

MARG

A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS

FOUNDER EDITOR
Mulk Raj Anand

EDITORS
Jyotindra Jain
Naman P. Ahuja

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Latika Gupta

ASSISTANT EDITORS
Jyotsna Nambiar
Mrinalini Vasudevan

EDITORIAL EXECUTIVE
Nisha S. Nair

**TEXT EDITOR
(CONSULTANT)**
Rivka Israel

DESIGNER
Naju Hirani

**SENIOR PRODUCTION
EXECUTIVE**
Gautam V. Jadhav

**PRODUCTION
EXECUTIVE**
Chetan S. More

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Shyam Benegal
Himanshu Burte
Divyabhanusinh
Anuradha Kapur
Geeta Kapur
Ram Rahman
Ashish Rajadhyaksha
Kapila Vatsyayan

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE
OFFICER**
Rizio B. Yohannan

FINANCIAL CONSULTANT
Rohinton B. Anklesaria

ACCOUNTS HEAD
Usha V. Shenoy

EXECUTIVE ACCOUNTS
Neeta Suvarna

**MARKETING & SALES
HEAD**
Almitra Billimoria

**SENIOR MANAGER
SALES**
Baptist Sequeira

**MANAGER
MARKETING & SALES**
Mary Abraham

**MANAGER
DIGITAL MARKETING &
BRANDING**
Anjana Premchand

**ADMINISTRATIVE
CONSULTANT**
Asha Shiralikar

**MANAGER
ADMINISTRATION &
CIRCULATION**
Shyla Serrao

OFFICE ASSISTANTS
Sadanand I. Salian
Ravindra K. Shewale
Rukmaya Suvarna

**MARG'S QUARTERLY PUBLICATIONS
RECEIVE SUPPORT FROM TATA TRUSTS**

Marg A MAGAZINE OF THE ARTS | ISSN: 0972-1444

Marg is a registered trademark of The Marg Foundation

© The Marg Foundation, 2019

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored, adapted, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, or translated in any language or performed or communicated to the public in any manner whatsoever, or any cinematographic film or sound recording made therefrom without the prior written permission of the copyright holders.

This edition may be exported from India only by the publishers, The Marg Foundation, and by their authorized distributors and this constitutes a condition of its initial sale and its subsequent sales.

Printed and published by Rizio B. Yohannan on behalf of The Marg Foundation and printed at Silverpoint Press Pvt. Ltd., A403 TTC Industrial Area, Mahape, Navi Mumbai 400 709 and published at Army & Navy Building, 3rd floor, 148 M.G. Road, Mumbai 400 001, India; Editor: Jyotindra Jain.

Processed at The Marg Foundation

The Marg Foundation, Army & Navy Building, 3rd floor,
148 M.G. Road, Mumbai 400 001, India

www.marg-art.org

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION FOR 4 MAGAZINES

INLAND: ₹1380 inclusive of packing and registered A.D. postage.

FOREIGN: US\$79 inclusive of packing and registered air mail postage.

SINGLE COPY: ₹350 (US\$14).

All cheques should be crossed and payable to: The Marg Foundation

EDITORIAL NOTE



Essays on Indian theatre appeared in *Marg* as early as 1952, with G.D. Sondhi writing about the need for open-air public auditoriums that would respond to local climatic conditions. In 1981, Kumud Mehta assessed transformations in the field from the 1950s to the '70s. And in 2000, Rustom Bharucha stressed the importance of improving working conditions for theatre artistes and encouraging greater solidarity among different linguistic and regional theatrical traditions.

As a follow-up to these earlier writings and to throw light on more recent developments, *Marg* presents its first dedicated issue on theatre, edited by veteran practitioner and pedagogue Anuradha Kapur. Not intended as an encyclopedic compendium, this issue seeks to trace a non-linear mapping of theatre in India. Contributions by leading directors, actors and scholars chart a history of modern and contemporary theatre through the prisms of genealogies, institutions and practice. The focus on materiality and making runs as a thread throughout the volume, complemented by discussions about ideologies and etymologies of form.

Post-independence India saw the establishment of national and state-level organizations such as Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA) and National School of Drama (NSD), dedicated to the promotion of performing arts. In later years, festivals like Bharat Rang Mahotsav (started in New Delhi in 1999) exposed the public to international and local practice. Simultaneously, in different regions of India, individuals and collectives have continued to develop unique theatrical vocabularies.

Looking at some of the successes and failures of the last six decades, Anuradha Kapur charts what she terms as “multiple registers of modernity” that have emerged through the interactions and intersections of site, method and form. Is it at all possible to define an “Indian” grammar of theatre? The essays examine this by critically analysing the pedagogy put in place by SNA and NSD, and the standards of production and professionalism set by iconic figures like Ebrahim Alkazi and B.V. Karanth. Writers also highlight newer spaces, techniques and sources of support that artistes that have found and created. Moving beyond the centre-periphery model, they look at powerful practices that have emerged in Assam, Manipur and Kerala which respond to contemporary sociocultural and political exigencies.

As an extended commentary on the variety that exists alongside mainstream metropolitan theatre, we show productions responding to local contexts and traditions in our thematic ad-portfolio. We hope that these essays and images will encourage readers to relook at the debates about language, form, aesthetics, politics and reception that are key to understanding theatre in India today.

Latika Gupta

Staging Change: Theatre in India

EDITED BY ANURADHA KAPUR

- 14 Introduction
ANURADHA KAPUR
- 16 Genealogy and Overwriting
ANURADHA KAPUR
- 24 Intersections of Practice and Pedagogy: The National School of Drama
KIRTI JAIN
- 36 Personal Reflections on Ebrahim Alkazi and B.V. Karanth
NEELAM MANSINGH CHOWDHRY
- 46 India's Postdramatic: Conversations with Theatre-Makers and a Critique
ASHIS SENGUPTA
- 64 Politics of Location: A View of Theatrical Contemporaneity in India
GARGI BHARADWAJ
- 76 Hybridity and Regional Visions in Contemporary Theatre in Kerala
ABHILASH PILLAI
- 82 Contemporary Theatre Practice in Manipur: A Reckoning
TRINA NILEENA BANERJEE
- 92 Grandeur and Simplicity: The Spectrum of Performance Practices in Assam
TRINA NILEENA BANERJEE
- 98 Polyrhythmia and Circus-Theatre in the Contemporary: Notes on *Talatum*
AMEET PARAMESWARAN
- 108 Contributors

Inside front cover and pages 1–9: Thematic ad-portfolio on contemporary Indian theatre

MRINALINI VASUDEVAN

Pages 10–11: *Are You Home Lady Macbeth?*, directed and performed by Maya Krishna Rao, 2010. Photograph: S. Thyagarajan.

Cover: *Naked Voices*, directed by Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry, 2016. Photograph: S. Thyagarajan.



Introduction

ANURADHA KAPUR

THIS EDITION OF *MARG* IS PREMISED ON an imaginary map of intersecting circles. The essays fall into, and mark intersections between, three key categories of “histories”, “practices” and “institutions”. They present shifting approaches to theatre pedagogy, performance space, material and forms. Their ordering within the editorial schema is based on my understanding of “genealogies” which I discuss in the opening essay and use to rethink conventional linear narrativizing.

We first address “institutions”: Kirti Jain and Neelam Mansingh Chowdhry look at the consolidation of forms via curricula in the National School of Drama (NSD). As one of the oldest theatre training institutes of modern India, NSD is seen programmatically. It has been the locus of many conceptual shifts related to transmission and education since the 1950s. When a given project of formal theatre training/education is consolidated, a complex set of interdependencies needs to be recognized. These interdependencies are: *content* (what is taught), *pedagogy* (how it is taught), *discipline formation*, or what is considered knowledge worth transmitting. NSD’s pedagogical practices have been both roundly rejected as well as clearly paralleled, indeed emulated, in the many training institutes across India.

To address “practices”, I invite authors who might *step out*, who might deliberately take on what is *outside* of any institutional bind. The essays of Gargi Bharadwaj and Ashis Sengupta look at theatre practice from outside the frame of dominant grammar; and distinctly outside the prevailing notion of theatre purities.

Ashis Sengupta frames contemporary work within the discourse of postdramatic practices where he sees the postdramatic as a *tendency* that is outside of the narrative frame of *identity* and its equally common descriptor, *hybrid*. He sees it

as unsettling at once the narrative based on the *invention of tradition* and its conceptual co-relate, modernism *as rupture*. By setting up a conjectural conversation between Indian theatre-makers and practices worldwide, he annotates (through interviews with practitioners) the very definition of the postdramatic as a dialogic rather than a narrative space.

Gargi Bharadwaj proposes an institutional critique. She elaborates the need of prising open the institutional space in order to reorder the meaning of training today. She looks at interdisciplinary, often intractable work that usually functions outside the regulations of formal (and even informal) structures, festivals and teaching programmes, and notes how these works are a provocation and demonstrate a complex relationship with state policy.

From a more general overview of changing practices, we move towards looking at select traditions and practices defined by regional identities in a section on “histories”. Here featured is a short essay on contemporary theatre in Kerala by Abhilash Pillai and pieces on Assam and Manipuri theatre by Trina Nileena Banerjee.

In recent practice from Kerala, the regional and the international, the vernacular and the cosmopolitan, are constantly in debate. Different media, genres and styles, and the specific affects produced and reflected by them are in debate too. Abhilash Pillai reflects on this struggle of forms. As a practitioner himself he trains a lens on what is emerging: a combusive force of work that deals with the complexities of the now—often in a resistive mode and in a variety of tongues.

At the other end of India, Trina Nileena Banerjee looks at Assam and Manipur where theatre often marks an adversarial relationship with the state. Issues about subnationalism and such everyday violence that is played out as consequence, have put pressures on perfor-