

Q - How has theatre, especially the Marathi stage changed in the last few years?

A – 70s & 80s was a renaissance period for Indian theatre. While cutting across the colonial influences, creative minds were trying to fuse indigenous theatrical forms with the universal idioms. The regional experimental theatre movement was led by playwrights like Badal Sircar in Bengali, Vijay Tendulkar in Marathi, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi and Girish Karnad in Kannada. Directors like Shambhu Mitra, Ebrahim Alkazi, Badal Sircar, Damu Kenkare, Shyamanand Jalan, Habib Tanveer, Satyadev Dubey, Vijaya Mehta, Amol Palekar, Ratan Thiyam, B. Jayashree explored space even beyond the proscenium arch.

90s onwards, that momentum slowed down. However the mainstream Marathi theatre continued to have tremendous audience patronage as much as that for the Sangeet Natak tradition of the 19th century. All nuances of the art forms were wrapped in a ruthless banner of 'entertainment', essence of which was mediocrity. The 'market oriented' mindsets gradually took over and demanded lackluster productions. Of course, exceptional sparks kept our hope alive.

For last 8 to 9 years, the younger Marathi theatre practitioners who have survived the onslaught of TV serials, mega budget films or other commercial diktat, have been actively producing plays with diverse themes and fascinating stylistic forms. There is a growing trend of reviving the celebrity experimental productions of the past on the commercial Marathi theatre; mainstream Marathi theatre audience is lapping it up! These new trends are proving that our hope was not in vain!

Q – With TV, film and the internet becoming so easily available and almost in your face, has theatre in your view suffered as a result?

A - Certainly. The non-availability of dedicated actors, paucity of new plays, higher cost of production, descending theatre economics along with reduced footfall etc are the direct consequences of technological advancement. The human race, let alone the art forms, is facing a serious threat from electronic and social media; and a possible take over of our lives by the virtual reality.

Even then newer demands of 'corporate events' encourage increasing theatre activity. Corporate sponsorship has evolved novel patronage through "theatre festivals". Ranga Shankara at Bangaluru,

Prithvi at Mumbai, NSD at Delhi, or theatre festivals in Pune, Kolkata, Thiruvananthpuram cherish experiments on theatre.

Q - Is theatre especially the regional stage seeing a slow and steady decline in the 21st century especially when it comes to audiences and their interests?

A - (have answered with 1.)

Q - How can theatre become more appealing to people, again?

A - In my childhood, emergence of 'Cinema' had wiped out even the most popular theatre companies. During my adulthood, both theatre & films faced the fear of extinction with the advent of Television. However, creative forces continued to flourish. No art form will ever die! The angst of survival itself shall root the young artistes in experimentation while creating the new audience. They will find innovative expressions which will sculpt fresh theatrical possibilities. Neelam Mansing, Veena Pani Chawla, Usha Ganguly, Atul Kumar, Makrand Deshpande, Shernaz Patel, Rajat Kapoor, Vinay Sharma, Mohit Takalkar, just to name a few, are handling the theatre space uniquely which is appealing to people.

Q - As a theatre personality which is your favourite play?

A - Badal Sircar's 'Evum Indrajit' – a great contemporary Indian classic! The script gave a new non-linear structure and a fresh visual possibility beyond realism. 'Indrajit' remains the eternal truth!

Q - Which stage role did you absolutely love playing and why?

A - Devdutt in Satya Dev Dubey's production of Girish Karnad's "Hayavadan". Of the two main characters, Amrish Puri was playing Kapil and I was asked to play Devdutt. Dubey insisted that the physicality of Kapil and sensitivity of Devdutt should be conveyed by both of us without using any external object such as masks, headgears, wigs etc. So to convey that our heads were transposed, I had to express Kapil's robust, masculine physic leaving behind the frailness of Devdutt's body. Thus, I had to play 'Nat' as well as these two roles.