

## BOOK REVIEW

### An account of the People's Theatre

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- **A History of The Jana Natya Manch: Plays For The People By Arjun Ghosh. New Delhi: Sage Publication India, 2012. 293pp. Hardcover, 695 rupees. ISBN: ISBN-10: 8132107284**

This unusual book is divided into two parts. The first part of this book is historical and tells us the story from 1973 to till now. How street theatre evolved at that time in our country when there were many ups and down in the political and social scenario a comprehensive analysis has been given on that. On the other hand, the second part elaborates the experience of drama and street theatre and this section starts from chapter six.

Overall this book has tried to give a detailed account of all information about Jana NatyaManch. How Janam's street play worked for social change, is also trying to illuciated. G. P. Deshpandey has defined this book as a biography of Janam.

In the earlier days, CPI (M) didn't have any strong cultural wing to propagate any strong form mobilizing social change; makeshift platform had been used with self-scripted play by Janam.

The first chapter "The early year (1972-80)" explains the foundation year of Janam. This chapter also informs about the performance of all self-scripted street plays of Janam 'Machine', 'Gaon Se SadakTak, Hatyare', 'DTC Ki Dhandhli', 'Aurat', 'Samarth' and 'Raja Ka Baja.' How Janam started its journey with limited resources – everything is elaborated here.

In the next chapter, a factual scenario of emergency period has been portrayed. It was trying to portray that how government is imposing emergency. When Indra Gandhi disagreed to give resignation from the post of Prime Minister, Janam made skit – 'Kursi, Kursi, Kursi'. To show the excesses of the emergency, they produced 'Ab Raja Ki Bari Hai'. The writer put an effort to show Janam's communication motive during the emergency period. The writer also gives an account of producing many plays and their contexts like 'Machine' (Hering – India

worker strike), ‘Gaon Se ShaharTak’ (Migrant labor searching for job), ‘Hatyare’ (communal rights), ‘DTC Ki Dhandhali’ (Hike on bus fare by DTC), ‘Aurat’ (based on working woman), ‘Samrath: Madari-Jamura’ (price hike) etc.

In the third chapter “An Eventful Decade (1981 – 1988)”, the writer describes various activities. The writer states here: ‘Janam needed to develop organizationally so as to attract talent not only through its art but also through its commitment to a progressive politics’.

AsifNaqvi, Vijay Kalia, SanyaSirohi Gupta were the new-comers at that time and their memories are also quoted here. This chapter also gives an informative part about communal separatism in Punjab and Janam’s activity. Some dialogues are here quoted from ‘Veer Jaag Zara’:

**Man:** O people, Punjab is burning...

**Voices:** Opposition parties are responsible.

**Man:** Communalism is on the ascendancy.

**Voices:** Opposition parties are responsible...

**Man:** Regionalism, Sectarianism, Secessionism is growing.

**Voices:** Opposition parties are responsible.

**Man:** Poverty, Unemployment, Starvation, Corruption is on the rise, prices are touching

the sky, crops are failing, peasants are being ruined.

**Voices:** Opposition parties are responsible.

Opposition parties are responsible.

..... “

The author also makes an attempt to show Janam’s work on politics and communalism through putting some dialogues from their plays:

**Jamura:** Yes sir, from there turn right, then straight, then right again, then straight, then

rightagain...

**Ring Master:** Only right turns,no left turns!

**Jamura:** No, no, no, never turn left. Or else you will reach Bengal. JyotiBasu is in

government there. He has thrown Sampradayikta into the Bay of Bengal.

**Ring Master:** Thrown it into the Bay? How did he have the audacity to be so cruel on an

innocent, helpless animal?

**Jamura:** Let alone wild animals, if he gets to know that you are here to help Sampradayikta, then he will kick you out. He is very strict in these matters”.

In the next chapter “Martyrdom and After (1989 – 1994)” the post martyrdom (after the murder of SafdarHashmi) works of Janam are elucidated. SafdarHashmi was murdered at Jhandapur in Sahibabad during the performance of ‘HallaBol’ (1989). Janam decided to return there and finished the interrupted play. It is also discuss that how Janam received help from different activists and artists. Author also studies Janams work during the period of 1990s (in changing political and economic climate).

The last chapter of the first section “New Directions (1995 – Present)” this chapter is focused on the remarkable works of Janam and tries to explain the plays on ‘communal violence, globalization, displacement of working-class slums, and attacks on democratic rights’ (pp.18). This chapter explicatesJanams response to communal riots of Gujarat (2002).Janam also used new techniques and improve their work.

The sixth chapter “The experience of the streets” gives well explanation of the performances of Janam in different cities. It is also mentioned that Janam’s campaigns are only for creating awareness, not for influencing the mass opinion.

The chapter “A Different Proscenium” reveals the works of Janam and New Theatre. The activity of HabibTanvir also has occupied valuable space. Author mentioned two plays while discussing this- “Moteram’s Nonviolent Resistance” (which is focused on the British Policies), “EkAuratHipeshiyaBhiThi”. This chapter also describes G. P. Deshpandey’sSatyashodhakand Brijiesh Sharma’s ShambukVadh. SafdarHashmi and HabibTanveer jointly worked in many plays during this time. It is a good chronicle of street plays of that period.

The eighth chapter has told us about the new-comers of Janam. It has also given a new direction on how new talents can be utilized as collective creativity through showing the functionality of Janam. Along with this, it provides an insight to their economic condition. The experience of four decades is well arranged in this part.

In the ninth chapter “Players, Spectators and Bazaars”, ArjunGhosh has shown a clear picture of Janam’s struggle in Delhi. The life style of inhabitants in Delhi was different. At that time, Delhi was occupied by the people of different economic status – upper middle and lower class. Slum areas were become the result of heavy population. Economically poor people were easy prey of the Govt. for gaining vote. In such circumstances, Janam had made an attempt to reach all kind of audiences and to make them aware. It has been also told how Janam selected proper place for performance to reach a wide number of people. It was quite challenging for them.

The tenth chapter has tried to explore the connection between the CPI (M) and Janam. He gives an account of the nature of their links and the degree of sovereignty of Janam. During the Cultural Revolution in China and the left movement, it has been described how Janam worked and helped them in disseminating the ideas and concepts of the party programs in Delhi.

In the end, the writer refers to how Janam sustained itself under different threats and challenges; how they overcome their financial crisis and performed in many festivals. He also quoted:“ I have demonstrated how in their use of street theatre the parties of the establishment make suitable alternations to street theatre. They put in place a top-down structure which is in consonance with their politics.” He also briefed the scenario of Janam in both pre-independence and post-independence period. ArjunGhosh also scanned the role of Janam in present day. Janam’s performances were become very popular and these were also used by the political opponents to attack others.

Overall, it can be clearly understood how culture can be used as an effective tool for political communication after reading this book. This book can be considered as a great contribution of ArjunGhosh towards the history of drama and theatre. The effort made by ArjunGhosh is really appraising. Anyone can have clear idea about writing a good biography on theatre after

reading this particular book. It is an important asset for the people who are interested in theatre.

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