

INTRODUCTION

Habib Tanvir was born in Raipur. He candidly wrote about his date of birth in his memoir, “If you go by the school certificate, I was born on 13 July 1925. If you take my mother’s diary as an authority, which I accidentally discovered after her death and which contained the dates of birth of all her children, then my date of birth is 1 September 1923” (Tanvir 44). His mother was a native of Raipur while his father, Mohammed Hayat Khan, was a migrant from Peshawar.

Among Tanvir’s eleven siblings, seven survived of which three were brothers and four were sisters. It is interesting to note that the age gap between him and his eldest sister was so wide that she had breastfed him when he was an infant. The second sister’s name was Akhtar Jahan Begum and Bilqis was his third elder sister. Among the brothers Hameed was the eldest who died at the age of twelve. Tanvir explained the cause of his death, “Hameed Bhaiyya suffered a few burns on his limbs and the doctor applied a dressing. But, after some days, he developed a tumour of the brain and died” (8). The other two brothers were Mazhar and Zaheer. Tanvir was the second youngest child and his sister Qaisar was the youngest, five years junior to him. His father initially handled grandfather’s business of ivory merchandise but later worked as an overseer with Public Works Department in Delhi, “He would draw up architectural maps for houses and supervise their construction” (7). It is a possibility that Tanvir might have learned something about stage architectural planning by observing his father make such maps. He was introduced to tribal culture of Peshavar by his father. He had great desire to visit Peshavar and become familiar with its tribal culture but couldn’t do so because of some political restrictions which prohibited foreigner’s entry into Peshavar.

He was named Habib Ahmed Khan by his parents but when he seriously started writing poetry he adopted Tanvir as his surname as well as his pen name. He described his foray into poetry, “This was after 1945 when I started composing poetry seriously, my ghazals started finding a place in Sardar Jafri’s journal Naya Adab, and I became a regular invitee to the mushairas at Amravat, which were organized by Siddiqi Saheb [Abdur Rahman Siddiqi]” (Tanvir 182).

For his formal schooling he went to Laurie Municipal High School, Raipur. There he actively participated in plays which were organized by the school, in Urdu or English language. In school he won many prizes for acting in plays. When he scored distinction in his school his teachers and family members advised him to take up science but contrary to their wishes and in alignment with his own desires he took up arts as subject of his choice for higher education. For his college studies he went to Morris College, Nagpur. After that he completed his masters in Urdu from Aligarh Muslim University in 1944.

He married Moneeka, who replaced him as a director in ‘Hindustani Theatre’ when he went to Europe for his theatre training under RADA scholarship. Her parents were from Bengal but she was born and brought up in Shimla. With her, he had a daughter whom he named Nageen and she was born on 28 November 1964. He also had another daughter, Anna Tanvir from Jill MacDonald, an English lady who worked at Exeter University as an educational researcher. She was born, raised and lived in Devonshire, UK. Tanvir met and grew close to her during his tour to Europe.

He grew up in close knit community and family. He used to visit the home of his relatives and friends during holidays. This certainly helped him to develop cultural sensibility and keenness. He heard of Chhattisgarhi folk song *dadariya* for the first time when he visited Lukhrapa village in Bilaspur district of Chhattisgarh. Here his eldest sister

used to live with her husband. People were not allowed to sing *dadariya* within the parameter of village boundary. Because of that, it was sung outside of the village, for example, near the river manihari. Tanvir explained:

Dadariya is a self-composed song which proceeds in the form of question and answers, and the singers come up with lines extempore. They are thus singers as well as poets. Good dadariya has a compelling force, and girls are known to elope with their lovers under its spell, therefore it is forbidden to sing it inside the village. [Tanvir 24]

Samarendra Saraf in his essay *Folk Culture of Chhattisgarh through an Ethnographer's Kaleidoscope* highlights cultural diversity of Chhattisgarh. It is “having fairly rich cross-sections of linguistic/ dialectic diversity ranging from Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Malawi to Bundelkhandi and Chhattisgarhi, besides a multiplicity of tribal dialects” (115). He further explains that this cultural diversity is saved in folk forms practiced in this region:

Chhattisgarh also present unique cultural heritage----- still preserved by populace in its oral condition, still rehearsed in their folklore, the genre whereof being their myths, legends and folk tales, their folk songs and folk dances, their epic poems, their festivals and games, their jokes, proverbs and riddles, and so on. (Saraf 117)

In his childhood he was influenced by local poets of his hometown. In his own home he had inspiration available in the form of his elder brother Zaheer Ahmed Khan who composed poetry, *naats*, *hujooos* and *naats* in his leisure time and even acted in plays often taking up the roles of women. Zaheer was popular in his hometown for the same reasons. His mother and sisters brought him closer to the field of singing. They were good

singers and for this reason ‘Women’s Milad’ would often held at his home. Sometimes he used to join them in singing, “I would attend it with the women; sometimes Amma by herself, at other times three of us siblings [Bilqis, Akhtar and himself], would sing from Akbar Allahabadi’s *Miladnama*, from a *naat* by Bhaijaan [Zaheer] or other assorted songs” (Tanvir 20). These cultural activities helped Tanvir to hone his art of singing and poetry composition from the early stage of his life.

Cultural tradition in Raipur which played an important contribution in development of theatre sensibilities in Tanvir was annual staging of Kali Bari Theatre,

There was a tradition in Raipur that a new play would be presented at its Kali Bari during Durga Puja every year. The stage was quite large and usually well equipped with all kinds of props. That is why I have always had a soft spot for Kali Bari, which I regard as being an important cultural, rather than a religious, institution. (27)

The first play which he saw was *Mohabbat ke Phool* written by Hafiz Abdullah and performed by Kali Bari though it was mostly performed by Parsi theatre companies. At that time Parsi Theatre Companies were dominating the theatrical scene in India. Besides theatre halls they also owned travelling companies which travelled to different parts of India throughout the year and staged various plays. He described his first theatrical experience in great detail in his memoir:

The band took position in the pit of the stage and began to play a kind of overture. Then the curtain began to rise. First we saw coloured and bejeweled feet, then bright, multicoloured costumes and, finally, heavily made-up beautiful faces. The curtain was rising to the beat of the band and behind it we saw a row of actors singing the traditional opening tune of the

Dhrupad Vandana. These days the curtains usually part sideways to reveal the stage; I have always preferred it the older way, when curtains rose up from the ground and disappeared. (27)

Another technique used in this play which enchanted him was related to sound effects and stage set up which made the experience of watching this play even more exciting for him:

There was another trick that totally captivated me. In the wings there was a man holding a long iron rod and he would strike it hard at an iron receptor containing gunpowder, there would be a big blast and voila! The whole scene on the stage would change. The sets were made of painted curtains: a garden was depicted by rows of scenery flats kept aslant, which acted as wings and had paintings of flowers, trees, etc.; a palace was depicted by a painted curtain at the back and so on. (30)

Apart from music and dance he believed that drama and painting also share a close bonding, “During rehearsal I often use the example of painting to illustrate things for the actors: how to understand concepts like grouping, balance, focal point, etc” (29).

Mushairas also held a charm for him. He got fascinated with *mushairas* in his teenage year, “I had been introduced to the New Poetry wave in Urdu in Raipur itself. During our teens we’d go and listen to *mushairas* on the radio in Company Bagh” (116). His interest in poetry expanded with his advancing age. He along with his classmate and friend Madani would compose poem and debate over what constituted good poetry. He would go to weekly meetings held by Abdus Salim, a munshi in the commissioner’s office to narrate and discuss poems which were self-composed or that written by famous poets.

Also “Sometimes, I would organize a mushaira in my own house. Mushairas were frequently held at Madani’s House too” (ibid 119). Madani’s father would recite naats or marsiyas. So there were different forms of poetry which were composed, recited and listened to. They were *gazals*, *nazms*, *urooz*, *mushairas*, English poetry etc. During this time he also read poems by ‘progressive poets’ such as Mazaz, Jazbi, Jan Nisar Akhtar, Faiz, Makhdoom, Jafri etc. He met Jafri in Chhattisgarhi College in Raipur and even received his guidance regarding composition of poetry.

Cinema which began with silent movies had deep impact on him. In his memoir he talked about movies like *Toofan Mail*, *Rin Tin Tin*, *Huntermali Nadia*, *Nurani Moti*, *Amrit Manthan*, *Sita* etc. New Theatre in Calcutta and Prabhat Theatre in Pune were two major companies which were producing films at that time. When he was young he was most influenced by New Theatre films. “I would tell my friends that New Theatres’ class was evident in the fact that every new film had a different hero and a different director but the films were always of high quality” (131). Films produced by New Theatre Company are *Crorepati*, *Chandidas*, *Street Singer*, *Manzil*, *Devdas*, *Dhoop Chhaon* and *Chandidas*. He favored New Theatres’ films over Prabhat Theatre’s films because “The films produced by Prabhat tended to be slightly didactic and propagandist, the New Theatres films relied on subtler tones to convey their message” (131) and “The other difference lay in the fact that the Prabhat films were usually shot indoors, which allowed us to glimpse the marvelous set-making talent of Fatehlal and Damle whereas New Theatre films were mostly shot outdoors, showing us the river fields of Benga” (131).

It is interesting to note that he named his own theatre company which is Naya Theatre after New Theatre. Name of his theatre company is literal translation of Naya Theatre into hindi language.

Songs in the movies were not just attractions but piece of art in themselves. He also recalled songs like *Baalam aaye baso mere man mein* and *Sukh ek din the ek sapan tha, dukh ke din beetat nahi* from the movie *Devdas* as his favorite in his memoir. Songs in early movies were a hybrid of classical and folk, “The songs drew on our classical tradition on the one hand and folk forms on the other” (143). For example, Sardar Akhtar song *Andheriya hai raat, sajan rahiyo ki jahiyo*. Songs composed by S.D. Burman were based on Bengali folk tunes. This might have inspired him to experiment with folk and classical forms in his play like *Mrrichakatika*.

Tanvir was against stereotyping actors because “A good actor will suit comedy or tragedy, a hero’s or a villain’s role equally well or not at all” (137). He praised acting of Noor Mohammed Charlie because he acted in different kind of movies and took up different roles. *Char Chakram* is one of the most famous film which Tanvir could summon up in which Charlie played a comic role. He criticized cinema for stereotyping actors, “Our film industry is often obstinate in the way it uses its actors. It destroys their independence and stereotypes them in accordance with the success of their films and the money this generates” (135). Despite cinema having this drawback he acknowledges the contribution cinema had made in his life, “My first lesson in acting came from cinema. While at Morris College I used to see Hollywood Films at a cinema hall in Nagpur devoted exclusively to English films” (138). He adds “I kept up with the passion even after moving to Bombay. We would watch a film and discuss the performances, the shooting, the technicalities for hours on end- we would be under a spell for a long time” (138).

Before becoming singly devoted to theatre he entered into many vocational professions. When he first came to Bombay he acted in a movie titled *Aap ke Liye* in main leading role but this movie never got released because of dispute between producer and

director. He also worked as supervisor at the ammunition box factory. Then he worked for All- India Radio Bombay. After working in radio he worked for Baburao Patel's monthly magazine Film India. He also wrote articles and movie reviews for newspapers like *Bombay Chronicle*, *Soviet Cinema* and *Illustrated Weekly*. He even learned dancing from Shanti Bardhan who had formed Little Ballet Troupe. His wife Moneeka worked a secretary of this group for several months.

One dance program which had a lasting impact on him was of that of Vallathol, famous Kathakali dancer, which he saw in Bombay:

I was left quite amazed by a dance programme. On an open stage in a huge ground two dancers appeared holding a six-foot square curtain in their hands which they carried to the centre of the platform and stood still holding it straight. Somebody, positioned behind the curtain, was shaking it. He first showed us his golden-painted nails by displaying them above the curtain, then he stirred the curtains with his hands for a while, then he lifted the curtain slightly to reveal his feet and quickly covered them again. (28)

Eventually the curtain was dropped and the figure behind the curtain was revealed to be of Hanuman played by Vallathol. Tanvir interpreted the meaning behind this unusual dance practice to be:

The artiste must have assumed that if we saw Hanuman in all his splendor all at once we would not be able to bear the sight. So, he showed us different parts of him before revealing himself completely so that we became more accustomed and more prepared to witness his full glory. (28)

He called him his “first guru in theatre” (30). By observing this performance he learnt that a constant shift in focal points in a performance can bring forth and illuminate aspects of performance which an artist wants to emphasize upon.

It was in Bombay that he developed leanings towards left and became member and participant of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) and Progressive Writers Association (PWA). He also witnessed great political events like Quit India movement (1942), Sailors Mutiny (1946), Second World War (1939-45) and India’s partition (1947).

Progressive Writers Association established in 1936 is one of the most significant movements in history of Indian literature. The aim of PWA was to work for ‘progress’ and freedom of common people from not only colonial and imperial rule but also from social evils like caste, class and gender discrimination. Here the term progress refers to evolution of ‘human civilization’ and society. Some of the notable literary figures who supported and were associated with this movement are Ismat Chughtai, Saadat Hasan Manto, Krishan Chander, Ali Sardar Jafri, Maqdoom Moinuddeen, Razia Sajjad Zaheer, Niaz Hyder and Kaifi Azmi. Writers who were its active members are Rajinder Singh Bedi, Upendra Nath Ashk, Khwaja Ahmad Abbas, Abdul Sattar, Ahmad Nadim Qasmi and Suhail Azimbadi. Among the poets were Faiz Ahmad Faiz, Josh Malihabadi, Firaq and Sahir Ludhianvi. Their works were amalgamation of aesthetic values and social concerns.

Tanvir’s love for writing poetry brought him closer to PWA, “What is the purpose of art- this was the argument raging in full steam everywhere. Along with acting I had also begun to compose poetry. And that had brought me close to the Progressive Writer’s Association” (257).

In order to curb the activities of PWA and hinder its expansion Government of India, Home Department leveled charges against it of it being a Socialist Party, kept close

watch over its activities and imposed heavy censorship on the works produced under its banner. This hindered its expansion and later working.

Sajjad Zaheer, Rashid Jahan, Mahmuduzzafar and Ahmad Ali are considered to be founding members of this movement. Together they published a collection of Short Stories titled as *Angare* which received lot of criticism and caused great uproar. *Maulvis* issued Fatwas against the book and authors. Punishments like ‘stoning to death’ and ‘hanging by the neck’ were sought for the authors. Rashid Jahan faced the severest of criticism. Threats of cutting up of her nose and rape loomed around her. Consequently the book was banned by the Government of the United Province under section 295 A of the Indian Penal Code on 15 March 1933. Faced with heavy censorship, political oppression and advent of second world PWA was dispersed in 1939.

IPTA began in Bangalore in April 1941 with four musical performances by Ram Gopal. The first conference of Indian People’s Theatre Association (IPTA) was held on 25 May 1943 in Bombay. The main objective of the conference, “was the passing of the resolution, the forming of an All India Committee and the forming of Provincial Organizing Committees” (Pradhan 152). Resolution of IPTA was recommended by Snehanshu Acharya and was passed unanimously. The resolution passed was, “That this conference resolves that for the purpose of spreading the movement all over the country a representative of All India Committee be appointed and Provincial Organizing Committees be appointed” (152).

IPTA was working closely with people’s culture and used folk form to find ‘authentic’ representation of the common people. From IPTA group Raza Ali, a renowned mathematician and Yash Pal a successful scientist impressed Tanvir the most. In his IPTA days he acted in a play *Naql-e-Makani* by Rajender Singh Bedi, directed by Balraj Sahni

with Zohra Sehgal in role of heroine. He did another play *Dakkan ki Ek Raat* [One Night in Telangana] with Balraj Sahani. About his IPTA days he said

It was a time of great ferment and excitement. Propagandist and reformist songs were being composed on folk tunes; different kinds of political plays were being staged. We would stage productions in halls, in parks and grounds, on the road, in the narrow verandahs of worker's chawls; it was a time of great activity. (Tanvir 253)

Tanvir credited IPTA for the growth of his interest in folk tradition, "The IPTA provided my first schooling in theatre, especially in the folk forms of performing arts" (Katyal 23). He was appreciative of IPTA for it worked with theatre in close relationship with peasants and working class people.

He was in favor of interpreting tradition with imagination and creativity. His plays involved cultural epithets and language of common man. Some of the characteristics of his plays are explained by Katyal "a fluid structure with interwoven narratives, humorous sequences, live songs and music, a local flavor in the setting and the language" (26). In 1948 when main leaders of the IPTA were arrested during a procession he took up the charge of IPTA and helped to reorganize it.

IPTA successfully operated from 1942 to 1948 but later because of internal conflict among its members and external suppression by the government, it slowly dwindled. Under Dramatic Act of 1876 police was given the right "to raid places of performance, arrest actors, remove stage property, and confiscate manuscripts of the play". IPTA playwrights were asked to submit manuscript of their plays to the police before getting their plays staged. Government imposed entertainment tax on plays performed by IPTA

and IPTA being a non-profit organization was unable to keep up with expenses of production of play and payment of salary of members and taxes.

After his IPTA days Tanvir consciously started collecting folk songs. One of the most important characteristics of folk theatre is its close relationship with people. This form of cultural expression was ‘sophisticated’ as other forms of cultural expression according to him. When he organized workshops in rural areas he realized that:

When I began going to the villages to have workshops and began mingling with them, only then I realized at long last that there is a lot to learn from them, not only to give to them, which is the usual attitude of the elite or middle class officials in rural amelioration projects. There is in fact more to take from them than to give. (109)

One of the most important aspects of folk theatre is its close relationship with people. Tanvir while dealing with folk theatre adopted different approaches. According to Katyal one was of using ‘minimal intervention’ which he used in his play *Arjun ka Sarthi*. The second one was ‘creative intervention’ in matter of costume, content, music etc. whose application can be found in plays like *Thakur Pritipal Singh* and *Sone Sagar*. The third was incorporation of, “knowledge of costumes, lightning and theatrical techniques with traditional artistes” (110). Lastly, the fourth one was combination of folk tales with his ‘directorial vision’ to form plays like *Hirma Ki Amar Kahani*, *Bahadur Kalarin* and *Ponga Pandit*.

From Bombay after his stint with IPTA, he went to Delhi. In Delhi, he started leading his own path in theatre. The first play written by him was *Agra Bazaar*, performed for the first time in Delhi in 1954. Katyal remarked on the play *Agra Bazar* in her book *Habib Tanvir: Towards Inclusive Theatre* “I consider this to be one of Habib’s most

important productions. It reflects his fundamental concern with the beauty and value of the culture and language of the common man.” (26) This play was written to mark the anniversary of celebrated eighteenth century poet Nazir Akbarabadi on the request of Athar Parvez and other members of PWA. Teachers and students of Jamia Millia Islamia along with villagers of Okhla acted in this play. The success of Agra Bazar inspired him to form his own traditional theatre company, Naya Theatre.

He became a member of RADA [Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts] in 1955. He got scholarship from RADA and went to Britain to receive professional training in theatre. After a year of training he took lessons of art production at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. According to Tanvir “Telling the story is all the game in production. If it falters, it means the production is faulty, you’ve failed to tell the story. If anything is coming in the way- costume, light, décor, anything- you’ve failed to tell the story” (Katyal 37).

He had great desire to meet Bertolt Brecht, German playwright, poet and director. When he reached Berlin to his utter dismay he found that Brecht had died weeks ago. At that time Brecht’s plays were being performed everywhere, therefore Tanvir got to watch all his plays. He even saw the rehearsals of Brecht’s theatre company. His experience in Europe helped him to gain clarity as to what he wanted from theatre:

My absence from the country for about three years in mid- 1950s, when I was studying theatre in England and observing the theatres of Europe, made me acutely conscious of the fact that India needs to fall upon its traditions in theatre in order to evolve a new type of theatre which will be both authentic and contemporary. That to my mind is the crux of all cultural renaissance.
(37)

Among his international tryst it will be noteworthy to notice his visit to Kabul. He went to Kabul as a member of parliament with the task of writing a report on Afghani culture. For the same purpose he went to see Kabuli Theatre. Government officials there suggested to him to not watch it because according to them it was vulgar. When he saw it he was reminded of Parsi theatre of his childhood because of the similarity of infrastructural and sitting arrangement. Cheapest ticket buyers were made to sit on floor and quality of seat improved in accordance with the cost of ticket bought. Expressing respect and admiration for Kabuli Theatre in his memoir he wrote “I made a resolution that if Kabul lacked a middle- class and respectable theatre, and all it had were these performances, I must come back and work with these prostitutes and illiterate actors. Who knows, we might be able to come up with something radically new and meaningful” (Tanvir 286). From this we get to understand that his expectation from his engagement with theatre was to create something new. Chhattisgarh folk artists who are highly skilled in their art form face same discrimination in India as Kabuli theatre face in Kabul.

Tanvir expressed his dissatisfaction with the mainstream for neglecting folk artists out of its prejudices against ‘adivasi’ and ‘illiterates’. About folk form Katyal wrote “They were subaltern forms, brimming with irreverent digs at the status quo and subversive wit and humour. However, as the rural economy weakened and collapsed, folk actors and groups found their survival threatened” (Katyal xviii).

On his return to India he worked on *Mitti ki Gaadi* for Hindustani Theatre. This play was based on Shudraka’s play *Mrachchhakatikam*. It is a classical play but Tanvir directed this play in folk form. There were protests as to how a classical theatre was performed in folk form, an ‘inferior’ art form. Following these protests Tanvir was asked

to leave as he was not willing to budge from his decision which was that he will direct the play *Mitti ki Gaadi* only in folk form.

In 1964 he was removed from RADA on the basis of accusations made against him which accused him being a communist for his participation in IPTA. At that time people subscribing to communist ideology had to face fury of right wing government and they were disfavored when it came to government job or other provisions made by the government.

Regarding his involvement with folk artists and folk form he wrote “I have conducted several workshops in the Chhattisgarhi nacha form, have worked with Rajasthani actors in the khyal form and with the svang actors of Haryana” (Tanvir 296). One workshop was held in Rajasthan organized by Komal Kothari on the *Khayal* form. Another was held by him in Raipur on the folk form Nacha for twelve days in 1973. In this workshop local artists were taught new techniques of theatrical performance by the actors of Naya theatre such as techniques of using small products of day to day usage for stage technicalities were taught. Tanvir taught about a hack:

I would take a dalda tin and put a bulb in it, to show them the difference between a flood and a spot, and I told them, if you have nothing else, you can use this, and that by itself is a kind of spot since it controls focus, which is all a spot does, and the reflection of the white tin inside will increase the light. You can increase it more by adding reflectors, or put a lens on it.
(Katyul 57)

Besides *Nacha* folk form of Chhattisgarh, *Khayal* of Rajasthan, *Swang* of Haryana he also held workshop for Orissa folk form *Prahalad Nataka* and *Bharata Lila* in Ganjam district of Orissa in April 1976 sponsored by Ministry of Education and Social Welfare,

Government of India. *Prahalad Natak* closely follows ‘classical ragas’ in terms of music, dance, costumes, make up etc. The atmosphere of scene is developed with the help of beating of drums or dholaks.

According to Tanvir in Naya Theatre brochure for *Prahalad, Nataka Bharata Lila* on the other hand is “a less rigid and totally different form of theatre. Though essentially a musically form, it leans more on verbal expression” (Katyal 121). The content matter is from Mahabharata where Arjun is married to Subhadra. “The tone is light, witty and satirical, with everything contributing to this overall effect- not just the improvised dialogue but also the songs, dances and gestures. There is a chief jester figure, the Dwari [in fact, an alternate name for this form is Dwari Nata]” (Katyal 121). In the play heroism of Arjun and other Pandavas is mocked by Dwari by recalling some of their unheroic moments like humiliations they had to face while hiding in Virathnagar. This play reveals the subversive nature of folk art form.

He himself learnt a lot from folk theatre and folk artists. He understood use of dance in Sufi religious celebration like *wajid* when he saw the tribal dance performed by folk artistes of Chhatisgarh. “The singers at fair can invite the Devi, the listeners may be possessed by *devtas* but it has everything to do with the beat. Jazz musicians, voodoo magicians, tribal dancers from Dang in Gujrat, folk singers in Africa and the Americas can all come under the same spell- of music” (Tanvir 97). Besides folk artists he also included rural people and ‘housewives’ who could sing and had “experience of singing and dancing in the temples, fields and homes as part of the process of worship and daily work” (97) in his Naya Theatre.

He started Naya Theatre with his wife Moneeka in New Delhi and got it registered in 1964. About his theatre he said “And howsoever other people would like to characterize

it, my theatre was, and still is, modern and contemporary” (Malik and Malik 142). Two chief attributes of oral tradition which are Improvisation and non-linear treatment of time and space are used by Tanvir.

Frequent clashes and conflicts emerged between Tanvir and his Chhattisgarhi troupe members because “Habituated to the easy-going Nacha, where there was no director and actors themselves improvised at will and pretty much did as they pleased, this tough, demanding discipline took some getting used to” (Katyal 80). But the relationship between them was such that if Tanvir hurled any abuse at them they would answer him back with even more abuses. If any artist left his group he would trace them, go after them and bring them back. Later he developed an open door policy. Once when Fida Bai, the lead actress of Naya Theatre was locked by her mother-in-law so as to prevent her from acting, he went to the extent of going to police and getting her freed. Later Fida Bai got divorce and lived as an independent woman. When Fida Bai immolated her-self in a fit of rage, he took care of all the cost of her treatment and took her to ‘good’ hospitals for treatment and care. Also he shifted headquarters of his theatre to Bhilai where her treatment was going on.

His daughter Nageen recalled how he would extract best acting from his actors by completely involving them in rehearsals:

Baba used to first explain to the actors the theme of that particular scene. What happens in the scene, what does the scene say? A scene is made up of units, the units have sub-units and these are further subdivided....Each of these has a focal point. After explaining the scene to the actors he would ask them to improvise the dialogues and the movements and hand gestures

freely. Then he would ask them, what does the scene say, to test whether the actors had quite understood. (Katyal 56)

This way he will derive active participation from his actors. The unique feature of Naya Theatre is “Naya Theatre productions would typically feature Chhattisgarhi actors performing in their mother tongue, live music and songs, dances and rituals, and minimal stage and lighting design and props” (75). Since Chhattisgarhi folk artists came from tribes and scheduled caste they were not treated equally either in urban or rural settings. Exposure on International platform helped folk artists of Naya Theatre to get glimpse of a new worldview where they witnessed their own worthiness.

In 1962 Tanvir was selected as representative of India by Ford Foundation’s educational program. Under this program he visited various cities in United States for the duration of two years. In the year 1969 he was awarded by Sangeet Natak Akademi. In 1972 he became member of Rajya Sabha.

He produced adaptations of many classical, Indian literature and foreign plays too. The Sanskrit play includes Sudraka’s *Mrichhakatikam* as *Mitti ki Gaadi* and Bhasa’s *Urubhangam* as *Duryodhan*. Other plays include *Rustom-o-Sohrab* by Aga Hashr Kashmiri, *Bagh* from Sisir Das, *Jis Lahore Nahi Vekhya Voh Janmya Hi Nahi* by Asghar Wajahat, *Shatranj Ke Mohre* and *Moteram Ka Satyagraha* from Premchand and *Rajdarshan* by Manoj Mitra’s as *Nand Raja Mast Hain*. “Later in his career, Habib turned to Rabindranath Tagore. He presented *Visarjan* first as a collaborative production with Rangakarmee, Usha Ganguli’s Kolkata-based company and, later, reworked it as *Raj-Rakt*, drawn from Tagore’s drama *Visarjan* and his novel *Rajarshi* ” (89).

From International sources, Soviet play *The Feminist Touch* was adapted by him into *Jaalindar Parde* and *Khudkhushi* from a story by Dostoevsky. *Shah Badshah* was

inspired from *The Government Inspector* by Gogol, *Dushman* from Gorky's *Enemies*; and *Zehreeli Hawa* from Canadian playwright Rahul Verma's *Bhopal*. "He also did a story by Stefan Zweig, 'The Eyes of My Undying Brother', as *Dekh Rahe Hain Nain*; and Moliere's *The Bourgeois Gentlemen*, first as *Mirza Shohrat Beg* and later as *Lala Shohrat Rai*" (89).

He also adapted William Shakespeare's play *The Taming of Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as *Kamdev Ka Apna Basant Ritu Ka Sapna*. Bertolt Brecht is another playwright whose play *Good Woman of Schezuan* he adapted as *Sajapur Ki Shanti Bai*.

Some of his plays concerned with social issues are *Ponga Pandit*, *Kushtia ka Chaprasi*, *Zehreeli Hawa* etc.

Inspiration for his play *Mere Baad* came from what had happened to the poet Yagana, "One day, as a result of a shenanigan by the famous scholar Niyaz Fatehpuri, some people got hold of him, painted his face black with coal tar, put him facing backwards on a donkey and paraded him to the beats of a *dholl* all over the city." [207] In a while after this incident Yagana passed away. Affected by this incidence Tanvir wrote the play *Mere Baad* though it was based on Ghalib's life.

After 1970 he tried to make plays in the language of his Chhattisgarhi actors and organized workshops in the region of Raipur and other rural areas. This led to formation of the play *Gaon ka Naam Saural*, *Mor Naam Damaad*. It is an important play because despite being performed in local language of Chhattisgarh it proved to be successful in Delhi. It ran twelve shows houseful in Delhi and thus was successful in crossing language barriers:

This paved the way for *Charandas Chor* in 1974 and for all the other plays that followed. Tanvir explains, “It was a turning point in my career, a breakthrough in introducing Chhattisgarhi as a language for a modern play. It gave me an all- Chhattisgarhi cast. Upto now I was combining them with urban actors. Now only folk actors” (Tanvir 337).

Charandas Chor is one of the most famous play written and directed by him. The story for *Charandas Chor* is taken from Rajasthan written by Vijaydan Detha. For this play his team received Fringe Fast award at the International Drama Festival in Edinburgh.

Almost all the associations which Tanvir formed with people were based on his love of cultural art. During his stay in Nice when “a young Algerian lad approached and kept pestering him for a souvenir- his last 10 pound note, his fountain pen- till Habib asked him if he could sing” (Katyal xv). Habib sang a Chhattisgarhi song to him and learnt an Algerian song from him. At moment of dispersal he told him “Now you’ve got a souvenir from me and I’ve got one from you and we’re none the poorer for it, in fact we’re richer. Goodbye” (Katyal xv). This incidence indicated that cultural art was indeed important to him more than anything. Katyal adds “Songs, and the oral tradition of which our folk performance forms are an integral part, remained central to Habib’s theatrical journey right to the very end of his life” (xvi). After his death Sudhanve Deshpande, theatre activist called him a ‘renaissance man’ for the reason that:

There was nothing he could not do in theatre-he wrote, translated, adapted and evolved plays; he was a mater director, a superb actor and a good singer; he wrote poetry and songs; he could compose music; he was a designer; he was manager of his company Naya Theatre, which he ran first with his wife Moneeka (and single-handed after her death) for exactly fifty

years; he was a critic and theoretician; more, he was a seer, a guru for generations of younger theatre artists. (xvi)

Tanvir brought folk and modern seemingly two different worlds together. Katyal asserts “He has shown that the folk actor can confidently perform in and make contribution to modern theatre, in terms of both form and content” (xxi).

After three weeks of illness he died in Bhopal on 8 June 2009. Sudhanva Deshpande and Sanjay Maharishi have made a documentary on him. He is recipient of awards like Padamshree and Padmabhushan, Fringe Firsts Award at the Edinburgh Drama Festival and Sangeet Natak Akademi.

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