

Habib Tanvir (1923-2009)**Man who knit India and Bharat through theatre passes away**

Veteran Indian play wright and theatre director Habib Ahmed Khan "Tanvir" died on June 8th 2009 in Bhopal, aged 85, after a brief illness. He was in the process of finalizing his autobiography, *Matmaili Chadariya* in Urdu, when he died in the early hours of June 8. He leaves behind a daughter, Nagin, who is a Hindustani vocal singer, having debuted at the home of Bhopal based Dhrupad masteros Umakant and Ramakant Gundecha. Tanvir's wife and professional partner, Moneeka Mishra, died in 2005.

Born on September 1, 1923 at Raipur (now in the Indian state of Chhattisgarh), which was at that time a small town surrounded by villages on all sides, Tanvir schooled in Nagpur. There was daily and constant interaction between the residents of the town and the village folk. Although his immediate family was town-based, some of his

uncles were landowners and visited the countryside often. As a child, he too had several opportunities to visit villages where he listened to the music and songs of the local people. He was so fascinated by these melodies that he even memorised some of them. After finishing school, he was sent to Aligarh Muslim University for his Bachelor's degree.

He was the organizer, secretary, playwright and actor director of the left-leaning, progressive and secular Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) during 1948-50. In 1955, Tanvir went to England where he spent over three years studying theatre at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts, London, and Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. He also travelled extensively through Europe, watching theatre. He spent about eight months in Berlin in 1956 and saw several recent productions by Bertolt Brecht (who had died that year). This was Tanvir's first encounter with the German playwright-director's work and he was more profoundly influenced by it than by anything that Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA) could teach him. In fact, on returning to India, he quickly began to unlearn much of what he was taught in England – and thus followed a trajectory of development diametrically opposite to that followed by other British-trained Indian directors. Tanvir was now firmly convinced that no truly worthwhile theatre – that is, no socially meaningful and artistically interesting theatre – was possible unless one worked within one's own cultural traditions and context.

Tanvir founded a theatre company called the Naya Theatre in 1959. He wrote and acted in plays like *Agra Bazar* (1954). The play, as we know, is based on the works and times of a very unusual 18th-century Urdu poet, Nazir Akbarabadi, who not only wrote about ordinary people and their everyday concerns but wrote in a style and idiom which disregarded the orthodox, elitist norms of decorum in poetic idiom and subject matter. Using a mix of educated, middle-class urban actions and more or less illiterate folk and street artists from the village of Okhla, what Tanvir, in a highly interesting (and, for its time, revolutionary) artistic strategy, put on the stage was not the socially and architecturally walled-in space of a private dwelling, but a bazaar – a marketplace with all its noise and bustle, its instances of solidarity and antagonism, and above all, with all its sharp social, economic and cultural polarities. The play also foregrounds a poetry that takes the ordinary people (their lives, and their everyday struggles) as both its inspiration and its addressee. It uses the example of Nazir's poetry and his plebeian appeal to challenge orthodox, elitist literary canons. What the play thus offers is a joyful celebration of what Mikhail Bakhtin called 'the culture of the marketplace.'

In *Agra Bazar*, two major emphases that characterise Tanvir's work in the theatre – one, an artistic and ideological predilection for the plebeian, popular culture; and, two, a penchant for employing music and poetry in plays not as superfluous embellishment but, much like Brecht, as an integral part of the action – had their first and one of the finest expressions.

Some of his other plays are *Charandas Chor*, *Moteram ka Satyagraha* (based on Hindi writer Premchand's story) and others that became milestones in contemporary Indian theatre history. He was the first to meld the Chhattisgarhi, Pandvani and Nacha folk dance and song forms of his region in his theatre, brining urban and rural actors together in one production.

Contd.

Cultural Calendar for July 2009**July 10**

Film: Palassey ki Jung (Battle of Palassey)
(Documentary in English)

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 1 hr

July 14

Film: Song of the Sanctuary India
Infrastructure- An opportunity
(Documentaries in English)

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m. Duration: 55 mins

July 16

Talk - Historical evidences of Ramayana &
Ravana in Sri Lanka

by Mr. Neil Kiriella, Chairman, Ramayana Trail
Executive Committee, Ministry of Tourism, Sri
Lanka.

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

July 22

Film: Sampooran Ramayan (In Hindi)

Venue & Time: ICC 5.30 p.m. Duration: 3 hrs

July 24

Hindustani Vocal Recital
by Sangeeth Shasthrapathi Asith Athapathu,
BHU University, India

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

July 31

Bharatha Natyam Lecture cum demonstration
by Kalasevabharathi Roja Kannan, Director of
Bharatha Natyalaya Academy of Dance &
Music, Chennai, India

Venue & Time: ICC 6.00 p.m.

(Admission to all programmes is free and on first come first served basis)

Tanvir explored a large bandwidth of content in his theatre, from Sanskrit drama and Shakespeare to tribal and folk themes and contemporary European satire.

He acted in nine feature films, including a role in Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*. In the nineties, his play *Ponga Pandit* on communal policies was repeatedly attacked by the extreme right wing parties, but he continued to stage it nevertheless.

A founder-trustee of the NGO, Sahmat, formed in consequence of the murder of theatre-activist Safdar Hashmi. Tanvir was an important organizer and participant in Sahmat's Hum Sab Ayodhya exhibition and the Mukta Naad cultural sit-in in Ayodhya in 1993, after the Babri Masjid demolition. He became the Chairman of the Sahmat in 2003 after writer Bishma Sahni's passing away.

Awarded Indian state honours like the Padmashri in 1983 and the Padma Bhushan in 2002, Tanvir was nominated as a member of Rajya Sabha from 1972 to 1978.

Some of the best known works of Tanvir are *Agra Bazar* (1954), *Shatranj Ke Mohrey* (1954) *Lala Shoharat Rai* (1954) *Gaon ke Naon Sasural, mor Naon Damand* (1973) *Charandas Chor* (1975) *Uttar Ram Charitra* (1977) *Bahadur Kalarin* (1978) *Ponga Pandit* (1989) *Jis Lahore Nai Dekhya* (1990) *Kamdeo ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna* (1993) *Zahreeli hawa* (2002) & *Raj Rakt* (2006)

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.

(Sources: <http://www.samarmagazine.org> and <http://www.hindustantimes.com>)

SANDESH
The monthly newsletter of the Indian Cultural Centre, Colombo



Ramananda Bandopadhyay, Shakti, Mixed media, 57 x 76 cms., 1991

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July 2009

Past Events

12th May

Programme to mark the 148th Birth Anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore



The Indian Cultural Centre commemorated the 148th birth anniversary of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore on the evening of 12th May with a programme that brought together several Tagore lovers and Shanthiniketan graduates. The programme included Rabindra Sangeeth recital by Sangeeth Shasthrapathi Thilini Priyankari Rodrigo and a flute recital by Sangeeth Shasthrapathi Anil Mihiripenne.

15th May

Carantic Vocal Music Recital by Smt. Revathy Ratnaswamy from India



Rajiv Gandhi Prestigious Awardee Smt. Revathy Ratnaswamy presented a memorable evening of Carnatic Vocal Music for the music lovers at the Centre. Her programme lasted for an hour and half and she sang several ragas and songs. Some of the songs and ragas she sang were "Saveri Varnam", "Vathapi", "Thayay Yasotha", "Ranjanimala" and many more. It was a treat for all music lovers.

20th May

Seminar by the Sri Lanka India Society – Effects of Global Economic crisis on developing countries & policy responses, with special reference to Sri Lanka and India

Talk by Dr. Saman Kelegama
Discussants: Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda & Dr. H.N. Thenuwara



The Sri Lanka India Society organised a Seminar on Effects of Global Economic crisis on developing countries & policy responses, with special reference to Sri Lanka and India on 20th May at the Indian Cultural Centre. The introduction was given by the President Mr. Chandra Schaffter which was followed by the talk on the subject by Dr. Saman Kelegama, Director, Institute of Policy studies, Colombo. Dr. Jayadeva Uyangoda, Head, Department of Political Science, University of Colombo & Dr. H.N. Thenuwara, Assistant, Governor, Central Bank of Sri Lanka also discussed further on the subject. The seminar was followed by an interactive session. Several dignitaries and Educationists attended the seminar



LIBRARY

Recent Library Accessions

The White Tiger

Adiga, Aravind
New Delhi, Harper Collins Publishers, 2008, 321p.
[Winner of the Man Booker Prize 2008]

The Exile : A Novel based on the life of Maharaja Duleep Singh

Sarna, Navtej
New Delhi, Penguin Group, 2008, 250p.

Ancient Indian Dynasties

Misra, V.S
Mumbai, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 2007, 411p.

An Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Indian Culture

Dash, Narendra Kumar
Delhi, Agam Kala Prakashan, 2008, 390p.

Indian Culture for everyone

Kumar, Arvind
New Delhi, INTACH, 2007, 96P.

Foundations of Indian Aesthetics

Misra, Vidya Niwas
Gurgaon, Shubhi Publications, 2008, 158p.

Towards a Nuclear Weapon Free World

Ed. Manpreet Sethi
New Delhi, KW Publishers, 2009, 164p.

Sri Aurobindo : A Contemporary Reader

Ed. Sachidananda Mohanty
New Delhi, Routledge, 2008, 235p.

Films in July



Palassey ki Jung (Battle of Palassey)

The film shows the Mughal Era nearly 300 years ago, the undivided India. The Mughal Empire was tottering. The Nawabs in different provinces were almost Independent. Foreign Merchants, specially the Dutch, Armenians, French and British were making a bid to capture the Indian Market, their "Paradise". The main hunting ground was Bengal. British traders were bent upon capturing the Bengal Market by hook or by crook. Murshidkuli Khan, The Nawab of Bengal, had set up his capital at Murshidabad. The next Nawab was Sirajuu-Daula who ruled from 1725 to 1739. The great Battle of Palassey took place in the regime of Siraju-Daula.



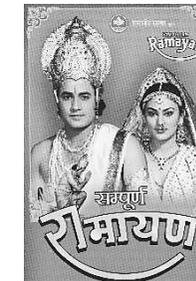
Song of the Sanctuary

The film explores the pioneering initiatives of environmentalist and physicist Vanadana Shiva, Social activist Beena Sebastian and feminist writer and publisher Urvashi Butalia.



India Infrastructure-An opportunity

The film showcases the flurry of activity being witnessed by infrastructure all over the country and to explain the PPP Model for Public-Private Partnership to Prospective investors in the Private Sector.



Sampoorn Ramayan

Sampoorn Ramayan was the first mythological serial shown on the Indian television, created by Dr. Ramanand Sagar. The serial portrays the story of Lord Ram in a most aesthetic manner and carried a lot of devotional value. Sampoorn Ramayan gives a lesson on Deep rooted culture of India, traditions and the heritage of pure ethics and principles.

NEW COURSES

Violin

Age Limit : 12 years and above
Course fee : Registration fee Rs.250/=
Monthly fee Rs.300/=

Vacancies exist in beginners & advanced classes