

Chapter - I

Introduction

Indian theatre has an unbroken history of over two thousand years. Almost contemporaneous with Aristotle's poetics, ancient India produced an encyclopaedic manual on theatre called *Natyashastra* ascribed to Bharata, which became the basis Indian performances genres for centuries to come. This means that there already a rich tradition of performance practice long before such a work appeared. The aesthetic theory of rasa briefly but cogently expounded in *Natyashastra* influenced Indian aesthetic theory and practice for more than a millennium.

This was the second phase of the evolution of theatre in India, which was based on oral tradition. This form of theatre was being performed from about 1000 AD onwards up to 1700 AD and continued further till today in almost every part of India. Emergence of this kind of theatre is linked with the change of political set up in India as well as the coming into existence of different regional languages in all parts of the country. The classical theatre was based on *Natyashastra* was much more sophisticated in its form and nature and totally urban oriented. On the country, the traditional theatre evolved out or roots and was more simple, immediate and closed to the rural milieu.

It was during 15-16th century that the folk theatre emerged forcefully in different regions. Indian folk theatre can be broadly divided into two broad categories – religion and secular – giving rise to Ritual Theatre and theatre of entertainment respectively. Most often the folk and tradition forms are mainly narrative or vocal i.e. signing and recitation – based like

and *Nautanki* without any complicated gesture
arts of dance. India is also rich in ballad singing
tradition such as *Pubuji-ki-pukar* of Rajasthan and *Nupipaalaa* of
Manipur.

While most of these theatrical styles have their own unique form
dependent on their local customs, they differ from one another in
execution, staging, costumes, make-up and acting style although there are
some broad similarities. The south Indian form emphasis on dance form
like *Kathakali* and *Krishnattam* of Kerala and actually qualify as dance
drama, while the north Indian forms emphasis on songs like *Khyal* of
Rajasthan, the *Nacha* of MP, the *Nautanki* of UP and *Swang* of Punjab,
Jatra of Bengal, *Tamasha* of Maharashtra and *Bhavai* of Gujarat stress
on dialogue in their execution, the latter two emphasise on comedy and
satire.

After the breakdown of Sanskrit classical tradition in North India in the
10th century, there was a reflowering of the of the performance tradition
in South India. It was first manifested in *Kuttiyattam* of Kerala, the only
surviving performing tradition of Sanskrit drama. *Kuttiyattam* found
place in large Vishnu temples performed in Temple theatre called
Kuttambalam. Kings provided the patronage to the theatres. Later, in
Kerala itself in the 16th century, there developed two highly evolved
forms - *Krishnattam*, an eight-cycle play on the life of Krishna which
found place in large Krishna temple of Guruvayur. Along with this,
Kathakali with its highly codified performance elements also developed.
Kathakali too, found patronage from the kings and the temple. Similarly
in Karnataka state there evolved in the 17th century *Yakshagana* which
performs stories from the two epics. All these forms retained recitation

which have been the roots forms of the Indian

Traditional Theatre

An important point needs to be made at the very outset: the word ‘*tradition*’ (from the Latin ‘*tradere*,’ meaning ‘to restore,’ ‘to transmit’) carries within it a contradiction charged with repercussions. In its primary familiar usage, the word ‘*tradition*’ signifies ‘a way of thinking or acting inherited from the past’¹: it is therefore linked with the words ‘custom’ and ‘habit.’ In this sense, one might refer to ‘academic tradition,’ to a ‘Comédie Française tradition’ or to ‘Shakespearean tradition.’ In theatre, tradition represents an attempt at mummification, the preservation of external forms at all costs—inevitably concealing a corpse within, for any vital correspondence with the present moment is entirely absent.¹

A second, less familiar meaning of ‘*Tradition*’ is ‘a set of doctrines and religious or moral practices, transmitted from century to century, originally by word of mouth or by example’ or ‘a body of more or less legendary information, related to the past, primarily transmitted orally from generation to generation.

So in essence Tradition is concerned with the transmission of a body of knowledge on the spiritual evolution of man, his position in different ‘worlds,’ his relationship with different ‘cosmoses.’ This body of

¹Article on Peter Brook and Traditional Thought , by Basarab Nicolescu Translated by David Williams. (This essay was originally published in French in *Les Voies de la Création Théâtrale*, Vol. XIII (CNRS Editions, Paris, 1985, edited by Georges Banu).

unvarying, stable, permanent, despite the assumed in its transmission, and despite those distortions brought about by history and the passage of time. Although its transmission is usually oral, Tradition can also be conveyed by means of the science of symbols, by various writings and works of art, as well as by myths and rituals.

Traditional knowledge was established in ancient times, but it would be futile to look for a ‘source’ of Tradition. As far as its deepest roots are concerned, Tradition could be conceived to be outside both space (geographical) and time (historical). It is eternally present, here and now, in every human being, a constant and vital wellspring. The ‘source’ of Tradition can only be metaphysical. By addressing itself to what is essential in mankind, Tradition remains very much alive in our times.

One can find a precise point of contact between Tradition and theatre in Tradition’s quality of vital immediacy—a quality reflected in its oral transmission, in its constant reference to the present moment and to experience in the present moment.

Peter Brook refers to this “Theatre exists in the here and now. It is what happens at that precise moment when you perform, that moment at which the world of the actors and the world of the audience meet. A society in miniature, a microcosm brought together every evening within a space. Theatre’s role is to give this microcosm a burning and fleeting taste of another world, and thereby interest it, transform it, integrate it.”²

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Ritual Theatre

Scholars say that the ritual theatre emerged as result of the Bhakti movement in medieval India. Unlike orthodox Hindus, followers of the Bhakti movement believed that man could approach God directly, rather than with aid of a sacred interpreter. The simple act of repeating God's name was considered an act of faith. Thus theatre becomes the perfect vehicle for communicating that faith through depicting the act of god, both for those performing it as well as those witnessing it. The Ramlila, Krishnalila and Raslila, performed in various north Indian states, are excellent example of this kind of theatre; other example includes the *Prahlad nataka* of Orrissa, *Teyyam*, *Krishnattam* and *Muttreyillyu* of Kerala and *Terakutu* of Tamil Nadu among other.

Rise of Modern Theatre

Against the background of this rich tradition, Indian drama was reborn during British colonial interregnum in 18th and 19th centuries. The impetus came from two sources: the rich heritage of Indian drama and the exposure to Western dramatic classics through English. Translations started appearing simultaneously of Sanskrit classics and Western classics, particularly Shakespeare. Till now drama had not developed as a major literary genre in Indian languages. Drama now began to flourish as a cherished literary genre alongside the modern genre of fiction, also a response to Western influence

The development of Modern theatre in India may be attributed to change in the political set up in India. The 200 years of the British rule brought the Indian theatre into direct contact with the western theatre; the seeds of

in the late 18th century, with the consolidation of Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamilnadu. It was in the thriving metropolises of Bombay, Calcutta and Madras that they first introduced their brand of theatre, based on London models. The initial purpose of the British, while introducing modern theatre in India was to provide entertainment for the British soldier and citizens trying to acclimatize themselves to a foreign country. For the first time in India, the writing and practice of theatre was geared fully towards realistic or non realistic presentation. The themes also underwent a drastic change. They were no more woven around big heroes and gods, but had become a picture of common man. Initially most dramatics works were composed in three languages – Bengali, Tamil and Marathi. But later plays began to be written in other languages like Kannada, Gujarati, Hindi, Oriya, Urdu and English.

But Bengal in its *Jatra* form had vigorous indigenous theatre. *Vidya Sunder*, dealing with the story of two young lovers, was quite popular among the locals at the time. Regretfully, this was rejected by the intellectuals and the aristocracy on the ground of obscenity in the performance.

In some languages, however, dramatics created modern drama on the model of indigenous forms. For instance, in Hindi, Bhartendu Harishchandra was the first dramatist who wrote plays on the model of traditional forms like *Rasalila*. He also wrote a play *Vidya Sunder* based on the story popular in *Jatra*. In another theatrically strong region, Maharashtra, Vishnu Das Bhave wrote first modern Marathi play *Sita Swayamvar* in 1843 taking inspiration from the indigenous form *Yakshagan* of Karnataka as prevalent in the Sangli region of Maharashtra.

asthi the first proscenium theatre was built in
g frontal view of the performance on the
spectators. This totally changed the aesthetics of reception of a theatrical
performance and also broke close and intimate relationship between the
actors and spectators. Indian audiences had traditionally seen
performances often by moving from different angles and levels, having
multiple perception of a performance. Sculpture on the other walls of the
temples is also meant to be seen by making *parikrama*
(circumambulation) because it is only then that the sculptures make their
full dramatic impact on the viewers.

However, independence in 1947 generated a process of decolonisation of
our life, arts and cultural modes. Senior directors like Habib Tanvir in
Hindi, Sombhu Mitra in Bengali in the North ,B.V. Karanth and K.N.
Panikkar in the South and Kanailal and Ratan Thiyam in Manipur, took
the lead to have an encounter with the tradition, and to match the intensity
with which the modern theatre had arisen with violent rupture from the
indigenous theatre. This encounter has given rise to 'new' contemporary
theatre with some distinctive features. The emergence of new theatre has
been prompted by quest for identity and search for roots. It has also led to
the creation of two streams in modern theatre.

Contemporary directors, heirs of a glorious tradition, are remaking the
idiom of theatre by drawing on resources of old traditions and of the
electronic age. Performed in 24 major languages and in many tribal
languages and in English, Indian theatre today has infinite varieties and
potentials, which is still attracting audiences in spite of the overwhelming
popularity of its rivals-cinema and television. It is therefore one of the
most potent expressions of contemporary India and the world.

Music and Movements

As per Shri Suresh Avasthi mentioned in his article that with the decline of naturalistic theatre and the emergence of new theatre following the performance practice, music and movements have been brought back. It was Habib Tanvir who in mid-50s in his theatre used music, songs, movements, dance and poetry, which were practically exiled from the naturalistic theatre. His production of *Agra Bazar*, a play constructed by himself on the poetry and life of popular poet Nazir of Agra was a celebration of life on the stage. He put on the stage a whole Bazar scene with hawkers selling their goods and singing Nazir's poems. Later Tanvir did this play again in local dialect with the folk performers of *Nacha* form of his region Chhattisgarh.

Music has now become so important and integral to the performance that it has acquired the status of a theatre language like that of the dramatic text itself. It has its own channel of communication. From the *Natyashastra* to the other treatises, all have laid great emphasis on music in drama. In all traditional forms music and movements are integral to the performance.

It is a special feature of the new theatre that several directors are also music composers and compose music for their productions in relation to the dramatic text and movements. K.N. Panikkar, B.V. Karanth and Ratan Thiyam are the senior directors who compose music for their productions. One may say that a new class of theatre music composers has emerged. In the credit list for a theatrical production, the name of music composer is given along with other technicians.

production of Sanskrit plays make entrances and exits set to *tala* and accentuated by the drum. This greatly increases the impact of the entrances and exits of the actors. Both Panikkar and Karanth use *swar* patterns and *bols* as music. Karanth also uses *alap*, chant and humming for musical effect. In new theatre, music rather than being ornamental has become functional and organic.

Along with music, dance like movements are also added. Some directors use the services of dancers and choreographers to work on a scheme of movements and their names are given in the credit list.

Ratan Thiyam's famous play *Chakravyuth* which was full of movements and rhythm and was based on Abhimanyu story from the *Mahabharata* heralded the beginning of the new theatre. While this production made great impact on the audiences used to spoken theatre; it was disapproved by the directors who still practiced realistic theatre. They commented it was ballet and not theatre. They did not realize that Indian tradition did not exclude movements and rhythm from a theatrical production.

Indigenous Theatre Style – A New Theatre

One of the several features important for the understanding of the aesthetics of new theatre is the rejection of the proscenium theatre by most of the directors. They use variety of performance spaces to bring about a closer relationship between the actors and spectators, and also provide a new perception of the performance.

It is paradoxical that in a theatrical tradition which provides a great variety of spaces with most exciting environmental features, the modern theatre that arose during the mid-nineteenth century chose for itself proscenium theatre. The flexibility of the performance space is utilized for mounting production in different designs. More and more, younger

le open spaces and the space determines the

It was in the west in the early 1960s that the theatre directors revolted against the proscenium theatre in order to experiment with their productions. In proscenium tradition the viewing is fronted and is found to one unitary channel. It was to break this monotony of unilaterality of frontal viewing in proscenium theatre that necessitated architectural changes. This resulted in the creation of thrust stage, arena stage and theatre-in-the round. These varieties of stages brought about closer relationship between the actor and the spectators with possibilities for manipulating the relationship and providing multiple perceptions of performance. The monotony of production design conditional by the proscenium theatre format was thus broken and enabled the directors to shape their productions in relation to the type of stage they used.

An important feature of the new theatre is the endeavour to get back to the classics. In Maharashtra, with the singing of the *shlokas* in the style of Sangeet Natak (musical form), the classics also became part of the Marathi Sangeet Natak, which is a special feature of the Marathi theatre.

Panikkar's *Madhyam Vyayog* made great impact on the audience and marked the beginning of rediscovery of *Bhāsa* in theatrical terms. Panikkar was followed by Ratan Thiyam who also did successful productions of *Urubhangam* and *Karnabharam* in Manipuri putting strong imprint of Manipur's rich performance culture. These productions completely negated and proved meaningless conventional text book productions of Sanskrit plays. His actors make strong and prolonged entrances and exits with dance-like movements. His compositions and groupings are pleasant and powerful. Speech of his actors is almost

is by *Wari-Liba*, the story-telling form of

Theatre based of Folklore

As a result of encounter with the traditional theatre, several directors following Tanvir's example started working with the mixed group of folk performers and urban actors often using folk legends and community myths. As a result a new theatrical genre called folkloric theatre has emerged. The credit of eliminating the great divide between modern-urban and folk-rural theatre goes to the senior theatre director, Habib Tanvir. With his new folkloric theatre, working with the performers of *Nacha* form of his region, Chhattisgarh he blurred the line between these two worlds. *Nacha* performers are brilliant singers and dancers, and perform with great gusto. Habib Tanvir produced his famous *Charandas Chor* based on a folk tale of Rajasthan.

The power of traditional themes, music and dance used by the directors made these folkloric performances quite popular with the audience. For instance, cutting across linguistic barrier Habib Tanvir's *Charandas Chor* has been receiving large enthusiastic response from the audience in Kolkata. Similarly, Waman Kendre in Mumbai has developed into a bright young director after his successful production of *Zulva* during one of such festivals. *Zulva* is based on a powerful story concerning the Yellamma community. Jaishri from Bangalore has two presented a brilliant play *Lakshapati Rajan Katha* by M.S. Nagarajan.

the movement, several directors are now working and folk actors. Neelam Man Singh Chaudhary working in Chandigarh has professional *Naqqals* of Punjab in her group, who had with great virtuosity dance and movements to all her productions and act as female impersonators and work as stage hands too. She did *Raja Bharthari*, a traditional play, imparting it a contemporary idiom. Later, she did a production of Lorca's *Yarma* in adaption by Punjab's famous poet Pattar. The production of *Yarma* was greatly admired for its strong images echoing the agony of Yarma's barrenness. Later, she did Girish Karnad's play *Nagmandal* based on two Kannada folk tales. With complex weaving of the thematic material, the play moves on several planes. She mounted the production with moving ritualistic images and put a strong imprint of Punjab's rich culture of traditional arts and crafts. *Mena Gurjari* by R.CPakih and directed by Jaswant Thakart where element of *Bhavai* is used. In Nag Bodas play *Nar Nari*, *Khabsurat Bahu* is based on the *Nautanki* Style.

With the breakaway from the naturalistic spoken theatre in early 1960's, several directors of the new theatre used yoga, martial arts, circus skills, gymnastics and acrobatics to impart physicality and plasticity to a theatrical performance and evolved their own system of training. These systems are primarily suited to their own production but also have wider applicability. Some of the senior directors who have evolved their own systems of training are: K.N. Panikkar, B.V. Karanth, Ratan Thiyam, Kanhai Lal, Bansi Kaul and N.Muttuswami.

As part of the actor training system, K.N. Panikkar has developed rhythmic exercises taking inspiration from some of the traditional performance modes of his region. Rhythm is provided by actors

cite, sing or perform exercises to the tune of the
of *Charis* is a distinctive feature of Panikkar's
production design.

Like Panikkar, Kanhai Lal has evolved his own theatrical idiom with emphasis on lyrical images. Kanhai Lal puts emphasis on breathing and physio-psycho impulses. In Manipur because of the strong tradition of martial art, *Thang-Ta* and complex religious performance forms like *Natsankirtan*, the body culture is very rich. Kanhai Lal and Ratan Thiyam have exploited the Manipur tradition of rich body culture to train their performers.

New theatre has produced some modern classics. Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghasi Ram Kotwal* is one such play on the life of morally decadent Peshwa ruler Nana Phadnavis and the corrupt Brahmans of Pune with music and dance woven in the very fabric of the play inspired by Dashavatar traditional form. These elements of traditional form sharpen the irony of the situations. Jabbar Patel's production of the same play in 1973 is a landmark in the new theatre. The play has been performed in several Indian languages and has enjoyed great popularity. Girish Karnad, noted Kannada playwright, wrote *Hayavadan* taking inspiration from Thomas Mann's short novel *Transposed Heads* which is turn is based on an ancient Indian tale given in *Kathasaritsagar* by Gunadhya. The play has been constructing using elements from the traditional form of Yakshagan of his region. B.V. Karanth's production of the play in 1971 with music and movements is another significant work of the new theatre. The play has been performed in several Indian languages and is marked for its innovative structure and elements.

right Chandrasekhar Kambar, poet, novelist and several plays which have been performed in Kannada, Hindi and other major languages. He draws upon the rich resources of folklore and uses elements from Bayalata, a folk form of his region. His most popular play *Jokumaraswamy*, which received the national award, starts with a fertility rite in honour of the phallic deity Jokumar, who is worshipped in the form of a snake gourd and then consumed by those desirous of bearing children. An impotent landlords' virgin wife feeds the snake gourd by mistake to the village rake and has a child by him. The rake's death at the hands of the landlord is a kind of gang-rape-cum-fertility offering. The landlord himself is literally left holding the baby he cannot dispose off.

Similarly senior Hindi actor-directors Shyamanand Jalan in Calcutta and late Sataydev Dubey in Bombay, both working in realistic mould, have done several productions over the years. Their productions are mounted with great competence. Their forte is the dramatic word, and delivery of dialogues. Badal Sarkar's play *Evam Indrajit* and Gyandev Agnihotri's *Shuturmurg* are Jalan's noteworthy productions in which he resorted to stylization with great success. Credit goes to Dubey for first discovering theatrical potentialities of Bharati's *Andha Yug* when he presented it in 1962 on Alkazi's terrace theatre in Mumbai.

Another senior Bengali actor-director, the late Utpal Dutt, committed to Marxist ideology practiced political theatre. He is known for mounting massive productions with large sets and crowd scenes. Dutt mostly wrote his own plays *Angar* on the problems of the coal miners was a great success and created sensation with lighting designed by Tapas Sen. Dutt remained committed to his philosophy of revolutionary theatre and to his

rote and directed plays for Jatra, the indigenous

Encounter with performance tradition and the rise of a new theatrical form and idiom has led to a great debate in contemporary Indian theatre. Those playwrights and directors who still practice naturalistic theatre denounce these efforts and consider the use of performance elements and conventions from the traditional and folk theatre as misappropriation. The protagonists of the new theatre lay emphasis on return to roots to liberate Indian theatre from its colonial moorings.

However, encounter with rich performance tradition has reversed the process and the theatrical productions have acquired new idiom. Directors now maximize stage sings and symbols and minimize literary sings, thus creating a rich performance text. Traditionally, there has always been great emphasis on creating a performance text rich in staging elements and visual quality. Tradition even provides a separate word for performance text. In Sanskrit, dramatic text is referred to as *Kavya* or *Drishya Kavya*, whereas performance text is *prayoga*. Similarly Jatra of West Bengal is a performance form and *pala* is a dramatic text. *Bhand Pather* of Kashmir is dramatic text, whereas *Bhand Jashna* is Performance text.

In this running account of the modern theatre which arose in the mid-nineteenth century under the direct influence of British theatrical tradition causing a breach with the old and living performance tradition of the country, and emergence of 'new' theatre after Independence as part of the process of de-colonisation and quest for identity.

the National theatre is on its peak. In the are moving towards the Atomic world and mechanical world. It is necessary to get relaxation in the stressful modern life, as it has been already proven so many times Art is the best medicine and too our regional traditional form, our rituals are so strong in this connection, then why not we go towards our roots and flow like river by using this, we may make our impression something different in the theatre world.

In my later on chapter I will try to study the performances done by the directors like Late Habibi Tanvir, Shri K.N.Panicker and Shri Ratan Thiyam where the elements of the Indian tradition are used. By using the indigenous source material what kind of new impact have been come out and how we can reach on path towards the new theatre and indigenous style are on the roll or not. What kind of the improvement is required has to be finding out.

These all three directors are different in their works for example Late Shri Habib Tanvir was used a local dialect of Chhattisgarh and mainly focused on the folk theatre of their region. Shri K.N.Panikkar used the traditional form like *Kuttiyattam* which is the only form have Sanskrit theatres element in it. While Shri Ratan Thiyam is using the traditional elements of Manipur like *Lai haroba*, *Thang Ta* etc., in his production and also the visual formation by the latest technology without hurting the content of the play.

There are so many directors are using the traditional and rituals elements in their play but they all are success upto certain level. But these three directors have kept our tradition on the highest level and world has now

Understand this intricacies and microscopic view of more on the way of the indigenous style. As the focus of my research is on Habib Tanvir, Ratan Thiyam and K N Panikkar I will discuss about him in detail in the separate chapter but few directors like Ebrahm Alkazi, B.V.Karant and Neelam Man Sing have a major contribution in shaping the modern theatre using the tradition in their own way. At some point we may say they are the pioneer, so it is to be discussed, I will give brief detail of their biography here and in later chapter I will discuss their work in other chapter.

Ebrahim Alkazi

If we were to choose an individual who formed the concept of Indian theatre, it would almost certainly be Ebrahim Alkazi. But the fact that he is the offspring of a Saudi Arabian father and a Kuwaiti mother is one of those ironies with which theatre history bristles. In the immediate post-Independence era, the need for a national theatre was a desperate obsession.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi-National Academy of the Performing Arts was born with the National School of Drama (NSD) attached to it. But it was the then 37-year-old Alkazi, appointed the first director of NSD in 1962, who defined what the term would mean. A graduate of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, London, he spurned several offers to work in the UK and returned to Mumbai to start his own theatre.

His later achievements at NSD have tended to overshadow his work in Mumbai, but in an era which deified George Bernard Shaw and considered the drawing room the defining locus of modernity, Alkazi revealed to Mumbai the riches of Sophocles, Anouilh and Strindberg.

director for 15 years, no mean feat given the political interference, staff lethargy and student indiscipline endemic to these institutions in India. B.V. Karanth, his student and successor to the post, barely lasted three years. But Alkazi taught himself Sanskrit, worked with his students for 12 hours a day and insisted on hands on exercises with meticulous attention to detail.

His fundamental contribution was to devise a methodology of theatre training which has continued after him, and to create a body of actors and directors which transformed the notion of theatre at the grassroots level. It would be no exaggeration that the concept of a professional director was unknown in most parts of India until Alkazi's students began to return home in the '60s, carrying with them a new sense of expertise and dedication. Most importantly, he spurred his students to look at regional drama.

But those close to him which, needless to add, include many of his students - swear by his warmth, sense of humour, deep concern for people and intense sensitivity. These qualities often prompted him to retreat into a shell of hauteur and portentousness to shield himself from the controversies and public criticism that his immense achievements have inevitably exposed him to. Doors that we, in our vernaculars, did not even know existed had begun to open. Alkazi has been accused of being tyrannical, intolerant of difference of opinion and impatient with what he considered mediocrity.

B.V.Karanth :

Babukodi Venkataramana Karanth is a popular name in contemporary Indian theatre. Popularly known as B. V. Karanth, was nationally recognized for the rich variety and high quality of his achievements in various languages. He was also famous for directing plays, composing music, conducting workshops, translating or adapting, and heading prominent cultural organizations. B. V. Karanth also scored music for cine directors like Mrinal Sen and Girish Kasaravalli, and contributed significantly to children's theatre.

B.V.Karanth was born in Manchi, in 1929. That is a small village in Dakshin Kannad district of Karnataka. Karanth first acted in the title role of Kuvempu's Nanna Gopala i.e. "*My Gopala*" at the age of 7. While still in school, he left home to join Gubbi H. Veeranna's company named Gubbi Company in 1944. He was there for six years. After this, he developed his interests in theatre, music, and literature. Gubbi sent him to Varanasi for higher studies. There he completed his MA in Hindi language at Banaras Hindu University and learnt classical music from Pandit Omkarnath Thakur. Subsequently, he enrolled at the newly established National School of Drama (NSD), worked in Delhi for a while as a school teacher and participated in theatre with Dishantar, and came back to his home state in the late 1960s.

By that time, a new theatre movement was taking shape in Karnataka of which he first became a catalyst and later a protagonist. From 1967, B.V. Karanth directed plays, often at a feverish pace, travelled to different parts of Karnataka, and soon created a large following for his brand of theatre and music. The festival of plays he directed in Bengaluru during

work in Kannada Theatre. By 1977, he was well known in the state of Karnataka and was nominated Director of the NSD during 1977-81.

Neelam Man Singh

Neelam Man Singh was born on April 14th, 1951 in Amritsar. Her father, Dr. Man Singh Nirankari was an eminent ophthalmologist, who retired as the principal of medical College Amritsar. He was also a theologist and used to write poems. It inspired Neelam Man Singh for art and literature. She went to Sacred Heart High School in Amritsar for schooling and then did M. A. in History of Fine Arts from Punjab University, Chandigarh. After this she went to National School of Drama for formal training of drama, which was a hobby till now. After completing three years, she went to Mumbai.

After a short stay in Mumbai where she trained children in the arts of theatre, she moved in 1979 to Bhopal, working with the Rang Mandala, a repertory attached to Bharat Bhavan. In 1984 she moved to Chandigarh, forming a theatre company of her own under the name The Company. That is the city where she has stayed since, teaching at the Department of Indian Theatre of the Punjab University since 1990, and heading it for a time as its Chairperson.

Dr. Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry's theatre group has participated in a number of major national and International Festivals. Among them have been The London International Festival of Theatre (1993, 1995,1997) The Uzbekistan International Theatre Festival (1993), The Festival d'Avignon (1995), The Festival of Perth (1999,2000), The Singapore

the Laokoon Festival in Hamburg (2003), The
ts (2003 and 2007 in Tokyo and Kyoto), The
Zanani Festival in Lahore (2004,2005,2006), and the Sadler Wells
Theatre Festival in London (2009). The plays produced by her repertory,
The Company, have for the most part been based upon great classics of
the western world, rendered into Punjabi by the eminent poet, Surjit
Patar. For many of them the music was composed by B.V. Karanth.

Dr. Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry, whose doctoral work was on Situating
Contemporary Punjabi Theatrical Practice in the Context of the Trends in
Modern Indian Drama 1970-2007, has been the recipient of several
awards, The Padma Shree 2011, the Sangeet Natak Akademi award
(2003), and The Shiromani Bhasha Vibhag Award in 2004. She is a
member of the Academic Council of the National School of Drama, and
serves on the advisory panel for theatre for The Indian Council for
Cultural Relations. She has also been a member of the General Council of
the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi.

This indigenous style I feel will only be achieved by studying the work of
these directors. The talk of today's Indian theatre is only possible if you
understand the root of rich rituals and tradition. Our rituals and tradition
so powerful that any script can be fitted into it without hurting the
original thought.

Before going to the in depth study of theses directors work let's just
understand in brief the Traditional theatre form of India.

Additional Theatre Forms

Bhavai :

Bhavai is the popular folk theatrical form of Rajasthan and Gujarat. The pioneer of Bhavai was a Brahmin known as Asait Thakore or Ashram Maharaja, who lived in a village of Gujarat called Unjha. Initially, the Bhavai performance was presented as a religious ritual to propitiate the Goddess Amba and it took place only during the religious festivals of *Navratra*. Very soon it got converted as an important form of the theatre of entertainment. The Bhavai has a series of playlets known as *Vesha* or *Swanga*. Each *Vesha* has its own plot and locale. There need not be any continuity of homogeneity among them. The *Veshas* has four broad category of themes i.e. mythological, social, royal Rajput and contemporary. The *Veshas* of *Krishna and Gopi*, the *Veshas Zanda-Zulana* and *Chhela-Vatau*, the *Vesha* of *Ramdev* and the *Veshas* of *Vanazaro and Purabio* are examples of each of these categories. Asait Thakore wrote over 360 *Veshas*. The music is a combination of classical tunes rendered in folk style. The musical instruments used are *Bhungala*, *Jhanjha* and *Tabla*. Dancing is an indispensable feature of the plays and has its own style, which is quite different from other dances of Gujarat. The dance, which is a combination of *Rasa* and *Garba* with traces of Kathak, is used as a connecting link between *Veshas* and also between different incidents within one *Vesha*. The performers are called *Bhavayas*. Till the 20th century the men played female roles. The *Sutradhara* or anchor of the Bhavai is known as *Nayaka* who sings, acts and directs. He is also the producer of the performance. As a folk dramatic form, Bhavai is specially known for its social plays, which are full of humour. It is not merely a theatre form to be seen, but an atmosphere to be experienced with the players themselves. The Bhavai of

al and less theatrical when compared to that of

Daskathia and Chhaiti Ghoda:

Daskathia is one of the several narrative forms that flourished in Orissa. It is a performance in which a devotee narrates a story dramatically to the accompaniment of a wooden musical instrument called *kathia*. This is a performance of two narrators, *Gayaka* (chief singer) and *Palia* (assistant) who is the co-narrator. The *Chhaiti Ghoda* troupe of performers comprises of two players on the musical instruments *dhol* and *mohuri* and three other characters. A dummy horse is improvised out of bamboo and cloth and the dancer enters into the hollow body and dances, while the main singer along with co-singer delivers discourses, mainly from mythology.

Gondhal:

In Maharashtra, the dramatic narration of mythological stories, hero-lauds and folk legends form a part of a ritual dedicated to various deities. This interesting ritual with its narrative performance has deeply influenced the dramatic and narrative traditions in Maharashtra and its neighbouring regions

Garodas:

In Gujarat the members of the *Garoda* community practice the art of narrating stories with the help of painted pictures. It is performed with a paper scroll with pictures painted in water-colours one below the other and separated with a thick black line.

Jatra (Yatra):

The popular folk drama form of Eastern India is the *Yatra* or *Jatra*, as it is known in Bengal. It assumes different forms in different regions within the eastern parts of India, which include mainly the states of Assam, West Bengal and Orissa. *Yatra* literally means a procession or a pilgrimage from one point to another. It is generally an open-air performance. *Jatra* originated in Bengal as a ritual theatre devoted mainly on themes relating to the life of Lord Krishna. The illustrious Vaishnava saint and religious performer Chaitanya used the medium of Jatra to propagate his teachings of Krishna by inspiring his devotees to participate in communal singing and dancing. Apart from the exploits of Krishna, the Jatras dramatised the Puranic legends, folk-tales and episodes from *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*. In West Bengal, famous playwrights or palas attempted to bring structural perfection to the Jatra. These palas were called by various names like *Rama Jatra*, *Shiva Jatra* and *Chandi Jatra*. Later Jatra adopted more secular themes and historical romances, love stories and even patriotic themes during the freedom struggle were added to the repertoire. The most famous was Bidya Sundar, which started a new trend in Jatra. In Orissa, a unique form of Yatra known as Sahi Yatra is performed in the by-lanes of Puri as a kind of street theatre. Jatra today is one of the most popular folk theatres in India. West Bengal alone has to its credit 300 Jatra companies, and Jatra competitions are held during the Durga Puja festival.

Kariyala:

This is the most interesting and popular folk drama form of Himachal Pradesh. It is most popular in the districts of Shimla, Solan and Sirmour. The season of Kariyala generally starts after the festival of Deepavali. *Kariyala* is an open-air theatre, which consists of an entertaining series of small playlets, farces, skits, revues and burlesques. It is generally staged during village fairs and on some festive occasions. The *Kariyala* entertainment starts in the evening and goes on throughout the night staging various popular items one after other. The square-performing arena is called *Khada*. In the centre of *Khada*, a bonfire is lit which is considered very sacred. A number of musical instruments like *chimta*, *nagara*, *karnal*, *ranasingha*, *shahanai*, *basuri*, *dholak* and *khanjiri* are used to provide background music.

Keertan:

Keertan is the most popular narrative form which is prevalent in almost all parts of the country under different names such as *Katha Kalakshepam* and *Harikatha*. *Keertan* means to laud, extol, exalt, worshipping of the deity by chanting his praises and celebrating the praises of god with music and singing.

Khyal:

It is a popular folk dramatic form of Rajasthan and is full of dancing, singing and music. *Khyal* has assumed different names in different regions of Rajasthan. It is also known as *Tamasha*, *Rammat*, *Nautanki*, *Maach* and *Swang*.

Maanch:

Maanch is an enchanting folk opera of Malwa region in the state of Madhya Pradesh. It evolved about two centuries ago in Ujjain. The themes are usually based on mythological events or romantic folk tales.

Oja-Pali:

Oja-Pali of Assam is a very interesting form of storytelling which utilises many dramatic techniques to illustrate the narrative and enhance its visual impact. This art form is associated with the worship of Manasa, the serpent goddess of Assam. The performers take many days to narrate the story, which is divided into three parts: *Deva Khanda*, *Baniya Khanda* and *Bhatiyali Khanda*. The Oja is the main narrator-singer and the Palis are his associates or members of his chorus. There is yet another type of *Oja-Pali* parties in Assam, known as the *Vyah-Gowa Oja-Pali*, which narrates stories from the Assamese version of Puranas and the epics.

Powada:

In Maharashtra the narrative hero-laud is called *Powada*. The first available Powada in Marathi was written on the thrilling episode of Shivaji killing his adversary Afzal Khan. The tradition of Powada singing was kept alive by the folk singers of Maharashtra known as Gondhalis and Shahirs. The Powada is presented in a most dramatic manner. High pitch singing and melodramatic acting is its soul.

Swang:

The tradition of folk entertainment in North India, especially Haryana, is that of *Swang*. It is a musical folk drama which enacts near similar stories in all its related regional variations. These stories are in verse and are sung in different classical, semi-classical but mostly in popular folk musical modes. A number of musical instruments like the ektara, dholak, kharta, sarangi and harmonium put flavour to the dialogues. Ali Baksh of Rewari, who is regarded as 'the father of folk theatre in Haryana', is the pioneer of the Swang tradition. Pandit Deep Chand, known as the "Kalidasa of Haryana", modified and polished Ali Baksh style of folk theatre. Other luminaries of Swang include Swami Har Dev, Qutabi, Dhoom, Pandit Bhartu and Pandit Lakshmi Chand.

Tamasha:

Tamasha evolved itself from the earlier forms of folk entertainment in Maharashtra. It is known for its humour and erotic singing and dancing. It is one of the rare folk theatre forms of India in which women play the feminine roles. Naughty episodes of Krishna Leela are invariably enacted in the opening part of a *Tamasha* play. The *Lavani songs*, which are sung along with dancing, are delightfully naughty and erotic.

Villu Pattu:

Villu Pattu literally means bow-song. This form of recitation (using a bow-shaped musical instrument) of Tamil Nadu developed in the 15th century. There are seven to eight persons in a bow-song party who form a kind of chorus that supports the main singer-narrator. The stories from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the Puranas are told in these ballad style songs.

Bhand Pather:

The traditional theatre form of Kashmir, is a unique combination of dance, music and acting. Satire, wit and parody are preferred for inducing laughter. In this theatre form, music is provided with Surnai, Nagaara and Dhol. Since the actors of Bhand Pather are mainly from the farming community, the impact of their way of living, ideals and sensitivity is discernible.

Haathras:

The meters used in the verses are: *Doha, Chaubola, Chhappai, Behar-e-tabeel*. There was a time when only men acted in *Nautanki* but nowadays, women have also started taking part in the performances. Among those remembered with reverence is Gulab Bai of Kanpur. She gave a new dimension to this old theatre form.

Raasleela:

Rassleela is based exclusively on Lord Krishna legends; it is believed that Nand Das wrote the initial plays based on the life of Krishna. In this theatre form the dialogues in prose combined beautifully with songs and scenes from Krishna's pranks.

Bhaona:

Bhaona is a presentation of the Ankia Naat of Assam. In *Bhaona* cultural glimpses of Assam, Bengal Orissa, Mathura and Brindavan can be seen. The Sutradhaar, or narrator begins the story, first in Sanskrit and then in either Brajboli or Assamese.

Dashavatar:

Dashavatar is the most developed theatre form of the Konkan and Goa regions. The performers personify the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu- the god of preservation and creativity. The ten incarnations are Matsya (fish), Kurma (tortoise), Varaha (boar), Narsimha (lion-man), Vaman (dwarf), Parashuram, Rama, Krishna (or Balram), Buddha and Kalki. Apart from stylized make-up, the Dashavatar performers wear masks of wood and papier mache.

Krishnattam:

Krishnattam folk theatre of Kerala, came into existence in the middle of 17th century A.D. under the patronage of King Manavada of Calicut. Krishnattam is a cycle of eight plays performed for eight consecutive days. The plays are *Avataram*, *Kaliyamandana*, *Rasa krida*, *kamasavadha*, *Swayamvaram*, *Bana Yudham*, *Vivida Vadham*, and *Swargarohana*. The episodes are based on the theme of Lord Krishna - his birth, childhood pranks and various deeds depicting victory of good over evil.

Mudiyettu:

Mudiyettu traditional folk theatre form of Kerala is celebrated in the month of Vrischikam (November-December). It is usually performed only in the Kali temples of Kerala, as an oblation to the Goddess. It depicts the triumph of goddess Bhadrakali over the asura Darika. The seven characters in *Mudiyettu*-*Shiva*, *Narada*, *Darika*, *Danavendra*, *Bhadrakali*, *Kooli* and *Koimbidar* (Nandikeshvara) are all heavily made-up.

Yakshagaana:

Yakshagaana traditional theatre form of Karnataka, is based on mythological stories and Puranas. The most popular episodes are from the *Mahabharata* i.e. *Draupadi swayamvar*, *Subhadra Vivah*, *Abhimanyu Vadh*, *Karna-Arjun yuddh* and from *Ramayana* i.e. *Raajyaabhishek*, *Lav-kush Yuddh*, *Baali-Sugreeva yuddha* and *Panchavati*.

Therukoothu:

Therukoothu the most popular form of folk drama of Tamil Nadu, literally means "street play". It is mostly performed at the time of annual temple festivals of Mariamman (Rain goddess) to achieve rich harvest. At the core of the extensive repertoire of *Therukoothu* there is a cycle of eight plays based on the life of Draupadi. Kattiakaran, the Sutradhara of the *Therukoothu* performance, gives the gist of the play to the audience and Komali entertains the audience with his buffoonery.



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