



The chocolate boys who get to live their dream end up on Hersey's bottles in the world of Thukral and Tagra

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(Top & above) Two 'successful' sons

international auction circuit would have noticed that even in the lean 2007-2008, when top auction houses had curtailed on their budgets and dealt with only the very top names of art, Thukral and Tagra had figured in the rarefied A-list along with the likes of Subodh Gupta, Jitish Kallat, T.V. Santhosh and a few others.

INTERNATIONAL seems to be the undercurrent of the art of Thukral and Tagra as they have collected prestigious feathers for their caps mostly abroad. When we wonder the apathy for India, Tagra asks, "How many would be ready to experiment with our art? Largely, the mindset is traditional and we don't fit into that mould."

That's true. Given their craziness, it's rather impossible to picture the two in a traditional art set up. The skepticism with all things bound-by-norms has seen to the launch of the Foundation Thukral and Tagra, to support innovative HIV preven-

tion programmes. "We had done the art show *Pui It On* at Bose Pacia Gallery, New York in 2007 which had awareness about HIV prevention as the theme. We had created condom-usage designs on flip-flops, on undergarments, etc. All of it was part of a room-installation in the gallery. We had hoped that this would be taken up further in actually taking the message to the people it should reach. But our experience with the NGOs has proved that a lot of money is lost in 'administrative costs' and the purpose is also lost somewhere. That's why the foundation," the two explain.

Full of energy and ideas, the two are breaking new horizons in contemporary Indian art. So far, to use the words of exhibition designers Swaranjana and Vikas Satwalekar (as shared with us by Tagra), they have been able to translate the energy with which they create their art to their canvases and pass it on to the onlookers too. That seems to be the secret of their success—a simple recipe that can be replicated by many more artists.

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Shakuntala comes home via Pakistan



A scene from the Pakistani adaptation of Kalidasa's classic, *Shakuntala*

by Archana

Kalidasa's 5th/6th century story of love between forest damsel Shakuntala and king Dushyant is one of the most popular stage adaptations in India. But now, Pakistanis are interpreting this tale on stage for the annual theatre festival of the National School of Drama (NSD), the 12th Bharat Rang Mahotsav that will be held in the city from January 6 to 22.

Shakuntala in Urdu will be staged on January 17 at the LTG Auditorium as part of the 12th Mahotsav. It's being presented by Karachi-based theatre director Zain Ahmed who is making waves in the Pakistani theatre circuit for his experiments on stage. "At NAPA (the National Academy of Performing Arts, with which he is closely associated), we try to expose our students to theatre from all over the world. We try to build a sense of history of the subcontinent as well. And so if we can do Shakespeare, then why not Kalidasa," says the 37-year-old Ahmed.

The play opened in December 2007 in Pakistan and earned rave reviews for the experiments that Ahmed had tried to carry out on stage with the play. "Before doing *Shakuntala*, we had read other plays from the sub-continent too but chose this one for its universal theme," adds Ahmed.

He elaborates that he has focused on expressing the inner dilemma of the characters through movements by highlighting some important dialogues in each scene. "The cast keeps changing with every show, so that each artiste gets to play more than one character. Besides, there is no restriction on who will speak which character's lines. That's unusual in Pakistan," he adds. Ahmed has not just directed the play but also adapted the story for stage and designed the 90-minute production.

Ahmed's upcoming India visit is not his first to the country. He has been to various cities in personal capacity and participated with the group in a theatre festival in Amritsar a few months back, with the play, *Janey Pehchaney Ajnabi*. "Shakuntala is not the first Indian play that we have done. At NAPA, we have staged modern Indian plays too like *Aadhey Adhurey*, *Silence*, *The Court Is In Session* and others."

The director's association with India is rather special — his grandfather W.Z. Ahmed owned a film studio in Pune in pre-Partition days. "I've never been to Pune but I've been told by the family that my grandfather's studio, Shalimar Studios, is where you now have the FTII," he shares. Ahmed's father, Fareed Ahmed, too was a filmmaker, while his mother Sameena is an acclaimed actress/director. "It's common for theatre actors in Pakistan to do television or take up teaching drama, to make it possible for them to do theatre," he adds. Very much like India, we would like to tell him.

He is aware of the fact that last year's Pakistani entry to the NSD fest, *Hotel*

Mohenjodaro by Ajoka theatre group of Lahore, had found itself in the middle of controversy as its entry wasn't confirmed till the last moment due to political tensions between the two countries. Ahmed is, however, hopeful that the visas for by his team will come through soon.

Just as Ahmed awaits visas to travel to India with his team, theatre buffs in Delhi too must be eager to see what *Shakuntala* and Dush-



Karachi-based Zain Ahmed, seen with his son Ali Samiuddin, is presenting *Shakuntala* at the Bharat Mahotsav

THE GLOBAL ACTS

- **The Spirits Play** (Singapore) January 8; Abhimanch, NSD, 6 & 9.30 pm
- **Johnny's Midnight Goggles** (UK) January 9; Abhimanch, 6 & 9.30 pm
- **La Folle De Chaillot** (Bangladesh) January 12; LTG, Copernicus Marg, 7 pm
- **WolokolamskerChausse** (Germany) January 12; Kamani Auditorium, Copernicus Marg, 6.30 pm
- **The Orphan of Zhao** (China) January 13; Kamani, 6.30 & 9.30 pm
- **Buzak-e-Chini Wa Gurg** (Afghanistan), January 13; Sammukh Auditorium, NSD, 2.30 & 6 pm
- **Kiosk** (Japan), January 14; LTG Auditorium, Copernicus Marg, 7 & 9.30 pm
- **Odysseus Chaoticus** (Israel) January 15; LTG Auditorium, 7 & 9.30 pm
- **Putaliko Ghar** (Nepal) January 16; Bahumukh, NSD campus, 2.30 pm & 6 pm
- **Medea** (Italy), January 17, Kamani Auditorium, 6.30 & 9.30 pm
- **Solo by Min Tanaka** (Japan) January 21; NSD lawns, 5.30 pm
- **Democrac(ies)** (France) January 22; Abhimanch, 6 & 9.30 pm

— For the detailed schedule of Indian plays being staged, log on to www.nsd.gov.in. Tickets, priced at Rs 100, 50, 30 and 10, are available from January 4 at NSD.

yant look like in the hands of those on the other side of the Radcliffe Line.

Besides the Pakistani entry, there are many other reputed international acts waiting to hit the Delhi stage (see box). Not to forget the Indian plays which like always, will give city's theatre enthusiasts an opportunity to watch contemporary theatre from across the country.

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