

# Approaches to Theatre Training

Ashok Da Ranade

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*The N.C.P.A in collaboration with the I.C.C.R. and the Department of Culture, Government of India, organised a workshop focussing on the theme of Theatre-Training. The effort was titled 'Actor at Work'.*

*Given below are excerpts from the interviews of some of the national and international theatre personalities who participated in the workshop.*

## **Edward Argent**

*(b. 1931; Address: Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama, 100 Renfrew Street, Glasgow G2 3DB, U.K.) Trained at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and London branch of the New York Actors' Studio. Taught at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, Webber Douglas Academy, the British Drama League and the Morley College. Appointed Principal Lecturer and Head of the School of Theatre in Manchester Polytechnic in 1970. Director, The School of Drama, since 1974 (Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama). Is a Director of the Citizens Theatre, Glasgow, and the Scottish Mask and Puppet Centre. Also taught at major theatre institutes in Warsaw, California and at universities in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Toronto and Singapore. Directed for the Bristol Old Vic, The Royal Court Theatre, The Lyric, The Mermaid and the Royal Shakespeare Company.*

**Ashok Ranade: In the changed nature of theatre do you feel that training methods also need to change as far as weightage given to various departments of theatre is concerned?**

**Edward Argent:** Yes. Training must constantly change to keep up with the changing nature of theatre, theatre must change to keep up with constantly changing nature of the world around us... Recently in Britain we have had a strong influence from Europe in terms of more physical theatre to counter the strong emphasis on the spoken word. (A reaction to criticism made on British actors that they are the best of the world from the neck up!)... This has been all to the good. In some cases of course it has gone

right over to the other end. The voice and text have been lost altogether and I think that's a shame, a great loss. But a lot of my own work has always been to work for a basis for the actor's work which is not bound by the text and which realises that the text is only one of many ways in which actor communicates with his audience.

**Vijaya Mehta: Do you find that in order to cope with multimedia which a modern actor nowadays has to face, you need to have different types of inputs or do you see the basics being the same?**

**Argent:** I think it's very desirable to have a variety of technical experiences but not absolutely necessary if an actor has good grounding and a good training in his craft... And if he has had the training that an audience can give, alongside training that teachers are giving, then he has a basis from which he can adapt into the media... We are extremely lucky, quite miraculously lucky in Scotland that just four years ago we moved into new built up premises, in which we have a 100-seat proscenium arch theatre, a 100-seat flexible studio theatre, a television studio of and a radio studio of broadcast standard plus an open air space... attached to technical back-ups, wardrobes, rehearsal rooms and dance studios and so on. We are in state of art in terms of technical apparatus but in fact the work that our students are doing is not drastically different... It's just being better prepared for the variety of technical demands in a wider perspective... The employment opportunities would be open...

**Ranade: We, in India at least, have another problem i.e. linguistic plurality. All of our regions are full of theatre forms and all of them are now claiming separate attention legitimately. In the light of this situation dialects and standard language distinction is disappearing fast and dialects are claiming a major share of attention. Do you feel that training methods need to change or some flexible approach can be devised?**

**Argent:** Yes, teaching must live in a real world. I must not hold on to past or be content to re-examine the past forms... Everyone in training should be looking to the present and if possible the future but not the past. It is vitally necessary for trainers to be, if possible, coming and going and being professionally involved, so that they know what is happening and how it is happening in the theatre for which they are preparing students... This is happening in Britain, particularly about a relationship between Scottish speech and speech in other parts of British islands and this became a political issue already. There are some politicians who are prepared to play a cultural card but it is also a genuine cultural feeling about the identity of a nation. So I am very well aware of the kind of thing that you are talking about and I think as long as everybody concerned

approaches in a positive, open, questioning spirit and does not take up attitudes it will be good and bring positive results. Closed minds produce bad theatre on any topic.

**Mehta:...** How do you get an actor prepared to work in different styles?

**Argent:** If possible by giving him a grounding in different styles and I think all of us in British theatre are re-thinking what the categories should be... It's a matter of finding time within a three years course, fit in everything... So we continue to include Shakespeare and Chekhov and the British high comedy style which includes through Congreve to Oscar Wilde to Noel Coward... But also looking into experimental forms, I have been recently taken to task by my daughter who now works in children's theatre and is being very severe with me that I have made assumptions about people being unable to go and do children's theatre!

**Ranade:** To what extent training methods which you have been using have a transcultural application?

**Argent:** ... Only those using it can say. I am thrilled at the response to my methods that I get from your Indian actors... . Because I was quite prepared for my work not to make sense at all and so it's really exciting for me... I think, yes, there is 'transferability' but one cannot lay down what will be transferable and what will not. It will come down to individual perceptions and responses.

**Ranade:** In Britain multi-racial society has created special and specific problems. Has theatre been developing different lines of approach to meet those problems?

**Argent:** Yes... We have strong encouragement from actors in the British theatre community of the ethnic origins... We are on the lookout for talent from whatever source... It would be patronising if I took them on in order to fill a quota of ethnic origins to match the percentages and proportions within society generally! But I am very delighted to get talent from every area... In the new year a better acting of Shakespeare in which I will have a black Englishman (somebody born and bred in London, in my own part of London, as it happens), will be playing a leading role. In it there will be no attempt on our part to translate that character into an ethnic background but simply playing him with no reference to his colour. It would be very interesting to see.

**Mehta:** During morning sessions the one aspect that you didn't touch on was the energizing aspect!

**Argent:** Yes, in a way I feel everything I do is a looking for energy. But again there are no hard and fast rules...

**Piotr Cieslak**

*(b. 1948; Address: Zelwerowicz Higher Theatrical School, UL. Miodowa 22/24, 00-246 Warsaw, Poland.) Had early training in Mime and Theatre. Established alternative theatre company in Pulawy, a small factory town in which he developed a theatre training method based on Grotowski's approach. Began teaching drama in A. Zelwerowicz State Theatre Academy in 1980. Has concentrated on direction and training. Has been cast in Wajda's Marble Man. Important productions include: Baal, Wedding, Operette, Princess Magdalena or the Importunate Prince, And They Awake Towards Morning, Thursday Ladies, Beggar's Opera, Volpone, A Midsummer Night's Dream and Animal Farm. Has appeared in Dante, Ashes and Diamonds, Danton's Case and Shadow Line.*

**Ashok Ranade:** Do you feel that demands made on the training procedures and the actors have changed so much that different training methods are required?

**Piotr Cieslak:** I do not think that the media compel us to change. May be it is not a problem in Europe where we have a strong tradition of naturalistic acting. May be its a problem here!... Even the innovations in the technical aspects such as lighting etc. are not a problem for us. Perhaps the British theatre has this problem because they perform in immense spaces with an audience of a thousand or so. It is not a Polish tradition. If a theatre has a capacity to have 350 or so, it is a big theatre in our measure. However, our Academis have big spaces of say 30 square metres. Here we have to take note of the physical problems posed by big spaces.

**Ranade:** In view of the prevailing physical conditions, which kind of theatre is favoured in your country?

**Cieslak:** A studio kind of theatre is surely favoured. Your Experimental Theatre is a space I liked. Your Tata Theatre is too big and has a strange shape to its stage . . . However, we have opera houses which are quite big... The latest theatre in Poland would take place in any empty space. There is something like a tradition of 'poor theatre'. For example Grotowski's theatre is a theatre of empty space and also of

the poor. In it everything is created through acting or by creating the props etc. in artistic ways. This is the Polish tradition.

**Ranade: You have mentioned the Opera tradition and also Grotowski - perhaps two very contrasting theatric traditions. What happens to the training methods?**

**Cieslak:** I do not think they have any connection between them... This has some connection to the fact that we were under foreign rule for over a period of 250 years. The rulers had imposed strong censorship, leading to 'double language' everywhere. This meant that even a classical play would speak in two 'voices'. For example in *Macbeth*, the so-called 'forest coming' scene... in Poland it strikes a significant note because our underground army was in forests. Thus one story is told according to the convention while our bodies are telling a different story. This is the reason why we have a very physical kind of theatre in which we tell something different through our movements.

**Ranade: This means that your theatre has close connection with the general life pattern... Will there be another change in theatre now?**

**Cieslak:** Yes. A number of former artists feel lost. They have to fight a new social situation and they must set for themselves new social aims. This will be a difficult problem in contemporary Poland. But I hope that they have not lost the language of the Polish theatre as such!

**Ranade: I remember you said that during the first three years of their theatre-study, students are not allowed to perform before audiences. On the other hand there are many who advocate early exposure of the actors before a variety of audiences...**

**Cieslak:** I agree there is a special problem as far as actors are concerned. First you have to create a taste in a student and then allow him to come to the audiences. At this phase there is a problem of creating their own body language and acting language. Going to the audiences early may force them into using cliché... of television personalities and elder directors etc.

**Ranade: Your statement gives rise to another question. Do you feel that acting can be 'taught'? And how much of conscious teaching and learning would help an actor to become an artist?**

Cieslak: Acting is imagination and you can increase, expand the imagination. To make clear the story derived from imagination, you have to learn some skills, body language, flexibility of voice and other things... I do not like actors who are not conscious. I do not like the mysterious methods of giving guidance in a special atmosphere etc. I think the only possible way and a cultural way of doing good theatre is to have 'friends' on both the sides. We do the performance together i.e. the actors and the directors and the audiences... all come together.

### **B. V. Karanth**

*(b. 1929; .Address: Rangayana, Nata ka Karnataka, Kalamandir Campus, Vinoba Road, Mysore 570 005.) Graduated from - the National School of Drama, New Delhi, and obtained a diploma in classical music from Banaras Hindu University. Has been Director of National School of Drama (Delhi). Rangamandal Repertory Company (Bhopal) and Rangayana (Mysore). Composed music for all his plays and films. Has so far directed more than 150 plays in Hindi, Kannada, Sanskrit, English, Punjabi and Gujarati ranging from classics to operas. Recipient of the Sangeet NatakAkademi award, 1976. Important productions include: Jokumaraswami, King Lear, Ghashiram Kotwal, Skandagupta, Oedipus, Barnam Van, Mudrarakshasa and Hayavadana. Engaged in evolving a training method while experimenting with the regional and other theatre traditions.*

**Ashok Ranade: You have worked in Karnatak, Delhi, Bhopal and once again in Karnatak. In other words you have worked in many languages and yet you insist that it is better to work in one's own language. Why?**

**B. V. Karanth:** I refer to the total language behaviour when I talk of one's own language. I may deal with many languages but that is not working in them. Of course I cannot say that I deal in Hindi because I have been working in that language from the days I was in professional touring dramatic company... This does not mean that other languages are bad!... and yet my own language is my language, like my mother!

**Ranade: In view of the variety of media operating in the country, is it necessary for the theatre people to work in many languages?**

**Karanth:** Yes, as theatre benefits by a language, a language also gains from theatre... I mean that theatre must have initially a language-base... later a theatre-language can become universal, though there is a danger of our becoming too indulgent with this business of being 'universal'! One must begin with a concrete base which may gradually become abstract. However theatre cannot be as abstract as music or dance.

Theatre is more 'local'... As exemplified by the flower girl in *Pygmalion*... theatre language in India would mean language for and of every land, locality.

**Ranade: Once you had referred to the intrinsic music of Indian languages and the need to keep this fact in mind for training in theatre...**

**Karanth:** One feature to be noted is the phonetic nature of our languages. I also believe in the propriety of rhasva and deergha... I had given example of words Pitaji and Peetaji! Of course we also have modulation, that is, kaku as mentioned by Bharata and others. Further our's is also a tradition of singing. In fact our saints were a kind of street singers. Their tunes indicate that their desire was to communicate. I have experienced many a times that one has to depend on music to communicate. Languages differ but more so in their tones.

**Ranade: Today there is a stress on physical theatre or a theatre of violence. What would music and language do in the theatre?**

**Karanth:** Language has lost today because it has become false. In western countries language has nearly died. However, not so in India! In the west, words lost their meaning because of the world war and the destruction in it. In India language lost its strength because of its ill-use by the politicians. A new strength is to be given to the language. Music and poets can understand this... I feel that the feudal age in India contributed by its use of protocol to the musicality of languages and the martial arts to the angika... What is needed in theatre is the alertness of body...

**Ranade: But I am referring to the contemporary view of getting theatre-content via martial arts. How can you present this type of content?**

**Karanth:** We can. The way it is shown through body, it looks crude. Through sound it would be more artistic, though I know that artistic is a very hackneyed word!

**Ranade: Now an issue more related to training... In Mysore you are imparting training through Kannada. What about people from other areas?**

**Karanth:** First, one must accept one's own limitations. No use working for the Universe! If you understand your own region well, it is easier to move ahead... One point I would like to stress is the neglect of the satvika abhinaya. As you know satvika is not 'goody goody'! Our over-accentuation of the physical is harmful. The aim should be maturity... where neither word nor physicality is important.

## **Mary Ann Vargas Martino**

*(b. 1956, Lima, Peru) Diploma in Plastic Arts and Theatre Studies. Actress, director, translator and voice-teacher. Has acted in plays by Shakespeare, Strindberg, Brecht and Beckett and has directed plays like Maria Jesus and Homegaje a Seratina Quitnteras. She has also participated in and conducted several theatre-workshops.*

**Ashok Ranade: Training-wise do you feel the necessity of changes in training procedures in your country?**

**Ann Vargas Martinto:** Normally a young actor wants to be a multiple actor. I mean he wants to go into the films, television etc. That is, he does not want to restrict himself to a group which however is a very important structure in my country to provide training. So he enters the academic or the semi-academic structure. This he finds inadequate to cope up with the demands of the real theatre. It is very difficult to know exactly what he needs and where to go! I think therefore that the contemporary young actor must be aware, must be an informed person... We see some actors – because of their life bring physicality with them... They don't need to be trained to 'do' things. But urban actors usually do not have that background and hence they would need to be trained to achieve that extra physicality e.g. of folk actors. Specially in a country like ours, where we continue to receive information that has ceased to have cultural reference... Theatre has gone outside to the realm of culture.

**Ranade: Do you feel that the overwhelming stress given on the physical theatre has done injustice to the dignity of the word? Is the stress necessary? You have been a writer and hence specially sensitive to words and its possibilities, hence the question.**

**Vargas Martinto:** I think in countries like India, Peru, the multiplicity of languages must be taken into account. In my case Spanish is a formal language, language of law, religion, literature. There is a reaction against it because it is not a language we speak. Peruvian Spanish is more natural of all the Spanish spoken in Latin America. We are inhibited by Spanish because we still feel that it has been imposed. Hence Latin American literature has created a language which the people in theatre have to accept. It is a young movement as a whole and the approach is to be developed. Personally I think the word has been abused. I think language should be properly used. There is space for everything, space for physical theatre too. But in countries like India,

Peru, the word has been a bit stupidly left in the fire because it belongs to literature. I do not think there is a need to do so.

**Ranade: Do you think that a creatively written word carries seeds of everything that an actor needs? For example the gestures, the movements etc.**

**Vargas Martinto:** I think in English, Shakespeare had that capacity.

**Ranade: Do you feel that physicality itself is interpreted too narrowly? Is it correct to suggest that physicality is passion and violence alone?**

**Vargas Martinto:** What you say is true. Physicality itself is an abused concept. In Peru there is lot of terrorism today. The way media handle information on terrorism – they clog the media with images of violence and make things difficult for say creative dancers to project their kind of images.

**Ranade: Do you feel that greater and better use of music would help in correcting the imbalance in image projection?**

**Vargas Martinto:** You have touched on something which is my passion. I work through music. In my context music is one of the 'fusions' that help a creative artist in theatre to transcend.

**Ranade: In music what would be more evocative as a medium – instrument or voices?**

**Vargas Martinto:** Obviously voice, if I speak through my experience. The music and songs I have collected for my work are extremely resonant. I love instrumental music, though on the stage it is very expensive!

### **Natesan Muthuswamy**

*(b. 1936; Address: Koothu-P-Pattarai Trust, Nani Janaki, Plot No. 58. III Main Road, Sri Ayyappa Nagar, Madras 600 111.) Served in a government department before deciding on working full-time in theatre (1988). Took to play-writing, in 1969. Founded Koothu-P-Pattarai in 1977. Published Neermai (short stories) and Naarkaalikkarar (three plays). As a follow-up of examining interaction between traditional and contemporary theatre, established a repertory in 1988. His work is aimed at establishing a valid theatre idiom and training methodology by bringing, together folk performing arts and modern theatre.*

**Ashok Ranade:** Muthuswamy, this morning's presentation definitely impressed everybody by the linkage which you are able to establish between your training and presentation – actual performance. I would like to know in what steps you train your actors.

**Natesan Muthuswamy:** I don't have any methodology. From 1977 onwards our group is working. Up to 1988 I was working in a company. Only in the evenings or on holidays, I was able to work with actors. After 1988, I am working with them fully. I ask others to train them in different methods. For example a teacher comes daily to work with the actor – street theatre... terukuttu actor comes and works with the actors for a month or two. In the morning a yoga teacher comes and works with them. When my actors are working with teachers, I will be there watching!... When I work with them... I apply what they have learned. I ask them to lead in rotation: Today one actor will lead the other actors... tomorrow somebody will lead, I watch. Thus, they try to apply methods on their own... Now I am giving them 'words'. I give them more words from which they try to write poetry. We have started working on language now. I want to train them in our Indian way. So far they have received a 'western' kind of training. There are possibilities to train our actors from our own methods. I also try to discover that 'consciousness'. If an actor is able to discover 'consciousness' he will react very positively... At present we use physical exercise to develop this consciousness or awareness. But sound also has that quality... That will bring something from within... psychologically. Something hidden will bring out that kind of feeling... In that I need training in music. I am not a 'music man' but music is in me. I am hearing music within me. I want to work with music in future.

**Ranade:** When you write a play, to what extent do you 'write' it?

**Muthuswamy:** I improvised this play... *England* with the actors. My plays arc from our Indian tradition of theatre. I take Indian theatre-concepts and use them in my play. I improvise with the actors. I try to rehearse...try to work the idea with them and write the play. I develop my play with sets... if possible I prepare a miniature set. Because my play does not have a scene by scene division. It will only stop at the end, there is no break in between. For that kind of play you need some devices - some flexible sets, many entrances or exits. As one thing ends the next thing should follow immediately because there is no scene division.

**Ranade:** Why do you write a play without a scene division... is there any special reason?

**Muthuswamy:** Scene division is an interruption. You see, this morning's demonstration is 'total' – from beginning to end... All my plays are 'total'. It is a kind of music... like elaborating a raga.

**Ranade:** Your exercises, this morning, were emotionally very intense exercises and as you said the actors broke down! The question is... do you feel that in your plays you will have this emotional intensity sustained for that long?

**Muthuswamy:** This kind of intensity will not be there... There it will be poetic intensity. Physical intensity without words... that intensity is very unbearable. After the exercise was over the actors wept. This is not possible in a written play... It will have its own lyrical quality. Their action will go on and on. One actor will go another will come... it is in a calm way... in a very leisurely manner or very intense manner.

**Ranade:** Do you write in prose or in verse?

**Muthuswamy:** Only prose, but all the qualities of verse are in that prose. It is a kind of a long poetry.

**Ranade:** Are you influenced by folk songs in your area or... ?

**Muthuswamy:** I am influenced by sound, not by music or folk music or classical music. It is sound that fascinates me. I enjoy jazz, Hindustani music, especially the flute and shehnai. I enjoy... sheer sound, beautiful sound.

**Ranade:** You were also very closely connected with the movement of modern poetry in your area?

**Muthuswamy:** Yes.

**Ranade:** You are talking of your attraction for the sound reflected in your writing... I didn't know that modern poetry in Tamil Nadu has such 'sound'?

**Muthuswamy:** Yes, it has a lot of sounds and images.

**Ranade:** I read the synopsis of your play England. You have been talking about Indian mind, Gandhiji, conditions prevailing in India and at the same time you were telling me that you are interested in scientific discoveries of the new world, scientific advances in surgery etc... Are you able to connect, say, Gandhiji and Gandhi's India with the modern India's scientific advances?

**Muthuswamy:** I discovered Gandhi only when I started writing *England* . . . Gandhi is the most modern man. We misunderstood Gandhi - Gandhi has been distorted all over India.

**Ranade:** Your play *England* cannot be easily understood by the common man while *Gandhiji* was easily understood by the common man!

**Muthuswamy:** Yes, the urban mind will not understand my play. If a play is performed in the village the villagers will get the feel of the play and will be satisfied with it without wanting to know the word by word 'meaning'. Here, the city dweller wants the word by word meaning. I hear Chaurasia's music in the early morning. I don't know anything about raga-s but I enjoy the sound of it the way he develops it into something beautiful. Without knowing the meaning I enjoy it.

**Ranade:** Can you recollect any instance where a villager understood your play better and he told you so?

**Muthuswamy:** Yes... as I told you we are working in the village, 120-125 kms. from Madras, where we conduct theatre festivals. I showed them my play but they were not ready to see it as they wanted to see the *terukuttu*. My play was only for an hour from 8 to 9 and the *terukuttu* performance started at 10. The villagers were very uneasy during that hour in between. We realised that an hour's play will not do for them so next time we combined four to five plays from six or seven groups from all over Tamilnadu and the villagers enjoyed it. They asked us, specially the women folk, why we were conducting this workshop only during this festival... why not in their villages also!

### **Rajindernath**

*(b. 1935; Address: C-5 Press Enclave, Saket, New Delhi 110 017.) Taught in a college. Associated with Abhiyan since its inception in 1967. Insisted on producing - directing plays in Hindi adapted/translated from different Indian languages. Till 1989 worked as the Director, Shri Ram Centre for the Performing Arts. Important productions include plays by Vijay Tendulkar, C. T. Khanolkar, G. P. Deshpande, Badal Sircar, Satish Alekar, Mohit Chatterjee, Madhu Rye, Bhisham Sahani!, Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Debashish Majumdar. Recipient of many national awards including the Sangeet Natak Akademi award, 1977.*

**Ranade: Do you feel that due to the multiple media available now to the actors our training methods need to change?**

**Rajindernath:** You are presuming that there are very well-codified training methods available to us! The question of changing them in the light of the multimedia conditions probably doesn't arise... But whatever training methods are there, I don't think there is any drastic need for changing them. The reason being that if the actor is being trained in a school, particularly in the National School of Drama where he has to adapt himself for various kinds of plays from the extremely naturalistic, realistic, semi-stylised, folk, traditional... I think he can easily adapt himself to any media...

**Ranade: Do you feel that (as now we have better lighting equipment Or better public address systems, acoustically better auditoria etc.) any particular department in acting needs to be strengthened or emphasised or modified... ?**

**Rajindernath:** Yes, there is a very very strong area in which our actors have to be strengthened to a great extent... In fact that is not only the actors who are working with groups or those trained formally but even those actors who are working in the proper school going through a formal training. I find that most of the emphasis is given on the training... particularly in the schools our emphasis also is on either tuning of your body, tuning of your vocal cords... The mind is somehow neglected!... If the training is also of the sharpening of the mind, it will be of great help to the actors and if such actors come to the directors they will be of immense help to the directors... This area somehow, by and large, remains neglected... I got this impression from this workshop also.

**Ranade: You have been directing plays and you have specialised in taking plays from Indian authors in other regions and producing them. You haven't been a trainer, theatre trainer in that sense. Do you feel that there is a place for specialised theatre trainers, in addition to what the directors give to the actors?**

**Rajindernath:** I have been directing plays for the last thirty years and I have done all Indian plays, translated from various Indian languages into Hindi and I have done all kinds of plays also, that is an important thing... I don't think there is any important author or any important play which I have not done. In fact I don't think there is any other director who has done this kind of theatre... This is my peculiar kind of a qualification you can say!... As far as training is concerned... see... when I am doing a very realistic kind of a play... *Ashadh Ka Ek Din*. I don't think there is need of any more training except the training which I can give to my actors and that training also varies according to the need of a particular actor, all actors are not trained together... Whatever

the need... if an actor is weak in movements then I give him some training in movements separately, if an actor is weak in speech... he is given some training in speech... For such kinds of plays I don't need any more training... Supposing I am doing... as I have done *Ghashiram Kotwal* there, I have to get the help of various other trainers in order to make that production as I visualised... Work and training cannot be separated... We give training to the actors while working on a particular play and the need of that play, needs of the actors – according to that we have to vary and adjust our methods.

**Ranade: You have plays from almost every Indian language... Do you feel that you are familiar with all these traditions from which these plays came?**

**Rajindernath:** I will not claim that I am quite familiar with them but taking various plays from various languages... (if they are not written in any particular form of that region) straight plays made no difficulty for me... after all, howsoever diverse this country may be, still it is one and sensibility is one and the culture... overall culture is one! If I take a play which has some traditional or folk background like *Ghashiram Kotwal* ... I was not familiar with the forms which Tendulkar has used in the particular play, I am still not familiar with the forms he has used and I liked the play. There was no opportunity for me to learn those forms... So I forgot whatever forms were there!... I evolved my own forms. It is a free flexible kind of a form with enough input of dance, music and drama... I make them into one particular whole...

That was a great landmark and a success in Hindi theatre. People still talk about it... and if I leave modesty aside for a while... some people think it is better than the Marathi production!

**Ranade: This raises a peculiar question... You are taking plays from regional languages, which are not typical of those language traditions... Once you choose a non-typical play from a tradition... a play which is regarded there as an experimental etc. etc. and you choose another form from Hindi theatre... your activity then is more elitist than the elitist!**

**Rajindernath:** No. I don't choose another form for that play because whatever plays we have taken from various languages most of them are realistic plays and even when some of them are not realistic then I am not denying that tradition, and I don't think I am doing any harm to the play... I will give you one anecdote...

Tendulkar is probably known for not seeing his plays. At least he says so! We finally invited him for the 25th show of *Ghashiram*, 25 shows in Hindi means, my God!

What an achievement kind of a thing! So he came and saw the play and he gave me a compliment... a very strange kind of a compliment... he said that "well when I went into the auditoria I thought I will not see the play but I will think about my next play but I could not." So this speaks a lot!

**Ranade:** You have been insistent on taking plays from Indian languages, you have been a teacher of English literature... So it seems that... to bring a non-Indian, English-trained sensibility to Indian situation gives rise to a particular chemistry. Now when you say that our training, as it is obtained, need not be radically changed and then you say that the actor's mind needed to be trained and you produce plays which are experimental in each region of India... Don't you feel that you are, at least philosophically, on a shaky ground?

**Rajindernath:** No no... I am not... because all these questions you asked were in a very specific context... my reply is in that specific context... My being a teacher of English literature does not make me a person who has English sensibility!... My sensibility remains very Indian. I still feel that this has not affected me. In fact it has probably made me more sensitive to do certain things in life by teaching English literature. I think one of the greatest contributions of people like me... (I am only one of them)... has produced good results. If there is a substantial body of Indian plays now available in various languages... it is only through this movement... You can at this moment say that we have some kind of a national theatre... If you want to use that big word...

**Peter Bzduch**

*Actor of Slovak National Theatre in Bratislava. Czechoslovakia.*

**Ashok Ranade:** In view of so many media now becoming available to actors, do you feel that the teaching of acting should change or you feel that there are certain fundamental principles which can remain the same, whatever may be the media?

**Peter Bzduch:** We are human beings and all these training methods are concentrated on some principle e.g. tension-relaxation, concentration, communication with the partner... So I think that there may be some exercises with specialized orientation but the basic is always basic... all over the same.

**Ranade:** Can we say that if you are trained for theatre, you can also work for the television or the radio but if your exposure is only to the television then.

**Bzduch:** Yes I think that both the processes can be vice versa... But if I want to communicate with the audience in Kathakali I have to learn step by step the alphabet and then the whole language... It is possible...

**Ranade:** In view of all available (technical) aids, do you feel that the style of acting, or the way of acting, has changed or should change? Which department of acting now has become important?

**Bzduch :** Very difficult question... not the question but the answer is difficult! Why are people coming to the theatre? I think because they want to watch the story or because they are interested in the plot but also because they want to communicate with 'live' people and for me it's a basic thing. So if my partner – that means audience – appreciates my so-called 'means of expression'... everything is alright... of course this technical advances make 'corrections' but for this we have technicians... . So I think it depends only on people sitting in the hall and the actors on the stage.

**Ranade:** The other day, you specifically mentioned that you begin training or that you would prefer to begin theatre-training at the age of 14-15... you also said that at that age you have childhood qualities of wonder, or innocence of the impressionable age. However we get a feeling today that by the age of 14 or 15 adolescence has gone and the children have almost become mature persons! They have strong views. They have tendencies of their own, they ask you very inconvenient questions!

**Bzduch:** I can't say with full responsibility that the age of 14 or 15 is the best age to bring the children to the theatre. It is a very dangerous age because they are neither children nor adults and sometimes I feel very nervous about the responsibility because every touch may remain with them... for the whole life. But I think this age has also many advantages... I feel like being a part of it because I am so close to them everyday. These students are so sensitive, they are so full of energy... When they finish their whole study they are very young. And the range of possibilities is quite big. They can go to a theatre and play Romeo-Juliet in the age 18-19. They are very fresh...

**Ranade:** In your country, what type of theatre do you do mainly?

**Bzduch:** European! We are firstly a repertory type of a theatre. That means we are not concentrating on one chosen type of theatre let me say, theatre movement or theatre based on text or so called composition drams, G. B. Shaw or Oscar Wilde etc. We

have to be more flexible, we have to pay attention to the taste of our audience... We have revived musicals based on our national tradition of folklore. It is very successful and we are using some principles of movement-theatre... lot of dance although we have repertory from the classic European... Strindberg, Camus... We are trying to do as wide a range as we can... Because we want to be more close to the public, audience... so we pay more attention to the demand from them and this doesn't mean only a musical but also a comedy... I think that all the technical equipment can't be instead of the actor or the man standing on the stage. The same thing is connected with training... Training is only to develop the possibilities of an actor .

**Ranade: Perhaps you know I can ask you a personal question... Why are you wearing this wonderful cap or headgear?**

**Bzduch:** This one?... I am an actor... although I am a professional actor I sometimes feel a stage-fright, so it is my mask!... Well... It is a present from my friend, my close friend from Bratislava and the second reason I wear it you know I like people with a smile on their faces and when I am crossing the street people look at me and suddenly they are smiling!

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