



# Drumbeat

Teesri Duniya Theatre's Newsletter

January 2006



## Giving the Arts Meaning: A Message from Rahul Varma

Memories of the Tsunami had barely faded when South Asia was hit again—the Kashmir region straddling India and Pakistan fell pray to a devastating earthquake on October 8, 2005, killing over 55,000 and injuring many more. Over three million people are now homeless and displaced. The United Nations says that the situation for survivors is worse than that after the Southeast Asian Tsunami.

In Montreal, various NGOs, civil societies, and South Asian community organizations joined hands to organize a benefit concert for the earthquake victims. Some of Montreal's best artists working in South Asia and Canada donated their time and talents. The concert, which took place at McGill University on November 11, 2005, drew over 500 people.

Aditya Verma, the charismatic Sarod player, and Catherine Potter, one of Canada's best Bansuri players, won huge admiration of audience members with their captivating performances. Hita Raghunathan and Deepa Mathur, two of Montreal's most well-known South Asian vocalists, sang to a mesmerized crowd. Akram Butt, one of Pakistan's most accomplished ghazal singers, delighted everyone with his passionate voice. All artists were accompanied by Jagjit Singh Soni on tabla. Together these artists not only thrilled their audience for a worthy cause, but also gave us them a sense of the cultural vibrancy that exists in Montreal.

This concert raised more than \$8000, which was donated to the Pakistan India People's Forum for Peace and Democracy (PIPFDP). The sponsors and participating artists made this event special because they were motivated by the growing solidarity between Indians and Pakistanis after years of hostilities.

Participating organizations were Alternatives, CERAS, Himalaya Seniors of Quebec, Kabir Cultural Center, Montreal Serai, Pakistan Association of Quebec, Pakistani Canadian Society of Quebec, South Asian Women's Community Center, and Teesri Duniya Theatre.

Une coproduction  
du Théâtre Sortie de Secours et  
du Teesri Duniya Theatre

## BHOPAL

Récit d'une catastrophe oubliée



Espace Libre  
du 31 janvier au 18 février, 2006  
du mardi au samedi à 20h  
1945, rue Fullum, Montréal, QC  
Tél: (514) 521-4191

***Calling all closet and out-of-the-closet political cartoonists!***  
**Want to see your artwork published in *Drumbeat*? If you come up with a visual that you think cuts to the wick of a social or political event, send it along for us to see. If we like it, we'll publish it. Be sure to send only a copy, though, as we will not be able return work that is not selected.**

## Call for "Ahimsa Day", International Day of Non-Violence, on January 30th

*Ahimsa is a Hindi word that means "non-violence." Mahatma Gandhi used Ahimsa as an ideology not only to achieve India's independence from British rule, but also as an everyday philosophy to be used in all interpersonal, social, and religious relations and practices as well as in political action – a philosophy that compels all to consciously inflict no harm on other human beings.*

In a world torn asunder by battles for wealth, power, glory and revenge, a gentle voice was raised by children from various lands who were at the International School of Paris asking for this madness to stop. The children resolved to send a call to women, children and men across the world to suffer no longer through the catastrophes wrought upon them by those waging the deathly battles. These children were motivated by the hope that a better world is possible and began to imagine ways in which life on the earth could be made more beautiful. They said, stop all wars, use arms budgets to provide drinking water and use no money (the best things in life are free), don't touch a car on that day for the need for oil leads to war, reclaim the streets — get to know your neighbors. Organize a No-Logo day, no brand name clothes or shoes ... and so forth.

The children felt that everyone needed to think over seriously whether the men in power and world leaders who run the affairs of the world really understand what they are doing to each other, to their own humanity, and to the earth, air and water that nurture life.

The Hindi word *Himsa* (violence) in its many forms, seem to describe what the men in power positions and world leaders were doing in the name of some imagined cause: violence for the domination and superiority of one group supposedly held together in the name of religion,

culture, or national security, over some other group; violence to grab in greed what is everyman's need and could be shared in peace; violence even for the control of what is unnecessary— what we could do without, at least until all in the human family are properly fed, clothed, sheltered and cared for.

In year 2004, thousands of people who attended the European World Social Forum held in Paris, found themselves moved by the hope of children that a better world is possible. Learning that the World Social Forum was coming up in Bombay India, in January 2004, they proposed January 30th as the special day for introspection, hoping that weightier voices would take up the cause of Ahimsa or non-violence in Bombay India.

On their part, on January 30th 2004, in Paris, groups of children and teachers, unconcerned about official approval, observed their first Ahimsa day at school, and across the river under the Eiffel tower.

**January 30th**, because it is the day of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by a man moved by puny ambitions. Ambitions of power and glory of a single "proud nation" for which Gandhi, who believed that all humanity was one family, had to die.

Dr. Shirin Ebadi of Iran, who won 2003 Nobel prize for peace, endorsed the call of children. She spoke to young girls in the most modest of schools in Bombay, about non-violence. She said *a-*

*him-sa* means absence of the desire to hurt. She spoke about the human family, of movements of national or religious pride leading to war and murder. She said that on January 30th, she would pray for peace in the world. The Indian girls promised to do the same.

Could we heed the message of the children in Paris and Bombay?

The call for Ahimsa day (day of non-violence) which took life in Paris and Mumbai in 2004, has caught attention of many across the world ([www.sacw.net/idnv](http://www.sacw.net/idnv)).

Thematic focus of Teesri Duniya Theatre's upcoming season is "Staging Peace in Times of War. We will observe Ahimsa day on Jan 30, 2006, which will be followed by the opening of our play Bhopal in French on January 31, at the Espace Libre in Montreal. We will promote Ahimsa day as a yearly observance all across the country.

On January 30th, let each of us, wherever birth or fate has put us on our planet, stop in our routines and scrambles, and do some things differently. Let us remind governments, 'experts' and armies that they are only entitled to act in our name, for the common good. What sets us apart from the other creatures of the world is our power of imagination. Let us use it, in our classrooms, workplaces, homes and neighborhoods, so that on Ahimsa Day, improving ourselves, we could make the world a better place.

## Aparna and Raju on the Silver Screen

by Ken McDonough

Cutting-edge activist dancer Aparna Sindhoo and her husband, Raju, recently wrapped up a major screen venture.

*Anandabhadram* is a film directed by Santosh Sivan, who has also helmed Bollywood creations such as *Ashoka*, starring Shaukh Khan as well as international art house films such as *Terrorist*. He is also an acclaimed cinematographer whose list of accomplishments includes films such as *Bride and Prejudice* and *Mistress of Spice*. Raju is Executive Producer of *Anandabhadram* and Aparna choreographed two songs for the film.

You can check out this MediaZen production at [www.anandabhadram.com](http://www.anandabhadram.com).

## **The Trial – A Performance that Was a Social Happening**

by Rahul Varma

More than 250 people packed the FC Smith auditorium on November 19, 2005 to see a staged reading of *The Trial* based on an adaptation of Kafka's seminal work by Matthew Behrens and Laurel Smith. The reading was jointly organized by Teesri Duniya Theatre and the Coalition for Justice for Adil Charkaoui. The event was part of Teesri's Untold Stories initiative which explores new methods and new aesthetics in bringing artists and communities together. Dozens of volunteers led by Mary Foster worked tirelessly to make the evening a success.

Lib Spry directed the reading which included prominent anglophone and francophone actors, community artists, and local celebrities. Diana Fajrajsl, Carmen Ferlan, Jacques Lussier, Lisa Ndejuru, and Marthe Turgeon who, along with celebrated novelist Anita Rau Badami, hip hop artist Yassin (Narcy) Alsalman, poet, playwright and photographer Ehab Lotayef, esteemed playwright David Fennario, activist Jaggi Singh, and Mr. Charkaoui himself, showed the tremendous power of artistic voices expressing invisible social issues. Sylva Balassanian, who has built a repertoire of songs marked by tradition and originality, blending the sounds of east and west, enchanted the audience with her powerful voice.

Mr. Charkoui, who was arrested by the Canadian authorities in May 2003 and released on bail in February 2005, continues to live with his family under fear of deportation back to his native country where torture surely awaits. Under the Canadian Security certificate, he must wear a tracking bracelet at all times and is prohibited from leaving his home without his mother and father. The police are authorized to have 24-hour access to his home without a warrant, so it was not surprising to see a couple of police cars constantly stationed right outside the venue during the show.

Curfew conditions forced Adil to return home after the first half of the reading. Mr. Singh, who had rehearsed the show, could not participate either because he is barred from entering Concordia University for having taken part in a demonstration against former Israeli prime minister Benjamin Nathanyahu for his role in war

crimes. Mr. Fennario also could not stay for the whole show due to health reasons. However, under Ms. Spry's skillful direction, the rest of the team filled in and the show went on.

Dr. Jaswant Guzder, a transcultural psychiatrist, visual artist, and member of Teesri's Board of Director, offered some of her views on *The Trial*:

"The Trial was not a show but a social happening. Adil Charkaoui's forced departure, police vans stationed outside, Jaggi Singh and David Fennario's absence due to security and health reasons, and the silenced migrants detained under Canadian Security certificates—these were all part of the performance event. As an audience, we were as much implicated in current quandaries of Canadian justice as we were implicated in world conflicts through these masterful performers. Theirs were the voices suppressed but not forgotten. It was fitting that the voice of Kafka's anti-hero in his famous labyrinth of *The Trial* was woven into the current political moment.

"Simultaneous translation projected on a screen in the background, and the resonance of two official Canadian languages intertwined with Arabic poems sung through the beautiful voice of Sylva Balassanina was particularly moving. Articulating anguish in a language foreign to our ears added to the power of the unheard voices, which is one of Teesri's many goals.

"With events like this, Teesri continues to expand the borders of concern and consciousness in our multicultural democracy, fulfilled in a profound message of belonging.

"Our humanity and dignity is diminished with each injustice to our fellow human beings on this planet. *The Trial* simply places all of us on the stage. Ehab Lotayef's poems were crossing oceans and joining us together into one family.

"This was a wonderful experience of a multicultural cast, a political prisoner, an artistic company, and a social action group joining with Kafka in awakening our possibilities as Canadian citizens."

Over the next few months, *The Trial* will be touring various CEGEPS, and community centres in both English and French.

## **Jaswant Guzder Goes to India**

by Ken McDonough

In the last two weeks of January, Dr. Jaswant Guzder, child psychiatrist, artist, and Teesri board member, will be sharing her insights and creative talent with various groups in cities across India. Her busy schedule includes holding a workshop on personality disorders in treatment at Delhi University's new Institute of Psychoanalytic Studies in New Delhi; giving a workshop on the arts in therapy at a children's health centre in Goa; and speaking in Mumbai to therapists on attention disorders in children and to parents of Umeed Development children on the impact of attention disorders on autistic children.

She will also deliver a lecture on psychotherapy issues among diasporic women of Indian origin to the Psychoanalytic Society of Mumbai, present an art exhibit titled "Visions from the Diaspora", and speak to the Museum Society of Bombay.

Congratulations to Jaswant for pulling together this important project. All of us at Teesri wish her a very successful and rewarding trip!

## Baghdad: Two Years of Kidnappings, Death and Turmoil

by Ehab Lotayef

*On December 6, 2005, Ehab Lotayef, a friend of Teesri Duniya Theatre as well as being a local activist, poet and photographer, was sent to Baghdad by the Canadian Islamic Congress to speak on behalf of Canadian Muslims against the abduction of the Christian Peacemaker Team workers in Iraq.*

When I left Montreal, I didn't have a solid plan. Many Muslim organizations around the world had issued statements appealing to the captors to release the four Christian Peacemakers Team workers in Iraq. They testified to the good work that was being done by the CPT workers and affirmed Muslim confidence in the CPT. However, in the 48 hours leading up to my departure, it had become clear to me that more was needed, even if it meant a lot of work and entailed some risk.

After much reflection, I accepted a request from the Canadian Islamic Congress VP to go to Baghdad. I believed that a statement in Arabic made in Baghdad by an Arab Muslim who had travelled thousands of kilometres to be there and who had personally worked with CPT activists would have more of an impact than those that had been issued up to that point. I was also inspired by chapter 5, verse 36 of the Koran, which would turn over in my mind while I made the flight over: "...he who kills a soul, except as punishment for murder or for spreading corruption in the land, it is as if he killed the whole human race, and he who saves it, it is as if he saved the whole human race..."

Some friends in Baghdad, the CIC and other activists in Canada helped me arrange a meeting and joint worldwide press conference in Baghdad with Sheikh Abd-es-Salaam al-Kubaisi of the Association of Muslim Scholars. The press conference and meeting went very well and, again with the help of my friends in Baghdad, other meetings with prominent Iraqi leaders were scheduled for the following Friday and Saturday.

The time I spent in Baghdad, while short, was enough to get a sense of the situation in Iraq. In addition to the endless line-ups for gas, power blackouts and water supply interruptions I had seen two years earlier, there was more sewage in the streets, less security and more fear! In other words, it was not just the same; it was worse! In fact, I would later learn from an opinion poll that 57% of Iraqis who responded thought that restoring public security should be the top priority of the government and only 18% thought the reconstruction was effective!

Although we hear about the 200 foreigners taken hostage and the 2,000 US killed in Iraq, we seldom hear about the many thousands of Iraqis who have been kidnapped or arbitrarily detained, or the 30,000 Iraqis who, according to some independent studies (there's no official figure), have been killed since the 2003 invasion.

One reason the CPT workers went to Iraq was to reveal the ugly truth about its situation to the world. Let us pray and hope for the safety of James Loney, Tom Fox, Harmeet Sooden, and Norman Kember—for their sake and the sake of their loved ones, the Iraqi people, ourselves, and a better world.

## Editorial: Waging Peace through Theatre in Times of War

by The Editors of Drumbeat

As Canadians, we often find ourselves watching events from the end of a remote control device. However, there are many in our community—refugees, recent immigrants and long-time citizens—who have witnessed first-hand the devastation wrought by hatred, savage self-interest, and political expediency.

They can tell you that once brutality loops forward, it is impossible to wind the film back to more peaceable times, before lives were brutalized and lost and the environment degraded. They can also tell you that the memories remain painfully etched in the minds of the survivors and feed the attitudes and actions, for good or for bad, of generations to come. In other words, aggression and conflict have consequences that last far longer—sometimes decades or centuries longer—than the paltry attention span of the Western media.

While many rise above the injustices and indignities wrought by war to struggle for an end to suffering and for a gentler, more just world, they do so against an often much stronger tendency toward further instability, as new forms of violence and debasement are pursued in a bid to right the scales, exact vengeance, deter retaliation, and/or consolidate political and social power.

Armed aggression is the surest way to guarantee that people will live in fear and despair. In a landscape ravaged by war, armed conflict or "military action," the future is bleak: fear and despair easily erode hope and render people vulnerable to the inducements of armed interest groups or aggressive national militaries; and criminal activities such as human trafficking, which counts tens of thousands of victims every year, flourish as perverse and cruel substitutes for real opportunity.

This year, Teesri Duniya has chosen the theme "Waging Peace through Theatre in Times of War" in order to focus attention on war and its consequences and put theatre to work for peace. We call upon other artists and theatre practitioners to join us in taking up the cause of peace in these times of war and conflict. Through concerted gestures, we can build a common ground for a more caring world!

With this year's theme in mind, we would like to extend our wishes for peace to all of you. We look forward to seeing you often over the coming year.

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