance-dramas, the experiments did succeed in the reintroduction of dance to theatre, for they had a direct bearing to the region and used the living art forms still practiced by a large number

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<sup>2</sup>*Rang Sopan: Celebrating contribution of Ratan Thiyam and his Chorus Repertory Theatre*  
- Dr. Sunil Kothari, January 21, 2013, <http://www.narthaki.com/info/gtsk/gtsk65.html>

*ubhangam*, Kavalam used the huge masks and with sensitivity and imagination which made the character of Duryodhana acquire a new dimension. In Karimkutty he applied Malayalam folk-theatre conventions that blended with the theme and its dramatic presentation.

The important distinctions in Panikkar's dramaturgy are therefore between the "basic-written text" and the "acting-action text," "narration" and "action," the "written version" of a text and its extended "stage interpretation" or the "plot- or character-based structure" of a play and its "performing structure." The thematic richness of a performance depends not on an intricate plot but the strong communication of textual meaning as action, particularly through the resources of music and dance. Panikkar's ideal of dramatic representation in this respect is the *Kuttiyattam* actor who undertakes a night-long elaboration of a single mythic episode before an enraptured audience.

The poetics and practice of Ratan Thiyam overlap with Panikkar's to some extent because he has a similar interest in combining classical Indian dramaturgy with regional and folk musical, dance, and martial arts traditions, and has presented some of the same Sanskrit plays by *Bhāsa* in revival. Thiyam's work as a director, however, is a unique fusion of the aesthetic and the political. Such plays as *Karnabharam* (1979), *Imphal Imphal* (1982), *Chakravyuhaa* (1984), and *Uttar Priyadarshi* (1999) are deeply immersed in the problem of violence and the embattled post-independence politics of Thiyam's native northeastern state of Manipur. But the omnipresent influence of indigenous narratives and regional performing traditions in his theatre embeds the political and philosophical content of his plays in anti realistic, performer-centered forms of varying

ively draw attention to the aesthetics of craft that communicates his “ideas” is the most ambitious, exacting, and innovative contemporary Indian expression of the concepts of visual poetry and nontextual staging in the theatre. In comparison, the body is all-important: “It is imperative to make the body intelligent, so that when the brain begins to think the body should be able to display the thought. The vibrations of thought should emerge through body movements, postures and gestures orchestrated and translated into action”.

Ratan Thiyam’s plays present a remarkable juxtaposition of traditionalism and the demands that a remorseless technological world makes on all of us. In the ultimate analysis, his plays represent the victory of abiding traditional values over the present world of wars, conflicts, violence, greed and inequity. Through it all runs the thread of Ratan Thiyam’s intense patriotism. Ratan, in his own inimitable way, has used the stage as a canvas to paint his plays. His signature, depicting a play as a masterpiece of painting, is deeply imprinted in every scene a ‘live paintings’ with profound depth. Gestures, body movements, emotions articulated through voice, not words, highly charged sound; appropriate costumes, soothing music and effective lighting aptly carry the message across the audience. Without understanding even a single word of the dialogue, evidently in Manipuri, one can follow the play with ease-here lies his skill. Every available space of the vast stage is so miserly utilized using a very limited number of stage props or none at all, not even a single inch of space is wasted, a rare feat that can be achieved only after meticulously carrying out a time and motion study. Thiyam is an Indian guru cut from traditional moulds, one of the most influential directors on the subcontinent.

have an added advantage as even today in arts are a part of one's upbringing. Classical, folk and traditional dance are alive; everyone learns dance as a child, plays instruments and sings. There is hardly any social occasion in Manipur which is not celebrated with dance and music. The dominant vaishnava faith coexists with earlier tribal modes of worship and a strong martial-art heritage. The plural vocabulary of dance forms, classical and folk, ritual and ceremonial, ballad singing and storytelling, offers a treasure trove to any sensitive director. Son of a dance guru, Thiyam turned to it consciously and artistically for his productions of *Urubhangam* and *Karnabharam* and his own play *Chakravyuhaa*, based on the story from the *Mahabharata*. The Thang-ta martial art form, appropriately used for combat scenes, chorus singing in Nata Sankirtana style where the movements imitate the playing of cymbals and in some cases the dancers actually play the cymbals, the classical Manipuri dances by women and men, the dancing with flagstaffs typical during the Holi festival, the *Pung-cholom* or playing upon drums while dancing, have all been imaginatively dovetailed by him in his plays.

One of the most spectacular and impressive applications of Karatala-cholom is seen in *Chakravyuhaa*, in the sequence of Abhimanyu narrating how, when he was a foetus in his mother's womb, his father Arjuna told his mother the secret of the *Chakravyuhaa*. Depicted in flashback, Subhadra and Arjuna are on a platform in front of which are seven actors forming a circle in blazing red costumes, playing cymbals. In the centre is Abhimanyu narrating the story with simple dance gestures, the cymbals held in his hands turning into a lotus when Subhadra describes nature around them. When, at the climactic moment,

...t of how to come out of the military formation,  
...l Abhimanyu in the womb is unable to listen to  
his father's words; the seven dancers' cymbals rise to a crescendo and,  
with the cry of Abhimanyu requesting his mother not to fall asleep. The  
use of *Karatala-cholom* is at its imaginative best.

Another extension of tradition with contemporary sensibilities occurs in the final scene of *Karnabharam*, when Karna drives off in his chariot to the battlefield. The horses are suggested by four Pung-cholom dancers playing drums, their beats creating the sound of the hoofs of the galloping horses, and four dancers on the sides taking circular movements with drums in their hands suggest the rotation of the wheels. The understanding of traditional forms and their creative usage set Ratan Thiyam apart from others who had been inserting dance into theatre.

<sup>4</sup>Todd Hammes describes the rhythms of Thiyam's theatre as "the result of a fully integrated aesthetic of movement, sound, light, poetics, and color, both regional and intra-national concerns and practices. Epic in scope, Thiyam's works relies on an intensive and physically demanding performance technique, developed specifically for his company". Highly symbolic props, elegant costumes, and dramatic lighting effects are other important elements in Thiyam's carefully choreographed, visually spectacular theatre.

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<sup>4</sup> *Theatre of Independence by Aparna Dharwardkar Page no.105*

## 6.2 Objective of these Directors

Thiyam's object is to design a training program for "contemporary theatre" and communicate with contemporary audiences. In comparison with Panikkar, therefore, Thiyam's relationship to "tradition" is more deeply meditated by postmodernist experimentation, and his view of theatre as eventually an autonomous and synergetic art. Thiyam thus adapts inherited elements to the needs of a specific work through a process of "invention" or "fabrication" that contrasts clearly with the relatively consistent traditionalist aesthetic of Panikkar's plays.

Despite its deliberateness, this method has been enormously influential because it addresses the vital issue of the "relevance of traditional Indian forms to contemporary theatre" at the levels of both theory and practice. Panikkar and Thiyam's original texts for performance are "natural" expressions of an aesthetic grounded in tradition.

The performance productions of both Panikkar and Thiyam are fundamentally inter textual with the work of *Bhāsa*, Panikkar established his pioneering role in the *Bhāsa* revival with a land mark production of *Madhyam Vyayog*.

This interlinked Panikkar-Thiyam-Tanvir represents the most complex instance of the dispersal of the classic within contemporary urban performance. The diversity of the re-presentations-in the medium of drama that is centered on performance rather than text-has also opened up new possibilities of cultural and political effect in the *Mahabharata* narrative.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Study of *Bhāsa* in Performance Major Research Project by Prof.(Dr.) M.C.Shah.

classic classically, in the original Sanskrit, and in dramaturgical principles of the *Natyashastra*. He belongs to the community of Chakyars in Kerala who are considered the living embodiments' of classical Indian theatre traditions, like the Noh families of Japan, and to cultural region that has preserved a continuous, if rather obscure, link with Sanskrit theatre through such forms as *Kuttiyattam* and *Kathakali*. But more than any other theatre professional in India, he has theorized the relation of epic narrative to classical theatre, and of both to contemporary theatre conceived as a performer centered practice grounded in tradition. Thiyam in contrast, transplants both Panikkar to the theatrical, cultural, and political contexts of the embattled northeastern state of Manipur. He performs the classic in Manipuri, the dominant language of the region, and in a style that blends classical dramaturgy more eclectically with regional cultural forms, such as Thang-ta, a martial art; Nata Sankeertana, a lyrical style of devotional music, and Wari-leeba, a type of oral recitation that 'paints pictures through words'.

Thiyam does not believe in instructing through his plays. "I' am just an artist. I can't teach anything to the people. All I can do is to share and discuss my experiences of life with them," he says modestly. Thiyam's philosophy is perfectly visible in the treatment of his plays. His plays point out the wrongs in the society and rectify them by putting questions on human intellect rather than trying to force a moral judgment on the audience.<sup>5</sup> Thiyam's plays are an amalgamation of the performance techniques from traditional art, contemporary theatre formats, his

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<sup>5</sup> *Ratan Thiyam Scripting a new Chapter in Modern Theatre Printed in Assam Mirror on November 6, 2012 by Satarupa Mishra. Downloaded from website: <http://assamirror.com/ratan.php>*

cial and political issues. Rather than being mere theatre and traditional performing art, his plays strive to create a new form that interplays with both tradition and innovation. The new form may owe a lot to Thiyam's thoughtful take on tradition. "Tradition is a contemporary thing. It is like a cascade flowing down. The flow may change it's shape as the water strikes against different down. The flow may change it's shape as the water strikes against different social, economic and political stones. The shape changes, but the cascade continues to flow," the theatre icon philosophies.

Despite the mammoth influence of the rich culture and history of his home state of Manipur. Thiyam's plays are able to mirror both regional and global issues and practices. The messages of all his plays are at once local and universal. "Human emotions are the same everywhere. It's not just in one place that a problem started. Today, the whole world is going through series of unrest, violence and upheavals. There has to be an approach of collective harmony, without wars, in resolving the problems. We can heal the wounded Earth only with peace," Thiyam says. He leaves us thinking when he asks, "Have we ever thought what we are leaving for our future generation? We work so hard in building professionals. But, how far have we succeeded in making true human beings?" Having traversed places worldwide, Thiyam has been enriched with myriad experiences, particularly his rich opportunity of interacting with different traditions. "Human expressions are same. Some may eat with spoon and knife, some with chopstick, while we eat with hands. But all of us eat. I've made friends in different countries and have exchanged

of us have agreed to the importance of living in  
the realities of life,” he says.

### 6.3 Directorial viewpoint

So, what does it take to be a good director? Thiyam’s first reaction is, “I don’t know.” Then, putting a little thought, he says, “A director has to work very hard, must be open to experimentation, and must be able to put new ideas every time. It is like an endless journey.” Undoubtedly, Thiyam is a perfectionist. Neither he nor his troupes would rest unless even the minutest details of the play are perfected. “I don’t create a play just for the sake of its production. I take up every play as a creative challenge,” he says. Ask him how would he evaluate his works, Thiyam is prompt to reply, “I am the hardest critic of my own work. I am hardly satisfied with my work. That is the reason why I don’t go to the rehearsals of my plays often.” Ratan Thiyam has remained a passionate exponent of performing art for over three decades. And the good news is that he has not finished as yet. “Few years from now, I’d like to carry on with my works. Despite all the changes that may take place I’ll continue to be in theatre for sure,” he assures.

Despite these differences, both Panikkar and Thiyam practice and elaborate spectacular and stylized theatre & emphasize physical and technical elements, such as costume, design, lighting, movement, gesture, and speech. In contrast, a play like Habib Tanvir’s ‘*Duryodhana*’ disrupts this classic contemporary continuum, at several levels. Linguistically, it renders the classic neither in the original nor in a major regional language but in the tribal dialect of the Chhattisgarh region in Central India.

the classic into the tribal context, retaining the events but presenting them in the cultural register of folk performance. Dramaturgically, Tanvir's production employs tribal actors on a bare stage and underscores the pathos of Duryodhan's anti heroic death, for a performance experience that is the radical opposite of the intricate physicality and visual opulence of Panikkar and Thiyam; its emphasis is rather on the simple affective pathos of the death of an antihero.

Habib tanvir incorporated in his work was the non-linear treatment of time and space, in direct contrast to Aristotle's stipulated unities of time, space and action. Tanvir's productions are characterized by subversive social comment through wit and humor, another folk characteristic typical of the oral tradition. His seminal *Charandas Chor* abounds in searching indictment of the hypocrisy and corruption of the rich powerful, including the falsely pious figure of priest and Gurus.

Prime amongst oral element in Tanvir's play is his use of song. Fascinated by the sheer wealth and variety of traditional folk songs intrinsic to every aspect of daily life of Chhattisgarh, Tanvir's love of music led him to gather a treasure trove of these, many of them on the verge of growing extinct, as even the *Nacha*, catering to popular demand, was eschewing these traditional songs for Hindi tunes.

<sup>6</sup> As Javed Malick rightly pointed out, the songs, "in a style reminiscent of Brecht' are used to comment on an action and to elucidate and underline its larger moral and social significance. Considering that Habib Tanvir is famed for the folk flavor of his production, it can come as surprise to realize that in the course of his career he produced a large

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<sup>6</sup> *Charandas Chor – Habib Tanvir translated by Anjum Katyal Page No .11*



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number of classical texts, both National and International, as well as play based on literary work.

#### 6.4 Evaluation of Major Contribution

Most of Habib Tanvir's play incorporates not just folk song but also folk dances and rituals for example, the Panthi dancers and Satnami rituals in *Charandas Chor* or the *Gauri-Gaura* rituals. Often Brecht says, the purpose is quite simply to 'help to lend variety to the entertainment'. By bringing these sequences Habib achieves several things at once: he showcases the richness and vitality of folk culture that is rarely seen outside its own culture context or by urban audiences; he adds an aesthetic dimension to the production by bringing in different flavour and texture; and he controls the pace of the narrative by introducing these 'breaks' in the flow of the play.

In my view Habib is the pioneer factor to up bring the Indian theatre at his best in modern time. He started experimentation and other legend follows him. Shyam Benegal said that Habib Tanvir was 'unquestionably one of the greatest theatre producers, directors, actors and writers and a pioneer of Hindustani theatre.

The reason for this is because in popular mind, the name of Habib Tanvir is closely linked to the idea of the folk theatre. It was no joke to recreate era of the people's poet Nazir Akbarabadi on the stage but Habib Tanvir accomplished the feat without showing the poet, in his play *Agra Bazar*.

...e. In any culture and in any age, it is rare for a  
...d in his or her own lifetime. Yet, judging by the  
immense enthusiasm and interest with which his productions are received  
by large audiences in different parts of the country. However, since  
legends are not born but made, it is instructive to remember that Tanvir's  
great success and popularity was not given to him on a platter but was  
earned through a lifetime of serious and sustained effort and struggle.

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extent because he has a similar interest in combining classical Indian  
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Panikkar, Thiyam is committed to nonverbal signs in performance.  
Thiyam thus adapts inherited elements to the need of a specific work  
through a process of invention or fabrication that contrasts clearly with  
the relatively consistent traditionalist aesthetic of Panikkar's plays.  
Whereas B.V.Karant's present interesting parallels and contrast to  
Panikkar and Thiyam because his theatrecraft is less intricate and intense  
than theirs but has greater range, both in the choice of texts and directing  
style. Panikkar and Thiyam's original text for performance are natural  
expression of an aesthetic grounded in tradition, but in principal,  
Karant's synthetic method of *Macbeth* also offers a theoretical  
explanation for Tanvir's Chattisgarh version of Shudrak's *Mrichhkatika*;  
Thiyam's Manipuri version of *Antigone*; Neelam Mansing's *Yerma*,  
which use the cross-dressing male naqqals of Punjab to recreate Lorca's  
tragedy in Punjabi.

the "folk" is not motivated by a revivalist or an is based, instead, on an awareness of the tremendous creative possibilities and artistic energies inherent in these traditions. He does not hesitate to borrow themes, techniques, and music from them, but he also desists from the impossible task of trying to resurrect old traditions in their original form and also from presenting them as stuffed museum pieces. Notwithstanding a popular misconception, his theatre does not belong within any one form or tradition in its entirety or purity. In fact, as he is quick to point out, he has not been "running after" folk forms as such at all but only after folk performers who brought their own forms and styles with them.

That is one of Tanvir's uniqueness I found during this study. There is no doubt that Ratan Thiyam and K N Panikkar have catapulted the Indian theatre on the world periphery and changed the notion about Indian theatre. But one thing I came across during this study which likes to mention here that both legends Ratan Thiyam and K N Panikkar have grown up in such a healthy artistic atmosphere like the parents of Ratan Thiyam belong to Manipuri dance while at Panikkar's home the story of *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* was chanted frequently which gave them space to think and grow. In the case of Habib Tanvir the whole situation was adverse, as we have seen in his chapter. His father was not at all allowing him to even watch the theatre, of course his mother and uncle were little supportive to him and his elder brother who were doing theatre hiding from their parents.

Habib Tanvir went to RADA, and then joined IPTA later on stayed at Delhi and worked there with Madam Zedi. But he was not at all aware of

only when he went to Chattisgarh and saw the  
v dimension & thought for his future theatre. He  
had struggled a lot to establish his Naya Theatre where the so called  
intellectual of the society registered their disagreement with Tanvir in  
terms of his one controversial play. But he was firm and serious about his  
theatre, which for me is exouvagin a special place in the theatre fraternity  
despite of all controversies.

Tanvir is quite careful not to create a hierarchy by privileging, in any  
absolute and extrinsic way, his own educated consciousness as poet-cum-  
playwright-cum-director over the unschooled creativity of his actors. In  
his work, the two usually meet and interpenetrate, as it were, as equal  
partners in a collective, collaborative endeavor in which each gives and  
takes from, and thus enriches, the other. An excellent example of this  
non-exploitative approach is the way Tanvir fits and blends his poetry  
with the traditional folk and tribal music, allowing the former to retain its  
own imaginative and rhetorical power and socio-political import, but  
without in any way devaluing or destroying the latter. Yet another  
example can be seen in the way he allows his actors and their skills to be  
fore grounded by eschewing all temptations to use elaborate stage design  
and complicated lighting.

Thus in contrast to the fashionable, folksy kind of drama on the one hand  
and the revivalist and archaic kind of 'traditional' theatre on the other,  
Tanvir's theatre offers an incisive blend of tradition and modernity, folk  
creativity and skills on the one hand and modern critical consciousness on  
the other. It is this rich as well as enriching blend which makes his work  
so unique and memorable.

in Thiyam after in depth study of this we can say a great director and actor, an ambassador of tradition and culture, and an amazing human being—how does Ratan Thiyam want to be remembered as? His answer is simple but in-depth, “I should be remembered as a small drop of water in an ocean, trying to contribute something for the mankind.”

We can say that the works of these directors are definitely leading toward the indignity of theatre. Indian theatre started from Bharata’s *Natyashastra* 2000 years ago & is now been understood by the modern audiences in 21<sup>st</sup> century due the work of these directors. Our tradition and classic theatre are such which can fit into any text and make them indigenous. It does not require Indian myth or classic text Ibsen, Shakespeare or Bernard Shaw can be seen in Indian context. Habib Tanvir-K N Panikkar-Ratan Thiyam has already proved it.

One thing in all these productions is that they try to use our local regional traditional forms. This has very good impact on the modern audiences. Use of music, dance are now a days getting more and more acceptance and used quite commonly in most of the production & credit goes to them.

Ratan Thiyam adds modern technology in his production to create the illusion of painting apart from the use of traditional elements which make him differ from Habib and Pannikar. While Habib uses the folk with ease and utmost simplicity. Panikkar use the blend of the classical and traditional form to create his own theatrical aura.

the directors work I still feel there are so many more in depth practical and field study. We have seen an analytical study to understand how they succeed to evolve the indignity but I strongly feel that by studying only the performances of the legendary work; we may not be able to achieve this. We need to be more focused on our tradition in practice which is now days got engulfed by the nutrient aluminum foil of western theatre, which may give us some short of shining but the root of our traditional and folk theatre will only grow if we put a seed in our own soil. Then and then only the dream of Indian theatre will come true. Here I am not proving the point hundred percent achievement of evolving indignity based on this study but I think I am moving forward; towards the indigenous Indian theater and opening up a debate once again. Of course as I have definitely achieved a new dimension through this study and I am sure this will surely help to the students of Theatre art to understand these directors, which I feel also is one aspect of my research.

I salute Late Habibji for his contribution to Indian Theater and I am also saluting Shri K N Panikkar and Shri Ratan Thiyam for their torch bearing work for the new generation. I will like to conclude my research on this note that nobody in the world have rich tradition like us. We have 33 corers of goddesses and rest world not even have 1 percent of it, if we are able to focus on it then we don't required to debate on Indian theatre our each work will gives rest world to prove themselves.