

## From the Editorial Desk

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### *Pedagogy, Playwrights, Performance and the Digital Turn*

Drama, as text, is a fixed construct while theatre is fleeting and fluid as well as shape-shifting. For educators, practitioners, and dramaturgs, teaching drama/theatre is a challenge: at the school level one teaches not merely a text but also empathy, negotiation and awareness of one's mind as well as body. At the undergraduate level, it is to prise open the very notion of performance: of gender, caste and class, but also colonialism and modernity. Teaching theatre in drama school is to constantly confront the limitations of institutionalism.

Texts are infinitely excavatable and many papers in this issue re-examine iconic texts, generating new and relevant readings. Sunhaib Izhar, in a radical rereading of Habib Tanvir's *Agra Bazaar* and Badal Sircar's *Evam Indrajit*, focuses on the politics of subaltern embodiment while Aateka Khan and Manila Kohli examine Mohan Rakesh's *Aadhe Adhure* to uncover narrative biases. Piyush B. Chaudhary focuses not only on Poile Sengupta's searing critique of patriarchy in *Mangalam* but also on her clever use of theatrics, and modes of spectatorship. Audience co-creation of meaning is never passive, shaped as it is by caste, class, gender, and memory.

The emergence of Performance Studies as a distinct academic discipline demands that we take performance as a vital mode of cultural production and social inquiry by documenting and critiquing regional theatre practices, especially those that have historically been marginalised by dominant narratives of theatrical modernity as evinced in insightful articles on *Kali Natakam* by Anu Lakshmi Babu and on *Bidesia* by Shuchi Sharma and Shubhangi Srivastava.

Teaching Shakespeare in India is an exercise in translation, of Elizabethan English, mores and dramatic conventions but we are also better attuned to Shakespeare, as Ruth Vanita points out, than the Western world today. However, we often forget, dazzled as we are by Shakespeare's poetry and his deep understanding of human nature, of how much he is framed by our colonial context. Yet, when an all-woman cast stages the *Merry Wives of Windsor* or a cross-dressing cast reveals the gender imbalance in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the plays become sites of subversion as Poonam Trivedi and Ruth Vanita point out.

Experimental drama and innovative practices emerge out of critical

pedagogical rupture and ground realities as posited by Priyanka Pathak in her account of her directorial venture for the National School of Drama. R. Sheeba Mary looks at how adaptations reshape meanings and performances translate trauma in the theatrical adaptations of Stephen King's novels. Garima Bhayana and Sneh Lata Sharma reimagine Mahesh Dattani's *Tara*, performed by specially-abled children, arguing that disability is only another mode of performance. While many of us hold a general, if hazy, sense of the benefits drama brings to the classroom, few have articulated those advantages with the clarity and depth that Manisha Kumari offers.

The interface with metatheatre, technological interventions and contemporary dramaturgy heralds exciting possibilities as highlighted by Preeti Sharma, V. Deepika and J. Sobhana Devi while Steven George and Ruchi Nagpal give us a glimpse into the fast changing digital architecture—the postdramatic, necessitated by Covid-19, which informs evolving theatrescapes. Digital platforms, Zoom plays, and interactive browser-based performances are, however, a double-edged sword, taking away the intimacy and liveliness of actual theatre but extending its reach exponentially.

The key highlight of this issue is a memorable, free flowing sharing of experiences by the renowned theatre guru, Keval Arora, as he maps his journey both as a theatre practitioner and teacher and who sees college dramatic societies as agents of change. An engaging article on the emotions and well-being of language teachers by K. Padmini Shankar and book reviews by Rajiva Verma and Indrani Dasgupta and a language activity by Menda Yogeswari and Solomon Benny Nadigotla make up the rest of the issue.

We hope that our readers enjoy this issue as much as we enjoyed putting it together and hope that the papers curated here give much food for thought as well as further research.

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