



East-West Theatre Encounter

Closed Sessions

[January 17-25, 1986, 9.30 a.m.-1.30 p.m., Little Theatre]

Friday, January 17.

Welcoming the participants, P. L. Deshpande, Honorary Director, National Centre for the Performing Arts (NCPA) said: "Friends, welcome to all of you who have responded to our invitation to the East-West Theatre Encounter (EWTE). I wonder if Bombay has ever seen a gathering of such well-known national and international theatre personalities coming together to exchange ideas and compare notes about theatre. The brief biographical note about the participants, published in the booklet brought out on the occasion, reveals that each one of the participants has made a significant and different type of contribution to the theatre. Despite varying geographical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, one common link binds all of us: the struggle to find out the meaning of theatre and a meaningful theatrical expression. In this struggle, I know you have not always met with what is commonly understood as success, but this has not frightened you away from this rather exacting and cruel art of theatre. There is nothing more tragic in the world of the performing arts than living on the memory of yesterday's success. It is a pleasure to find that all of you are working in the theatre of today. It is today and today's performance that matters most, and here is a gathering of theatre artistes who are going to discuss the present, the theatre of today, as they find it. It is a meeting of minds engaged in the pursuit of a common goal. This pursuit has given you the best reward that a person can hope for—a meaning and a purpose to life. I am sure that every one of us is looking forward to an exciting week ahead of us, or rather, 'nine days to drama' . . . full of speeches, dialogues, agreement, disagreement and, best of all, the theatre performances in the evenings.

"I must thank Dr. Lechner of the Max Mueller Bhavan (MMB) who is really the Host-in-Chief of this Encounter. Not only is he sharing the major financial burden (along with the other co-sponsors) but, by his dynamic leadership and sense of dedication to art in general and to the performing arts in particular, he has inspired all of us to make this venture feasible. Friends, I thank you all, on behalf of myself and my colleagues and, once again, I welcome you all to the Encounter."

Dr. Georg Lechner, Director, MMB: "Mr. Deshpande, ladies and gentlemen, Mr. Consul-General of the Soviet Union, very dear respected invitees and participants, on behalf of the NCPA and its Trustee-in-Charge, Mr. J. J. Bhabha who, unfortunately, cannot be present here, and on behalf of the MMB, my own organisation, and all the co-sponsors—I welcome you all—particularly, the USSR delegates—and invite you to consider the work ahead of us.

"This EWTE is not to be seen in an isolated way, but as an ongoing and serious attempt to create a platform for a meaningful dialogue in various cultural fields—between east and west, north and south.

"When we started organising this EWTE, we were aware that we had to deal with two different traditions. Whether we refer to the great tradition of sacred ritual, mythological theatre in this country, whether it is the old forms of Sanskrit drama or the younger forms such as Kathakali or other forms of dance theatre, whether in Japan, or in Greece, the great masters—we mean the same tradition of a highly stylized technique, of an absolute devotion to the concept of a rigorous discipline. But it is also a tradition that we find very difficult to make our own . . . . It was a tradition of a given time, and how much of it can be recreated and maybe made part of our own consciousness, is the big task before us. It can never be totally recreated. It was the expression of one time, of a wonderful past that we admire and respect, but it is not our time. The West meanwhile moved on from Greek drama and the Medieval Mystery plays, to Shakespeare in England, to the Commedia dell' Arte or to the high-society court drama of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Then Europe moved on to the social drama of the nineteenth century. Later it branched out into so many movements of theatre in this century, from Brecht's Epic Theatre to other forms, the Theatre of the Absurd, Living Theatre . . . Stanislavsky, Grotowski, Peter Brook. So much is being done. So much life is going onto the stage and so many claims are being made for the stage to reflect back on life that we don't know anymore where to look for the theatre of this century. But, if at least part of theatre will continue to reflect society, life, and will not be something that will only concern individuals in their search for self-realisation—although that also theatre must be allowed to do and to be—then, I think, we have come to a threshold where the East and the West must together steer a spaceship, Earth, that is no longer on the old route. It seems that previously we were on a journey, and there was a captain, there was a chart and a destination somewhere out there. But he sharing the major financial burden (along with the other co-sponsors) but, by his dynamic leadership and sense of dedication I am not sure that this is true anymore. I think that we have lost the Captain, we have lost a good part of the charts. We do not know anymore, in our deepest thinking, whether there is even a destination and, if there is one, what it will be. 'The properange man. So how can we know what destination, what man will have? I think we may have become professional travellers, flying Dutchmen, perhaps with no destination. Perhaps, the journey is all we have, the journey together, the journey in the spaceship that has become totally different from the old ships. That is, it seems to me, the task ahead—whether you call it theatre as a reflection on life, or whether it is anything else. We have to do that journey, or part of it, together, or we won't know what it is all about. I wish, therefore, that we become living and alive witnesses of this journey, of this process, of this life . . . . All my best wishes for the journey together."

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Vijaya Mehta: "I shall try to offer a capsule of my observations, almost like a confessional, tracing the changes in my attitude towards my work. In so doing I shall analyse again for myself, and get you to share my analysis of the way in which the West has influenced my work and in so doing helped me realise my Indianness, my Maharashtrianness, my ethnicity. I find that is a very important aspect of any encounter.

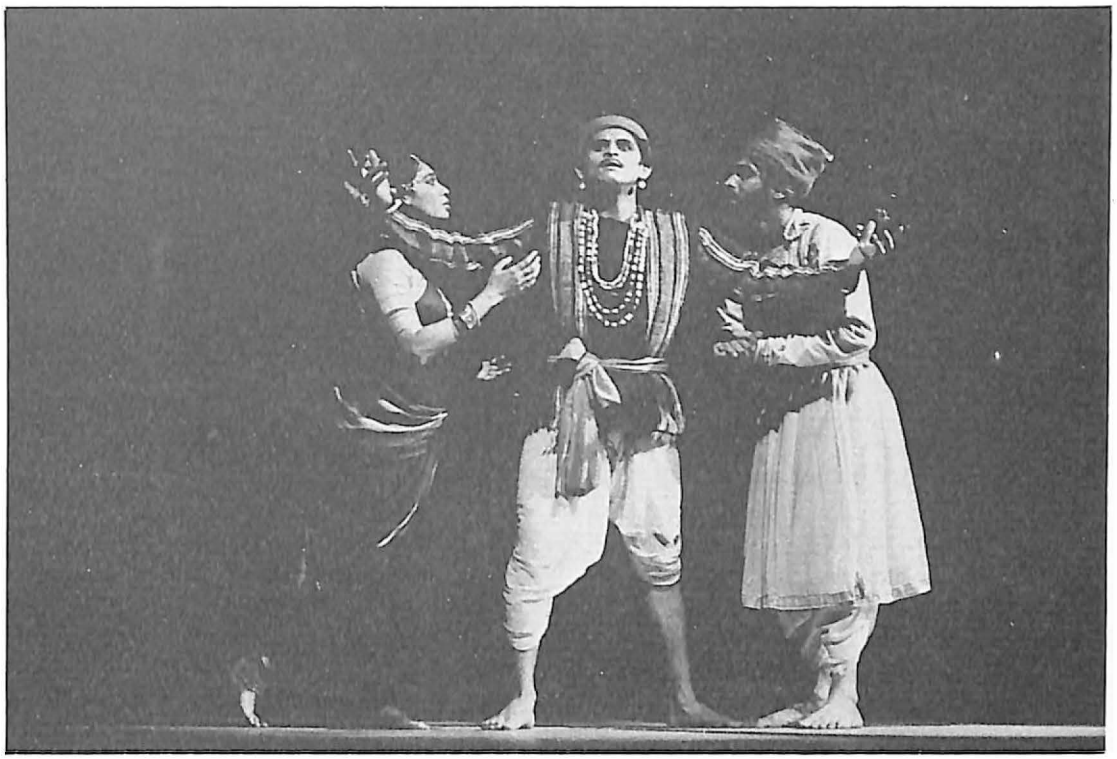
"There's a whole section of people in Bombay whose only language is English . . . . but I was born in a family that hailed from a remote village in Maharashtra. These are the kind of people I work with, that's my workfield and I am very happy with that set-up . . . because, though I live in a metropolitan city and speak English, I still think in my own language, and that gives me a fantastic sense of belonging and rootedness.

"I was already a leading lady in the Marathi theatre in my teens when I met E. Alkazi. I was with him for three years during which I was trained in a totally British system of theatre. It did two things for me: it convinced me that my workfield had to be my own language theatre, but, at the same time, it offered a certian alienation from my own workfield . . . . This way I could look at it and see for myself what I wanted to do with it. Then I started out on my own—ran my own ensemble for eleven years. To me, that's been the most creative period of my life, because all of us were together to understand what theatre meant to us, to life around us. We created a lot of actors and playwrights, who are now leading names in the Marathi theatre and in films. I saw the ensemble die a natural death almost fifteen years ago. And since then I turned a professional director-actress.

"After my ensemble disappeared, I went to England for three years with my husband. It was there that I encountered a situation where my personal need was to seek my own identity in a totally alien culture and to see in what way this identity was being reflected in my work . . . . There, for the first time, I asked what I was doing that was Indian, in my theatre. I consciously started thinking about things that were Eastern as opposed to Western. It was then that I started thinking about folk theatre: 'Is it really theatre? What is it? I realised that perhaps in an event which takes place for ten hours a day, there are may be ten minutes of absolute dramatic potency. The rest is ritual. By its very nature it is repetitive. How can I, therefore, get to understand the very essence of what is theatre? It took some time and, surprisingly, I found a vehicle in Brecht. Here was a man reacting to the German theatre of his time, to the socio-economic situation at that time. He had written two plays which I could see perhaps as vehicles to experiment with the essence of folk theatre strengths, as I wanted to discover them. I worked on them, was very dissatisfied with what I had done . . . . From the folk I went to the classical, but could not decipher it till I went to the *Natyashastra.* I thought to myself: Am I creating something which is a museum piece? The whole idea revolted me . . . . I controlled myself . . . . I am a person born in the 1930's and am looking at my classical traditions as I understand them . . . . An urban mind living in Bombay in the 1980's and I have to do a classical play. How will I receive it? You will see this in a short piece my actors will demonstrate: an extract from *Shakuntala.*

"I walked into folk, I walked into classical but what I do is not folk, not classical . . . . I am influenced by the folk, by the classical, and it gets reflected in my work.

"There is no intention to make a dead thing come alive . . . . I have a tremendous curiosity which takes me to the roots, but I belong to the 'modern' . . . . I don't believe in indulgence of the sort that makes theatre 'private' or in sensationalism, 'prettiness', dance, music, politics. I have not been able to understand the concept of political theatre . . . . For me political theatre cannot exist . . . .



A scene from Hayavadana

You are using theatre as a vehicle for something else. I am almost for a pure, religious approach towards theatre. As an individual, I like the lack of an attitude of negation. Questioning. Yes. But negation, no! Questioning already implies that you are questioning something out of curiosity and with reverence, and then denying it or defying it. But to negate is the easiest and most appealing thing for a performing art . . . . You negate and you're a hero and that's what worries me . . . . I could not negate till I had considered what was in the offing.

Vijaya Mehta then described the working of her theatre in Bombay . . . . "I am finding it increasingly difficult to hold on to an ensemble because the lures are far too many for a young person. . . . I find it very easy to work with people who are rooted somewhere or the other . . . . I can relate to them and get them to provide me with a certain spontaneous naivete which I require for my work. This naivete holds things together and allows me to experiment . . . . When I worked with German actors, I discovered how good my own actors are—not in comparison—but their strengths and their qualities . . . . Of course, the fact remains that they are not formally trained . . . but I don't know whether an Indian actor, the rooted actor, can ever be trained in a formal way. Because his whole intuitive force is one of untrained abandon. You can give them perhaps a certain sense of objectivity but you cannot touch them. That is the material I basically draw on and I am finding it very difficult to hold on to them.

"I have never left the ring. I knew that I was accepted as a leading lady and actress (I have a lot of following in my own regional theatre). I do a lot of theatre that my people need and require. There are two things I do. One,

what convinces me has to be done and the other is that I always try to be in the ring. It doesn't mean that you lose your identity . . . . I think over the last 20 years I have created a genre of people who like to see my type of work, but that happens to be in the mainstream of Marathi theatre . . . . I believe in standing by and yet relating to my people—I don't want to be a classroom teacher with my ensemble working on various projects . . . . I am looking forward to being with you all, to get new things floating into me, so that once again I feel I am starting something new."

She then explained the genesis and design of *Shakuntala.* "To the German actors who said, 'You bring to us a form which is so strict.', I replied, 'Try and get used a little to the strictness of the grammar and you will get a tremendous sense of liberation.' " She then described her work on *Hayavadana:* 'rooted' but 'modern'.

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Eugenio Barba: "No one can understand another culture. You can admire, be attracted, appreciate, be fascinated by it, yes. But understand, no. Paradoxically, all the great reformers of European theatre in the beginning of this century thought that they had understood what oriental theatre was, or, rather, the essence of certain oriental theatre forms. This misunderstanding has been one of the most fertile impulses in European theatre . . . . It was a typically ethnocentric view for Europeans . . . . They projected their visions, ways of thinking, values etc. on certain realities, which could not be judged by their vision.

"When Stanislavsky pointed to the Noh actor as the representative, as the finest example of how an actor should concentrate, he was projecting his own personal research, how every evening to achieve this rich, creative state, which was his own personal obsession, and stimulated all his research. When Meyerhold spoke about the theatricality of Kabuki, in reality he was projecting his own desire to make theatre not just a copy, merely realistic. But when he saw Kabuki theatre as showing a completely autonomous reality, he was just projecting his own vision. When Artaud in Paris was seeing Balinese theatre, he was also projecting his own desires—of how theatre should achieve an 'other' quality which, for him, should be a spiritual one. But he was also under the greatest misunderstanding when he spoke about the director in Balinese theatre as a sort of creator who decides on every action or every gesture or every step of an actor or a dancer. But we know that this doesn't exist in Balinese theatre. Similarly, when Brecht saw the Chinese actor Mei Lan Fang.

"All these misunderstandings have been extremely fertile for us in Europe, nevertheless. It has been a sort of help in teaching us the revolutionary way of approaching and leaving and transforming theatre—the ethical aspect of the theatre of which we hear today. This ethical dimension came from Stanislavsky . . . it is the invisible part of a culture.

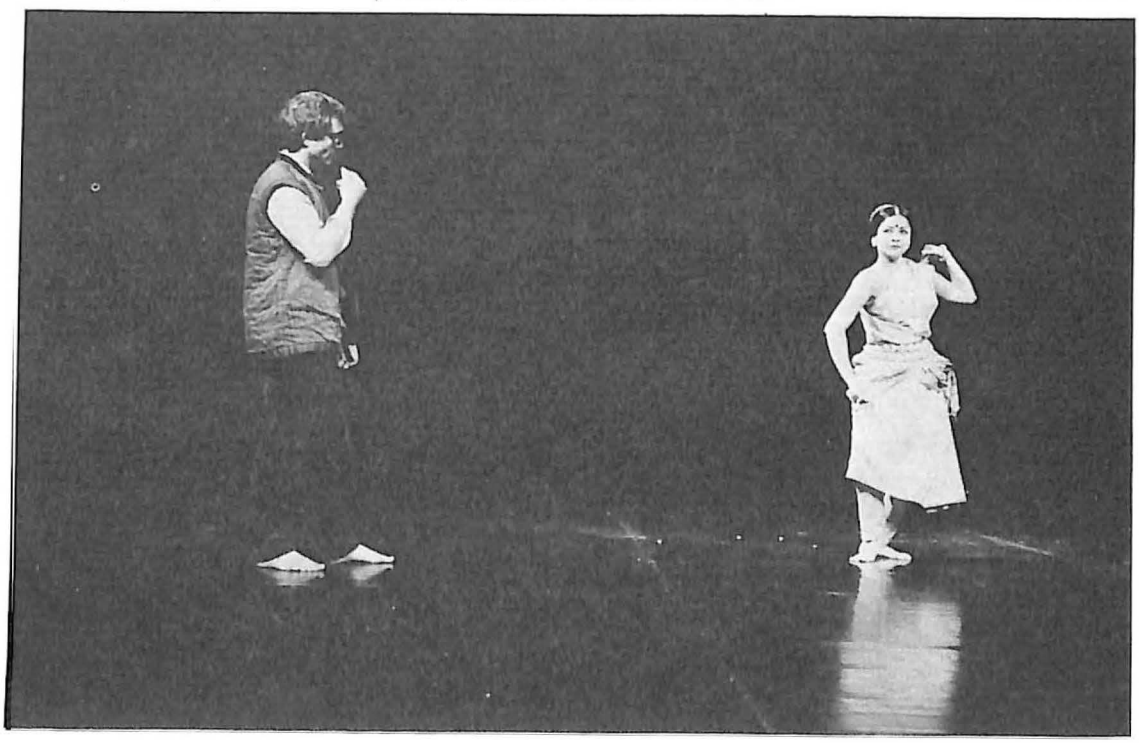
"Why we cannot understand another cuture is because we look at the visible part! Before the War, theatre personalities in the West had never been to the East. From their limited contact with Eastern theatre traditions, they had projected their own visions on these traditions—mainly in a struggle to move away from the traditional European theatre. After the War, this changed. Many

theatre people actually travelled to the East—not to find a confirmation for their theories, but to search for the invisible—what was, what existed, behind this unbelievable, fascinating, sensorial theatrical experience which we missed in the West.

"The actor's way of using the body is determined by three factors: the cultural background—where he's born, the social milieu he's brought up in, and his profession. What is the body technique of daily life as opposed to the body techniques of theatre? In the theatre I am using the body in a specific way, which dilates, expands my body energy and expands, dilates new perception. If there's no question of dilation, there's no building . . . . If I see a person repeating his daily body technique on the stage, as a spectator, I will not be fascinated. Too much technique kills the actor. As a director, I must help the actor go further. Can I find certain methods to help my actors?"

(His actors from Odin Teatret then demonstrated a scene showing a mother who had just lost her child.)

"To see is to interpret. Neither myself nor my actors had ever had any formal training in drama. So when we began training together we didn't know what to do. I had seen what Grotowski was doing—since I was with him for two years. Then I saw what his actors were beginning to do . . . . They had all finished formal training in theatre schools . . . so the training at the beginning was traditional training. Then, in 1963, I came to India. I didn't know much about theatre in India. I saw Alkazi's theatre which was very European. Then I went south and saw Kathakali, and it was a revelation. . . . I found that in all countries where poverty and misery exist, theatre comes across as a divine revelation . . . .



Eugenio Barba and Sanjukta Panigrahi

The actor really seduces me in these theatres. He conducts me to a point where the experience becomes reflection. This deeply impressed me. I had a dream that one day I would make my actors achieve this degree of suggestivity which is in the Kathakali actors . . . . I was not repeating the Kathakali exercises or the forms. That would have been a cul-de-sac. We've been working for years but only on exercises. Later, I understood that I had been working on energy, or how to build different patterns of behaviour which are organic and at the same time not like in everyday life . . . so that energy is dilated in the actor and, at once also the perception of the spectator is dilated. All these approaches were not psychological approaches. It was a break in our work in respect to the Western traditions that we were not working with psychologists. We were not working with intentions but with pure, apparently physical forms. But these exercises cannot be just physical exercises because training is not a physical factor; it is a mental factor. Training doesn't mean that you want to develop a certain ability. Ability in theatre is a handicap. It is important to achieve it. Once you've achieved it, it makes you its prisoner. With somersaults, for instance, you can do one, but if you keep on repeating it, the element of surprise, which is very essential, is no longer there. A Noh actor can only be a Noh actor. He cannot escape from it. The more you specialise, the more you risk being closed. So training is intended in order that exercise can achieve a certain quality of tension.

"Watching Japanese, Balinese actors rehearsing, I had the feeling that all this was very familiar. The style was different but I recognised something. I felt they belonged to the same blood group . . . . The pre-expressive or the biological level in theatre is what we call the 'presence'—the way an actor presents himself, so that you begin to feel the vibrations. If you begin with a codified form, you never begin with intentions . . . because you begin early and you don't explain. At the beginning, my actors were very gymnastic, very stiff. They arrived at the expressive oriental level after many, many years . . . .

"It is possible to go to other cultures without being blinded by the visible! It is not the action which is dynamic but the connection between two actions.

"Incoherent coherence—once you find a point of departure then you have to be coherent. When you work with an actor, you can make him understand his own levels of energy—he can work on them, expand, compress or do anything with them.

"I am now concentrating on the *lasya* and *tandava* aspects in presentation.

"Today, I receive about 250,000 dollars from the state and they don't demand anything from me. But to arrive at this point was very difficult. When I finished training with Grotowski, nobody would hire me, because I had no diploma, and Grotowski was then totally unknown. So I started my own group. In 1964, group theatre was quite new in Europe. From the beginning we were outside the mainstream, and our exercises at that time were mainly gymnastic.

"A nurse in Holstebro saw a performance, liked it, and phoned the Mayor, who was newly-elected and wanted to begin with a cultural policy. He invited the troupe over to Holstebro. For the first time, after years of being neglected, I felt I was being taken into account. We had no money. . . so we invited theatre personalities for seminars and absorbed a lot. After ten years, the Minister of Culture in Denmark gave a small grant. Our status now is that of a theatre

school, for people preparing to go into group theatre; we have a publishing house which published Grotowski's best-seller *The Poor Theatre*. We also have a sociological research unit . . . ."

At this point there was another demonstration by actors of the Odin Teatret.

"You build on simultaneity, not only on a succession of actions like in Ibsen. You work with simultaneity and discontinuity. In Eastern theatre, this is very evident, for example, in Noh. In Germany, Henri Muller's plays are built on this."

Dr. Lechner: "While you are making new demands on the actor and on yourself, what logical demands do you make on the audience, the new spectator?"

Barba: "You must remember the invisible . . . . I had no audience in the beginning. So I couldn't make any demands . . . . We're making a particular type of theatre for a particular spectator . . . . There's no humour, it's bleak. Certain spectators want to meditate on their existential situation. In reality, we're very much personalised. Therefore, intimacy is very important. The maximum distance between actor and spectator should be four metres . . . . In each new society, theatre must be very small."

Saturday, January 18

Mr. P. L. Deshpande said, introducing Jabbar Patel and Satish Alekar, "These two young directors are responsible for the new turn taken by Marathi theatre after a kind of a long-drawn, traditional way of presenting plays. Their activity started much earlier, with a group called the Progressive Dramatic Association (PDA), which undertook the production of experimental plays on a non-professional basis. It was a great venture . . . later even the PDA got into a traditional rut, and one group separated and started out as Theatre Academy, Pune. It met with great success in its presentation of *Ghashiram Kotwal*.

"Satish Alekar tried play-writing. His *Mahanirvana* can be described as the first 'black-humour' comedy in Marathi.

"Today, Jabbar Patel and Satish Alekar stand for all that is revolutionary, artistic and new in Marathi theatre, in particular, and Indian theatre in general."

Jabbar Patel: "We have a very big group now made up of actors who join us while they are still undergraduates. *Ghashiram Kotwal* was the cause of our starting this new group. There was so much controversy about the play that the Executive Committee of the PDA decided that it should be banned. All of us opted out and started a new group, the Theatre Academy. The play was first performed fourteen years ago and many of the original performers are still there.

"I have not undergone any kind of traditional training in theatre. Nobody in my family was involved with it. As a schoolboy, the smell of greasepaint and the warmth of the lights attracted me to the theatre, and here I am today—no one inspired me.

"Before *Ghashiram Kotwal*, we were into the naturalistic kind of theatre—Tendulkar gave us nine pages of the play *Ghashiram Kotwal*. He had in mind the *Khele*, a folk form of the Konkan, with a human wall (or curtain) of performers. In the villages, they do episodes from the *Ramayana* or other epics in this form.



A scene from Ghashiram Kotwal

From the curtain, suddenly, the performers come out and become characters. When they finish, they join the wall.

"Since I come from the rural area, the folk arts of Maharashtra have had a very deep impression on me. It is very difficult to pin-point the influence. *Ghashiram Kotwal* is a two-dimensional play. This human wall makes and breaks different compositions; so this folk-form has given me fluidity. There are no scenes. In this play, I broke off completely from my naturalistic style.

"Later we did P. L. Deshpande's *Teen Paishacha Tamasha* and more recently, *Padgham.*"

Satish Alekar: "I am not a theoretician . . . it is very difficult for me to discuss something that I have written or something that we've done on stage. None of us have had any formal training in theatre. What we do have is a tremendous liking for theatre, and we enjoy repeated exposure to an audience. This interaction between us and the audience gives us the strength to go on.

"Since the Film and T.V. Institute of India and the National Film Archives are based in Pune, members of our group also get exposed to modern Indian and Western cinema.

"We have no establishment whatsoever; no office, no building, no permanent property. We work very informally but sincerely. It is very difficult to support oneself on the theatre. Our profits at the box office are ploughed back into our various theatre promotion activities. Subsidy for theatre from the Government is almost non-existent. Some help comes from the Sangeet Natak Akademi, when we stage shows in Delhi. The MMB helps us in Pune by co-sponsoring shows. But basically we have to find jobs to support our families.

"Our main aim is performance. Our group is performance-oriented. We perform in rural areas too, and this interaction is tremendous. The Theatre Academy is also engaged in various theatre promotion activities. Recently, we received a small subsidy from the Ford Foundation for a project to develop playwriting. In the first year, seven playwrights were invited to write plays. At the end of the year, they came to Pune, where each one read out his play in front of a distingushed audience. These scripts were then placed in a script bank. In the third year, four young directors will be invited to direct these new plays. Later, we will extend this to a district level. We also give travelling fellowships to young theatre workers."

Dr. Kumud Mehta explained the controversial aspects of *Ghashiram Kotwal.* "On the one hand, you will be seduced by the colour, the movement, the compositions, but one mustn't overlook the fact that there is a violent element in it, which is very much a part of Tendulkar's thinking. There is the portrayal of a decadent society, steeped in ritual and dissipation, corroded from within, and the British, with their superior technology, waiting to step in."

Dnyaneshwar Nadkarni: "Could you say something about your experiences while staging the English version of *Ghashiram Kotwal* off-Broadway?

Satish Alekar: "I was invited to work as a consultant by the PAN-ASIA Repertory for the *Ghashiram Kotwal* project in English. My commitment was only till the dress rehearsal. I didn't see the performance. In any case, it is very difficult for me to react, seeing it in English. The lyrics have all been included. The actors are very sincere, and they've got the spirit of it. The best thing is that, for the first time, a professional group from outside India is being attracted to contemporary Indian theatre."

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Alaknanda Samarth, in a discussion on the training of actors for the contemporary Indian Stage, examined aspects, choices and decisions faced on the way. Drawing from her varied experience with trainee-actors, she came to some conclusions which are applicable to most groups of actors, whether homogeneous in terms of language and background, or heterogeneous, such as those she worked with in New Delhi.

During the training sessions, she found that the word 'modern' was understood to mean 'realism' or 'naturalism', but that the actor's response to naturalism varied according to region or sensibility. The influence of *abhinaya,* as derived from traditional dance forms, and other recognisable links with traditional forms were marked, even in actors who had no formal background of these styles. In addition, in actors from Orissa and Kerala, the oral tradition exerted a strong and wholesome influence, encouraging a heightened feeling for language. Though the actor's intuition was sound, his faith in it wavered. Some shortcomings were observed in the incisive use of the spoken word in creating contemporary rhythms and anti-rhythms. Also, actresses occasionally suffered from different types of repression and stress. Lastly, group action on stage tended to be weak.

"Amongst the problems facing the actor today are the marked lines of demarcation between communication signs in theatre, cinema and television. The actor should be in a position to exercise his option and cross all thresholds,

if he chooses to. Can techniques born in a separate metaphysical context, in fact, be transvaluated? Can the actor be put in touch with himself through inter-cultural techniques, opening up his present in relation to his past? The actor's art has to do with making the unmanifest manifest, truthfully and convincingly. However, today's actor lacks conviction in the forms handled by the mainstream theatre. This split between the role he performs on stage and the reality he experiences, causes a certain bewilderment. Although the actor's changing self-consciousness distances him from a mythological interpretation of the world, the two worlds need not be mutually exclusive, nor destructive. To arrive at a realistic interpretation, the actor needs to strengthen his faith in himself, to scrutinize himself fearlessly, and to place himself in relation to his environment. The confidence gained by this examination and understanding of the nature of the outer and inner worlds, would lead to the emergence of his distinct identity as 'the Indian actor', drawing his life-force and energy from control of his body, just as the dancer had done in the past.

"Areas which overlap in Indian theatre, but which demand individual consideration, are as follows:

Narrative: Uniquely Indian, it provides an enriching, abundant source of material.

Emotion: An analysis of elements in this area included exercises on whether modernisation has to do with a sense of revolt, individuality, irony and ambiguity. What emerged was that the actor's sense of authenticity lay in different degrees of schizophrenia. He should perhaps be given the assurance that all emergent impulses are wholly Indian. If there are dislocations in the psyche, so also is there continuity. Once this is understood, the actor will create, challenge, subvert, preserve and grow, to reach new heights as a more complete actor.

Memory: In this area, the crucial factor was the realisation of the present as a memory of the past, and the body's memory of its links. Another vital aspect is that of collective memory as a shaping force of social character.

The Stereotype: The stereotype provides a mark of easy recognition and continuity for the audience, as representing and conforming to a known pattern of values in one set tradition. By contrast, there exists the fragmented individual—a product of discontinuity.

Voice and Language: Here, amongst the areas explored, were regional rootedness and the actor's freedom, national consciousness and language, dissociating language and gesture.

Lastly the teacher-student relationship, which was confrontational. An attempt was made to provoke responses in imagination and emotion, encouraging an unhindered response. An impartial interpretation of the work of each by all was encouraged, and the norms created in the process were observed.

In this way, all actor-participants felt free to emerge, through discussion, to a greater freedom, and a better understanding of themselves and their art in the context of the present day."

Eugenio Barba: "In a theatre school you are preparing students to go out and fit into any kind of role the market offers. In the United States, it's

Broadway. The same in Europe. Everywhere the market is a sort of big brother where actors are sold like cattle. There are only two possibilities: either you go into theatre school in order to become cattle, to sell, to earn, or you aspire for another type of theatre. If a theatre school was trying to produce actors for the future, no one would employ them. You cannot destroy the market. It's too strong. You have to decide if you want to step out of the mainstream of theatre.

"Peter Brook, despite his really extraordinary productions, has not really been changing Western theatre. It's two groups who are responsible for changing Western theatre art—Julian Beck, Judith Malina and Grotowski . . . They obliged us to take into consideration the 'invisible': Why are you doing theatre?"

Dr. Suresh Awasthi: "Actor training is a complex problem. Paradoxically, ours is a tradition where you can't think of an untrained dancer or musician performing on stage, but we've been performing with untrained actors for over a century. Today, the training given in drama schools is far behind in sensitivity, when you compare it with the work of some of the troupes in India. Theatre now is becoming very, very regional—which offers signs of hope. The work of the 1960's was labelled: 'the search for identity'; of the 1970's: 'the search for roots.' The regional groups are also evolving their own training methods which have primacy over rehearsals. This kind of training is taking place outside the confines of drama schools, and it is a very good thing."

Ratan Thiyam: "I was a student at the National School of Drama from 1970-74, when Alkazi was the director. The training was very western in technique. I was one of the earliest students from the Manipur region. When I returned to Manipur, I couldn't apply most of what I had learnt. Then I started working with Manipuri actors . . . We need good teachers who can understand the actors—who are prepared to 'encounter' the actors. The selection process in the National School of Drama is wrong. The student never comes up with the right qualifications or a good grounding of his own regional theatre."

Georg Lechner: "How can you have a National School of Drama when you have no national theatre but only very good regional theatres?"

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Meera Syal was introduced by Farrukh Dhondy as "one of the most talented Asian actresses in Britain."

Meera Syal: "What I know about theatre could go onto the back of a postage stamp. I am a provincial in this company—a baby, in the sense that I've been in theatre for only two years. I don't belong to any theatrical tradition . . . I spent most of these two years trying to find some work . . . I can only talk of my experiences as a British-Asian actress and writer.

"In college, the syllabus was Eurocentric. We didn't study African or Asian theatre. After college I wrote to several repertory groups but didn't hear from any in reply. When I followed it up, I was told that at that moment they didn't have any roles for an Asian actress. It meant that my sphere of work was very limited. Where was my training ground? The mainstream theatre was almost impossible for me. There is now quite an argument in progress about integrated casting—which means that any actor can play any part, regardless of colour. But British directors rather underestimate their audience's intelligence. They

believe that as soon as a black face comes on stage, there has to be a reason for that face to be there. They're not there as performers, they're there to make a political statement about what it means to be a black and in Britain. So our art as a performer is always secondary to the political statement we are supposed to be making. The other avenue open to us is political theatre—with a small 'p'. This can range from theatre in education to actually left-wing groups. It's very good because they have a definite political stance. They don't particularly experiment with different forms . . . the politics comes first and the form is fitted round the politics. We're asked to play victims of racial attacks or trade-union leaders because that's a positive image. In other words, we're still asked to play roles that will in some way reflect a facet of the Asian experience. So again, that's limiting.

"I suppose the more lucrative area of work open to us at the moment includes the socio-realistic roles that are coming up in television. Even here the roles offered are limited. But at least they grudgingly accept us.

"If there's one burden the black actor has to bear in Britain, it's the continual expectation that he is there to make statements, to show people what we think about being black. Not to be, not to act—that's the great burden.

"Now black actors in Britain are getting together, forming their own groups, writing their own work. Our play *Vigilantes* was picketed by the more political members of the Asian community because they felt that it showed Asian men in a bad light . . . it didn't matter that it was the truth. I want the freedom to play classical roles, to play any role, regardless of my cultural background, and also to play roles that are written about my life in Britain . . . because as far as I am concerned there are a lot of stories to be told and I can't understand why this exploration which is going on inside our heads is not being represented dramatically.



A scene from One of Us

That's what the Asian Co-operative Theatre (ACT) is trying to do . . . One can't wait for the opportunities, one has to create one's own space in which to discover what one wants to say.

"There are many plays written by Black American and Caribbean writers. We have a language problem. Some of the finest Indian plays could be staged in Britain but we don't have access to good translations and the Indian forms are as alien to us as they are to the Britishers."

Then she explained the genesis of *One of Us:* "I haven't experimented with form because I have no experience yet—mine is more a theatre of reaction than a theatre of creation . . . We're a new generation—we're unique. It's only wise and hopeful that we bring forward some unique theatrical form to reflect that."

Asked whether the success of Ben Kingsley helped to further the cause of Asian actors in Britain, Meera Syal replied: "People like him or Sayeed Jaffrey, or Zia Mohiuddin are fantastic actors and should have been on the national theatre long ago, but, after *Gandhi,* they are definitely getting noticed."

She was also asked if the audience for their plays consisted largely of Asians. She replied that that depended on the area where they were playing. Dr. Suresh Awasthi said that his experience was that Asians did not go to see Asian performances.

Sunday, 19th January

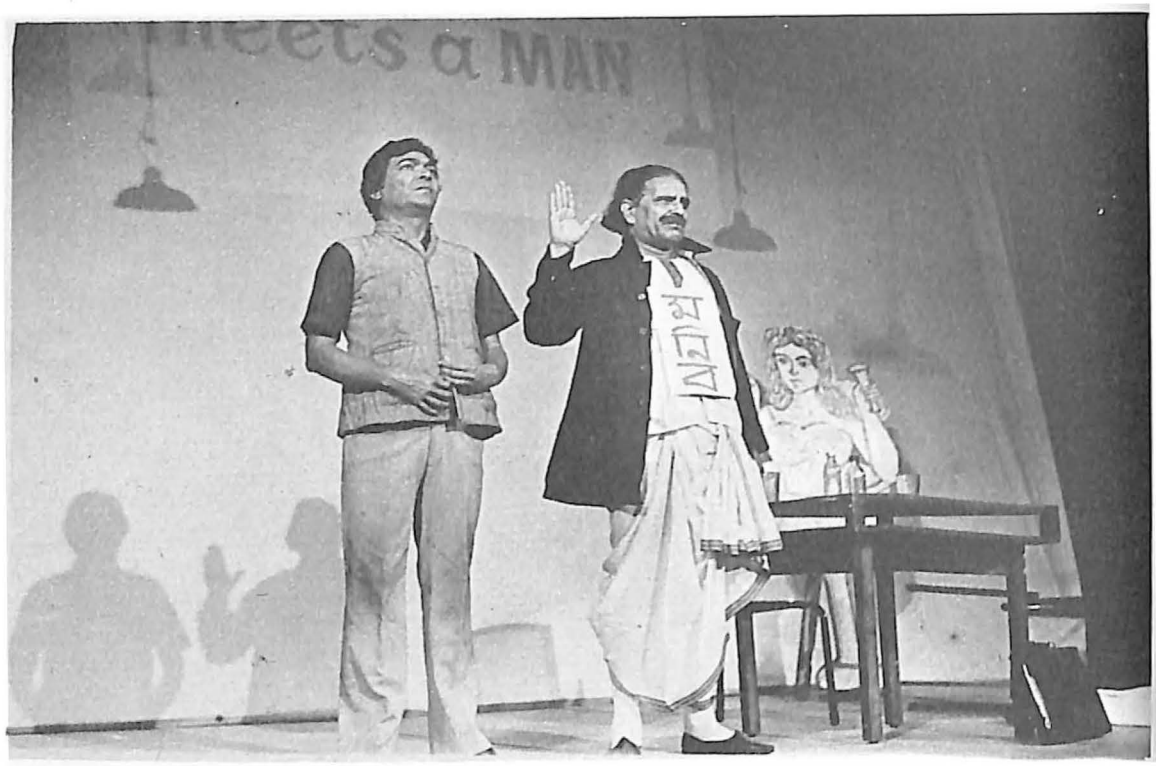
Dr. Georg Lechner introduced Sekhar Chatterjee as a director responsible for introducing Brecht and Franz Xaver Kroetz to Bengali audiences.

Sekhar Chatterjee: "As Peter Brook remarked, 'Brecht is the key figure of our times. All theatre work, at some point, starts or returns to his statements and achievements.'

"In West Bengal, Brecht's Marxist approach to social problems and his concern for the exploited breathed life back into the Left Theatre which had reached a dead end. In the sixties, it was facing tough competition from the folk theatre, or *Jatra,* and the commercial theatre. The *Jatra* repertoire began to include plays on political topics, and even Brechtian themes. In the seventies, after a spurt of enthusiasm for Brecht, whose name became synonymous with the Left Theatre, there was an equally sudden decrease of interest. This phenomenon needs some probing.

"The first time I took a Brecht play to a wider rural audience with *The Resistable Rise of Arturo Ui,* they could not relate to the play, since its historical context was totally unfamiliar to them. With *Puntila,* I wanted to make the production as simple and comprehensible as possible, always keeping in mind Brechtian dialectics. To keep the class questions always in focus, I put two stickers under the jackets of Puntila and Matti—one reading 'the Master' and the other 'The Servant'. I made Puntila wear a cap, which resembled the one worn by our ruling party leaders, but with a different colour, symbolising religion.

"Brecht confronts Aristotelian drama theories, 'the theatre of events', with 'the theatre of story-telling'. He wants the ideas of struggle to be as interesting



A scene from Puntila

as the emotions of struggle. The spectator should leave the play with the seeds of a new intellectual conviction planted in him. Brecht achieved this by structuring his plays in such a way that the spectators could form their own conclusions. However, our audiences, unused to react in this way and shaped as they are by traditional forms of theatre, accept no more and no less than the intended message of the play. We directors, too, should avoid the needless intellectualizing of our productions. If the theatre is to be instructive, it must also amuse; and insofar as it is good theatre, it will afford pleasure. I realise that Brecht's laconic style, and particularly the songs, are difficult to translate. I think the right approach is to adapt Brecht to suit different people of different countries. Though this may seem sacrilegious, it is the only way to keep him 'in circulation'.

"As the central problem or message are as crucial as textual resemblance, the best solution is perhaps an adaptation which can reach the uninitiated masses in a familiar art form."

Rustom Bharucha said: "It is a tricky problem as to how one adapts Brecht. On the one hand, one could commercialise him, as many Bengali productions have done. I don't think you are advocating a commercial Brecht, but a popular Brecht. But that balance is very different. Audience response in Bengal is not very conducive to Brecht's theories. The energy of the *Jatra* or the other forms is more suited to Bengali audiences . . . We need Brecht . . . but how do we find the balance between being true to Brecht in our own way, in the Indian context, without succumbing to commercial pressures? Maybe *Puntila* will illuminate this."

Sekhar Chatterjee felt that the problem of commercialism was always there and it was not special to Brecht.

Asked which of Brecht's plays he considered most suited for adapting to Indian conditions, he replied: "*Bread Shop.* My production was very well received in the districts. It is our responsibility to make Brecht intelligible to our audiences. His theories of alienation, etc. are meant to make his work more accessible to people."

Rustom Bharucha: "The *Jatra* had two conventions that are intrinsically Brechtian: the *Juri* and the *Vivek*. *Juri,* the singers who interrupt the action with their comments, and the *Vivek* or commentator. Have you ever thought of using certain elements within the *Jatra* form to popularise Brecht? Why not turn to the *Jatra* and make the necessary adaptations?"

Dr. Georg Lechner felt one must decide how many spectators one wants to reach with Brecht: a few and remain pure, or the many, and be commercialised!

* * *

The participants from the USSR included Prof. I. G. Sharoev, Producer of the Stanislavsky Theatre, Mrs. M. A. Grenkova, Secretary of the Association of Theatrical Artists and Musicians, and Mr. V. Y. Shubovich, Head of the Board of Theatre Societies of the Ukraine.

Sharoev outlined the problems of contemporary theatre in Russia: "This kind of meeting is very useful for us, for we can exchange ideas, opinions and experiments in theatre. It is of importance not to search for those things which divide us but for those that are common. This helps to destroy the barriers of non-understanding, of non-knowledge. We consider art-theatre as a big stimulus in our complicated contemporary life . . . It has a great emotional influence on people and acts as the dynamism of change in their inner life.

"An artiste should be dedicated to humanity, peace and social progress. Theatre is creative work . . . There is the dual personality of the actor and the character he's representing. Theatre can be a dialogue with the spectator . . . and through the spectator with reality . . ."

He spoke of the influence of Stanislavsky, Meyerhold and other Russian theatre personalities.

"Stanislavsky was deeply impressed by *yoga,* by the concentration it achieved." He added: "We have many experiments being staged now. Attention is being paid to the creation of small theatres. We have young dramatists called the New Wave in the Soviet theatre. In the various regions of the U.S.S.R., each region has its own theatre or theatres."

At this point there was a demonstration given by two of their artistes hailing from different parts of the Soviet Union.

Dr. Suresh Awasthi wanted to know whether there were any notes available for Tairov's production of *Shakuntala* in 1914.

The answer was: "There's a book written by Tairov himself and a good deal of information about the production. It is said that *Shakuntala* was one of his greatest productions."

Alaknanda Samarth wanted to know about various aspects of training in Russia.

The Soviet director replied that there were many institutes training actors. All have the same syllabus. Actors are trained for four years and directors for five years. Training is free for both categories and they are even given a stipend if they study well.

To a question about whether works from one language are translated into another within the various theatres in the Soviet Union, and if the classical works are translated and presented in other theatres, the representative from the Ukraine replied: "There are ninety theatres in the Ukraine province. They use both Russian and Ukrainian. All kinds of plays are translated and presented there. Festivals are held at which groups from other parts of the country are also invited. Plays by Western dramatists, too, are widely performed."

* * *

This session was devoted largely to a discussion of *Request Concert,* staged by Alyque Padamsee on the previous day, and the project on the play, as planned by Rustom Bharucha and Manuel Lutgenhorst, both of whom "are encounters personified."

Rustom Bharucha: "We are in the process of working on it. We have been working on it for ten days and will continue to do so for three years. I saw a production of the play in New York four years ago. It was one of the most enthralling of theatre experiences. It starred Joan Mcintosh. It was a silent play but the gestures had a resonance of a kind which I had never seen in Western theatre before. The gestures operated on many, many levels—personal, public. A play not about a lonely woman, but about the world of a lonely woman. I realised that if the production had to be done in India, it would have to be done differently. The suicide—not as a melodramatic gesture, but as one of protest.

"Later, I met Manuel in New York at a friend's place. He wanted to do *Request Concert* in Tokyo, I wanted to do it in Calcutta. The aim is to adapt and stage the play in nine Asian cities over a period of three years, to create a production afresh in each city, and then, at the end of the three years, to have a simultaneous video presentation, during which each woman would react to the same thing but differently."

Manuel Lutgenhorst said: "English is a second language. So I became accustomed to using my ears and eyes mainly because the language was rather difficult. I am basically a theatre designer, but have now extended my career into writing and directing. I like *Request Concert* because I understood it even though it was in English."

Rustom Bharucha: "I was drawn to this play because it was silent. It liberates me. We are not travelling with a production because I don't like cultural tourism. We want to go to these places with the text and work with people from that city, so that we are not directing a play, but initiating it. We might also be engaged spectators.

"I have a great respect for differences and I am scared of unity. Unity is an abstraction for me. I think we have to work towards unity but through differences. I want to believe in these connections . . . but I don't want to assume they exist. I

want to look for them and examine the differences . . . not to alienate, but to respect and understand each other better.

Manuel Lutgenhorst: "I was strangely touched by yesterday's adaptation. When is a piece adapted and when is it merely inspired by another?

"I saw only one or two similarities with the original—such as the title and the name of the author.

"Kroetz is showing how ritualised life is, and you don't even realise it. Yesterday's piece was very one-dimensional. It was just inspired by the original."

Rustom Bharucha: "The written text is not an imposition . . . it makes our creativity more dynamic."

The production roused different reactions among the participants.

Alyque Padamsee: "Loneliness in the West is more physical. I could see in Indian women a certain barrenness which I also found in Kroetz's play. Her only meaningful act comes at the end of the play. I admit I was more inspired by the play than intent on adapting it. I changed 'evening' to 'morning' in my production because I was trying to depict the Indian woman in her situation today. Her final act is the only significant action. Her suicide is both surprising and not surprising. What is surprising is that she does it at that time, but she would have done it at any time."

Kavita Nagpal: "I couldn't accept the idea of the battered woman. Also, there's an expression of resentment throughout the play which is perhaps not there in the original."



A scene from Request Concert

One participant wanted to know: "If you can't be faithful to a playwright, why do his play at all?"

D. G. Nadkarni said: "The play didn't move me at all—except for the good acting by Smita Patil."

Rustom Bharucha considered it an overwhelmingly naturalistic production and he didn't think that Kroetz was a naturalist.

Alyque Padamsee: "The detailing itself was part of the stylisation. Basically, I took Kroetz's play as a jumping-off point. What could I see in the play that had an Indian relevance? That was my main concern."

Manuel Lutgenhorst said that one should mention, in future productions of this play, that it is inspired by, and not adapted from, Kroetz.

Sekhar Chatterjee mentioned that Kroetz was adamant and rigid about changes made in his play during adaptations. He himself had done four of Kroetz's plays—*Request Concert, The Nest, Upper Austria, Neither Fish Nor Fowl*... Whenever you adapt, there are always problems. Shakespeare is done in so many ways... This kind of experimentation extends the boundaries of theatre and there should be no taboo against that."

Alyque Padamsee: "Is the director in theatre a re-creator or an interpreter? I believe in the director as creator."

Monday, January 20

Georg Lechner, introducing Jean-Claude Carrière, a close collaborator of Peter Brook on the *Mahabharata,* expressed the deep interest of all the participants in what happens to a great theatrical work of the East when it goes West.

Jean-Claude Carrière: "This is the first time I am in India without Peter Brook, so I feel like an orphan... It is difficult to talk about the show without the show... It is not totally finished yet. We are working on it still... We all live surrounded by walls. Some of them we know, like the walls between people and countries. Some of these walls are extremely difficult to break down because they are invisible; among them, the cultural walls are probably the hardest to pull down.

"The *Mahabharata* is totally unknown in Western countries—except maybe to specialists. We first encountered the *Mahabharata* in 1974; we were totally ignorant of it before. I have known Peter Brook for more than twenty years. When we first met in the 1960's, Peter was already one of the most brilliant directors in the theatre. In 1970, he gave up everything and got a subsidy from the French Government to stay in Paris. He decided to stop all celebrated activity and founded the International Centre of Theatre Research in Paris. He began working with unknown actors from all over the world, initially doing very strange exercises. I was curious about the work, so I used to go there once or twice a week. Then I began working with them... There is something in common between different cultures, including the attitudes, the gestures, the way of acting, of speaking, that could make a show in common possible. It was an attempt to get to something that could be common in human nature. At

that time we were groping in the dark. After three years, Peter Brook said: 'Enough of loneliness, of solitude.'

"At that time, we came across the Theatre Bouffe du Nord—an abandoned theatre in Paris. It was exactly what we were looking for. Our first production there was in September 1974—*Timon of Athens*. Then there was *The Ik* adapted from *The Mountain People* by Colin Turnbull.

"At that time, we met Philippe Lavastine, the Sanskrit scholar, and he told us stories from the *Mahabharata*. We felt that behind the situation of the *Bhagavad Geeta* lay a play. We asked, 'Would you tell us a little more about what is the situation? Who is this character? Why Arjuna? Who really is Arjuna? Why is Krishna driving Arjuna's chariot? Tell us this, because then we can see what dramatic material there is out of which we can, maybe, make a play.' After some sessions like this, Peter and I made a solemn decision that one day we would do it. But we would do it when it was ready. It would be as long as was necessary . . . . I started meeting Lavastine and taking notes. I met him and other people for about a year, asking questions and writing notes. After more than a year, Peter asked me to write a play, from the stories, just to see if a play was possible. I wrote a play that was about two hundred pages long using a story-teller. The result was encouraging.

"We stopped working on the *Mahabharata* for a year . . . We did one show, which was another step, but in a totally different way. We worked on the setting and production of *The Conference of the Birds*. In January 1979, we were invited to the Festival at Avignon in July. We had six months to prepare and we had absolutely nothing . . . . *The Conference of the Birds* is a Sufi poem written in the twelfth century by Fariduddin Attar, one of the finest Persian poets. It is an allegorical story about birds looking for a lost kingdom. Some of the actors knew the poem . . . and we had already done some exercises based on the theme of the birds. So in January, Peter asked me to write a play, a short play lasting one hour, fifteen minutes and based on it. And we did the play within six months. The response was fantastic. Behind the experience of the birds we kept thinking and dreaming about the *Mahabharata*. We had used Korean and Balinese masks in *The Conference of the Birds* and we realised that Western audiences were getting ready to receive something from the East. Not *India* in particular, but the *East*. We used oriental techniques in *The Conference of the Birds* but it was not located in a precise culture.

After that, we went to the *Mahabharata* epic itself—the poem. We didn't want it to be too literary or didactic . . . Peter Brook read it in English and I read it in French. We are lucky to have an almost complete translation in French. The *Bhagavad Geeta,* published in English in the eighteenth century, was immediately translated into French, before the French Revolution. In the nineteenth century, a Swiss national tried to translate the *Mahabharata* into French but it was not completed. In the mid-nineteenth century, an unknown French scholar decided to translate the complete *Mahabharata* into French. He didn't know how to sell it, but he sent out letters to libraries and received two hundred orders. He worked on the *Mahabharata* for more than twenty-five years but died before he could finish it. Then another friend took it up and he, too, died . . . .

"What we called 'our great reading' took a year and a half. Separately at first, then together, we finished reading it, and compared the translations. We consulted Sanskrit scholars to find out the precise meaning of this or that phrase, and also what we should keep or not keep. After seven months, we already had a selection. I started looking for the French words I could use. If I introduced the word 'sin', I would bring Catholicism into the epic, and so on. I had to be very careful . . . I decided to use a few key Sanskrit words such as *dharma, mantra, kshatriya,* as I realised that no French equivalents could be found for them. I had to introduce new scenes, which were not in the original, to explain these words.

"I visited India several times with Peter Brook, and the musicians, costume designers, actors. We didn't know India before. We wanted to get in touch with all the Indian theatrical traditions in order to be able to represent them in the *Mahabharata* today. We were surprised to find that, in India, characters from the *Mahabharata* are still alive.

"Our last trip to India was in 1985. In the middle of the rehearsals we took our twenty-eight actors to India . . . From Bombay to Mangalore, to Udipi, to see the *Yakshagana.* The actors were directly plunged into the energy of the *Yakshagana.* Then we moved further south and travelled up the east coast. The first time we played the *Mahabharata* was in India—in a forest near Madurai. We visited two temples in the hills. Peter Brook sent all the actors off to listen to and absorb the sounds and atmosphere of an Indian forest. We had instructions to pick up any object that caught our fancy and bring it back . . . All these objects we put on the ground at the foot of the tree . . . and we started doing our different exercises . . . Peter asked us each to say a few words about India, making a sort of bouquet of words on India. All of a sudden a native woman came in, saw the scene, and lay down prostrate in front of the objects without saying a word, or looking at us. She was only interested in the fact that we had tried to make some kind of an offering. We were moved and kept silent. We then played the meeting between Shiva (Kirata) and Arjuna in the forest, and the people who passed by realised that we were performing the *Mahabharata* . . . .

"We knew that we wanted to keep all the possible elements of the *Mahabharata.* We didn't want *à priori* to get rid of anything. Very often I was tempted to start the play and move directly into the action, but for some reason it didn't work . . . I realised that it was trying to impose a Western form upon an Indian story. It was not an easy thing to do. For a long time I hesitated between different beginnings. Then one night I had an image of the Madurai temple in the afternoon and a child walking . . . The idea of having a child, a young boy, in the story had never occurred to me before . . . I saw the boy coming, saw him meeting Vyasa, an old man, and I saw the old man asking him 'Can you write?' The boy says, 'No! Why?' The old man replied, 'Because I have composed a great poem. I have composed everything but have not written down anything . . . I need somebody to write down what I know.' The boy says, 'What is your poem about?' The old man replies, 'It's about you.' When I found this, I had found the play. In the original, too, I realised later, there is a boy (the grandson of Arjuna) who is told the whole story of the *Mahabharata* by Vaishampayan, a disciple of Vyasa. I thought I had invented the boy, but, in fact, it was coming secretly from the *Mahabharata,* but in a slightly

different way . . . . When I found the relationship between Vyasa and the boy, I kept the boy for the whole play. Vyasa tells the boy, 'I am going to tell you why you are here and what happened to your family.' Then the family appears and the boy is constantly in contact with them and with his own long-dead ancestors. The relationship between Vyasa, the boy and Ganesha (who writes the play) is a triple relationship. There is also a secret contest between Vyasa, who is a man, and Ganesha, who is a god, about which one of the two invented the other one. That is a very strange triangle which gave me the three feet of the play. After eight or nine years of work on the *Mahabharata,* in one night I found it. That night I wrote twenty-five pages. We have made very few changes in the original draft. It took me about two years to write the whole play . . . We wanted as many cultures as possible to be involved in our *Mahabharata*. We wanted to develop our group of actors to add to the six or seven who were working with us, and who were already in *The Conference of the Birds*. We started looking all over the world for two years. I auditioned nearly four hundred actors myself, with Peter Brook watching. It was interesting not only to test the possibilities of the actors, but also the potentiality of the scenes. It was auditioning not only the actors but the lines, and Peter was watching both the play I was writing and the actors acting. I, too, was testing my own lines with actors unknown to me . . . trying to find out what works and what doesn't work.

"I already knew that the play, which was in three parts, would last eight to nine hours. I did a complete reading of the play on three different days to all the actors, myself playing all the characters . . . like a storyteller. Another purpose was to keep alive the vitality of the storytelling all the time, as in the poem. Vyasa was not talking to the audience directly in the play, as he does in the original. There is a go-between: the boy, linking the author and the audience. We had to recapture the mood of the original poem. Peter told the twenty-three actors and the five musicians that there is one storyteller with twenty-three mouths. The basic way of acting is that they are both acting and telling a story at the same time. This happens several times in the play.

"During the eight months of rehearsals, I continued working on the play with the actors . . . in the same way as I was writing when auditioning the actors. If there is a problem somewhere in the play, if the scene, the emotion is not right, the actor is the only one to feel it. Not even the writer or director can feel it. Peter Brook is always participating in the writing and I am always participating in the directing. There is no rupture and ours is a real collaboration. There is no need for an 'apartheid' between the actors and the director. Every day starts with about two hours of exercises—trying to establish something which is a way of being together. We know about one thousand exercises. After the first show in India, we played an hour of the beginning of the *Mahabharata* at the Lycée Montaigne before people who had never even heard of it before."

Georg Lechner: "We enjoyed your presentation because it followed the only style it could—the epic style."

Wolfram Mehring: "I saw two parts of the play in Frankfurt. I realised that it was unfinished—not in a negative sense but as something that one is always working on. This is the biggest success of the play. I got the impression that the cast of actors was not as strong as the direction or the adaptation.

The actors were not strong enough for us to forget the beautiful lines and direction."

Vijaya Mehta: "I saw it in July 1985 and it has not left me still. I made a marathon effort, because I felt it was my responsibility to share my experiences with Indian readers. So I made a few jottings. All I can say is that I was totally bowled over. An individual has the capacity to receive on various levels . . . for me, the *Mahabharata,* as I saw it, was such an experience, I can't define it clearly, except to say that what I received will always stay with me. The Asians, the Africans, the Balinese . . . can cope, with humour, beautifully . . . could it be because in their culture, their tradition, as in ours, the most profound statements are made in the most ordinary way? The total impact of the reverence, the faith with which it was done, means more to me than analysing."

Asked to elaborate on his technique as a writer, Carrière replied: "As a movie writer, I am used to writing anywhere. I don't need any special conditions to write . . . You have at a certain point to write with your actors, and then go back to your loneliness and work. The director and the writer are, in a very secret way, acting too. When you act a scene it's very easy to write it."

Carrière was asked to elaborate on what he meant when he said that characters in the epic are alive in India to this day.

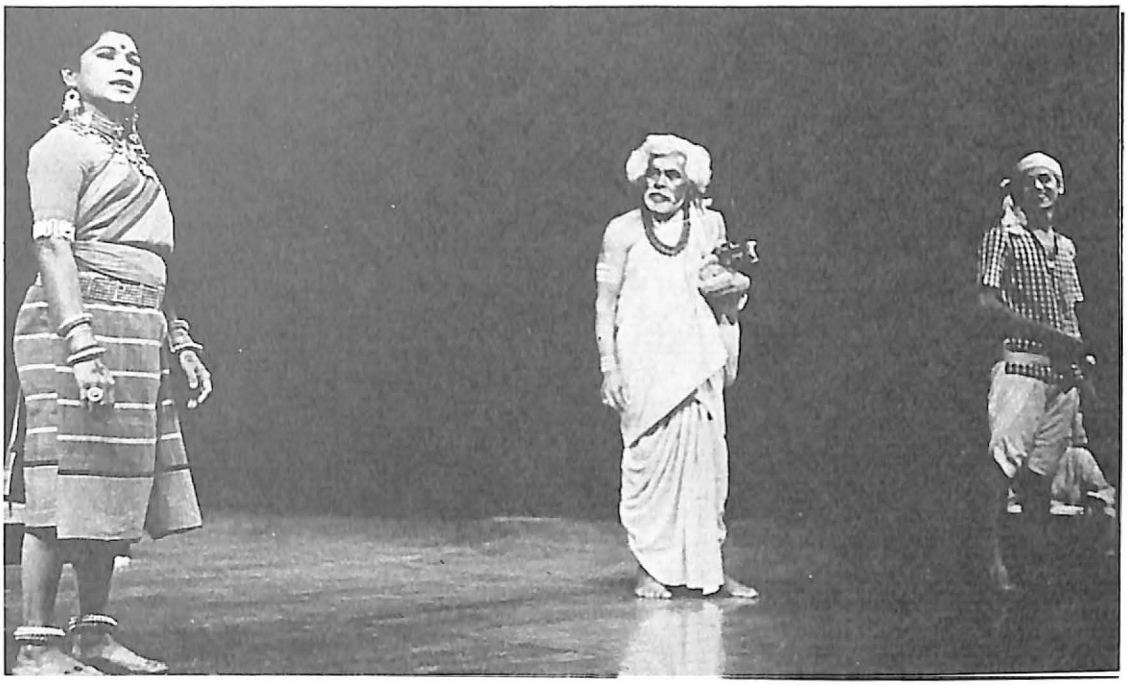
Carrière: "I was born in a country which has no myth. Till now the myths of India are alive . . . that is what I meant when I said the characters from the *Mahabharata* are still alive today. I will never forget what an Indian lady told me by way of explanation: a woman carries a baby for nine months which then has a lifetime of about eighty or ninety years. The *Mahabharata* was in conception for seven or eight centuries. You can imagine how long it is going to be alive."

Dr. Lechner said that it would be interesting to see how an Indian audience reacts to the *Mahabharata* when it comes to India, perhaps in 1987. He felt that a myth was also a religious reality for many Indians, the way it can't be for Western audiences.

Kavita Nagpal remarked that there was an Indian flavour to the costumes. Elements of Indian traditions were used. But she was happy to see that there was no attempt to 'Indianise' it.

* * *

Introducing Habib Tanvir, Dr. Suresh Awasthi said, "In 1954, he staged *Agra Bazar,* based on the life and works of the famous Urdu poet Nazir, of Agra. Prior to that, no playscript had been constructed in this manner—with a mix of folk and urban actors. This play was a kind of shock to traditionalists, like a fresh breeze. After four years, he did *Mrichchhakatikam* (The Toy Cart) in the *Nautanki* style. Again it shocked the critics. In 1958, Sanskrit drama was still considered the concern of historians, sociologists, not of theatre people. But Habib, by desecrating the classics, made them meaningful for us. He played a very vital pioneering role in putting theatre back into the *Natyashastra* tradition."



A scene from Charandas Chor

Habib Tanvir: "I worked for about eight years in the Indian People's Theatre Association before going abroad. I founded the Naya Theatre in Delhi in 1979. There is something in theatre which doesn't leave hold of me . . . I am with you on the limitless possibilities of theatre. We believe in authenticity. Given the anti-British sentiments of our younger days, we came to hate imitation. We derived inspiration from Stanislavsky, Chekov, Gorki, Tolstoy, and many of my colleagues and critics in Delhi, I find, are stuck where Ibsen was. This is not to say that Ibsen is limited but to get stuck with him is equally limiting. We passed through a very confused time in which we were not clear about whether we had or had not achieved freedom. This political phase had a cultural result. When it was clear that we had indeed won freedom, we began to realise that there are forces inside the house, inside the country, within ourselves and inside society which are inimical to the interests of the majority of the people . . .

"I find that those who are not educated in the formal sense, but truly educated in another sense, have a cultural continuity. They have open, receptive minds. They can imbibe such a lot, express, bring it all out. This is what the folk actor and the rural actor in many regions can do.

"It is often forgotten how fundamentally German Brecht is: his music, his colloquialisms, his language are all deeply connected with his and the country's past. It is that kind of authenticity which we have come to respect in theatre. This is 'authenticity'—being yourself first and foremost. Elitist interests, big monopoly interests are promoting culture. Now we want them to help us. We would like to lap up whatever they give us and, yet, boo at them. We feel not necessarily bound to respect them. But there is a contradiction here. When you take something, you fool yourself by suggesting that you may still be yourself;

you are, to that extent, losing ground. So it is a very delicate balance. Those who give all those awards, the pats on the back, feel that they may be able to suppress that most authentic voice! When people talk of folk theatre and its limitations, its inability to express adequately the contemporary situation, one wonders what is contemporary. Contemporary to whom and in relation to what? I find the villagers in India absolutely full of both dead stagnation and absolute creativity. Their ethos and their history are entirely different from the background of those living in towns and the friction between the two is what engages my mind.

"What is it in Greek theatre, in Shakespeare or in Molière that remains open to interpretation even today? What is authenticity and who can claim to be authentic?"

Dr. Lechner: "The 'element of surprise' in theatre has a very different meaning in the Indian context. The epic character of Indian theatre means that basic assumptions are clear and stories are explained in ever-new detail. There is no surprise in that sense. Our playwrights have a new surprise every minute. How do you react to this as an Indian?"

Habib Tanvir: "I find the meaning of the word 'surprise' as it is used here, very foreign to me . . . the 'surprise' you are talking about is a Western notion. I get a great surprise in the *Mahabharata,* particularly when one finds Duryodhana in Paradise at the end, because he is consistent in denying even a small piece of land to the Pandavas."

M. K. Raina: "When you talk of the élitist influence on culture, do you mean to say that encounters such as these between the East and the West, too, have such an element in them?"

Habib Tanvir: "I feel this élitist influence exists in India . . . I have been watching some people going right down the drain under the influence of patronage."

Tuesday, January 21

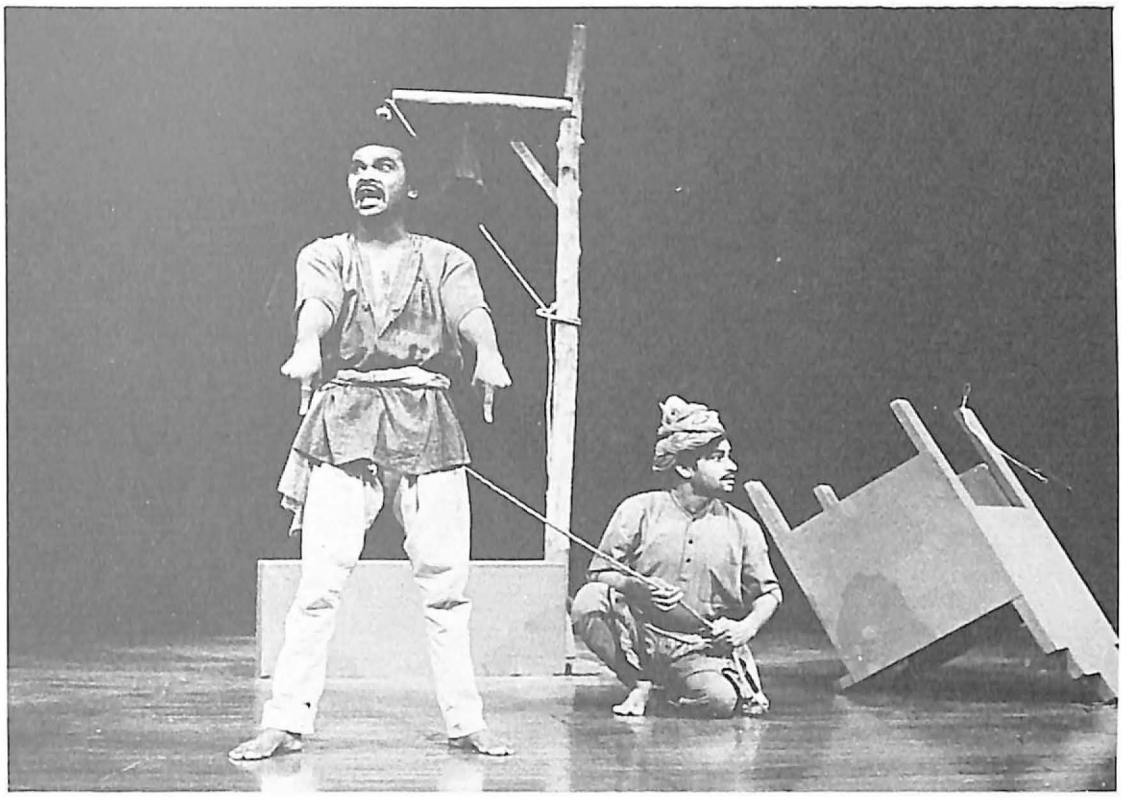
Dr. Lechner described Fritz Bennewitz as 'a living encounter' between GDR and India. He has realised 'encounter' projects with Vijaya Mehta and with B. V. Karanth.

Fritz Bennewitz: "Brechtian style—all talk of this kills the director's own style. There is a concept of Brecht but nothing like a Brechtian style . . .

"One should strive to be as close to Brecht as possible but, at the same time, to create an indigenous product . . . . In an Indian production, the play springs out of the music. In our productions, the music is external. You cannot transplant forms as though they are leaves of trees. The forms are the trees themselves, and if they don't yield results, it may be because they are barren or because we are barren."

B. V. Karanth explained the work of the Rang Mandal. "In our repertory most of the actors are not really trained as the National School of Drama students are. For me, folk theatre is not folk theatre or a separate entity, and I have never felt the contradictions between village and city life.

"I presented Brecht's *The Caucasian Chalk Circle (Insaf ka Ghera)* in Hindi, because I felt it was very near to an Indian situation.



A scene from Insaf Ka Ghera

"Now when trying to bring *Pandvani* on the stage, music should not be decorative, but interpretative."

M. K. Raina: "Has the Rang Mandal succeeded in regenerating the theatre movement in Madhya Pradesh, or in presenting the work of any new playwrights in the State?"

B. V. Karanth: "We did conduct a workshop for playwrights in Bhopal, but it was not a very successful experiment."

Dr. Lechner asked Fritz Bennewitz about the problems he faced when he adapted *Shakuntala* and *Hayavadana* for East German audiences. How did his actors react to the productions?

Fritz Bennewitz: "My job in this venture was that of a consultant. The concept of *Shakuntala* changes under European conditions. Initially, it is mainly the exotic quality of the production which attracts the audience . . . Later they get involved in the story. An Indian audience would never clap after the traditional *puja* is done. A German audience applauds with tremendous enthusiasm. It is an ongoing process."

Jabbar Patel: "Uptil now, most of the Indian plays you have staged there have been classical plays. I want to know whether there is any presentation in your country of modern Indian theatre."

Fritz Bennewitz: "My first step was to introduce classical plays to our audiences. Later, when I tried bringing over contemporary Indian plays, I did

not get a single play. As a substitute, we did Tagore's *Post-Box*. We are searching now for a genuine contemporary Indian theme . . . not just plays. I would like my Indian friends to help me find it."

Jabbar Patel: "It is high time that one turned one's attention to contemporary Indian and world theatre, because, during the last ten years, exchange has been merely confined to classics. Now we would like to see something new and contemporary from your country and hope you do the same with contemporary Indian theatre in your country."

Girish Karnad: "What is relevant to Indians may not necessarily be relevant to your audiences and vice versa.

"Of some of your experiences and insights gained while producing Brecht in India, have you been able to introduce them back into the GDR productions?"

Fritz Bennewitz: "The experience has become part of my identity and I can't separate it from the play itself . . . ."

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This session was devoted to an Open Forum on *Brecht—Reception in India.*

Panelists: P. L. Deshpande, Georg Lechner, Fritz Bennewitz, Sekhar Chatterjee, M. K. Raina.

Dr. Lechner introduced the subject. "A great humanist, Brecht challenges us in a deeper way. As a student of philosophy, I consider Brecht to be the one man contributing to the question of what man finally would be in the future. His main approach to everything is to doubt . . ."

Farrukh Dhondy: "When I see Brecht in Britain, it seems to me that Brecht is hitting politically at much larger and eternal political verities: the judges are wrong . . . the poor are good, sometimes bad, the rich are nasty, the soldiers behave in an indisciplined way, the government is usually corrupt, and so on. The truths are being transmitted to an audience which already knows them.

"I wonder whether there is any way to make a Brecht production or, for that matter, a production of any play from outside the borders of India, more specific to the very circumstances . . . naming names etc."

Fritz Bennewitz: "Brecht doesn't just make political statements. If the government is corrupt, his plays try to show why it is so, or they challenge you to ask—'Why?' I think it is much more subtle."

Girish Karnad: "*Arturo Ui*—in ten years, everyone in India will understand the play much better."

M. K. Raina related his experience while staging *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* in the villages of the north.

Sekhar Chatterjee: "The *Jatra* form, I found, has succeeded in bringing characters such as Lenin etc. to life for the masses. Most traditional plays have failed to do this."

P. L. Deshpande: "I feel that *Arturo Ui,* for instance, could be done in the open-air *Jatra* style without any problems whatsoever."

K. N. Panikkar: "I feel most of our audiences do not understand Brecht because of the structure, the format . . . I could not understand *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for years, so I took it upon myself to break up the structure entirely into a narrative . . . I had the Grusha story and the Azdak story going on simultaneously on the stage . . . I found that I understood the play better and so did the audience. I wonder how far this is possible?"

Fritz Bennewitz: "I feel it depends on the audience . . . I would never do it, not because I am afraid of committing a sacrilege against Brecht."

Eugenio Barba: "Political plays don't exist. Only the context makes a play political or otherwise. *Waiting for Godot* is not a political play . . . but once, in America, students were arrested for performing *Waiting for Godot.*"

Fritz Bennewitz: "*Puntila* . . . I think one has to know where, in the play, to find the system that is corrupt and not just the man . . . *Puntila* is a man of epic dimensions."

Habib Tanvir: "In Karanth's presentation of *Insaf Ka Ghera* there are subtler forms of suppression of the people. The use of the Bundeli dialect in the play by urban actors is not only an aesthetic offence because of the manner in which the dialect is spoken, but it also smacks of a subtle form of exploitation of the rest of the tribals . . . because they are getting alienated from their culture."

M. K. Raina: "The same things happen when handicrafts from villages come to the cities and are commercialised . . . that, too, is a form of exploitation."

P. L. Deshpande: "When I read the *Three Penny Opera,* I could see my *tamasha,* my metropolitan culture, the underworld, the goondas . . . and I thought I could present it as it was to my people. Brecht's plays are so very near to our *tamasha,* that there is a sense of liberation when you are doing the play. There, too, we encountered opposition from the Brecht *pandit*-s.

"I felt a close affinity with the people represented in the play . . . I also gave more accent on the political implications of the play. The audience felt that Brecht had written a Marathi play—it didn't give the impression of being a translation. The presentation was criticised because it was entertaining . . . I don't find anything wrong with this, because Brecht himself has said 'a play has to be playful.' "

Dr. Lechner: "The theatre of Brecht in Germany is a different theatre, it's a new theatre. Are you anywhere near developing a new theatre after Brecht in India? Personally, I don't see much evidence of it . . . yet."

Fritz Bennewitz: "These experiments by various directors represent, in fact, steps in just this direction."

Girish Karnad: "Two things need to be differentiated: the impact of Brecht's productions, and the influence of Brecht. In the 1960's, when we were first initiated into Brecht, our misunderstanding of him was very important, in that it gave rise to productions such as *Hayavadana* and *Jo Kumaraswami.*"

M. K. Raina: "Brecht's 'invasion' of India, I think, has come to an end . . . a new generation of writers, directors and actors is coming to the fore. We need a new consciousness among human beings."

Habib Tanvir: "I think the consumer society needs a set-up of competent directors, actors, theatres—even somewhat radical theatre—and I feel we are supporting this in a silent way."

Georg Lechner: "I think that's why we discussed Brecht in the first place . . . perhaps, Brecht has an answer to this question—maybe not a concrete one—but a hidden answer."

Wednesday, January 22

Dr. Georg Lechner introduced Girish Karnad and said that he was there in his capacity as a contemporary playwright.

Girish Karnad: "It's a truism that whatever a playwright wants to say, he should convey through his plays. The historical context in which we were writing (those of us who were writing after the post-independence era) was very important.

"When I was twenty-two years old, I got a scholarship to go abroad . . . a choice like that was fraught with tensions in the family. While preparing to leave, I suddenly found myself writing a play . . . I was surprised, because I wanted to be a poet. I had prepared to write in English but I found myself writing in Kannada. While the myth was Indian, in form, it was inspired by Anouilh's *Antigone.*

"I found that, while many Indian playwrights derive their material from their mythology and traditions, for the form, they often turn to Western models. Modern Indian theatre started only a hundred years ago in Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

"The Parsi theatre of those days has been swallowed by the Hindi commercial film. When I started writing, the 'Parsi' tradition in Karnataka had died down, leaving just a few decadent plays. The socio-realistic plays of the early 20's and 30's were created by playwrights who turned to Western society.

"In the case of *Hayavadana,* the idea for the play was born out of a conversation which I had with B. V. Karanth, regarding the use of masks. I told him the story of Mann's *The Transposed Heads* and said it would be a good idea for a film. He said: 'No, it would make a marvellous play.' That started me thinking about the endless possibilities of the theme. The use of masks was not a stylistic device, but a genuine case of transposed heads, and what better way was there to begin?

"There is a difference in the way in which masks are used in the East and in the West. In the West, mask and face are always contrasted. In traditional Indian theatre, the mask is only the face writ large. It is a kind of expansion of the characteristics for the stage.

"I was tremendously excited by the possibilities of folk theatre. The rich textures of Indian folk forms made possible the use of various technical devices . . . . Most of the people who used these forms initially have now gone back to the three-walled living room . . . it has been a sort of indulgence.

"The question of form is not only related to the content but also to the question of commitment, of how to make it relevant to one's audience.

"Some of us contemporary playwrights are still searching, unsuccessfully, for a relevant form, and that is why some of us have turned to films."

Suresh Awasthi: "I think people are still writing plays—only maybe they are moving in different directions. Richer plays and a greater variety are now to be seen."

M. K. Raina: "We can't wait for a playwright to write a play. We now have groups writing plays."

W. Eysselinck: "What features would you like to see in theatre traditions in order to encourage young playwrights? We seem to think a play happens but, in fact, it is carefully nurtured . . . what kind of forum do we have now? I am sorry but, for our playwrights, there is no theatre, no national theatre."

B. V. Karanth: "Raina's statement is very true. We can't afford to wait for a playwright to write a play during which all our theatre activities will cease."

Girish Karnad: "For almost one thousand years since Sanskrit drama died, India had no major playwright."

Farrukh Dhondy: "Talking about the redundancy of a playwright, in the U.K. and in Europe, at least, I think there is a definite consciousness in the minds of the audience about the difference in plays written by a playwright and those created by a collection of people. I find that it is only a play written by a playwright, and dialectically rehearsed with the group and rewritten, that can extend argumentative, logical, dialectical theatre . . . Other kinds of plays seem to be stuck within the consensus of thinking of a group of people. A playwright's play is capable of telling the audience something new. The collective's play reinforces what they already know and makes visible what was perhaps on the tips of their tongues."

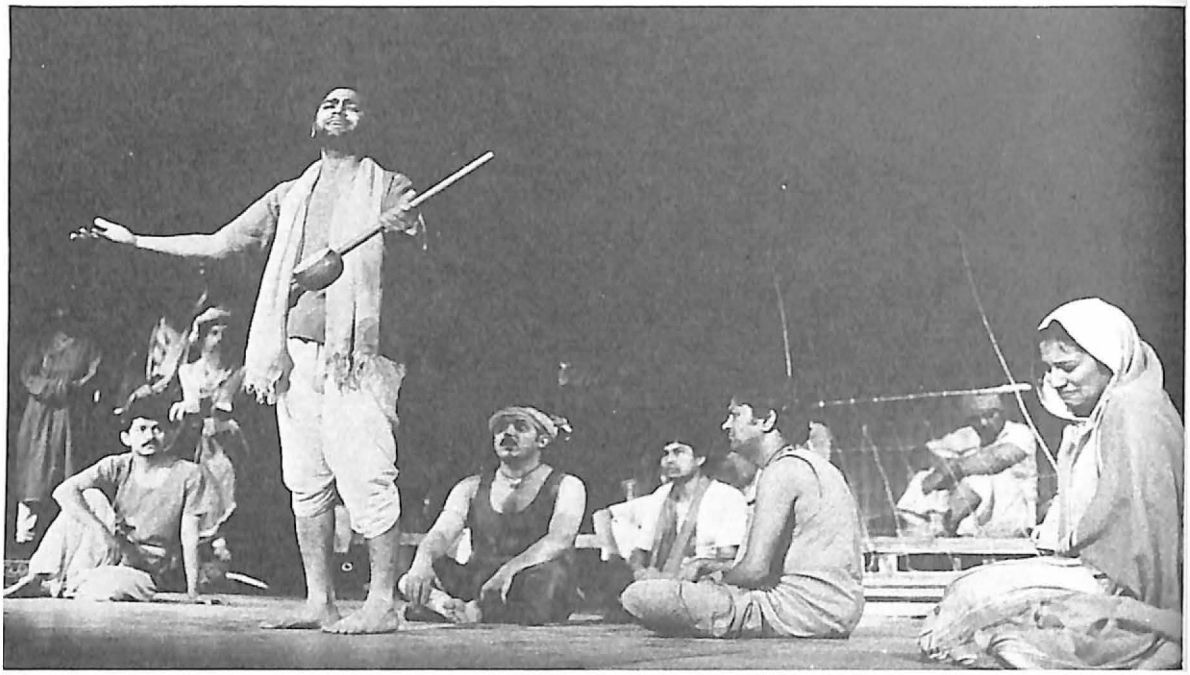
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M. K. Raina: "I was interested in theatre right from my school days, and received a state scholarship to the National School of Drama (NSD). I had not read any plays before. At the NSD I didn't understand what was happening. Then I acted in Shanta Gandhi's *Jasma Odan* which, I think, was my first exposure to traditional Indian theatre.

"While studying, I began to wonder about the relevance of the plays we were studying. I was introduced to Brecht by Carl Weber. That was the time of Bangladesh and Vietnam. Our small group did street plays mainly in protest. After I finished studying at the NSD, I wanted to return to Kashmir, my home state . . . which then, as now, was in a state of turmoil . . . I am still confused about my problems . . . am still searching . . .

"I did theatre workshops in Delhi for a while . . . staged *Lower Depths* which was liked . . . got assignments from various universities. The more empty space I have, the better I enjoy working in it. My concept of theatre is that one should be able to perform anywhere, in any costumes and with minimum props.

"I will not accept the heavy tradition of centuries . . . I will use it as a device, but not only as a form. Whatever experiments I have seen have merely been in the nature of decorative devices.



A scene from Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein

"Urban theatre people often use folk elements in their plays but without paying any attention to their genesis or other aspects . . . To me this is the worst form of exploitation.

"There are two ways for a contemporary, urban theatre worker to interact with tradition: (1) Enter the milieu of the form, totally immersing oneself into the lives of the people, eating, living and working with them and attempting to reach the soul of their expression and thus understand the basis of their cultural expression. An example of this is the work of Habib Tanvir. (2) Someone in an urban environment, with a different rhythm but with a serious interest in theatre, can use the traditional forms only as devices, perhaps to turn them inside out. The majority of us belong to this category.

"If a traditional form fails to survive the test of time, it should be allowed to die."

Thursday, January 23

Meera Syal introduced Farrukh Dhondy. She first heard of him through his short stories. Later, he became a sort of spokesman for the Asian community in Britain.

Farrukh Dhondy: "It is sometimes argued that Indians came to Britain because there was a colonial connection, that they looked upon Britain as the land of Shakespeare and so on. It is an appealing argument until you think about the Gulf. If one looks at it from that perspective, it is very clear that the second half of the twentieth century has become most significantly the era of international mobility of working classes. The Indians, Bangla Deshis and Pakistanis, who went to

Britain, did so because they thought they would have a better living. And also, in all these ex-colonial countries, there has been a fundamental failure of the nationalist ideal. The nationalist promises did not come true, and consequently there has been a mass migration. After the Second World War, Britain turned labour-intensive without the labour to fulfil the intensity, and in that way invited the influx of people. (I am saying all this simply to tell you about whom we speak when we talk about Asian culture in Britain.) For several years, from the beginning of that migration, which we can put down as taking place from the late 50's into the 60's, there was precious little that one could call transplanted or generated Black culture in Britain. The reason was simple. People were busy earning a living. The initial dream they may have had of getting back to their home country remained an ideal. The following generation, the Black Britons, to my mind, is one of the most exciting generations.

"In the 60's, you could find some kind of hark-back culture to the countries of their origin. The community occasions formed the nucleus of the nostalgic culture. There were folk forms, there were classical forms, but there was no modern contemporaneous form, because contemporaneous form in Britain—very generally speaking—is used for two purposes: either to assert a high culture, or for a progressive examination of what is going on today. Gradually, as the exploration of the contemporary became the chief form of art, one began asking the Asians: what is your contemporary art, why are you not using art forms to forge an extra language of dialectic within and among yourselves? The kitchen-sink plays, *Look Back in Anger* being the central focus, happened at the same time as migration took place, and coincided with the assertion of meritocracy against the Establishment.

"Obviously, it is in this tradition that the new generation of Asians had to begin to work. The British expected us to say who we are, why we are, what we want, how we are going to sort out this extremely difficult settlement into a society which was, by and large, alien to the parents, but becoming more and more familiar to the children. There were sociologists and university departments doing surveys on the immigrants. Apart from that, there rose in the Black communities the voice of militant journalism. This happened in the late 60's. An audience for a multi-cultural literature existed before the work existed—it didn't have to fight to create its audience. Social circumstances and the tradition of enquiry in liberal Britain had created an environment in which teachers, social workers and audience alike were clamouring for something that would not be sociology or journalese, but would be a literary weapon in the understanding of the new community. The purpose from the publishers' point of view was to try and explain Blacks to Whites. The Asians of the new generation were creating all manner of conditions within the institutions of Britain. There was a certain amount of upheaval in the schools as a new dictum was born, that something of their culture should be reflected in the school curriculum. Now what was the culture of the school? Was it the national culture of India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh, the West Indies, or were they making, through the conditions of their settlement, a new culture right there? Obviously, the second is the correct answer. Militant journalism didn't quite get at it. I think every one or two books in the last ten years tried to get at the culture of that settlement. The young generation was not producing their own stories. As far as theatre went, there was absolutely none of it except within the groups that supported militant journalism. We said to ourselves, we must

use more than the lecture form, more than the pamphlet form. The origins of Black Drama in Britain are extremely humble—an improvised form, without script, an extension of a dialogue that we might have had amongst ourselves, with a simple message about the problems faced by the Blacks. This was in order to get across to the older generation, who may not have read a pamphlet or wished to get involved with 'trouble-makers', but would go and see a play. It was when the present generation of British Asians came out of school that they began to demand equality with white meritocrats. They were measuring themselves against the British generation. Let me give you one example of the path which the drama movement took, that of the Black Theatre Co-operative, a West Indian co-operative of young actors. It was thanks to Mustafa Muthuna, a Trinidadian, and his authentic theatre of Black folk-form on the stage, that Black culture went white so to speak: it won a new audience. My own entry into theatre was facilitated by this.

"Through the late 60's and 70's, there grew in Britain what is known as a fringe theatre, which began to do plays which were not done by any established theatre which had funding. It was inspired by Living Theatre and the like from Europe. Being themselves a deprived group among the meritocrats, the white fringe began incorporating some Black material and inviting some Black actors. But they were given very incidental and minor roles and the Black actors found it necessary to operate by themselves. Also, when the white fringe incorporated Black material, it had one peculiarity: that of looking at Blacks from their own point of view, in the sense that the Blacks were made to say to them just what they wanted to hear from them.

"The funding of cultural activity became central to the rise of a new Black cultural class—actually a very small sub-section—who have fought their way by complaining about racism with fairly powerful positions. Fringe became the boss, racism became the chief leverage instrument. I was one of those trying to cast a few bombs into this. . . .

"I thought that the function of theatre for the Black and Asian community would be, first of all, to try and examine which is the rising class within us, what is it that we are doing with our dialogue with the community, the host community. Last year I wrote *Vigilantes* based on this situation—we must use theatre as a weapon to discuss it amongst ourselves."

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Dr. Suresh Awasthi, introducing K. N. Panikkar, said: "In the 1960's we used the expression 'quest for identity' and in the 1970's 'search for roots.' Most of us don't understand the new theatre and what it implies—it is part of a whole process of cultural decolonisation. In theatre, the dislocation was very, very violent . . . The concern with the text has finally restored the primacy of the actor in theatre—after nearly one century."

K. N. Panikkar: "I would like to communicate with you through the theatre idiom—the actor in the theatre is the creator.

"My approach to the Sanskrit texts is purely theatrical—in *Shakuntala,* I made the hunt of the deer seem to be the hunt of Shakuntala.

"My troupe will now demonstrate some *Chari*-s—which are the alphabets of my theatre work—with which we have experimented in our plays."

He also demonstrated some *Kalari* exercises and some scenes from *Karnabharam*.

P. L. Deshpande asked whether if the play was done in Malayalam, K. N. Panikkar would use the same techniques.

K. N. Panikkar: "I have translated the play into Malayalam using the purely theatrical aspects but it is not as strong or effective."

K. N. Panikkar explained that the actors received traditional training in *Kalari* and then came to Sopanam.

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W. Eysselinck was introduced by Dr. Georg Lechner as "one who tries to instil life into the theatre in the university. He is also a playwright."

W. Eysselinck: "For the past ten years I have been mainly involved in theatre training in the U.S.A. and elsewhere. I have concentrated on 'actor training.' My approach, from my education onwards, to the different countries where I have worked, my alternating, (after beginning as an actor) between directing and writing, is a very eclectic one. There is a philosophy in theatre that I embrace—pluralism in theatre. It is an essential and meaningful notion where I am concerned.

"In the 1950's, I founded a theatre group in Ghent—the first to do Beckett, Ionesco, Adamov etc. My work has gone back and forth, in equal measure, between my directing the classics and doing new work . . . be it premieres of adaptations or of original works. Working with playwrights producing new plays is a very interesting facet of my work. John Gassner was a great influence on me.

"I spent a couple of years directing plays for the Belgian National Television when TV dramas were just adapting stage plays. I continued to work in theatre. Then I ran an Arts Centre and a theatre in Sussex and value this experience very much because I really believe that a theatre must be more than just four walls in which plays are presented . . . I really feel strongly that a theatre must become a centre for a community by doing more than just presenting plays, by doing more than just being alive at least for the public for the few hours when plays are presented. It must be an inviting space . . . If I stress diversity, I mean structured diversity; then, indeed, the training programme must be such that an audience is constantly challenged . . . . If a mainstream theatre is to be relevant, to remain alive for society, it must remain in touch with the work that is done in alternate theatres, with work that is done by inspiring people in theatre laboratories . . . . I like 'live' audiences in the theatre.

"After seven years in England, I returned to the U.S. for a year; then I accepted an invitation to run the Royal Flemish Theatre which I had earlier turned down . . . Later, I resumed theatre training work in the U.S.A.

"Theatre education in America is a veritable industry . . . every university has a Theatre Department, a Theatre Programme and many of them claim to be

professional training programmes though very few are . . . . Carnegie Mellon (Pittsburgh, U.S.A.) is perhaps an outstanding example of a conservatory programme on an undergraduate level. It also has advanced courses in playwriting, design and direction. The University of Michigan has a generalist approach to theatre—leading to a B.A. degree in theatre.

"Although I am deeply committed to theatre training, I am also aware of its limitations. In England, where I was working for many years, a whole generation of actors questioned the notion of professional theatre training . . . I believe that, in certain cases, an actor need not go through a training programme. I do believe, however, that an actor should have an education, a background . . .

"I am interested in training people for the regional repertory theatre. This is very important. If ever there is to be a national theatre in U.S.A., it will have to be a regional theatre. Regional theatre in America is now facing horrendous financial problems. Theatre is a public service and I want to orient my work to that kind of theatre.

"We have to remind ourselves that the best theatre programme may not be the best for every actor. In fact, it may be confusing for some actors. We cannot create talent where there isn't any, but we can certainly create an environment where a talent can grow, blossom . . .

"The Yale Theatre programme is one of the finest and most comprehensive. Theatre is like an implacable lover: the more you give, the more it expects.

"An educated actor—one who has an active intellectual curiosity—is a pleasure to work with. A team must consist of practising professionals, because if a teacher loses his living relation to his art, he merely becomes a teacher. It is important for the students, too, because it changes a student's perception of the teacher and his relation to him.

"Research in theatre, too, is a roundabout way of adding new dimensions to an actor's capacities."

Meera Syal: "I wonder if 'integrated casting' is reflected in your training programmes?"

W. Eysselinck: "The problem of Black Theatre and society in the U.S.A. is agonisingly similar. More and more Blacks, I find, stay away from theatre programmes that are not Black-oriented. Very, very few Black people are joining. Some universities have a special programme in Black Theatre; but I find that disappointing.

"We tried in every way to recruit Black actors and to cast them in our productions, irrespective of colour. They play a rich diversity of roles in our university productions. But when they go out into the theatre world they again find their choice of roles limited."

M. K. Raina: "Do any of your programmes study the Indian traditional forms and make live productions on that basis?"

W. Eysselinck: "Very few. There are some small companies which are devoted to this."

Friday, January 24

Dr. Georg Lechner introduced Ratan Thiyam.

Ratan Thiyam: "I will introduce my repertory rather than myself . . . It's to my repertory that the whole credit goes.

"The Chorus Repertory Theatre (CRT) is situated very close to the Burmese border. It was established in 1976 by some of my colleagues. After my graduation from the NSD, my interest in theatre has always been as a professional. I joined the Navy and escaped from it within ten days. I started writing, but it was not easy to make it a source of living. Manipuri is spoken only by a few lakh people, and the royalty was very meagre.

"I was the only earning member (Rs. 200/- per month) of the CRT initially. In 1977, I got a grant of Rs. 2,500/- from the Sangeet Natak Akademi and from then on the State Akademi began helping. Living on theatre was not possible and the kind of theatre we wanted to do was not welcome. It was rejected. Now, people react very positively to our productions.

"We've always wanted to make the CRT self-sufficient. The grants are not enough. From 1979 onwards we have started paying our actors. We have got two ponds for fisheries, we have poultry and other farms. We live like a family where we also work for the theatre . . . we have a cyclical rotational system with the actors.

"From this year onwards, we have started a one-year apprenticeship course for students selected very carefully from the younger generation of theatre workers. We have four of them now. We give them Rs. 200/- per month. They know we have no money but we are trying to give them something. They are selected not as good trained actors, but by asking them: 'Really do you want to work in theatre?' If they said, 'Yes', then it's okay. We have got lighting properties which we hire out and thereby earn some money.

"This training is not only of actors but of an organisation. In India, it is very difficult to organise people.

"Most of our training deals with martial arts and other forms around the area. It is important to understand the flexible quality of martial arts. It is not only an 'offence and defence' sort of thing. It is not just the skill or technique which is important in wielding the *thanta* (spear). But it carries both rhythm and spiritual depth, including flexibility . . . an actor must also have control . . .

"There are two layers of a performance—one is communication from an outer level, the other from an inner level. Manipur has a strong martial arts tradition and I thought it is a very good idea for actors to go through this.

Then he explained the play *Chakravyuha*—it's a military formation which has a cosmic quality.

"In India, we can't afford to specialise in any one aspect of theatre. We have tried to find out ways to avoid the bitterness arising out of such specialisation in a company.

"I want to communicate to the people . . . I already have a weapon in the older traditional devices of my theatre."

Georg Lechner: "Where are the rhythms of modern warfare?"

Ratan Thiyam: "Rhythm is very important—you can break an opponent who is out of rhythm . . . it's the content that decides what to do, how to do."

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Lamberto Lambertini: "It is quite impossible to speak about one's own theatre. We work every day; we try to invent a show in a communal family atmosphere with all its advantages and disadvantages." He introduced the members of the group and they did demonstrations of the musical techniques they employed.

Ileana Citaristi: "A member of your troupe said he never trained, just followed what he was told to do."

Lamberto Lambertini: "A large part of our show is based on the vaudeville tradition. We present a sequence of episodes but there is no script as such. Sometimes there is a hidden story which, perhaps, our Neapolitan audience understands. The actors improvise their parts but gradually the whole thing comes together."

Georg Lechner: "You said you work in a family tradition. Is that still quite normal in Italy for your kind of theatre?"

Lamberto Lambertini: "No, not now. In the Naples area, there is a tradition of family nuclei, with other people joining in to make theatre . . . but I wouldn't say this is characteristic of theatre in Italy, in general. I use the word 'family' rather loosely. There is a very close relationship between the Neapolitan actor and his audience, who feels that the actor is 'one of us'."

Then the actors gave a demonstration of a song.



A scene from Peppe & Barra

William B. Coutts, Theatre Director, Commonwealth Arts Festival, spoke about the Edinburgh Arts Festival (EAF) and the Commonwealth Arts Festival (CAF).

"The EAF encompasses almost every type of performance. It was started in 1947 as part of a move by the British Government to establish relations with other countries through culture. Today, the needs of the festival are very different—the EAF has evolved organically over the years and it is really six festivals. There is the Main Festival and the Fringe Festival. Almost one thousand companies feature in the Fringe Festival. The EAF has been a seminal influence on the arts in Britain . . .

"The CAF is attached to the Commonwealth Games—it is a one-off event. My responsibility is directly related to the theatre programme. It is a very good opportunity to respect the interests of various people. It is sad to see that not much pioneering theatre work is being done in most of the Commonwealth countries. Finance is still a major obstacle in bringing foreign troupes to Britain . . . but the amount spent on foreign work in Britain is minimal—compared to the vast sums spent on presenting local work. Only two Indian theatre groups have been featured during the last ten years—Naya Theatre and Theatre Academy, Pune. I am a great believer in international work.

"The late 60's saw a great explosion in the Fringe Theatre. Most of these groups have now moved on into the establishment theatre in Britain which is almost an industry. It is a very sad thing that, outside the Festival, people rarely patronise the theatre."

Georg Lechner: "Does the EAF have a workshop-type format?"

William B. Coutts: "Sadly, no . . . Mainly because there isn't a large public for it."

Georg Lechner: "Do you give visiting groups the opportunity to perform elsewhere in Britain?"

William B. Coutts: "Yes . . . it is arranged so that they can tour and perform around the country."

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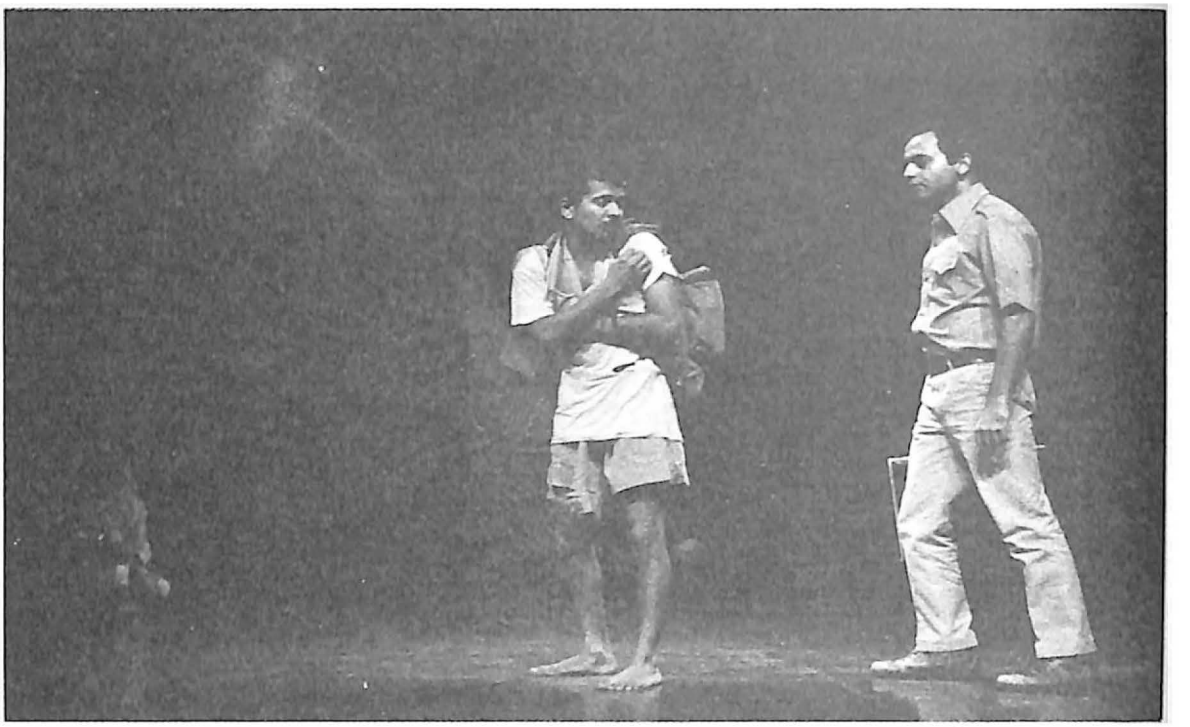
Saturday, January 25

Dr. Georg Lechner introduced Wolfram Mehring and thanked him for working on the production *The Exception and the Rule.*

Wolfram Mehring: "I think I will speak about my experience in Europe and in Asia and how they can come together. From the beginning my aim was to find a trans-cultural actor and human being.

"I deplore the tendency to use pieces from various folk forms in theatre productions without really understanding the evolution behind these forms. In Asia, Europeans merely collect . . . but if you really want to understand, you must practice . . . live there and work repeatedly on the same exercise.

"The general trend is to act from the neck upwards as if the body doesn't exist. Now, at last, people are realising that the body, too, can be beautiful . . .I was thrilled by the semantics of the body.



A scene from Exception and the Rule

"We tried to forget our techniques and what did we discover? The silence . . . the silence in Asia is very different from the silence in Europe and until you understand it, it won't make sense."

Georg Lechner: "What is the total actor?"

Wolfram Mehring: "The total actor is not one who knows acrobatics, the Commedia dell'Arte; he has a consciousness, he knows where are his centres . . ."

M. K. Raina: "What is this consciousness? Is it consciousness of politics or what?"

Wolfram Mehring: "Consciousness is not knowledge; it is a kind of understanding. In staging *The Exception and the Rule,* I wanted to prove that Indian actors are as good, if not better than European actors. To produce it in fifteen days was a challenge."

Eugenio Barba: "Consciousness is a very difficult concept to explain."

Wolfram Mehring: "You go through the details to the spirit . . . to find the rhythm of life in everything."

His actors then spoke about their experience of working with him. They were asked if they felt that language came in the way of expression, whether it was an impediment to reality.

Wolfram Mehring: "Each culture goes its own way through its language."

The Concluding Session:

Eugenio Barba: "All Indian actors talk of 'emotion', whereas if a European actor were to show emotion, I would be crazy . . . what the actor experiences is one thing, what the spectator experiences is another. In the theatre, the actor makes us forget his literality and gives us hallucinations."

Farrukh Dhondy: "One very refreshing aspect of this Encounter was that I heard, mostly from Western colleagues, philosophical disquisitions on the psycho-social nature of theatre. It was refreshing because in Britain you don't get that at all. It is a cliché to say that the British are anti-theoretical, but it is also true.

"What you get in theatre conferences in Britain is an argument about money—who is giving what or not giving to whom. From the Indian participants at the Encounter, on the other hand, one did not get more than hints about the funding of theatre projects . . . It's as if there was a big mystery surrounding this problem."

Habib Tanvir: "There are government subsidies, grants from the Ministry. Also, grants from State Governments, from the Central and State Sangeet Natak Akademies. There is public patronage."

M. K. Raina elaborated further on the funding system in India: Several repertories were getting grants. Also, there was some funding for specific theatre projects. But there are people on their own steam and that is the only relevant theatre activity in this country. "We are cutting down on production costs; new methodologies and new production techniques are evolving because of the economic needs of production. Since last year, the Ford Foundation has been giving grants to special cultural projects."

P. L. Deshpande described the funding sources in Maharashtra. There are two streams of theatre here: (1) The commercial theatre . . . its advantage is it keeps theatre alive (2) Amateur groups . . . they are active but not financially viable. The Annual Drama Competition of the State Government helps encourage theatre activity, and industrialists also sponsor plays and other activities.

As the session drew to a close, Dr. Lechner remarked, "One shares an experience only because one shares it. What we experienced was possible only because of the tremendous help and co-operation we have received from all at the NCPA and MMB.

"It's fitting that the Encounter should end with theatre performances and not with a Closed Session: *Chakravyuha* will be staged in the afternoon in the Experimental Theatre, *Romancero* in the Tata Theatre in the evening, and at night there will be the enactment of *Moon and Darkness* in the Experimental Theatre."

In his concluding speech, P. L. Deshpande said, "This Encounter was one of the most refreshing experiences in my life . . . Never have I found theatre viewed from so many different angles. So many varieties of experience were narrated and contemplated here. There is a Sanskrit verse which speaks of gods visiting the earth. To complete the appointed task, the plea is always for them to return. We share the same sentiment."

Public Performances

	Experimental Theatre	Tata Theatre
Fri. 17	*Hayavadana* 6.30 p.m. Dir: Vijaya Mehta	
Sat. 18	*Request Concert* 5.30 p.m. Dir: Alyque Padamsee	*Ghashiram Kotwal* 7 p.m. Dir: Jabbar Patel
	Street Theatre 1 p.m.	
Sun. 19	*Puritila* 7.30 p.m. Dir: Sekhar Chatterjee	*Wait for the Dawn* 4 p.m. *Puputan* Dir: Eugenio Barba
Mon. 20	—	*Insaf Ka Ghera* 6.30 p.m. Dir: Fritz Bennewitz
Tue. 21	*Marriage with God* 5.30 p.m. Dir: Eugenio Barba	
	The Nest 7.30 p.m. Dir: Sekhar Chatterjee	
Wed. 22	*One of Us* 5.30 p.m. Dir: Jacqui Shapiro	*Charandas Chor* 7.30 p.m. Dir: Habib Tanvir
Thu. 23	*Ottayan* 5.30 p.m. Dir: K. N. Panikkar	*Peppe & Barra,* 7.30 p.m. A musical scherzo in two acts Dir: Lamberto Lambertini
Fri. 24	*Kabira Khada Bazaar Mein* 5.30 p.m. Dir: M. K. Raina	*Exception & the Rule* 7.30 p.m. Dir: Wolfram Mehring
Sat. 25	*Chakravyuha* 4 p.m. Dir: Ratan Thiyam	*Romancero* 7.30 p.m. Dir: Eugenio Barba
	Moon & Darkness 9 p.m. Dir: Eugenio Barba	
	Street Theatre 4.30 p.m.	

"My body belongs to me, but not the space around it. Each movement violates the purity of the space. This awareness makes us tremble with the responsibility of our gestures."

Wolfram Mehring

"One can work for years behind a door with the word 'Theatre' written on it. All that you do requires a meaning so that your work seems justified. But what happens when the door and its sign is knocked down?"

Eugenio Barba

"Contrary to the rules of the traditional theatre, the stage must become the place where man puts off his masks."

Wolfram Mehring

"If the morals of the society become asocial, then art must develop its own (artistic) morals and become amoral towards all the rest."

Bertolt Brecht

"For our defeats prove nothing but that there are too few of us who fight injustice, and from the onlookers we expect at least that they be ashamed."

Bertolt Brecht

"The Living Theatre are in search of a meaning in their lives, and in a sense even if there were no audience they would still have to perform because the theatrical event is the climax and the centre of their lives. In the Living Theatre three needs become one: it exists for the sake of performing; it earns its living through performing; and its performances contain the most intense and intimate moments of its collective life."

Peter Brook