



NATYA SHODH SANSTHAN

Interview of

Amol and Chitra Palekar

FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF
NATYASHODHSANSTHAN AUDIO LIBRARY

Recorded on 1st. July, 1982



NatyaBhavan

EE 8, Sector 2, Salt Lake, Kolkata 700091/ Call 033 23217667
visit us at <http://www.natyashodh.org>

<https://sites.google.com/view/nssheritagelibrary/home>

(Amol Palekar & Chitra Palekar came a little late and joined the discussion regarding the scope of theatre and the different forms a playwright tries to explore.)

Chitra Palekar

It is not that you cannot do a thing. You can do anything, you can do anything. It is not the point. The point is that the basic advantage that cinema has over theatre, the whole mass of audience, you know, all those eight hundred or nine hundred people he can put them to a close-up. This tableau we still see in theatre sitting as a design in a particular frame but here you can break that frame, you can go closer and he can focus your attention on just a little point here and a gesture here, and a gesture there and you know, on stage you will have to show with a torch yet it won't be visible.

Amol Palekar

The point is Obviously two points come to my mind. First and foremost, suppose you are able to do it, and you are able to hold the audience then why not. The question is – yes, you do it for two hours, just keep one tableau and somebody the off sound is there. If that can hold then I think it will be a perfect valid theatre, why not?

Bimal Lath

Could it be that we can make 10 plays the same way?

Amol Palekar

Yes, why not? In fact I think on this issue I will say something which will immediately start a big fight so I will purposely started not for the sake of fight but because I believe in it also. I think we have this kind of wrong ideas about variety. You know, the moment I give you a play, one comedy and then one serious play and one movement play and one classic, we will say – My God, Amol has such a range! He is giving us so many beautiful things. Fine, but I think, any serious creator is always obsessed with one thing and he goes on searching the same point, on the same point he would go on probing into it and he would go on tackling the same problem from different angles gain and again, all over again. I think it is one essential quality of a master or one who is serious with serious approach. Like in the field of painting or in the field of literature, we usually accept it without any question. But when it comes to theatre or cinema we immediately pass the comment – Oh God, that man is finished! He is repeating himself! I personally think that our approach that we only need variety to prove something is very naïve, I personally find. And a person, in Calcutta particularly, I hear this argument about Badal Sarkar – Oh my God, he is doing the same kind of thing and you have seen one play of his and then now you don't have to see anything because he is doing only the same thing all over again and again! I personally think that here is a man who believes and he is trying to probe into the same problem because to him that is the problem which is of utmost importance. He is probing into it, he is going from different angles, different sides and he is trying to find all those things.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, Amol, but I think if we find that aspect there that he is trying to find in different ways, by different means the same thing we won't have objection. But whenever sensible people say that he is repeating himself then definitely he is repeating, he is not giving something new. At least a new vision, a new perspective to the whole thing and I think you understand well what I mean when I say it?

Amol Palekar

Correct.

Pratibha Agrawal

Let the problem be same, let the style be same but at the same time a creative writer or a director or an actor – he will add something which will make it more impressive or let me say the audience will at least feel that there is something new that he is giving to me – philosophically and so far as form or content let him believe in something we don't mind.

Amol Palekar

Correct. What I was trying to say is that we are what we tend to expect. Out of any art form, the first and foremost point as you rightly used the word that we want to be impressed first and foremost and immediately we get impressed by anything offered which is new, it is very easy for us to be impressed.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Only because it is new.

Amol Palekar

Yes, only because it is new. Whether it is valid or not comes much later which I personally feel is a wrong way of looking at things. The same thing – fine, there is nothing new being offered, just for the sake of argument, nothing new is being offered but if that same thing, consistently, if that still holds you and it still bothers you I think it is perfectly valid.

Pratibha Agrawal

Till it holds us there no problem, nobody will say that he is repeating, it is only when it does not hold, only then that comment comes.

Amol Palekar

Now, then, we would go to the second question, that why doesn't it hold us? May be we are only looking for variety, maybe we are looking only for new thing, we are not really thinking about

the problem or the content - that also may be true. Let us not try to put entire blame on the performer but it may be with us also. Why I am trying to say this is because I find this more and more disturbing. In life, in field of painting we come to accept Picasso's 'Blue Period' as one of the masterpieces where we reject all the colors and keep painting only in one. Now, you also have to give that benefit of doubt that here is a man who is capable, who has proved his capability and now as a matter of choice he is rejecting which I think is a very important factor that like this film – I haven't seen but whenever he was seeing I could gather or like Yancho also –

ChitraPalekar

You had almost started feeling he is gone now, all he knows is some compositions and nude girls running around and then he suddenly once again finds ...so there is always a phase in any creator where his work may not come up to the expectation of the audience for the simple reason that he himself is groping. In theatre may be the other things are not just giving a new content but he may be trying to find out actors' responses, may be his actors are being trained through every production to respond more physically, to respond more mentally and may be they have not come to the perfection yet. To me, if the work is not perfect, it does not matter.

Amol Palekar

The process is more important.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

In fact, much more exciting.

ShyamanandJalan

Don't you expose the limitations of the artist? He is not able to break. Suppose I find out from Badal that he is not able to get away from his limitations and that would be the boring part.

ChitraPalekar

Actually we should not talk on Badal Da only.

Amol Palekar

What I am trying to say is that the end result may not be satisfactory but because the end result is not satisfactory, let us not reject the process. All I am trying to say is this that may be, let us say for instance, that what Badal Da is doing today, we can find it interesting, and it does not hold us, fine. But that does not prove that the process of repeating himself and trying to probe into it we cannot reject the process. That process is a very legitimate and very valid process.

Dr, P. Machwe

Mrs., Vatsyayana has given an example of diving. You dive and dive. You may not get the pearls but diving itself has its own importance.

Pratibha Agrawal

Let us now turn the question to Amol himself.

Bimal Lath

The process, when you talk about the process, you go to see a film or you go to see a theatre, what you expect from the audience or from a critic or from anyone whom you call.....DarshakyaSamajik. Now if you put an empty stage there, nothing there, no lights even no play of light from this or that angle, absolute dark stage, would your audience accept this only if no words are coming for half an hour?

ChitraPalekar

It is a very theoretical question. What I mean is this thing should be tried out, it is very difficult to theoretically reply whether the audience will accept or not.

Bimal Lath

This has been tried in the film of Godard that is why I am saying. There was a blank screen.

ChitraPalekar

Ok. The people see it, try it in the theatre and see.

Amol Palekar

First and foremost I think again we will have to go to another point that you cannot answer this question theoretically for the simple reason that which audience you are talking about.

K. Khemani

Amol, I will ask you a question. You said that Picasso used blue color. He gave new things in that and because? It is not the question of Badal da or any individual, the question is that any artist, when he starts only repeating himself, it may be a process...yatra... And when a line...Rekha... is made out of a point – bindu....the element of point will be there but for that line, you will have to move further. If you go on repeating yourself standing at the same point then of which audience you talk and where do you justify yourself? As Machwe Ji said, dive is more important. If you don't go in for deeper in attempt how can you get the pearl? You have to go further further deeper. This is the question. Now, if we go on living in the same –

Amol Palekar

You said Picasso became immortal...but when? After so many years, now we can look back at Picasso's entire work and then we can gauge. Now we are trying to find the same kind of looking back system of our contemporaries which is not possible.

S. Joshi

I wouldn't say Picasso got the entire name after his death.

Amol Palekar

No, no, we are not talking about earning name, earning name could be –

S. Joshi

Earning name because of his creations.

ChitraPalekar

I personally think that we should not keep on talking about the names because then what happens that we go into individual problems and the general problems get pushed aside. It is not because Badal Sarkar or Godard that is important. I think the summing up of this little thing was that we were talking about the creative process as against trying variety or experimenting even at the people rejecting it and the validity of an experiment as against communication.

Question

Why?

ChitraPalekar

Ultimately one wants to communicate but just because today you do something and people immediately do not respond, do we reject.

Pratibha Agrawal

Please turn the topic to Amol, Samik.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Yes, I will, after a quick summing up. The point where Chitra has very rightly said that we should reach a point - Now what happened to the point which we started this morning with Godard? And if we just go back to that little point what Godard is trying to do is to deconstruct our response. Now we take this picture as something and Godard with his 45 minutes, he proves that we were looking at it the wrong way. We were not looking at the picture at all. We are taking it for granted that James Fonda in Vietnam is fine. Then we look at James Fonda, then at Vietnam, then at the picture as a whole. Then we look at the picture in relation to James Fonda in other films etc and the whole picture collapses, it decomposes before our eyes and we see how what we were seeing was not what we were really seeing was not what we were really seeing. If we try the same kind of exercise and there Godard becomes very important to me and becomes exciting is that we should try to do the same thing also when we are looking at Badal Sarkar

when we are looking at Pablo Picasso also. When we say that Picasso is great, Picasso has always been accepted – no, Picasso has not always been accepted. All his life he has had to struggle. Even now, even now, read the popular press and things on Picasso. Picasso is a joke. People don't understand Picasso. That's the kind of thing that is always been thrown at us from the newspapers. Picasso is still not accepted. Picasso is a name and so we accept the name. But try to think, what pictures by Picasso, what paintings by Picasso we have really loved, we have really formed an attachment with how many? And where are they? So even if we try to ask ourselves, what we have found in Picasso – similarly when we are trying to say that BadalBabu is repeating himself, I find it at times very absurd. BadalBabu had done a play called 'Michil', BadalBabu had done 'Spartacus', BadalBabu has done 'Bhoma', BadalBabu had done the play on Santhal revolt. They are all entirely different apart from the fact that they are being on in a certain theatre which he has accepted. Even that he has broken again and again. The way people sit in Spartacus and look that they have at performance, the look that they have at Julius are different. Even the theatre is different, the basic structure of theatre is different. So would you please all of us try to see separately every play and stop saying that he is repeating? What does he repeat? What is really repeated? Chitra, you have seen all these plays, what is repeated?

ChitraPalekar

Not only I see a production but I love to watch rehearsals and the process of rehearsal and that is when I felt that ok if the end result is not likeBecause I have watched this group for years. Whenever I come, I watch the rehearsals – just sit there and watch. And I realize every time I watch, the response of the actors is getting more and more. You know, they are becoming like one homogeneous body. Being an actress, we having a good group myself, I have always felt so jealous of that response, the way those peoples' minds reacts, the bodies react, they can do just like this and they know what it means. That is not there in my group and that is what I want to achieve and I think that a good enough for a performer it is very exciting. So what if the play is not liked, what they are achieving – it is like a laboratory. Actor's responses are becoming sharpened and sharpened. May be his research work will help somebody else, if we don't reject it straight away. I think it is very important also. He is paving the way.

Amol Palekar

Also another point, when we talk about repetition, basically we look at the form that he does it in this form, the audience is sitting all rounds and he doesn't use any other props and this and that, so he is repeating himself. I would like to ask another question that for all these years, aren't we repeating ourselves, everybody put together in that same proscenium arch where we use the sets, we use the lights, we use only frame for the audience and entries and exits? And we are not ready to accept that form as a repetition nor are we ready to reject that form because it is being repeated but another form which is being tried out and possibilities of that form which is being tried out, we want to reject it in a matter of two years' time which I think is again. It is our sort of...impatience or our injustice to the entire process. To me, the process is more important, to me the entire way we go on probing is important because I personally feel all of us at one stage

or the other realize the fact that to impress your audience is really very easy. By doing it for two years, any person who has done theatre for two years or films for two years he knows all the tricks and all the gimmicks by which he can very easily impress the people. Now, the choice is whether you want to only go on only impressing the people or you want to get involved with your own process and by which impressing people do, no more remain interesting to you. I will tell you about our own film 'Akriti' which we did. Now, being my first film, as a film director it was actually very easy for me or it would have been probably necessary also for me to show how many things I can do as a director. And how well I impress people as a director and I know all that gimmicks. I know what kind of hand-held shots excite people – My God, how this shot was taken? This kind of a question comes immediately or those beautiful compositions or beautiful angles and all those things, I know all that. But it is because of this kind of a process, in theatre as a director which I have gone through, that's why even being first directorial venture in another medium which is film, still I am no more interested in impressing people that way. Otherwise I could have done all these things. If you have seen my films you would realize that in that film I have consciously stuck only to very very simple kind of – I mean at no stage in my film a particular composition or a particular camera angle or any of these kind of things become overpowering, become very impressive. The entire film comes to you without making you aware of all these techniques and which I think is a part of my maturity or the process whatever I have achieved over all these years in theatre. now again, even in theatre, I have done all the experimentation, I have done this, that.....I have played with the form. Now I somewhere don't feel interested merely in trying those things and all –

Amol Palekar

Or another approach is that I have liked it immensely. It has moved me, it has stirred me, it has disturbed me, and it has excited me. now if it can, a particular story or a particular play or a particular poem or anything can do that to me, first and foremost I see no reason why it cannot do to another person. I start with that premises and it is like sharing the same experience with somebody else. Like we do it when, if Chitra reads a beautiful poem or a beautiful novel she would like to come and read it out to me. The basic thing is that because she likes it to share with me that very experience, that is one and secondly even at a very personal selfish level, I think, it is during that process, she is trying to re-live that earlier satisfaction, earlier excitement whichever she had got, she tries to relive those moments while sharing it. I mean, as I have understood, this is the whole process of any performing art. So when we look at it that way.....i perform a play, which has excited me which has given me so many good moments. I like to share those very moments, that very excitement with my audience. And I am hoping that, yes, we would be able to share, we would be able to share not once but may be five times. we can do it hundred times – the excitement is much more.

S. Joshi

Amol, one very significant point in this – you have built up yourself layer after layer. Do you think your audience also is being trained by that very procedure? Unless it is so, because now you have developed yourself, you are looking at some of your limitations and brought up to a particular level. The audience cannot be written off, that you would accept. Isn't it? So, to put those experiments of your achievement in the field of art, how you are going to put it to your audience which is completely innocent about your procedure? Where do you strike the balance?

ChitraPalekar

But the responsibility of training an audience I don't think falls on the performer.

S. Joshi

I do not say that –

ChitraPalekar

One second, because if you say that the audience has not got so many layers, that is when either the professor of aesthetics or the critics or you know, all these people are there to train up the audience and give all those layers to them. I mean the performer's duty is to do something honestly and hope that the audience likes it and by consistently doing it may be you are offering some sort of training or whatever that may be. But it is not the duty of the performer to offer training. It is the duty of the professor of dramatics or a critic.

S. Joshi

I don't say. I don't want to divide; I am just giving the facts of the situation.

Amol Palekar

Not only that –

ChitraPalekar

Otherwise you see, what will happen is every time you say, this is a very dangerous question because this is always asked that you may do something. When we did 'Gochi' in Bombay in 1972, people straightway said, this is not a play. And we went on doing it for two years and at the end of two years many people started liking it but we had to do it. Just because people were not trained or they may not accept it, what can we do? Why this is a very dangerous question is, then you say today we say people in Calcutta, people in Bombay let us say, people in Pune may not. The moment you say, alright, I'll do something which people in Pune may accept, people in Kolhapur may not. So who is your audience? So that way you cannot just do anything to please a particular set of audience.

S. Joshi

I did not want to pass over that responsibility to the performers -

Amol Palekar

Not only that, I would extend the same argument a little further that when you are talking in terms that while your own process has come to a particular stage, has your audience come to that point? I am taking it purposely to an extreme. Isn't it the same argument which we hear when a commercial play is done or a Manmohan Desai film is being made? He says, yes, I know what a great film can be. My audience is not ready for it. All I am left with is, I will give them only this kind of 'Amar Akbar Anthony'. Now this is a very very good escape for us by putting the entire blame on the audience. We say, yes, I know all this but my audience is not ready. Now, it becomes a very vicious circle that how the audience is going to be ready for it unless you do it. You want to put the whole responsibility on the audience and audience because it is not getting it, they are not going to be ready ever, so who does, where does it start? I feel that it must start with the creative artist because he goes on doing it. And as I said that, by doing it, I mean the entire theatre movement, Marathi particularly, like we did the play 'Gochi' in '72 which was totally out of whatever our concepts about the theatre or form or all what a play should be, whether this is theatre or not, whatever the ideas were, it didn't fit into them.

Pratibha Agrawal

Could you tell us a little more about 'Gochi'?

Amol Palekar

No, it is a little difficult to say.

ChitraPalekar

Because it was a play which we had done in 1972, we had to perform it in small places like this. When I say small places like this, that was the time even Badal Sarkar had just started this and mind you, so that perspective you have to see. That is a play written by D. Rege and actually the book is available in Marathi. Afterwards it was printed. What Amol as a director did was he completely broke it into various pieces first and reconstructed the whole thing and then made a form? There were four actors only, five actually. There is a man, there is a woman and there are two children. The two children are themselves chorus and they go on changing the roles, in any case. They are everything but the father and the mother. The chorus people. The whole thing was about the absurdities of a middle class life and if I can tell you just one small example, you might know. This woman says that my husband always comes home at 7-30. Now, one second past 7-30, two seconds past 7-30, 3, 4,5,6,7 and she goes into a hysteria and then if you understand this sort of thing. It was a very absurd sort of thing about any normal conditions. When the policeman comes, he says, I heard your husband is lost. Can you tell me what the color of his eyes is? What is the color of his hair? And this woman just cannot tell anything. It was this sort of a thing. And another example I will give you, the form was done, we had used a lot of

gestures and dance. Dance not in the classical sense but movements, all sorts of fluid movements, we did that. On one hand, the movements broke a pattern, we did not go to the folk form nor did we go to the classical forms, mind you, we just developed the fluid form, give it any label. And secondly, at sound level also, we tried a lot of things. Usually we talk of the tonal quality, the pitch varies according to the meaning. Here we went into contrasts and you know for example, the father says that Oh, I want to go away, let me be realized – something like that. All the time he was wriggling on the ground slightly melodramatic. He is being melodramatic. Now the fun of it was, we used to enjoy it very much, the moment he does that he makes a big speech and he stands on the stool and says, let me be away from all these. The chorus children also come out, so, Natak, acting, Hypocrisy. So immediately we bring it. We ourselves puncture it. We don't make the audience do it at all. We come and puncture immediately. And immediately we break into – the moment we say Natak, hypocrisy –

Amol Palekar

I take advantage of association, Hindi film association. This man sitting like this, suddenly becomes a tree and these two people running around and singing a typical Hindi film situation.

ChitraPalekar

And going and falling – Dhadak – on the stage.

Amol Palekar

Whatever our association with acting, where we talk in terms of acting comes, you know, all these association were used at so many levels – this play was done in '72.

ChitraPalekar

I don't think there was a single dialogue spoken in a beautiful natural way.

Pratibha Agrawal

Would you call this the first experiment on Marathi stage of this type?

Amol Palekar

Yes. Now this was done in '72. I will also tell you about the audience reactions.

Pratibha Agrawal

What was the duration?

Amol Palekar

One hour ten minutes. Now, this was again consciously done. Not a single performance – we did eighty performances of this play, not a single performance was done in proscenium arch. It was done in hall anywhere right from LIC canteen on Saturday afternoon, after half-day office, to going to some society and performing in the garage or on somebody's terrace. In this way it was

performed. Now, the response in Bombay, I mean, at one level it was held as one of the greatest landmarks and the starting point of a new thing and two that this is no theatre at all.

Chitra Palekar

People would say. Just four people coming together and doing a lot of bum chum like small children.

Amol Palekar

Right up to that. Now, I will tell you we went and performed in a small town like Kolhapur or Nasik where all this avant-garde movement and film and music and all this discussion and all had not reached. We went and performed there. And only introduction I gave there was that probably you may have heard about this play through newspapers and all that, that this is no theatre or this is absurd theatre or this or that. The only request I would like to make is that don't get baffled by all these labels, don't think about it and if you feel like laughing please go ahead, laugh and don't think that this is an experimental theatre and that is why we have to see it with serious faces. Nothing of the sort. Just look at it as you would like to look at any other play. And the audience, the way they reacted in Kolhapur or in Nasik was so fascinating they had no mental blocks about all these no theatres and absurd theatres – No, because they were not aware of all those things. And to them, this experience was something which held them. I mean, to tell you a fact, an old man, an eighty years old man after seeing that performance walked up to us and said, After seeing Bal Gandharva's play – now which is absolutely different form, entire music, but he said that excitement which I got in Bal Gandharva's plays, after all these years, I got it today. Now which has absolutely no relation but it is only in terms of pure theatrical experience.

S. Joshi

I think Amol, you have rightly put the word 'impresses'. This impression comes at this stage also. Don't forget that. So you have impressed people at a particular point or with a particular device. That is what so important. The artist is very conscious about his own work. He knows what he is doing and he has by doing that, he has definitely developed a particular façade in his work which somehow impresses the audience and not confuses them.

Amol Palekar

I personally think, you are taking two words as one which I don't take. I mean the impression you get, there has to be an impression but whether you impress people with something. Now I am not talking about the impression. There has to be an impression. I am talking about impressing people like today what I wear will create an impression yet. But I get personally decked up to impress you is a different thing. I wear most beautiful clothes or I wear purposely shabby clothes are conscious way of impressing. I am not talking about that.

S. Joshi

Pratibha Ji also didn't talk about that.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, I don't think that I meant that. I definitely meant that audience is there, it gets an impression. It gets impressed. You have to be conscious about it at some level.

Amol Palekar

Yes, yes.

Pratibha Agrawal

Then of course nobody can deny. This is very general thing Samik –

Question

Kalidasasaid, it is for different kind of people, what he could not achieve with sophisticated audience of Bombay. You could achieve at Kolhapur and Nasik which belong to the virgin soil.

ChitraPalekar

On the contrary, it is not true that we did not impress Bombay audience – is not true. As we said, we actually impressed – whatever the word is – the most sophisticated and the least sophisticated also. It has always been like this. I have suddenly realized that most sophisticated is the people who are forever watching, forever reading, writing or talking. Those people held it up and those who had never seen anything. The in between people, you see what happens, they would rather not see but worry a lot about it.

Amol Palekar

And also another thing which is very interesting to note, that after '72, today, all these forms and all these ways of presentation in theatre, in Marathi theatre has probably become so much cliché that we no more think that this is anything which we are getting. Right at inter-collegiate level, one-act play competition level, a young boy get up and do something like this in this form. So which also means, I think, very simply we can hasn't the audience also travelled with us? Because unless the audience has travelled with us in all these years, this kind of thing would not become cliché. And that is why again it becomes necessary today to find some different way of expressing, different form of expressing and again in that process the audience is going to be with you. So this kind of approach I can never understand that – yes, your own process is going on but what about the audience? Of course, the audience is also there and they also are with you and it also goes on through that process because it is not just one group doing or two groups doing when it becomes a movement, a valid movement.

S. Joshi

As Chitra has said there is segregated audience, untouched audience, I don't think there are such demarcations. The audience is there – say sophisticated audience or middle-way or the village audience. I think there is something that we have put which you have created, I again use the word 'created impression', not to impress again, impression on the say, aesthetic acceptance of

your word and that is something clicks. May be at different places at different ways. That is how..... (Something in Marathi) that is how it is happening.

Pratibha Agrawal

Samik, you were going to put some questions –

Samik Bandyopadhyay

I think one point has been very successfully and very effectively made by Amol and Chitra that it is no use always waiting for the audience to grow and come up and only when the audience is mature and understanding enough and then we do plays for them. And secondly there is no real way when a director can say that well, that the audience is ready. How do we know it? Unless we do something, the audience takes it and then we know it is ready. If they don't take it, we know that it is not ready so, there is no way in which we can really calculate and find out that since the audience is now ready for this kind of thing we can give them that. So this has to be an ongoing process, this has to be a dialectical process. When you go on doing your things –

Question

What happened to 'Raktakarabi' the way the audience took Sombhu babu is not it?

Samik Bandyopadhyay

In fact, it happens with everything, even a major work of literature. When James Joyce's 'Ulysses' first came along, it was immediately rejected that the audience never accept it, would never read it, this is not literature, this is not language at all. People had to wait and it was there. Now it is a classic, it is a masterpiece. The same thing has happened as Amol has said, Chitra had said with this particular play.

Question

There is a difference – 'Ulysses' is a novel, the only novel. But a drama and a film can't be compared to a particular novel.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

No, at the same time the example that Chitra has cited well, it took two years and then it was there. now Amol says now it has become too much of a cliché and it is time that we drop that kind of things. So audience –

Question

Is it only on the time factor?

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Yes.

Amol Palekar

Is not time factor very relevant? When we are talking about the entire process and that is where, I am not misunderstanding the word or anything, but just so that we clarify it again, once again that if we are interested merely by doing a play and impressing the audience right then and there, yes, it could be one way of doing it but when you are talking about the growth and the process and all that, it also requires time. All the things which I have understood or gathered or learned today over all these years, last fifteen years, whatever we have learnt, in theatre it was just not possible for even us assuming the fact that I am a genius, even then it is not possible for me to know it in any first play. So as it is very essential that I go on performing, go on learning, go on thinking, go on trying out things, go on probing for all these years, this time factor is bound to be there and which is very very important. In the same manner, even the same kind of process goes on with the audience.

ChitraPalekar

One second, let me give you a bit of thing which has happened in Bombay theatre and I think that will solve most of the questions. It is like this that in 1968-69, when we did 'Yayati' or 'SunoJanmejaya', PaglaGhoda and all that, we used to perform in theatre like Tejpal where ten people sitting in front, rest 550 seats are vacant. Now, that is the way. If we could have five performances it was considered great and a cause for celebration. Today hardly 13-14 years have passed and not only that a young complete generation of audience has evolved and that is also very important. Again we always say that our children seem to be a little cleverer than we were and that sociological thing is also very important. Today's eighteen twenty year old children seem to be much more sharp, seem to have much less mental blocks, maybe it is same here, than the previous generation. Therefore when you perform today you have almost an audience which is already a step ahead. I think this is inborn thing, it is not by studies, and it is just that what you will call it –

Samik Bandyopadhyay

History, time –

ChitraPalekar

Exactly. As if the whole race has improved slightly in aesthetics. Therefore, as it is, there is more audience in the form of younger people and on top of that another thing that we find is when these plays are performed, they are received, mind you, like professional plays. Today you can do 'PaglaGhoda' or 'EvamIndrajit' and very easily do about 70 shows in a big theatre like a professional play. That is one way. You can. It is possible if you have got the management to do that and the opposite is that the regular commercial theatre where people are paid their might's and all that if you go and see, they are doing plays which ten years back nobody would have dreamt of doing on commercial stage. They are doing a lot of Tendulkar plays and plays of young writers are being done, different forms – no more three acts, only two acts, sometimes

even one set. The style of acting is also that which may be of Anamika or of Aniket – everything, style of acting, dress, set everything. Today the commercial stage is doing what ten years back experimental stage was doing. Then what does it show? That in mere 10 years whatever was quite experimentation has become established. Now whenever experiments become established things, it means that things have moved forward.

Pratibha Agrawal

Do you meant to say that there are less differences in the content and the style and the attitude of the commercial theatre and the non-commercial theatre?

ChitraPalekar

No, no, no. I don't mean that way. The commercial theatre – the very basics are different. There –

Pratibha Agrawal

Leave aside the commercial side of it, the money side of it.

ChitraPalekar

I didn't mean it that way. What I meant was may be that the basic motive in choosing this type of play is variety again. I don't know the seriousness of choosing such plays –

Samik Bandyopadhyay

And commercial theatre also knows that they have an audience for this – an audience which you have made for this. So they want to get that.

ChitraPalekar

What I meant was the play, or the type of plays which ten years back were done by established amateur groups all over the country today in Bombay are being taken up and being performed on the commercial stage.

Amol Palekar

One concrete example of this is Vijay Tendulkar is no more considered experimental playwright. No experimental group in Bombay would think of doing Vijay Tendulkar plays. But Vijay Tendulkar is a very well-established and commercially accepted playwright. Or Jaywant Dalvi, a director like Vijaya Mehta.

Pratibha Agrawal

Could you analyze this situation a little more? What are the reasons that a playwright who came up as an experimental playwright and who is still respected as a playwright of importance and not a commercial playwright only. Now, are you saying that he is now an established commercial playwright, how and why?

ChitraPalekar

I'll tell you. I think we are mischasing the word 'commercial'. What is happening in fact is that what is obviously experimental is this is that here we are not going for money at all. Few years back, some 12 years back if 10 people came to see a play, then slowly may be 100 people, today those plays will be seen by 800 or 1000 and show after show – even if they go. It only proves one thing that he has not degenerated, it is only people have started responding more. I have been still maintaining because in fact what has happened is, these types of plays are no more considered as something – oh, we don't understand it! Now you will never hear people saying this. They will say, I didn't like the play or I like it. That is all. It proves that for 14 years various groups doing, consistently exposing, slowly the numbers have increased. Now comes the point why Tendulkar is not being done by the experimental groups. Because just as he has helped in creating more audiences, the experimental groups also want to outgrow Tendulkar and Elkunchwar or Kanetkar. I am not talking about my individual play because anybody may write one bad play or direct a bad play. Now the groups want something beyond that and the groping is going on.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, that is different –

Samik Bandyopadhyay

It is very simple process. Any radical experimentation, any new breakthrough is a breakthrough at one point of time and then it is absorbed into the mainstream. Once it is absorbed into the mainstream, you need a new breakthrough.

Amol Palekar

Yes. You have to wait for that breakthrough and it will come.

Pratibha Agrawal

I don't know how many playwrights are there, who started this way and became successful commercial playwrights or let us say whose scripts became very popular on commercial stage also. Can we sight a few examples of the modern playwrights?

ChitraPalekar

I will just mention names which we would - all would know commonly. Ok? Let us take the same cliché names – Badal Sarkar's old plays, Mohan Rakesh's plays, any of these plays – all these plays when done now it – 'AdheyAdhure' is run-away hit it is a commercial run absolute super hit and the best joke is there is no difference between the production, design, conceived style of acting ten years back and now today it is a run-away hit. It was not ten years back.

Pratibha Agrawal

But I would like to know that by commercial you mean the plays - they are being done by the commercial groups or by amateur groups doing with commercial success?

Amol Palekar

By the commercial groups they are being done and they are very well accepted.

Pratibha Agrawal

A few more names of the plays please. I would like to record that which are the plays are successfully –

Amol Palekar

Playwright like Jaywant Dalvi, I think is basically a writer of immense strength and power. He has written plays which ten years ago nobody would have touched them on commercial stage. Today Jaywant Dalvi is the most saleable name on the commercial stage and this does not mean that Dalvi is writing something bad.

ChitraPalekar

The play ‘Barrister’ has so many shades – so good!

Amol Palekar

I will try to clear is I am trying to prove that Dalvi has fallen –

Pratibha Agrawal

Is he purposely writing different and then –

ChitraPalekar

No.

Amol Palekar

He has always written those kind of things – a play like ‘Barrister’ which is a very complex play or a play like ‘Sandhya Chaya’ dealing with two old people, ten years ago nobody would have touched it.

Pratibha Agrawal

These are being done on commercial stage?

ChitraPalekar

Yes, absolutely buy off productions and paying might's to the artists and to the backstage.

Amol Palekar

Or even another level, a director like Vijaya Mehta who was a sort of pioneer of Avant-garde movement in Marathi, today, Vijaya Mehta is another name which is very very salable on commercial Marathi stage. The whole acting style has changed. Today even if you see a Marathi commercial play, you don't see theatrical acting or loud acting which we associate with commercial theatre and the kind of under acting we talk about or the naturalistic acting we talk about is very much part of the commercial stage today. You find most of the actors giving very good, fine, sensitive performance.

ChitraPalekar

What has happened is – again this is a historical that why people say – Oh, nothing new or exciting happening on the experimental front. I think if you look at it in a perspective, it is bound to happen that way because everybody who was thinking, doing things, the whole thing graduated to the mainstream. It will be sometime before the vacuum is again filled with younger people and somebody is bound to do it. When people ask questions like this, it is very irritating – Oh, Amol Palekar and so and so and so have gone into films and therefore the Marathi theatre became an orphan. There were friends of ours and they were very annoyed and they just said, you know, if Marathi theatre is so weak that if one person goes away it has to break its green bangles?

Amol Palekar

And if it is so weak it deserves to die.

Pratibha Agrawal

Samik, do we find this type of interaction or this type of influence in Bengal? Influence of the amateur theatre on the Bengali professional theatre?

Samik Bandyopadhyay

No, for the simple reason that Bengali commercial theatre is still too much high bound within its own frames, within its own conventions and the other thing that is where we get stuck is really that even in our experimental theatre, there is so much of the old 'Para theatre' kind of acting and everything. Even the arrangements etc. So we have a surface setting, glitter etc. but the basic acting style still remains tied to the older 'Para Theatre' tradition. Still too much of it is there. So that kind of a total break hasn't really happened here and that is one of the reasons why the commercial theatre and so few actors from our experimental theatre have really gone into commercial theatre. Commercial theatre still uses virtually retired film stars. The film stars who have been there thrown out of cinema, it is their area. So it is different here.

ChitraPalekar

In Bombay, let me explain to you, this type of theatre also exists in between. They have varieties with old film stars. Acting style is very poor and all that, but slowly that is dying. What has happened is may be because I have seen and studied Bombay, Pune, Calcutta and other groups, in Bombay it is very peculiar that groups are very flexible. If you say Aniket, we do not have like Anamika, a huge history, a big this thing! We are not group oriented people at all. Everybody forms his own group. And they all go and help each other. Any one of us who gets a break in professional theatre he goes and if he wants to act with us we just work together. It is just complete fluidity. In Pune, it happens in Theatre Akademie and PDA, the major groups that you will see theatre activity is much less in Pune than in Bombay. Every new young person who comes in, he goes into a big group. Then he gets over awed by the seniors. In Bombay, there is no respected idol. There every young man in Bombay thinks he is the greatest, he forms his own group and starts doing the thing. It helps him – this lack of respect.

Pratibha Agrawal

I think, here we may find similarly a little that groups like PLT or Bohurupee or Nandikar or Chetana all these who are doing plays for a number of days and whenever they do they get an audience. They are definitely different from the commercial theatre. Their production at the same time many a times, they are incorporating certain elements of commercial thing also or at least they are getting commercial success. So maybe that is something the situation is nearer to Bombay where you have groups doing this type of –

ChitraPalekar

No, why, it is different I will tell you Pratibha Ji because there is no group. A person like Mohan Tondewalkar or RajaramShinde or Mohan Wag, these are individuals. Like film producers, they put their money. Maybe they have the budget. They say on this very play I will spend 40 thousands or something like that he must be doing and he goes and asks Vijaya Mehta, will you direct? Then together they say let us ask Dalvi for a script. Let us see whether he has written, let us see whether – then they say this cast we will take. Then the director will say, No, no, this person, maybe a new person but still I want him. And then, it is like doing a film project. It starts with the producer who collects the director and a writer and a script, they collect actors in that way it is commercial. But somehow you see the end result, it is not commercial. It is like professionals doing very good performance, slick productions.

Pratibha Agrawal

This is what I am telling that these groups working here in Calcutta, we can't put them as commercial and they are definitely a little different than amateurs.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

We have already started calling Bohurupee and Nandikar semi-professionals because they are paying their artists, they are making profit definitely etc.etc. So virtually and they are doing that kind of plays. Once again the complaint or some kind of grievances that we may have.

ChitraPalekar

Just like INT we have in Bombay.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Yes. It is almost the same kind of thing.

ChitraPalekar

It's like a company where the decisions are taken by a group of people and they give might's every night after the show etc. They can afford to take more risks because the group has a strong financial base.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

And at the same time, the same kind of thing happens with INT and the Bohurupee, Nandikar etc. that since they are not clearly definitely identical as a commercial theatre, they can still get various advantages, grants etc. so that gives them another position.

ChitraPalekar

What I admire about these individual producers is, I have met them, I have talked to them, and I suddenly realized that they frankly don't have any love of theatre and all that. Even if they try out the new actors and even if it is dubious motive of novelty, but so what? Their motive may not be very pure but the fact is that the audience is getting to see more and more sophisticated thing. So that is good enough.

Pratibha Agrawal

Amol, there is one question that I wanted to ask you right in the beginning and begin the discussion but the discussion started. How you started acting, when did you start? Tell us a little about yourself, your first experience.

Amol Palekar

Oh, that is not at all interesting.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, it will be a valuable documentation even if it is not very interesting and maybe we will find it interesting.

Amol Palekar

I will tell you. I had no intentions of becoming an actor at all. I was not very fascinated by theatre or anything. As any normal, young boy is interested in going and watching theatre, that's all. Nothing beyond that. I never thought that I would like to be in theatre or I would like to be their acting and all that. The only thing which happened was I had lot of time on my hand at that time being a painter, plenty of time was there with me.

Pratibha Agrawal

You were painting at that time?

Amol Palekar

Yes. And I was also doing a job in the bank. Because I had lot of time and so I come in contact with Dubey's group. That is also at a very personal level because Chitra was acting and I was interested in Chitra so I used to go and sit there only so that I could date her. As simple as that. So, with all these factors combined together, that is when Dubey asked me to design sets for his 'Shuturmurg', sets and lighting, so I did that which I enjoyed to one extent but nothing great. Then after that he asked me since you are free why don't you act?

Chitra Palekar

Dubey is always at lookout who has time. He always manages like this.

Amol Palekar

And he made it very clear to me, Look, don't have this kind of impression that I find great potentials in you and that is why I am offering you a role or all that. Don't have this kind of misconception. Because you are free and because I am not finding actors, I ask you whether you would come in.

Pratibha Agrawal

Very blunt way of asking.

Amol Palekar

Yes, but very clear and very helpful also. When I did my first role in theatre (Santata, court chaluuahe), I also had no misconception that Satyadev Dubey, the great director has found some great talents in me and that's why I have come to the theatre, nothing of that sort.

Pratibha Agrawal

What role you did in that?

Amol Palekar

I did Pongahe. This is how I went in.

Pratibha Agrawal

Which other plays you worked with Dubey?

Amol Palekar

In the first year –

ChitraPalekar

This first year is very interesting.

Amol Palekar

1967-68.

ChitraPalekar

December '68. '68 to '69 was very interesting.

Amol Palekar

After this play was over, Dubey was to do 'SunoJanmejaya' and then again he took me for the 'Yubak' and that is when actually Dubey started training me. In the true sense of the term he started training me about every damn thing, how to stand properly, how to walk, how to speak, what is projection.

ChitraPalekar

He used to roach us in the room. I had a habit of another thing which he has taught us, in those days, somehow these things keep coming back to you, he used to say, tension, one tends to get tension wrinkles. You see in films and whenever we see, we suddenly remember Dubey's words – hitting by umbrella we would say – you think that just doing this wrinkles on the head or making shoulders tense you are giving a great tense performance? Relax your shoulders, relax this. Everything only through eyes.

Amol Palekar

From within, which is more important and that is how he started training. Again I was very much interested in the training process of it but it still didn't excite me to become an actor or something. It was just Ok. I did 'SunoJanmejaya', after that I did 'AadheAdhure'. Till that I was just there doing theatre as I was doing my bank job. No more interest than that. Very frankly it used to be Ok for me. Nothing which inspired me or excited me. At that time, Dubey asked me, why don't you direct a play? Now frankly I didn't see any reason how I was qualified to direct a play at that time, just dome three plays. I said, I don't think I can do, I mean I don't know anything about it and I should become a director or something? He said, well, that could be seen when you do a play whether you have it or not. What is the harm in trying it out? I personally think that it would work out nicely. As I have studied you, you can become a good director.

ChitraPalekar

He said, you have analytical mind.

Amol Palekar

Very analytical mind and you can also communicate with your co-actors very well. You have the knack of explaining and all these things. So why don't you try it out? And that is how I directed my first play in 1969 – Ballabhpur.

ChitraPalekar

And why it is important is that just one year before he was doing backstage and lighting and doing very minor roles. In '69, Ballabhpur was given to him and then Dubey just gave him the free hand – you do everything – his typical sentence in those days even when I directed the play, he would say, I am not going to come for your rehearsals. You will do everything. I will come in the last five days and I will watch.

Amol Palekar

So this is what happened and this was the point when I really became interested in theatre. theatre I started relating, I started thinking in terms of theatre, I started thinking in terms of plays, I started thinking more and more about theatre and I can now looking back I can clearly say that this was the point when I became interested in theatre. And then I went on doing more and more plays and so much so that at one stage I decided to switch from painting to theatre as my medium of expression. After that you know probably the whole process so I will not go into that. Like in 1972 with 'Gochi' it became another very major turning point.

ChitraPalekar

That was the first production of our group.

Amol Palekar

Where we formed our group and we started doing.

Pratibha Agrawal

Why did you not stick to Hindi theatre and went to Marathi theatre?

Amol Palekar

For various reasons, because –

ChitraPalekar

There comes a time when you don't want to work under anybody.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, that is not the point. You could have worked in Hindi medium in your own group.

Amol Palekar

I will tell you for various reasons. One most important reason was that though we were doing Hindi theatre or Dubey's group was doing Hindi theatre, we realized that the audience which

comes to see the play is totally non-Hindi in any case. People who come are Maharashtrians and a few Gujaratis. Now, in any case, if I am going to communicate to this audience then I think I can communicate to them much better in Marathi than I can do in Hindi which is not my language in any case.

ChitraPalekar

Another advantage was that, in those days, let us face the facts that acting in all those Hindi plays and all that meant you were suddenly in different society from what we ever knew. That advantage was there but at the same time at least personally I got this feeling that you are always doing for a particular group. Every time you performed the same faces come to see the play, then they clap and then there is a party and then they talk about it. How can we break that? How do we reach different people? Again I am talking of those days when theatre was appreciated more by the middle class Maharashtrians and not by the real sophisticated classes in Bombay. But somehow for those plays because of particular circumstances only those people used to come and it was not very enjoyable to keep on performing for these people who anyway come to it as a social event and somewhere we felt – no, we are more serious than that. So we don't want to perform only for these people at all and so that is when we did Marathi, I think, we could perform in other cities, other towns of Maharashtra. All sorts of other people come to see and I think the whole audience widened and expanded.

Amol Palekar

Some two years back, when we did a play we toured all over Maharashtra, went into interiors and performed even in small villages and all that kind of thing. Now, this was another experience to all of us of facing a different kind of audience, trying to communicate with that audience and all this has helped. If we would have been doing only Hindi theatre, I am quite sure, we would have still performed, instead of performing a Tejpal we would be performed today in Prithvi Theatre with same kind of audience you see every day, same kind of reactions you see every day, they are bowled over, and there is no other reaction.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Unreal experience.

Pratibha Agrawal

Do you mean to say that all the Hindi theatre that is being done in Bombay is going through that sort of -?

Amol Palekar

I would again make probably a dangerous statement but not only in Bombay, I think all over the country, the kind of Hindi theatre is being done is unfortunately limited to this extent. They have never tried to break and go and get different audience, more kind of audience off hand. Whatever

I have seen like Anamika – when Anamika performs in Calcutta, I am quite sure, you would see the same faces over and over again. That is the audience which is good but I personally think it has to go beyond that or when you see in Delhi, a production by RajinderNath, you see the same kind of audience coming again and again.

Pratibha Agrawal

No Amol, I must tell you when we do 50 shows 70 shows of a particular play, we have different audience, it is not the same. Maybe that 500 people are common or 700 people are common but beyond that different people come. Now of course if you have an only one or two shows maybe that in the initial shows you have the same people.

ChitraPalekar

About Calcutta I don't know, but again about Bombay –

Pratibha Agrawal

The ticketed shows that we have in that different people won.

ChitraPalekar

It may be controversial statement but it is a very personal statement is that I stay very close to Prithvi. And just as we talked about Marathi stage and its growth or whatever today again another point is this that in Bombay and it happened just before our eyes, since Prithvi Theatre is a lovely marvelous beautiful theatre but is set in such a locality where really the real people of Bombay cannot reach. Now what happens is and I stay very close to it, but even then I just don't get much inspired to go there – number one all the plays which were done ten twelve years back and we have already outgrown those plays, are today performed there. There is nothing wrong. It is not performing there, performing there is fine, but they are performing there with a stance that they are terrific experimental and modern which I think is wrong. They should just perform, you know. Then the people who come there are the people who are suddenly awakened to the fact – oh, that is theatre! They didn't know that it existed, now they suddenly realize and now it has become a fashion. But whenever I go to Prithvi, I have seen that out of 250 people or 350 people who sit there, only 5 or 6 people might be genuine theatre lover, it suddenly reminds me of old Tejpal audience again – those who come because the guests are at home and they have early dinner and show then the theatre. This sort of thing. Somewhere it is very irritating.

Pratibha Agrawal

But why irritating? Even those people, after all, think of theatre and not cinema or something else.

ChitraPalekar

Well, the moment it becomes a fashion, there is no communication.

Amol Palekar

I will tell you, another thing which has happened in Bombay theatre which is very much a fact is that today in Bombay, it has, as Chitra said, suddenly become the in-thing or fashionable thing to be associated with theatre. I mean suddenly everybody and one of the reasons is that, I can see is that, because every third film actor today you see, his roots are in theatre and he talks about theatre or he still goes and performs in theatre as I do or Nasiruddin Shah would go and perform and all that. Because of all these or Dr. Lagoo does, in Marathi theatre the most popular commercial actor NiluPhule who is the top saleable commodity and brilliant actor but even he is a film actor basically today and he still performs in theatre so that has brought this stage in Bombay theatre somewhere that you have suddenly become interested in theatre which I personally don't like. Because a person coming to see the theatre merely because there is a film star acting or because it is a fashion, yes, yes, we saw this -

ChitraPalekar

Pratibha Ji, we can't tell you, very difficult to put in words.

Amol Palekar

If they do cultivate, in the beginning it's Ok.

Question

Don't they acquire it?

Amol Palekar

No, it does not happen unfortunately because that is where other aspects come in like except for 'Theatre Unit' and Dubey, there are about 25 groups which have sprouted but none of the groups are doing any play which would really excite us. I mean Dubey's group is the only group which would go on doing something different, something new but all the other groups you will find them doing 'SunoJanmejaya' or 'AadheAdhure' or all those kind of plays with this kind of stance that they are doing a great experimentation.

ChitraPalekar

Not bad acting and now happens Pratibha Ji, when you go and watch, even if it is a very fair mind, now look, you have seen good acting, you are sitting with 250 people and everybody is clapping and clapping and you are thinking it is real bad. You feel embarrassed because you are the only person who think this is bad and everybody else is just clapping and clapping you know, so you think, better not to go maybe the things have changed, you are out-dated.

Amol Palekar

I would like to give another example to this which is again very controversial thing but this is why I reject English theatre. English theatre I personally think is no theatre at all. I am talking about Bombay English Theatre. I don't know about other towns but -

ChitraPalekar

With the help of publicity medium –

Amol Palekar

English theatre today will put up hoardings at five places in Bombay like film hoardings and the amount of publicity sponsored by this and sponsored by that and ultimately what they do is a exact copy of what is happening at West England or in New York to which also I wouldn't have much objection because that is one way we are going to see what is happening at West England. Fine but beyond that they will have four or five performances where again the same crowd will come. It is a beautiful social event and nothing beyond that. Now, in theatre I am no more interested in this kind of social activity.

ChitraPalekar

And I will tell you another thing – why I realize that people are not basically interested in theatre. When we came 50 many people asked us what do you do and all that. After doing for 14 years they just ask you what do you do and all that. We act in theatre – oh, but we never saw you at Prithvi. We don't perform at Prithvi – fine, the social.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Now you identify the audience, you know who these people are.

ChitraPalekar

Ok, after that they say, we would love to see your plays. Please come to Chabildas or Dadar. Here we are performing at ShivajiMandir. Where is Dadar? It is so difficult to drive down to Dadar. And there is no parking place there. Then I went once to Chabildas, once, because Dubey - we were invited but one has to sit there on ??and there is no fan. Why don't you come to Prithvi and perform? We love to see you but don't you come and perform at Prithvi?

Amol Palekar

It is the whole attitude towards theatre which I am no longer interested in communicating.

Pratibha Agrawal

One more question before we wind up. I would like to ask you that you are working both in film and theatre. And in film there is always a big crowd to cheer you up and have a look at you. In theatre you must not be having that I think. How do you feel about it? Because here somebody came and said I was expecting a gate crash here.

Amol Palekar

That is just precisely –

Samik Bandyopadhyay

That is one of the finest things for Amol that is no gate crash for Amol because he is here.

Amol Palekar

No, that is precisely another point. I am happy about that it is like this. I have a choice doing very popular commercial play today and which I know, with my popularity as film actor, we can mint money. Our group need not be incidentally even today our group is in debt which need not be but we still choose to do play like Diwakar or Roshomon – Diwakar is a play which is, very frankly, no play. It was an attempt to project writer who had immense possibilities but was never recognized during his life time. Not even after that. We found this writer – nor that what we did was great but we accidentally came across his writing which was not even published and which was written way back in 1910 and 12. And which even today, we found extremely exciting, extremely relevant and probably that is why that itself was the reason why he never was accepted at that time. We thought that first and foremost it excites us, his writing excites me and if it excites me, I would like to share it with the people. And so we designed this production which is a sort of homage to this writer in which we presented his writing in theatre form. He has written some plays. Writing a play of 12 minutes duration which I think is a full length play. Writing a full length play of 12 minutes in 1912 that it I think is very exciting thing. And we naturally can't present just a 12 minutes play. So we designed all his writings, punctuated with very factual presentation of his life, not necessarily to glorify him or anything but give us the entire idea of his personality that he was an ordinary teacher, earning 35 rupees per month in those days and out of those 35 rupees what he spent on was books. He had one of the finest collection of books, foreign books, Indian books and everything which after his death he donated to a library. Now this fact, merely by presenting in between as punctuation allows us to know more about the man but it is also I think, a theatrical thing. So it is something like documentary play. At the same time it is not only that or it is not only to know about Diwakar. I mean as an experience it is a very relevant experience what he is talking about, what he is trying to probe and what he deals with – forgetting the fact that it was written in 1912. In spite of that it is very exciting.

ChitraPalekar

That is one thing you know unfortunately what happens is, according to me, in last five six years it is one thing truly experimental again, because his form, the way he has constructed the whole thing, the way he talks about the problems and as you can understand, in 12 minutes to give a full length experience means such minimum use of words, images, everything is fantastic. He has also translated the Cyclus (sightless) in Marathi in those days. So that also we do. That is about 40 minutes. It is 1-1/2 hour programme. Now actually I was very keen that is the sort of thing that we should take everywhere, everybody should see it. But the unfortunate thing was that it is in Marathi. Being an old Marathi literature form, if it is translated, half the beauty is gone in any case. That's why we are actually toying with this idea that maybe we should make a short film as the productions was, keep it as a document with the help of sub titling more people can see that. I am very sad. Now when we did Diwakar, coming back to your point, how many people came to see it? Amol was there.

Amol Palekar

I had directed the play, I was also acting in that but my being a film star doesn't help the production at all because somewhere, the people who are interested in this kind of experimentation or people who are interested in theatre only they came. We did about eighteen performances of this. Now I am in a very happy that if people had to come just because they can see, have a glimpse of Amol Palekar there, they would have been thoroughly disappointed in any case because what they were going to expect of me is to be a hero of 'Rajanigandha' or 'ChotisiBaat' which I am not going to be. Fortunately these two things I have managed to keep separate and they somehow managed themselves to remain separate which is a very good thing.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

I think we can close on that. Just there is a little bit of information for Chitra and Amol both. In the Bengali theatre also we are having the same kind of experiences that you are having. At Academy of Fine arts either you see the same old faces or see new faces. People there are not for theatre, people who are there for fashion. And the only hope that we have, the only promise that we have is the work that BadalBabu is doing and the several small groups that have grown around Calcutta doing BadalBabu's kind of thing but in a very good individual different manner. But basics are the same. And something that very often hurts me, the point that you said that somebody would say that - we love to see your plays but can't go to Chabildas, it is so dirty and such a bad part of the city. Something happens here. There is an exciting group which is working in the suburbs of Calcutta, which performs every Saturday evening. This - everybody knows this is Pakka and everything, now you have to go there by train and have spent half hour on that. Train trip from Sealdah takes half an hour. So nobody goes, people say, it is so far off. But there are hundreds of people who go to their offices in the morning and it takes more than half an hour for that. So when people say that there is great expansion of theatre, I have my doubts. The same kind of things. And probably at that point we have reached almost in same kind of thing, same kind of situation with Bohurupee, Nandikar etc. have reaching a kind of dead end., have almost become professional and they are doing once again the kind of things that they were doing ten years or fifteen years back because now those things are in the mainstream. Sombhu Babu appears in things that have been excellent things, masterpieces in '52 or '54. He goes on reviewing those plays and appearing.

ChitraPalekar

That has a point because that is how younger generation can see classics again and again.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

So it has an archival value.

Amol Palekar/ChitraPalekar

Yes.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

But as far as Living Theatre is concerned, it has just no function at all. That's the state where we have reached. So are you concrete about – in fact I have heard from you in Bombay that any other breakthrough, this is an excellent way to have a breakthrough, to make old literature live for the audience through theatre using literature and theatre together. Do you have any other breakthrough of the kind?

ChitraPalekar

Actually what happens is that one goes through very personal experiences, like, for example, when we did this film, why our film is very much connected with theatre is because in our film entire group was involved in every possible way and just not the acting but production, technical thing everything. It was like an extension of our group activity. As a result for a whole year, all our energies and money had gone into one thing. Therefore now, that we are out of it, we are thinking since. In our group we do not have writers. That is a little disadvantage. Badal Da and all those are themselves writers. We don't have a writer. That is an advantage that they have.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, you have the advantage. (Laughter)

ChitraPalekar

Because of that and because of no exciting scripts come across, therefore like this Diwakar was, ultimately true that sort of search we found this. So the next thing we were thinking whether we should go to poets. Because one is very fond of poetry and try to derive something straight from poets. See, whether we can either give it a theatrical form or if nothing else, we just recite them. For us it is an exercise.

Amol Palekar

But in this connection, let me mention another thing which Chitra had tried sometimes back, called 'Kshobh'. Now this was an experience. Experiment tried out of about 50 minute thing which she had taken. She has collected poems from different poets but theme was the same. Now naturally every poet with his personality has his own way of expression. So there were so many shades of the same feelings and all those poems were recited or rather read out with the script in the hand but also not merely as a poetry recitation. It was sort of weaved in as a theatre with movement, with -

ChitraPalekar

The experiment that I was trying to do in those days was – which was very half finished experiment. There is plenty to go ahead in that. I feel personally. But that was to break the movement and the sound and try sound by itself, movement by itself almost like Godard (laughter) – but you don't. Godard is so inspiring.

Pratibha Agrawal

She hadn't seen Godard by then and it was just her own original contribution.

ChitraPalekar

I was just joking. In spite of all humility, sometimes you do feel so excited because when we did 'Gochi' and we read that Grotowsky in the same year had done there and we not having studied theatre in National School of Drama or something we didn't know he was there. It is not that how great one is, that is not the point. The point is, suddenly you realize that on your own you have also thought of forms with somebody else who may be a great fellow but he has also done around the same time. I think it is very exciting. It means that you are not going on the wrong line. That sort of thing. So this 'Kshobh' thing that we tried through poems it was giving an experience merely through the words. And not only words, along with words comes the sound. I had made a vocal orchestration so the movement was not so much the physical movement but the movement of sound. It was like orchestra but in terms of voices.

Pratibha Agrawal

Bimal has done a lot of it.

K. Khemani

Bimal was different, he did physical presentation.

Pratibha Agrawal

No, he recited poems also.

K. Khemani

No, Chitra Ji gave prominence to sound and elaborated through that.

ChitraPalekar

No, no, no, no, we were five only. It is even very difficult to inspire actors to join it, so only four or five of us did it. First part of this was big poems in which we used to take static positions and do all the movements only with the sound and the words and that was the thing.

Amol Palekar

And yet convey the meaning because the sound should not become so overpowering that –

ChitraPalekar

Sound was there to help the meaning.

Pratibha Agrawal

By sound you mean outside sound?

Amol Palekar

No, the recitation sound – I mean voice.

ChitraPalekar

Next time I will bring the script and read that. Another thing which we tried immediately after that was that we played the whole speech of Nehru, the speech that he delivered on the time of getting Independence. We put the disc on and on that we did a movement play. No words at all, no other music, only the record is going on and on in the background and on that we did a movement play. Again, I am somehow not interested in either classical movement because I have never learnt classical dancing and I want to break from that Norfolk dance but when what can be called pure movement, without any labels again. So I say a very simple story of a well - people going and trying to drink water, others coming and beating them, only four or five actors doing some movements which I did to see what the impact is - same thing, movement without sound and sound without movement presented together.

Pratibha Agrawal

Samik, now give the thanks.

Amol Palekar

I would just before that –

ChitraPalekar

I have, sorry Pratibha Ji, on the same line because the more and more I think, not getting scripts, scripts seem so outdated, but this experimentation has vast avenues according to me. The only problem of this is – we are now getting back to – when I say I am jealous of BadalDa’s group, what I mean by that is that here is a band of actors who don’t care, they just come together and do things. That is the type of thing I need to do this because on surface value, it is not at all exciting. You give a script and tell the actors you are doing this role, you are doing that role and everybody is excited. To give a vague idea and say now let us get together and do it, nobody somehow feels excited enough. So building a group like that is only taking time.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

So you are waiting for that to do this kind of –

ChitraPalekar

I have ‘Spartacus’ in mind and why I don’t mind in saying this. Spartacus but not at al BadalDa’s Spartacus or anything. It is on these lines.

Amol Palekar

Another thing I want to say, while all of us were talking about this problem. The thing which comes to mind I think it would be interesting. Like people saying, you said of this group

performing but then people say – Oh, you have to travel by train and do this or in Bombay people would say Oh, Chabildas is so out of way. I mean I think this is perhaps the irony or the contradiction of the entire situation itself that when one tries to analyze what is the advantage or how theatre is different than other forms, I think this is the first and foremost where to have this live thing, you have to reach.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Right.

Amol Palekar

TV is something which you have in your own room, you can be having whisky and chatting with your friends and it still goes to that or you can afford to switch it off. Even in film, you are able to see a film at hundred twenty places at the same time. But if you want to see theatre, if you want to see Sombhu Mitra performing, you have to go and see him and you can see him only at one place. Looking at it in that sense, it is probably the quality or uniqueness of theatre form which makes it exciting and that is why I think it is very ironical or contradictory itself that talking about the same form people give the same kind of - Oh, then we have to go so far and all that which is so funny. If you want to see theatre you have to do this, there is no other choice. I mean you can't have anything else. But this I think is the funny contradiction of it.

Samik Bandyopadhyay

Thank you Chitra and Amol.