Peter Brook's *Mahabharata*
Some Impressions

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Avignon, on the banks of the River Rhone, was the Pope's residence around the thirteenth century and still breathes the same air of medieval history. Narrow cobbled streets and alleys lead, through the imposing city walls, to the Pope's great palace and its picturesque courtyards. The twentieth century has in no way scarred its landscape and atmosphere except that the 'Pope' in residence has been replaced by 'Performing Arts'.

The city never sleeps during the annual festival month of July. The courtyards are flooded with people lazing around, sipping coffee or wine in the cafes, surrounded by bursts of varied street-theatre events. There are jugglers, clowns, young mime artistes — each doing his own act. Processions on horse-back, painters doing portraits and decorating human bodies, children in colourful outfits, marching to the accompaniment of music, three different church-bells chiming every hour, bugles announcing performances of *Macbeth* in the Pope's palace, even the Hare Krishna clan dancing away — they are all there in 32°C of sun, which sets at 10 p.m. and rises by 4 a.m. The whole atmosphere seemed to yearn with frenzy for freedom.

I attended three consecutive performances of *Le Mahabharata* on the 7th, 8th, 9th of July and the full cycle on the 13th. During the day and after the shows I met Peter Brook, Jean-Claude Carriere and those actors who could speak English. My stay in Avignon was for me a total *Le Mahabharata* week.

Journey into *Le Mahabharata*

The car took us through the beautiful city of Avignon and across the River Rhone. The landscape became barren as we reached the quarry-hills; the sound of crickets chirping in broad daylight (at 9 p.m.) seemed odd. There was a strong and fresh smell of thyme and basil. Hundreds of people were trekking in the direction of the quarry. Our car was stopped at half-a-dozen posts, to check tickets — a necessary measure to control gate-crashers.

We arrived at the quarry where a stadium of steel pipes and wooden platforms had been erected to accommodate 1,000 seats. The performing space was created by removing rocks (which still lay piled up on either side) from the square quarry bed. A fabricated, narrow stream of water ran at the back, right across the area. In front, near the audience, was a small pool of muddy water. The outdoor-space was closed in on three sides by jagged, quarry walls, with two or three shrub-like trees near the top, adding the only touch of colour. The whole environment was imposing in its barrenness. From the hill-top, the sound of the *nadaswaram* echoed through the quarry at intervals, announcing the approaching show-time.

Sitting amidst the French and European audiences, getting ready to watch the *Mahabharata* performed by an international cast, gave me a very peculiar and exciting feeling. I did not understand French so it was to be a dumb show for me as far as Jean-Claude Carriere's poetry was concerned. As I sat there

waiting for the performance to start, images of the *Mahabharata,* as I knew it, kept flooding my mind, images that had become a part of me over the years — through mother's story-telling sessions, the Puranic fables I had read during my school days, the songs I had heard and sung and later on through the reading of the original and the various commentaries for my own theatre projects.

I had total faith in Peter Brook and was aware of the reverence with which he and Carriere had turned to the *Mahabharata.* Perhaps, that may have been the reason I was making a marathon effort to drain my mind of any pre-conceived images and getting ready to receive a sincere probe by non-Indian sensitivities into our cultural heritage. I had to warn myself repeatedly that what was to be presented in a few moments would be the 'essence' of the *Mahabharata* as the world saw it and that though it might not bear resemblance to what I felt as an Indian, it was my responsibility to let it grow on me and allow its own truth to seep through to my feelings. I had to react with my Indian identity to the meaning of universal culture.

The magic of theatre is unfathomable. In it, 'truth' can be arrived at in many fascinating ways — sometimes by being honest to the minutest detail of ethnicity; at times by an austere yet generalised feel and smell of authenticity; on occasions by simplified direct communication. In fact, whatever is done with conviction and respect becomes 'true'. 'Who' does it, more than the 'how', determines the quality of the truth. How was Brook going to present his own 'truth'? How was I going to receive it?

The performance began without any preamble. Musicians came and sat in a corner. A bearded man arrived, clad in an Indian-looking outfit (may be Rajasthani), lit a fire near the stream at the back. Then he sat silently, as if meditating, while the flames were reflected in the water. There was a silence — a stretched silence. Then, a child appeared from behind the pile of rocks and went to the pool to wash his face. The bearded man called out to him. With their conversation in French, the play began. Despite my ignorance of the language, I realised that the man was Vyasa. He proclaimed that he was about to write the greatest epic in the world — "Anybody who reads it will not remain the same person."

"Will you be my scribe?" he asked the child. The child couldn't write so they decided to call Ganesha. Ganesha arrived, led by the child, making his way through the rocky path, in ordinary clothes — an enormous writing pad (still used in villages for account-keeping) tucked under his arm. Soft Indian folk music accompanied his arrival — played by musicians from Japan and the Middle East.

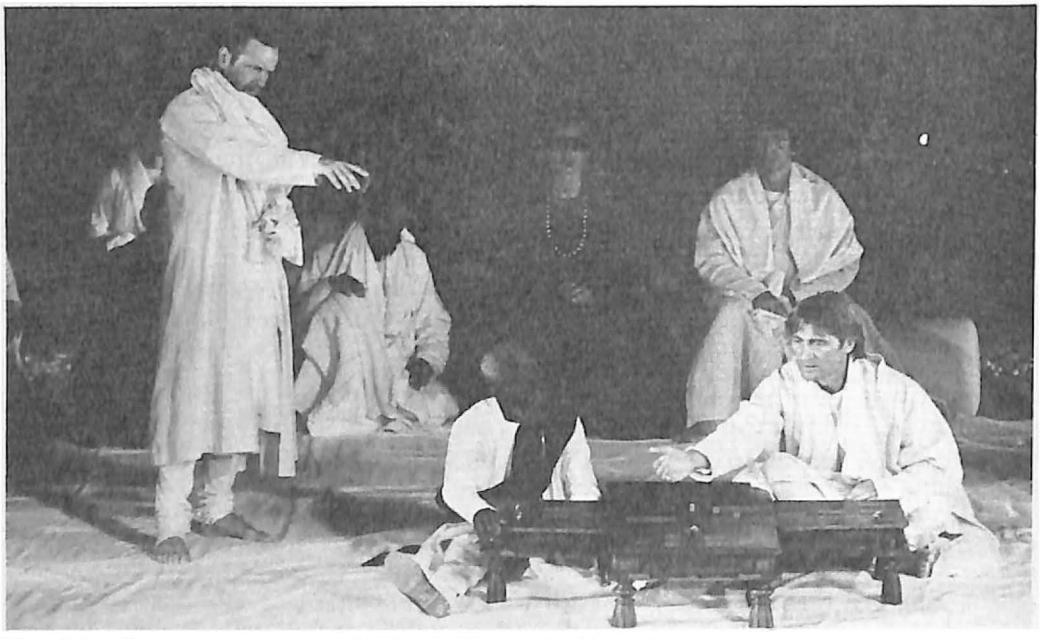
It was less than five minutes since the play had commenced. The fire with its reflection in the stream, the sprawling stretch of sand, the barren rocks and on this landscape, an ordinary human being arriving as Ganesha, led by a child, calmed my inner turmoil. The barrenness of the environment was converted into a stark reality. Within minutes, the actors with their own convictions and concentration made me feel in tune with what was to unfold. During the twelve hours that followed they successfully led me to share their excitement and discoveries. It didn't hinder me that the *Mahabharata* characters, in their costumes, did not belong historically to any period or locally to any region in India. The Rajasthan desert — with its off-white sand and flowing garments, with its dramatic bursts of colour in women's attire — kept surfacing in my mind, but only with its

visual impact and not with its ethnic connotations. Constantly, I encountered vivid images that substituted my very own earlier ones of the *Mahabharata,* stripping them of their ornamentations, frills and Puranic romanticism. And in doing so, they penetrated my sensitivities with their ultimate meaning. For me, the twelve hours were not only theatre but an exposure to the unknown territories of my own mind and emotions.

On the one hand, I was spell-bound and moved with a growing conviction that what I saw unfolding in front of me was the only way, in the given environment, that an epic could trace the history of human civilisation. And, on the other, I felt a tremendous frustration because of my inability to understand the language.

I shall try to capture the magic of some moments (amongst hundreds) during the twelve hours. Mine is not a chronological account, nor an attempt to recall the use of the various dance and music traditions of India. Instead, it is more in the nature of jottings of my own impressions on 'new dimensions and meaning of theatre' and the questions that were raised in my mind.

The entire *Mahabharata* was presented in three parts. The first part began with the birth of Satyavati and ended with the Pandavas losing everything in the dice game and leaving for the forest. The second part commenced with the Pandavas' exile in the forest, with Duryodhana, Duhshasana and Karna keeping constant vigil. It included Hidimba's meeting with Bhima, Arjuna getting his weapons from the *Shami Vriksha* and ended with the stay of the Pandavas in Virata's palace. The third part basically dealt with the battle of Kurukshetra, Krishna's death and the annihilation of the race and ended with a perplexed Yudhishthira on his way to *Moksha.*



The Dice Game—seated are Shakuni (Douta Seck) and Yudhishthira (Matthias Habich). (Photo: Georges Meran, Agence Photos Point de Vue, Avignon).

The Music

Toshi, the Japanese composer, is a great friend of India (an ardent admirer of Kishori Amonkar). It was fascinating to hear him sing Rabindra Sangeet, play the *tabla* and *ghatam,* use an Australian aboriginal flute. His group of musicians played many wind, string and percussion instruments from all over the east, including our *nadaswaram* and *shehnai.* When asked about his concept of music for theatre he replied: "Music in theatre depends on the quality of silence. This silence has its own sound which determines and creates the sound of music." I have always maintained that, in theatre, music and dance have to shed their grammar and take over a new identity. Toshi spelt it out as—"the identity of understanding and reacting to silences."

The Sets

Most of the time it was the rocks, sand, water, mud and fire. All kinds of fire: burning twigs, enormous brass lamps, small *diva*-s floating in the stream, torches creating patterns in the darkness, Balinese fire circles on the sand (resembling fire lines in the forests and on hill-tops), even inflammable powder thrown at the torches to create explosions of light.

A few thatched bamboo sections, which the actors carried in and out as required, were used sparingly. They became Virata's palace or trenches in the battle-field or the forest hut in which the Pandavas lived.

At times, an enormous white sheet covered the sand on which were scattered white bolsters and colourful Rajasthani carpets. Occasionally, masses of *chatai*-s were unrolled, creating the image and sound of tiny sea-waves washing the shore.

The Child

The *Mahabharata* is a narration of events. It is always *uvacha* (spoken). In Carriere's *Mahabharata,* Vyasa narrates to a child. It is the child that raises questions and Ganesha who writes down Vyasa's explanations. The wisdom of childhood in raising simple yet pertinent questions and accepting answers creates a whole structure of purity and naivety in which the audience participates.

Ganesha and Krishna

Maurice Benichou played Ganesha, Vyasa's scribe, who also answered many of the child's queries. During the first part, in the silence, while Kunti, Draupadi and the Pandavas slept, the soft sounds of a flute enveloped them.

"Who is playing the flute?" the child asked.
"Krishna" replied Ganesha.
"Can I see him?"
"Of course you can. He is everywhere. He is within you and me."
"Can I see him in you?"
"Yes, you can" replied Ganesha and hid himself behind a yellow saree-curtain, held by Vyasa and the child. As the yellow curtain was removed, Benichou was seen in the reclining *Sheshashayi* pose of Vishnu. His whole demeanour had changed. He was no more Ganesha, the next-door friend, but Krishna, the mystic. Throughout the Krishna-episodes that he played later, he displayed a tremendous

inner glow. He was a counsellor, philosopher, politician, an emissary for peace, his outward calm erupting into wrath as he killed Shishupala. During Kurukshetra, he became a force that read, analysed and shaped inevitable destiny. His *Virata-Darshana* (Cosmic Trance) was breathtaking in its simplicity.

Krishna, in the presence of the Kauravas, goes into a cosmic trance. Benichou stood with his back to the audience. A pale-blue drape was held behind him, in front of the acting space, which created an image of the skies descending on the earth. Dhritarashtra saw the cosmic image despite his blindness and knelt in front of Krishna. So did Bhishma. Duhshasana and Duryodhana remained untouched, almost bewildered at their father's reaction.

Brook's capacity in capturing epic moments with utter simplicity and discovering extraordinary images in ordinary happenings continually surprised me.

Krishna's death was yet another unforgettable image. We had already travelled through eleven hours of the *Mahabharata*. It was six in the morning. The first rays of the sun had reached the quarry. Birds had started chirping and flying above us. A cool, soft breeze created ripples in the pools of water. Vyasa and the child spread a green saree on the sand. Krishna reclined on it. A *Vyadha* (hunter) came, mimed the shooting of an arrow and with his own hands put a stick representing an arrow between Krishna's toes. He looked at Krishna and, realising who he had killed, ran away in anguish and shock. The child asked: "Vyasa, what is happening to Krishna?"

Vyasa: "He is leaving us."

Child: "But I wanted to ask him a question."

Vyasa said he could. The child approached Krishna.

"Can I ask you something?"

Krishna nodded his head and said: "Be quick, though. My time is running out."

Child: "What did you whisper in Arjuna's ears during the war?"

Krishna smiled, thought for a moment and said, "I can tell things only once."

And he died. The death of Krishna, as a new day was about to begin, symbolised for me the cycle of continuity. If theatre can achieve this, what else does one need to have faith in?

Gandhari and the Kauravas

I had read Iravati Karve's *Yuganta* and her commentary on Gandhari. Carriere's Gandhari bore a striking resemblance to her interpretation. Gandhari, a princess from a faraway land, arrives atop an elephant—radiant and excited about her forthcoming marriage. (A group of actors and musicians created the movement of the elephant, others held aloft a bamboo structure, in which sat Gandhari—to complete the picture of the grand procession). Her frustration on learning about her husband's blindness, her blindfolding herself as a mark of protest, her agony and her love for her children—specially Duryodhana, the first-born—created many memorable moments. The greatest of them was the birth of Duryodhana.

The *Mahabharata* narrates that Gandhari gave birth to an enormous ball

of steel (*pinda*) which was cut up into a hundred pieces, out of which were born the hundred Kauravas.

Le Mahabharata's Gandhari was pregnant for two years without any signs of delivering the child. In sheer desperation, she summons her maid to hit on her stomach with an iron rod. The maid does so and Gandhari stands with outstretched hands bearing the agony. Near her appears the ball of steel containing the hundred embryos of the Kauravas. As the first Kaurava (Duryodhana) is about to emerge, ill omens flood in—wind sounds, calls of the jackal. From behind the rocks, emerges a coiled-up body bound in red cloth. It tumbles about twenty yards forward through the sand and into the muddy pool where Gandhari and Dhritarashtra stand waiting eagerly. The draped body, still looking like a bundle, clings on to Gandhari's knees, water dripping from the red covering — making it look like a blood-covered embryo. An evil wail emanates from the bundle as it uncoils, still clutching Gandhari. A head appears—an evil, bearded face—wailing like a new-born babe. As Duryodhana, Andrzej Seweryn, the Polish actor, infused a tremendous voltage of electrifying energy in whatever he did—including the birth. A medium-sized man, as an actor he seemed gigantic, filling up the quarry with his presence and inner power.

On the other hand, Duhshasana—played by Georges Corraface, a handsome Greek actor with a delicate face and all eyes—created a fascinating, almost tender relationship with his brother Duryodhana. He shared his passions, his thoughts, had eyes only for him even while rolling mats or removing bamboo-structures (a routine that all actors followed for scene changes). In fact, the Kauravas emerged as a complete family, with Dhritarashtra and Gandhari as loving parents of problem-children.

Kunti and the Pandavas

As against the dramatic images of the Kaurava family, Kunti and her relationship with the five Pandavas was dealt with in a very human, day-to-day manner. Kunti, in her outfit, resembled a matriarchal, strong-willed Rajasthani woman. She sat in a small group sharing food with her sons and slept near them on the sands without any bedding. Together, the images they created were very similar to those one encounters on the pavements of Bombay. I realised that relationships and qualities of mind that one almost revered as part of an epic, could be discovered anywhere, any time—if only one has the perception. There *can* be a Kunti amongst the construction workers of Bombay, or an Arjuna in the hutments. It is not necessary to indulge in gloss and romanticism to capture an epic quality or a historical moment in theatre.

Kunti, when first introduced, keeps on staring fixedly at the sun.

"Why is she staring at the sun?" the child asks.

"It is a special secret", says Vyasa.

Throughout the sequence of events—her marriage to Pandu, Pandu's death, Kunti's verdict that Draupadi be shared by the five sons—the mystery of her fascination for the Sun lurks in the background. It is only when Arjuna and Karna are about to enter into a fierce combat in Dhritarashtra's palace, that Kunti swoons.

Arjuna (Vittorio Mezzogiorno) and Yudhishthira (Matthias Habich).
(Photo: Alain Sauvan, Agence Photos Point de Vue, Avignon).

"What has happened to her?" the child asks.

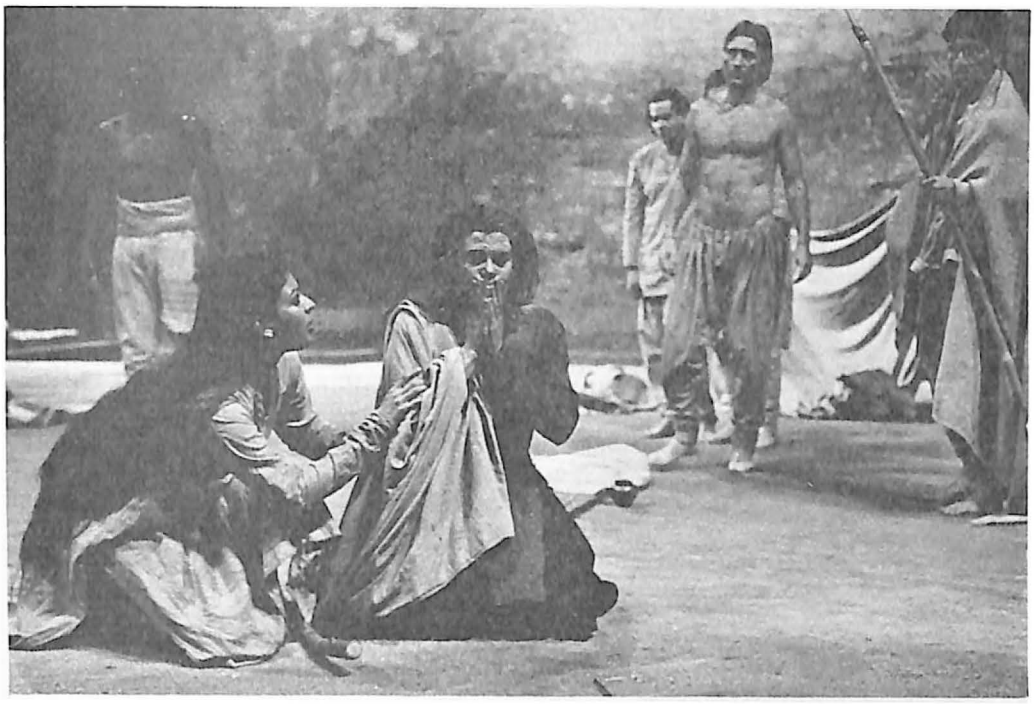
"I will tell you," says Vyasa and a flashback begins.

A negro actor, in a flowing red garment, appears at the top of the stadium and runs down to greet Kunti. The scene that followed was hilarious—the young Kunti, unaware of the fact that if you invoked a god like the Sun and he blessed you with his appearance, you had to sleep with him!

The Pandavas somehow failed to impress me as a total family. Individually they were good, but the bond between them did not seem to emerge. The narcissist Arjuna, the confused Yudhishthira, the child-like Bhima, the strong-willed Draupadi (played by Mallika Sarabhai) had somehow found no time for each other.

Amba

To trace the whole journey of the *Mahabharata*—starting with the birth of Satyavati and her son Vyasa till the death of Krishna and the annihilation of the race—to make French audiences follow the confusing relationships and family tree was a marathon task. I admired Carriere's innovative ways of introducing a character and weaving his or her story-line through the fast-developing narration. Amba was one such character. The frustrated and angry Amba appears in the early part of the *Mahabharata*, when Bhishma refuses to marry her and she vows to avenge her humiliation by killing him. She returns again towards the end during the Kurukshetra battle, as Shikhandi, and helps Arjuna in killing Bhishma. Carriere's Amba roams around the forests dishevelled, frustrated, aimless—in eternal search



Amba (Pascaline Pointillart) being consoled by Draupadi (Mallika Sarabhai).
(Photo: Michel Dieuzaide, Paris).

of the moment for revenge. She meets the Pandavas, talks to Draupadi. When she returns as Shikhandi, the audience is familiar with her anguish, having seen her a couple of times during the unfolding of the epic.

Ganga

Brook's Ganga appears wading her way through the stream, with a thin flowing, white silk covering her head. She meets and marries Shantanu and, as narrated in the *Mahabharata*, drowns her new-born infants. The use of the white silk and simple gestures captured the poetry of the myth. Ganga clutched her white scarf and it became her baby. She kissed it and then flung it into the pool of water. The scarf unwound and floated in mid-air for a while, creating an image of drifting water taking the baby away. It was delightful to watch a simple, silken drape, with its fluid lines, create an abstract moment of beauty.

The African Actors

Bhishma, Parashurama, Bhima, Ghatotkacha and Shakuni—were all Africans and remained Africans. In fact, their Africanness was their greatest asset. Bhishma did not look an Indian image of Bhishma, but his African face, body and mind showed the wisdom and calmness that is Bhishma. Parashurama arrived banging his staff in a tribal African manner—but brought with him Parashurama's wrath and power. Bhima's simple mind, strong body and affectionate soul was clearly evident in the African physique. One could never visualise a better Shakuni—he sat playing the dice game, with his thin African arms and legs,

jaw protruding, bulging eyes staring. He held the dice in his palms and flicked his wrists in a way that convinced you of his mumbo-jumbo power. Watching these African actors, one felt convinced that it is not ethnic familiarity or behaviour patterns that define characters, but something beyond these apparent barriers—a deeper meaning and intention which gives them their identity.

Humour

Traditionally, Indian folk theatre deals with the epics in a very special way—for instance, *Kirtana* or *Pandavani* give them a local colour. All characters display commonly-known behaviour patterns and the treatment is generally humorous, though with philosophical connotations. In the absence of such a tradition in the west, Brook and Carriere have discovered humour in the naivety of situations—for instance, the Kunti-Sun meeting, the Bhima-Hidimba-Ghatotkacha episode, *Ashwathama—the elephant—is dead* sequence and the palace of Virata. All these episodes were highly amusing, and created innovatively almost always by African and Balinese actors. Is it because, culturally, they are more capable than European actors of throwing themselves into a naive situation and enjoying it?

Kurukshetra

Kurukshetra was annihilation. The whole environment erupted : Trumpets, war cries, trampling feet sending the sand flying, mud-soaked bodies, faces covered in blood, the anguish of the women as they moved through the pile of dead bodies identifying their sons and husbands and, during all this turmoil, Krishna explaining to Arjuna the inevitability of destruction!

Karna's Death

A wheel rolling in the sand, pushed by one hand, a horse-whip lashing in the other—these were Krishna and Shalya, the two charioteers, followed by Arjuna and Karna. They circled, confronting each other in the sand pit, rode through water, disappeared behind rocks, chasing one another, emerged from the gangways of the stadium—caught in a frenzy to kill. Karna's chariot wheel got stuck in the pool of muddy water and Arjuna, advised by Krishna, killed him. In principle it was similar to war games that children normally play and while playing believe in. Imagine the conviction and dedication with which the actors must have played their game to involve a thousand spectators to share their belief and feeling of truth!

Bhishma's Death

Bhishma's death was equally simple and stark. He rode on top of a bamboo structure held up by the Kaurava soldiers and climbed down at the sight of Shikhandi, aware that his final moment had arrived. Hiding behind Shikhandi, Arjuna aimed his arrow. Krishna held it by his thumb and fore-finger and gradually walked towards Bhishma who stood gazing fixedly at Krishna and the approaching arrow. The music played a steady siren-like note. The moment seemed to continue for hours as everybody stood still—only the arrow travelled in Krishna's hand. Krishna stuck the arrow in Bhishma's arm, Bhishma recoiled under its impact and, with a thud, the bamboo structure held by the soldiers fell to the ground. Bhishma staggered on it and lay prostrate. The actors around him stuck hundreds

of bamboo-sticks in the structure creating an impression of arrows invading Bhishma's body. Two of the sticks, crossing each other, made a head-rest and he was carried in, on his bed of arrows. Bhishma receiving and welcoming the call of death—is an image that registered deeply in my mind.

Duryodhana's Death

I had fallen in love with Duryodhana, as indeed had all those who saw him. He was every inch evil with a very human cause-and-effect syndrome written all over him. His agonized chanting as he lay huddled up in a cave (created by a cloth held over him), his animal passion as he engaged in his battle with Bhima, his bewilderment and frustration as he heard Krishna advise Bhima to hit him in the thigh, his effort to hold on to life as he lay crippled and mud-soaked near the pool of water, his limbs and senses gradually fading while his energies slowly subsided. How one wished he would die soon and be saved the suffering!

The Other Deaths

Drona's death, on the other hand, was ritualistic in an Indo-Japanese manner. On learning of his son's death, he sat cross-legged on the sand and emptied an earthen-jar full of coloured water on himself, getting ready for human-sacrifice or harakiri. Dhrishtadyumna, his face painted like a blood-red mask, approached and beheaded him.

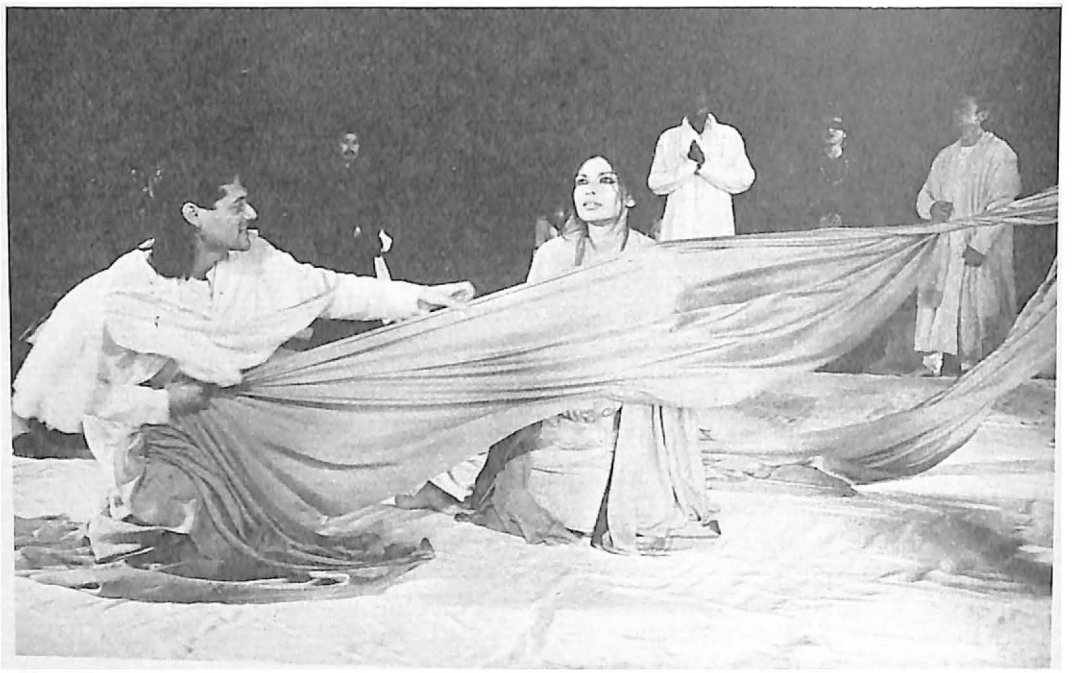
Abhimanyu's death in the maze was, likewise, in the tradition of the stick dance. Duhshasana's death was presented in the Kathakali manner, with Bhima pulling his entrails out. Both these deaths failed to register any impact since the forms used were far too obvious. The image that haunts me still is when Draupadi (Mallika Sarabhai) came towards Duhshasana's dead body and spread her hair on the open wound and Bhima with his blood-covered hands smeared her hair. All this happened while Gandhari stood watching a few yards away, holding on to a distraught Duryodhana, wailing, "My only living son". This is a vivid picture of the animal in man that war unleashes.

The war at last was over—with dead bodies scattered all over the sand-pit. The women came, covered their own dead with colourful sheets. The sand—and on it the scattered colours—was all that remained of a race that had lived, loved, fought and disappeared.

Theatre Through Images

How surprising it is to find one's own mind being trained. After being in tune with the stark simplicity of Brook's treatment of the *Mahabharata*, my mind seemed to react adversely to anything that represented obvious acceptable norms. For instance, the Balinese tradition of fire I saw being used for the first time. It resembles the patterns which fire-lines create in India in the forests and on hill-tops during the winter months. It was fascinating on account of its sheer dramatic novelty but did not move me. It was too grand to create a lasting image in my mind.

As against this a simple device to create a moment disturbed me deeply—



The disrobing of Draupadi (Mallika Sarabhai). Also in the foreground is Duhshasana (Georges Corraface).
(Photo: Valerie Suau, Agence Photos Point de Vue, Avignon).

for instance, the bee attacking Karna's thigh. Karna sat with Parashurama's hand on his lap. Musicians came in the arena blowing softly on long Australian aboriginal weed-instruments. One of them circled Karna and touched his thigh with the instrument. Karna winced with pain. The musician went away still playing and sounding like a departing bee. Karna touched his thigh and then looked at it. It was covered with blood. A weed instrument generated an undefined yet unforgettable magical moment in the theatre!

Draupadi's disrobing was a similar, vivid moment. The Pandavas looked like ordinary human beings in their off-white clothes. A shrieking Draupadi was dragged by her hair. Duryodhana bared his thigh for her to sit on and Duhshasana sneered and chuckled — while the Pandavas looked on helplessly. Dignified Bhishma, compassionate Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, the king, and Karna, the righteous man, decided it was not their responsibility to interfere. A morbid situation of a woman being raped in broad daylight! Draupadi cried out to Krishna as Duhshasana pulled at her saree. Krishna came holding yards of cloth in his hands, handed over one end to Duhshasana and, standing near Draupadi, kept on unrolling it as Duhshasana pulled. Duhshasana got entangled in the cloth and eventually collapsed.

The whole sequence convinced me once again that the make-believe world of theatre generated its own reality and sense of truth — perhaps better, if untouched by theatrical conventions and trappings. We have ample evidence of this in our folk and tribal cultures. It is the urban, analytical faculty of our minds that has led us to a false and pretentious idea of theatre which attempts to recreate reality and thereby bypasses the 'truth'.

In Conclusion

The whole week of the *Mahabharata* at Avignon was a greatly rewarding and penetrating experience for me. Of course, unavoidably, my ethnic feelings surfaced at times with some complaints.

For instance—I missed the episodes of Draupadi's wedding to Arjuna, the house of lac, the stories of Kacha-Devayani, Dushyanta-Shakuntala etc. (Carriere mentioned that he had written many of them and that they would be presented separately). I also missed in the characterisations the generosity of Karna—Bruce Myers played him as too much of an introvert, in constant battle with the world. Kunti played by Josephine Derenne had an earthy quality but could not convey sufficiently her wisdom and tenacity. Draupadi (Mallika Sarabhai) I found to be still in the process of discovering the *Shakti* which she symbolises. Matthias Habich's Yudhishthira, the confused dreamer, came across, on many occasions, as a weak *kshatriya*. Vittorio Mezzogiorno's Arjuna conveyed self-centred, narcissistic qualities rather than his all-pervading charm.

Two excerpts from a note I had written to Brook I find very relevant:

> "Something could be done about Krishna's physical image. Indians—many of them—are against the 'Satya Shri Sai Baba' cult and physically Benichou looks like him."
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> "The women at times disturbed me in the way they sat—specially in Virata's palace. There is something very distinct in the way an oriental woman sits. There is a certain fluidity even when she stretches her legs and rests her arms on a bolster."

The costumes looked too stitched for the *Mahabharata* characters. ("There was no option as the actors had to run around so much", said Chloe Obolensky, the designer).

However, I do not attach much value to these reactions of mine. What I experienced during the eight days totally wipes out these minor distractions. *Le Mahabharata* will always remain a part of me.