

qualify for this label. One cannot possibly call a military parade a dance. The images can be narrative in character as in the case of expressional passages, or may be abstract as in pure dance. Dance is both for the ear and the eye. Dance was elated to the pedestal of a form of worship. Even the *natya* meaning 'theatre', implies both acting and dancing.

Avartani—a three day festival by the Centre for Indian Classical Dances—presented all the three events—a dance performance, depicting theatre-like situations, a play that had some elements of music and dance besides acting and finally a music concert which sang of the great personal drama in the life of a historical yet legendary personality. This was Centre's fifth annual festival, presenting programmes around a definite theme as was done during the previous four festivals.

The festival opened with *Ranganayika*—a recital in Bharatnatyam—by Sonal Mansingh, the force behind the Centre. Sonal has always tried to break new ground and enrich the visual language of her dance by taking up unconventional themes and yet remain within the classical framework. Her personal charm, her agility, her clarity and her tremendous control over movement and rhythm help her carve out dynamic images in space. Wading through the traditional *Mella Prapti*—the formal entry of the dancer signifying the beginning of the *Yajna*, she went on to *Ashtapadi*. Sonal demonstrated her histrionics in *Ashta-Nayika Bhed* where she personified eight heroines: Abhisarika, Vasaksajja, Vipralabdha, Virahothanthita, Khandita, Kalahantirita, Swadhinabhartrika and Proshita Patika. The way she captured the spirit of the song in Padam and her Tillana—the statuesque quality of Bharatanatyam—was an example of her firm grip over the art form.

Padatik's production of *Shakuntalam*,

on the second day, promised a visual treat combining the poetry of Kalidasa with choreography of Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra and music by Girija Devi—the prize presentation of Avartani. It was not a dance drama—as was clarified by director Shyamanand Jalan—but a drama employing the elements of dance and music to increase the effect. Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra's choreography did seem to have helped in striking interesting groupings on the stage and the characters gliding around. Girija Devi's music also heightened the emotional effect of certain scenes.

Kishori Amonkar and her troupe sang the life of Meera in *Magan Hoyee Meera Chali*. A classical singer of repute, Kishori Amonkar's selection of Meera Bhajans and her rendering was faultless. Her compositions varied and she drew liberally from the Rajsthani folk, using the *majeera*, *pakhawaj* and *moorchang*. Her Holi song was the highlight of the evening. One felt there was no need to narrate the life story through two indifferent commentators.

The Centre also honoured Damayanti Joshi (Kathak) and Guru Mayadhar Rout (Odissi teacher) under their scheme of honouring eminent artists every year.

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LAST MONTH IN DELHI NSD REP'S TUGHLAQ

RAJINDER PAUL

If I were asked to name one play that could represent contemporary theatre in India, I'd unhesitatingly say *Tughlaq*. Of course it's as subjective an assessment as Karnad's own of Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* being the best Indian play of the last hundred years. This statement is characteristic of Karnad who is nothing if not the most sophisticated and intelligent playwright that India has today. These epithets could of course be used for other colourful personalities like Utpal Dutt, Badal Sircar and Vijay Tendulkar. Karnad, however, puts his eclectic education to the best use in that he is the most conscious of playwrights who works more with his intellect and less with inspiration. He is conscious of what constitute a modern sensibility vis-a-vis the western tradition and the Indian ethos and applies them to the greatest advantage. His themes are what, according to Yeats, ought to engage a serious man—death, sex and religion. Even in his first play *Yayati* (1961) he deals with a man wanting to preserve his youth and bartering away his soul. In *Atte Ka Kukut* he deals with sex and religion and what in Judaic-Christian terms approximate to adultery. Whether it is a sacrificial dough cock or a real one, killing is killing, and adultery in the mind is not less adulterous than that involving the body. Karnad questions one's belief in what constitutes morality and religion. Morality and religion are after all partly a matter of one's own choice—a willing acquiescence in the society-formulated framework whose perpetuation and status quo provide anchor to one's individuality. Karnad presents and knocks at the belief simultaneously making one conscious of one's constant struggle with the anarchic self in a social order.

In *Hayavadana* Karnad characteristically, handles a riddle which has plagued mankind in wanting to break out of society-inflicted moral codes. Karnad's protagonist is Padmini the woman

and not Kapila or Devadutta, and just as well, because our social beliefs put such a price on her purity. Padmini epitomises the eternal desiderative wish of a human being for the acquisition of a sustainable Ideal. Padmini wants both brain and brawn as her companion in life. Karnad's own vision doesn't let her succeed. Mankind cannot live with perfection. On the other hand, Karnad allows half-man-half-horse Hayavadan to evolve into a full horse because he fixes his sights lower down the ladder.

In *Tughlaq*, Karnad once again translates ideals into theatrical metaphors. How ideals get vitiated when put into practicality, how pure breath comes back to you with a stink. As if the environment for its survival can only turn oxygen into monoxide. Whatever the riddle, scientific or poetic, realistic or imaginary, intellectual or mundane, there's nothing more interesting in Theatre than to see how ideals and innocence and purity come to grief. Characteristically again, Karnad sets limit for his protagonist. A man like Tughlaq is bound to end in tragedy as no man has ever succeeded in such a vast enterprise. It is not that Tughlaq's ideals of imparting love, peace and plenty to his subjects in the face of external and internal dangers, and asking them to rise above their religious bigotry and to make himself understood when he wanted to shift to Daulatabad for administrative reasons are wrong. He probably under-calculates the magnitude of the problem of the impoverished populace undergoing such a trauma. When Mao has failed, how can Tughlaq succeed? Tughlaq bases his throne on a bloody coup, but, unlike Lady Macbeth, does not want the scents of Arabia to wash it back to fragrance. For Tughlaq a murder is a small price for a higher ideal. With autocratic sweeps, he blunders and chariots ahead, crushing man and matter. His tragedy is our tragedy—the ruler and the ruled are



both made of unideal stuff and to dare attaining an ideal is as tragic as it is to waste a life in not making a try. Life, and the playwright, present the conundrum in *Tughlaq*—that is why one would like to see once again the ideal and our own unsuccessful attempt at reaching it. Sisyphean perhaps—but worth it. Karnad doesn't go beyond history to formalise in theatre what is impossible in life.

There have been several productions of *Tughlaq* in Kannada, Urdu and English. The National School has done two, the first one by Om Shivpuri and later by Alkazi at the Purana Qila and the Meghdoot Theatre. The latest is by Prasanna, an alumnus of the School, who like Shivpuri in 1967 has designed it for the proscenium. Prasanna says 'The present production follows a new Urdu translation (by Surekha Sikri and K.K. Nayyar) which is based on the English translation done in 1970 by Girish Karnad himself. This was published in 1972. Karnad had, by then, witnessed all the important productions of the play. Moreover, by 1972 the post-Pinteresque theatre language had begun to influence playwriting in India. As a result Karnad made certain alterations in the play during its translation. He tightened the scenes considerably and used a language that was conversational and dense?' Prasanna uses, 'the Parsi theatre techniques of shifting between the forestage and the deep stage.' He uses a string curtain which is manipulated by actors and stage hands. The 8-foot-high string, which runs from wing to wing, cuts the rest of the deep stage sets horizontally. One purpose of the curtain which Prasanna has used in two other plays that I have seen is to facilitate scene changes. The other must be to delineate the locale realistically, so that a neutral structure of permanent proscenium sets of levels, steps, arches and bridges would not come in the way of various scenes achieving auth-

enticity. Prasanna follows the play text like a film maker, closing up on locales and backdrop. Even in *Maya Bazar* and the Kannada version of *Shatranj Ke Khilari* he was keen to define the locales. I find it's an unnecessary and at times jarring exercise which is justifiable neither on aesthetic nor on dramatic imperatives. It only forces us into viewing it as a peep show. Moreover, the curtain compartmentalises his acting area and forces him to make the Conspirator's Scene awkwardly linear, with their back to the wall, unless of course Prasanna wanted us to grasp their character without the aid of dialogue. Only Shihabuddin (G.P. Namdev), like Brutus, comes out convincingly.

Prasanna's Tughlaq is a loud and mad Sultan, short-tempered and violent, and has little to offer to his subjects. His idealism, scholarship or statesmanship is hardly in evidence except in his clever political machinations which could be the lefthand work of a politician in the backwaters of Har-yana. All his manoeuvres boomerang and the audience unstiffles a chuckle.

What would be the director's point in introducing Scene 7 of a Camp on the way to Daulatabad where Aziz, the Sultan's double as it were, tortures a mother whose child is dying. Was it to show that Tughlaq's officers down the line were as inhuman and corrupt as they are today? That very mother later recognises Aziz in the disguise of Ghiyasuddin Abbasi as he is about to meet the Sultan. She points a silent finger at him, as if the director had found us napping. The character of Aziz has lost a lot the way he is depicted. He never gains our sympathy. And if the purpose was to show how only a crook could convert Tughlaq's well-meant scheme to his selfish ends, the effect is weak.

Prasanna questions: 'Is it that only such grotesque parasites as Aziz, who spring up in the midst of dehumanised violence, can survive in the end?

These are some of the questions the production tries to raise.' I find it hard to accuse Tughlaq for his forgiveness of this imposter.

Prasanna has tried to do away with a lot of things that he saw in Alkazi's production—the expanse, the vastness, Tughlaq striding on the ramparts of the fort and quarrelling with a nineteen-year-old guard for not understanding his vision. The trouble is, if the play is about the vitiation of ideals, why are we not allowed to see them falling piece by piece? Why is Tughlaq only shown at his worst? With hardly a scene of Tughlaq meeting with his beloved subjects, we are only shown the ill effects that a power-hungry, eccentric, megalomaniac king has on the ruled. Creative people, I suppose, like to do the opposite of what marksmen do; sometimes they shut the right eye, sometimes both, depending on their faith in their creativity. A mundane observer is thus likely to miss the point and take the arrows for the target.

Manohar Singh as Tughlaq stumbles his way from anger to cruelty, hardly the poet and the visionary he is supposed to be. Surekha Sikri as Step Mother, Anang Desai as Barani, Vasant Josalkar as Najeeb, Prem Matiani as Rattan Singh, mostly fit into the puppet-like Parsi theatre setting and characterisation devised by the director. In the end, Tughlaq is seated on a low chair with Barani bowing out, tired and exhausted beyond repair, facing wing left, as if he wouldn't have another day. In fact it is a very taxing role for Manohar Singh who has to act out a lot of visualisation of the playwright's verbal imagery. Manohar Singh in fact does his part very well and with energy, though he loses a lot of sympathy for all the bloody schizophrenia he has to 'Lear' out. Comparisons are as odious as they are unavoidable. This production fails to attain any kind of character-roundness that the earlier NSD produc-

tion had. My own faith in the play is a bit shaken. But may be that was the intention of the director. I stand on less firm ground. R.P.

Tughlaq

Prasanna is nothing if not audacious in his selection of scripts. First a film classic: Ray's *Shatranj Ke Khilari*; then a stage classic: Girish Karnad's *Tughlaq*. He fails miserably in his former attempt, displaying not only his incompetence as a theatre practitioner but also his lack of understanding of Ray's poetic subtlety. His production of *Tughlaq*, however, is successful in terms of interpretation, being remarkable in its candour, its pragmatism and its economy of expression. He has denuded both character and spectacle of the bleary-eyedness. This he has done with great courage of conviction so that he has used nonchalantly the same theatre tools, the same style of presentation—the premises and the approach to characterisation—as he had done in his version of *Shatranj*. Only this time it is with a much greater degree of maturity—deeper thought and more intense study. Added to these are the Repertory's infra-structure and its expertise.

Girish Karnad wrote *Tughlaq* in Kannada in 1964, which was translated into Urdu by B. V. Karanth and produced in Delhi by Om Shivpuri in a proscenium design in 1966. It was revived by Shivpuri under the Dishantar banner in 1972. E. Alkazi's first production, with Manohar Singh in the lead, was mounted almost simultaneously, in the open-air Meghdoot theatre. Alkazi used split levels of the venue with his usual sense of scale and aesthetics, imbuing the play with the classicism that Karnad the playwright had intended. Karnad's script achieved its most glorious moments two years later in Alkazi's Purana Qila conception—a production which vouched not only for the director's sense of history but also



for Karnad's creative response as a writer to an eminent style in dramatic literature. Looming large over the ramparts of Alkazi's cognisance was this playwright's visionary hero, distorted and destroyed by that inevitable germ of decay. Manohar Singh as Tughlaq portrayed the dramatic conflict in the true tradition of a Shakespearean actor.

It is a pity though, that those who have gone to this latest production for that same grandeur, that same Macbethian high drama, have not opened up their minds to Prasanna's contemporaneity. For what after all is history if not a record of immediate or past events contoured into shape by immediate experiences, immediate perceptions? There has occurred between 1964 and 1982, in the case of the Indian educated youth, a loss of innocence (by itself a tragedy!) This is besides the minor point of a change in theatre fashions which has recently been manifest in the visually stark. Young directors have opted for mobility rather than durability, devising sets which can be rolled up into cabin trunks and shoved into train compartments.

Prasanna has not tampered with the sacrosanct script in order to achieve his end. He has picked up the English version which had been translated by Karnad himself in 1970 and got it retranslated into Urdu by Surekha Sikri and K.K. Nayyar. It is perhaps true that the English translation did not satisfy the author/translator at the time. The frugal demands of the foreign idiom which had forced Karnad to cut out much of the imagery and much of the ornamentation of the vernacular, had also stripped the play—and the character of Tughlaq—of its third dimension. The initial bewilderment therefore even in the case of Karnad, must have been at this literary casualty. Yet, one is not sure if it was the English language alone which was at fault. It was the onset of the post-

Nehru era and the first stirrings of cynicism among the history watchers. As for Prasanna, he has just gone and italicised what Karnad had put into Roman print. Nevertheless the English frigidly has got toned down once again in retranslation, but then these are details for linguistic experts to analyse or contest.

In the matter of interpretation, what stands out most in memory, is the depiction of the amirs. Here one is tempted to quote oneself with reference to Alkazi's *Purana Qila* version; '... the amirs who try to emerge out of their classified whole, are often ludicrous' (*Democratic World*, 1974). Alkazi's style and times sought high drama and 'high' conflict. Dumping such obvious props of interaction as the amirs in a single-line comment, would have been a case of missed opportunity. Yet the treatment must have gone against the grain of the play to have occasioned that remark. Prasanna, on the other hand, presents his noblemen in a significant straight line in the scene in which the amirs hatch a plot to kill Muhammad Tughlaq and seats them with their backs against his signature front curtain.

This forestage curtain which is manually plied with the aid of visible rings on a taut white string, is an adaptation of the Parsi theatre device of inserting interludes during crucial scene changes. Prasanna swears by it just as much as M. K. Raina and Bansi Kaul by the *Yavanika*: all for the sake of easy accessibility in the mofussil. However, in this case, the comment on the worth of the amirs is implicit in their positioning, the uncanny feeling is that the whole lot of them have been threaded together and left to hang! As for the general contempt that this evokes, recent history bears out the director in this harsh verdict.

Again, it is not as though he has not detailed them individually. But his bias is different from Alkazi's. In the scene of the prayer, prior to the

attempt on Mohammad's life, eight of them are put in a straight line once again, but this time in a standing position, backstage. Though each is seen as a distinct hyperbole, not one emerges out of that 'classified whole', because the sum total of each is the same protruding cypher. Yet it is not irresponsible caricature that Prasanna indulges in. He forestalls the danger inherent in a depiction of this sort by a subtle blend of human concern. This whole scene thus, which culminates into Muhammad's brutal murder of Shihabuddin, makes a shattering impact.

Karnad's own disdain for the amirs, which increased by the time he translated the play, is evident in some of the conclusive word-substitutes that he has used. As early as in scene III Sheikh Imamuddin refers to them as 'a gang of bootlickers'. In the 1964 version the adjective employed is *ghulams* (slaves). They are further brought closer to the contemporary Delhi scene when their strongest reason for not wanting to shift from Delhi to Daulatabad is made out as political. Earlier, their concern was for loss of tradition; for generations' old relationships, for the impending rootlessness. While all that is deleted, two new lines are added to complete this new picture: 'And it is no use his (Muhammad's) saying stay behind if you like. We have to be in the Capital!'

Muhammad, likewise, is reduced in stature. The 19-year old poet-philosopher-visionary becomes a figment of one's imagination. The reality is the grand murderer who has rationalised the killings to megalomaniac tolerance levels. No wonder he can sleep once again even after 5 years of uncompromising brutality. He has met and recognised his alter ego in Aziz, the common scoundrel—Karnad's stroke of genius! At last he is able to shed the self-adulatory flights of his romantic fancy. This is tragedy and Prasanna presents it with sensitivity in the final scene. Manohar Singh, who becomes

the most memorable actor even in this reduced version, proves once again that he is material for western classical theatre.

Aziz's character was endearing in Alkazi's version, repelling in Prasanna's. There have been enough permutations/combinations of an Aziz upon the current political scene to discount fantasies of the Alkazi ilk. Yuvraj Sharma in the role, however, is out of his depth just as Prasanna is in handling him. But more work should improve matters. Yuvraj is a good actor.

The inspiration for the mini-sets—frames within the proscenium frame—comes from Persian miniatures. Proportion and colour blend are an outcome of the Alkazi aestheticism; the secular modern eye followed by the world's classical arts.

The costumes designed by Uttara Baokar are generally very appealing being outstanding in the case of Barni and Najib. But then why that waywardness for which the only woman character of consequence seems to be singled out? Surekha Sikri as the step-mother of Tughlaq is clad in revolting embossed Indian pink artificial satin. She seems to have stepped out of her *Bivion Ka Madrassa* into the harem of Muhammad Tughlaq. Surely, Prasanna can start showing more respect for his females, even if it is for the sake of the aesthetic and the historical balance! The step-mother was scheming, power-hungry—perhaps with adulterous and incestuous leanings—but there is no reason to believe that she was not blue-blooded. After a disastrous impression that Surekha creates in the 2 scenes of the total of 3 that she appears in, she redeems herself through sheer histrionics in the final. She goes to her gruesome death, a memorable actress.

Vasant Josalkar's Najib is restrained and convincing. His Marathi lisp is taken care of by the reference to his Hindu origin. Anang Desai as Barni



continues wishy-washily till the last scene of the play when he suddenly shows up as a match for Manohar Singh. Raghuvir Yadav as Azam is a delightfully terse tragic comment, Pramod Moutho as Imamuddin and Namdev as Shihabuddin are passable but Vijay Kashyap as Ghiyassuddin Abbasi has been neglected. He arouses neither laughter, nor derision, only pity. Nutan Surya as the woman in the crowd is an interesting cameo. So is Matiyani as Rattan Singh. Nevertheless, all these minor characters need a good tightening up before they are presented at the Festival of India. Also warranted is a smoother scene change and a gentler tread on awkward elevations.

Finally, why those hideous blue and red chessmen in the land of pure ivory? Should the comment be carried to such 'plastic' contempt?

REETA SONDHI

The Curlew's Cry

Indian plays originally written in English remain woefully unperformed. The fading out breed of English language theatre practitioners have failed to relate themselves to indigenous output. Not that the indigenous have tried to come out of their self-imposed incestuous insulation. Whether it is poetry or novel, the area of experience is grossly ivory. Partly because a creative use of the language of education has only resulted in raising ludicrous stereotypes or arm chair ideologues. The moment you let an Ayah or a clerk mouth English you straitjacket the propagators of the English idiom into condescending superficials.

The stage is a particularly uncharitable medium. The licences that you could very easily take in a poem or a novel, where the whole being is not always visible, viz. his clothes, gait or his stance, the stage debars you from suspending your disbelief. Even a very

creative use of the language will still make the visual acceptable only with a distate for propriety. It seems there's nothing like a universal language of theatre—as in the other arts like painting, music or cinema. That's why perhaps plays written in English have never become part of the mainstream of Indian writing. At best they have remained closet plays. They have not even generated any interest in the translators who are always on the look out for scripts. Why for instance Pratap Sharma, Gieve Patil or Prithipal Vasudev or even Asif Currimbhoy have never been performed in the regional languages even when they have dealt with less trite themes than their vernacular counterparts? Part ignorance and part prejudice have stood in the way of the vernacular theatre's indifference towards the Indian writing in English.

Even a belated realization on the part of the Sultan Padamsee Award organizers to bolster creative playwriting in English hasn't brought about a movement. An Erna Vatchaganandy here or a Gurcharan Das there have not helped much to warrant the usefulness of such efforts. Still it is wrong to damn the efforts as misguided aberrations. Even if one came to the conclusion that English in India can't play a creative role on Indian stage, you can't wish it away and its track record of useful communication of ideas in an emergent, educated class.

The fact is that people write in English, sometimes plays also, and want to be staged. There's nothing ignoble about it—look at the crowds Padamsee drew for his shows in Delhi, even if for the wrong reason and for a wrong play, indifferently done. See a Marcus Murch do *The Mouse Trap* to a full house and come back home to resolve never to be trapped by him again, even if his bloated ticket rates came down to the equivalent of a packet of oily chips in the interval.

So with such noble precedents to take

succour from, you buy the tickets for the Yatrik production of Kamal Kapur's first full length play to be staged in Delhi—*The Curlew's Cry*—after looking up the shape of that crying bird in a Mickey Patil drawing. For vernacular crowds a character in the play even tells you the Hindi equivalent of Curlew and weaves a romantic tale around it for our mellifluous sentimentality. It could well be a piece from a Shashi Kapur-Nanda Hindi movie with a doleful Mohd. Rafi song.

Otherwise Kamal Kapur play is an innovator of sorts, employing for the first time in a play in English, liberal use of Hindi and not only of the condescending type that one uses with Ayahs or maidservants. Kapur's recognizable characters—four young persons or two couples—for most part use English, but now and then uninhibitedly use Hindi when stuck for the right words in English. The dialogue is natural and easy, without pretensions. If we take this innovation into account, I think, Kamal Kapur has taken a step which will augur well for Indian playwrights expressing themselves in English but whose characters are from the mainstream of the social milieu for whom bilingualism is a natural enough tool. I know to suggest this play as a model is like suggesting the Wright Brothers' model for the 747-addicted travellers. What with all those writing in English thinking of employing chunks of conversation in Tamil, Malayalam, Gujarati, Marathi and what have you and making the translation of their writings all the more horrendously ludicrous.

This preface part, one can now talk of the play. *The Curlew's Cry* is about Kunti, a sensitive young writer, who when the curtain goes up is spotted in a strange kind of hypochondria, talking of those days before marriage when everything looked green and luscious. She starts discussing her problems in Hindi with the old maidservant who has seen her grow. Kunti looks as if she has had

a miscarriage, though it is only the miscarriage of her dreams and ideals. Her husband Vijay is an executive of sorts and breezes in and out of the acting area as if he had those wheels attached to his persons and his brief case. Comes in a young bright air-hostess who takes up residence in the same flat and jumps in and out of this couple's living room without much excuse. Fine informality. She is alone, seems in love with life, and has a lot of energy to spare. She also brings in her boy friend Jamil, who looks like a flowerchild of Maqbool Fida Hussain, actually paints horses and wears an embroidered Kurta over Jeans. He flips for the quiet Kunti, advocates that her strangulated self needs fresh air, a romance perhaps, brings her books of Whitman and Nietzsche to compete with those of Plato that are already on Kunti's desk. The foursome-party that they have, recouples into Kunti with Jamil and Rita obviously with Vijay. It looks like a good arrangement only that likes more often than not repel each other. Kunti discovers Jamil hasn't totally broken off with Rita, while Jamil doesn't have much to offer or excuse himself with. In such a permissive set-up, which one has nothing against even if turned permissible, Jamil talks of love as if he had just hit upon a new icecream flavour in high summer. In fact, Jamil's character, as messed up by Sumit Tandon's acting is so sneakily selfish that one is left with blaming the playwright. Coupled with Kunti's character, (Renuka Narayanan) who murmurs her cloudy romanticism three years after marriage in uncertain voice, the play becomes an unjelled mix of vague anguishes. Director Bhaskar Ghose just positions them loose-limbed centrestage. Otherwise the down-to-earth Rita (Chitra Ramchandran) and Vijay (Bhaskar Bhattacharya) do manage to liven up the proceedings.

Kamal Kapur received the Sultan Padamsee award for the best English play

