

In 1969, my theatre career took a quantum leap when I translated, directed & played the lead role in *Badal Sircar's "Ballabhpurer Roop Katha"* in Marathi. Soon after that, the news of *Badal's* new play (which he himself described as "a sweet love story") arrived in Bombay theatre circles and the Hindi translation of "PAGLA GHODA" (Mad Horse) by *Pratibha Agrawal* followed. "Theatre Unit" immediately decided that it would undertake the Hindi & Marathi productions simultaneously. What came as a surprise was that along with the task of its Marathi translation, the directorial responsibility of both the versions was given to me by *Satya Dev Dubey*. He further offered to be my co-director so as not to unduly burden me with so many tasks. A senior celebrity director like *Dubey* offering to be a second-in-command to a newcomer like me was unheard of and such a gesture could have been shown only by a great soul that is *Dubey*. I also had the privilege of directing *Amrish Puri* - one of the most fascinating actors of Indian Theatre & Cinema.

In 1992, when I revisited *PAGLA GHODA*, I found many more shades of the man-woman relationship— something I had probably missed in the earlier productions. What is even more heartening is that these new audiences found *PAGLA GHODA* as meaningful and relevant as the original audiences. The Marathi performance of this new production in front of a packed Bengali audience in Calcutta was a richly fulfilling experience. It was followed by another performance, also for predominantly Bengali audiences, in *Chandan Nagar* (formerly a French colony on the outskirts of Calcutta) on the same day when *Babri Masjid* was demolished. The organisers did not allow the news and subsequent curfew to affect our performance and after the standing ovation, our team was escorted safely to Calcutta.

And now in 2008, I will be trying to find new dimensions of the humanities in the script all over again. Working with non-resident Indian actors is going to be a new challenge all over again. I hope to explore yet unpeeled layers of this classic work of art with the ever enthusiastic performers of New Jersey.

At a linear narrative level, the play begins in the graveyard outside a village. Four men from different strata of the society - a chemist, a postmaster, a labour contractor and a school teacher - have come together to do the last rites of a dead, orphan, young woman. They sit beside a burning corpse; drinking, playing cards, waiting for the skull to shatter. They tease each other, crack crude jokes, and gossip about the unknown, dead woman. But as the night wears on, things start to change. The men's facades begin to crack... loss and yearning surface... anguish and regret overwhelm them. In the end, all of them cannot avoid facing a perennial question, why does a WOMAN fling herself into the maelstrom of love, trust blindly, give herself fully...Why? And why does a MAN tread warily, hold back, shield himself...Why?

Though the title of the play *PAGLA GHODA* is derived from a children's nonsense rhyme, its complex, layered structure probes the adult minds with many more questions -

Who or what is this *PAGLA GHODA* -

Is it the undertow that pulls you into a tumultuous sea of emotions?

Or is it an unstoppable force that rampages through the body and heart?

Does it symbolise crazy love?

Does it epitomize unattainable desire?

Is it a symbol of fulfilment and hope?

The audience is bound to derive its own answers to these questions - with incessant interpretations and relentless appreciation.