

Khalid Tyabji

Resume:

Khalid Tyabji's theatrical career began almost by accident and certainly without premonition in 1974 while he was a student at the *University of Delhi* in India. He served his apprenticeship under Barry John with the **Theatre Action Group**. Working with the group for six years as actor, production assistant and eventually Administrative Director proved to be a complete theatre education not only in all aspects of theatre production but in a vast variety of styles and subjects ranging from Shakespeare to contemporary plays, from classical Indian drama to rock musicals... He achieved critical acclaim with his performances in over 13 productions. Interesting and educative though this variety was, Khalid's primary interest remained with what had ensnared him in the first place during a workshop production based on the training of Jerzy Grotowski's **Laboratory theatre** – a form of ensemble work with the psychic and physical being of the actor as its central focus. Wanting to explore this direction further and weary of repeatedly mounting half-finished productions of great possibility (due to the standard short period spent in their preparation) Tyabji left the company and began a phase of leading workshops with groups and institutions. His concern at this time was not so much with the creation of theatrical productions as with the theatrical workspace as an arena for a special sort of human encounter not available in contemporary everyday life. His meeting with, work and continuing friendship with the Calcutta playwright, actor and director Badal Sircar helped stimulate his ideas further.

It was during this period that Tyabji began to travel amongst tribal areas in Central India. As a means of communicating with people with whom he shared no common verbal language, as a way of explaining himself, and as a way of giving non-material gifts, he developed a form of theatrical play and exchange with the aboriginals that later came to be called **General Tomfoolery**. The schizophrenia he encountered in bridging the life of a modern

Indian University student (where he was working on a Ph.D. in social-anthropology) and his own incarnation of a loincloth-clad tribal found its resolution in the character of the Fool which he had first studied while preparing to play it in Shakespeare's **King Lear**. **General Tomfoolery**, as the name suggests, is more a mode of performance than a performance per se – it is a way of playing with people rather than playing before them, a transforming of everyday space into theatrical arena.

In Europe and the United States between 1984 and 1988 he adapted his **Tomfoolery** for an urban environment more restrained than the tribal. Out of this grew **Foolshow** which was performed very widely in New York, Britain, Poland, Sweden, Iceland, and the Faroe Islands. It was also developed as a means of therapeutic interaction at psychiatric hospitals in London and at a centre for autistic children in Warsaw.

In Poland Khalid worked at the **Second Studio of Wroclaw** established by Zbigniew Cynkuts. While there Tyabji led training with the international company and acted in productions with the international and Polish companies. His primary work at the *Studio* was however on a solo performance, **Foolsong**, which he created together with Jolanta Cynkutis, Zbigniew's wife, after the tragic death of the latter. He performed **Foolsong** in Poland, the U.K., Sweden, Iceland and Greenland before taking it back to India. He also conducted a number of training workshops in all these countries.

On his return to India Tyabji was appointed leader of training with the **National School of Drama Repertory Company** in New Delhi and then Visiting Professor at the *National School of Drama* where he taught between 1991 and 1997. He has also taught extensively amongst numerous groups and at a multitude of institutions all over the country. He developed **General Tomfoolery** as a way of interacting with a variety of communities and created several versions of **Foolsong** - in cooperation with Shaupon Boshu in Pondicherry - performing in a very wide range

of physical and social environments to considerable critical and public acclaim.

In 1997 Khalid returned to Poland to collaborate again with Jolanta Cynkutis on creating a new solo performance - **In Search of the Man of the Heart**. Since then they have frequently worked together in leading training and workshops and are currently working on translating materials left by Zbigniew Cynkutis.

In 1997 Tyabji also established the **Theatre Trust** in Bangalore and in the following year founded a theatre company with which he worked for two years in a theatre-centre he has designed and built near Hampi in South-Central India. Owing to what he refers to as 'more drama off-stage than on-stage' he was forced to dissolve the company at the end of 1999 but the centre remains a site for pan-Indian and international collaboration.

In 2000 Khalid created a joint performance with Jola Cynkutis entitled **On the Other Side of the Light** which was performed at the *Maski Theatre Festival* in Poznan. He also led began to lead workshops collaboratively with Cynkutis in Poland, India, Britain and the USA. He performed in Lech Raczak's **Child of the Stars** at the *MALTA Festival* in Poznan where he also performed his **Foolshow** after many years. In 2002 he was again part of Raczak's *MALTA Festival* production of **Easy Dying** and began work on another collaborative performance with Jola Cynkutis.

Apart from his work in the theatre Tyabji has also acted in four films: Mira Nair's **Kamasutra**, **The Return of Sandokan**, Frederic Fougea's **Hanuman**, Shyama Prasad's Bokshu and Tom Kingdon's **Three Ways to Kill**.

Since 2005 Khalid has been performing **Stations**, a 'Theatrical Poem' jointly created with Jola Cynkutis, at a number of international venues. He has also been teaching both at home and abroad. He is currently collaborating with Jola Cynkutis on translating and editing notes left by **Zbigniew Cynkutis**, former member of Grotowski's Laboratory Theatre.

From press reviews of **Foolsong**:

Solo performance of exceptional skill.
Hindustan Times, New Delhi. 1991.

A volatile intelligence and a singular theatrical energy...plays his athletic body like a virtuoso musician.
Economic Times, New Delhi. 1991.

A distinguished addition to a long line of philosophers with mischievous smiles and piercing eyes...an insistence on the bare essentials – a theatre without frills.
The Pioneer, New Delhi. 1991.

From press reviews of **In Search of the Man of the Heart**:

Sure-stepped, steeped in poetry...his body language...teased and hammered, veiled and revealed, prised and concealed the self, the mask that conceals the man, the mind beyond the mirror.
...proves that the actor is the theatre, all else is ephemeral.
Deccan Herald, Bangalore. 1998.

From press reviews of **General Tomfoolery**:

The Fool elicits a strong reaction from the most diverse audiences...hilarious, subversive and highly participatory...anything may happen but laughter is guaranteed.
Bazaar, London. 1987.

Being a Fool, everything is permissible...
Na Przelaj, Warsaw. 1986.

Contact:

jolkha@wp.pl
jolkha@rediffmail.com

Mail:

Jola Cynkutis/Khalid Tyabji
ul. Skarbka 20/1
60-348 Poznan
Poland.

Jola Cynkutis/Khalid Tyabji
1/23 Shantiniketan
New Delhi 110021
India.
