

## **Habib Tanvir-The Making of a Legend**

### **Nagin Tanvir**

Five decades ago six actors at the grassroots level from chhattisgarh were brought to the capital of delhi by a man who thought differently,shocking the urban audiences. This pioneering and bold step was taken by none than Mr.Habib Ahmed Khan.

When he first brought these folk actors to the ‘Hindustani Theatre’ founded by Begum Quadsia Zaidi in 1958. Begum Zaidi was most displeased with their appearance. They were dark skinned,one of them was cock-eyed. She said to Habib, “Habib, you call them artists? Look at their faces. Actors should be fair skinned and handsome looking. Dr Zakir Hussain is coming for the function as the chief guest and you are going to present these people?” Habib Tanvir smiled and said,”He is going to like them.” Begum Zaidi said,”Of course Dr. Zakir Hussain is not going to criticize them, himself being a refined personality.”Well, when people saw these artists performing they were amazed. They had never seen anything of the kind ever before in their theatrical life. Habib succeeded In showing that theatre could also be like this, where th actors were natural actors, who had an instinctive sense about acting, where improvisation,ready wit and abandon were like second nature to them. With these qualities as the basis(which one finds in the folk Nacha tradition of Chhattisgarh) the work of a catalyst was done by Mr.Habib Tanvir creating an entirely new idiom in the theatre world. The resu;lt emerged as a new style where tradition were kept intact and something contemporary was said which was very refreshing and radical, and such that the common man or layperson could relate to directly as his own experience. This style of thought paved the way for other theatre practitioners who understood that being attached

strongly to one's roots is vitally important. Unless that foundation is there, one cannot take flight and create anew. This is true in music and dance as well.

Way back in 1958, before Naya Theatre was founded, when the six folk Chhattisgarhi actors had come to Delhi, Habib Tanvir had to unlearn whatever he had learned in the UK at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts and the Bristol Old Vic Theatre. He went to RADA, London in 1955 on a scholarship recommended by Begum Zaidi, for an intense theatre training in all aspects of the art form including acting, directing, lighting, set designing, costume designing etc. The scholarship lasted for a year, but Habib stayed on for three years. At 'Rada' the teacher was teaching the student from Asia, speech. For example how to enunciate the letters 'V' and 'W'. In the class theatre student went on practicing Wah Wah Wah....! And "Vah Vah Vah—" and they also practiced the rolling of 'R'. After many sessions, Habib lost patience and thought, 'what nonsense!' He discontinued the course and found out that the Old Vic Theatre in Bristol was very good with Duncan Ross as the Artistic Director at the Head of the institution. So he headed for Bristol. The training he got there turned out to be very fruitful for him, for this entire theatre life. To illustrate the type of Duncan Ross was, let me give you an example. A particular actor could not get into the characters of his role according to Duncan Ross's expectation. The actor tried again and again to get the role right, but could not succeed. Finally he asked the director, 'Can I take that cap as a support?' Duncan Ross said, 'Go ahead, by all means.' The actor took something else as a prop to help himself in the role. Duncan Ross did not stop him. When Duncan Ross felt that the actor had finally arrived in the role, he told the actor to do away with the cap and the other props, because the actor did not require them any longer. Duncan Ross was subtle in his methodology. According to the prescribed drama course in England, a student had to produce a comedy, a tragedy,

and a third variety. But Duncan Ross said, 'produce whatever play you like. It might not necessarily be a classical play or a modern play or for that matter a popular play. If you like a script, produce it, keeping in mind your first reaction when you read it and reproducing that first impulse and conveying it to your audience. 'This was always remembered by Habib Tanvir whenever he tackled a new play.

Duncan Ross' method of handling each actor was different, depending on the actor's mind and his limitations. This also was learnt by Habib Tanvir and he applied this method with his own actors. The third lesson that Duncan Ross taught Habib Tanvir was 'If anything is coming in the way of the story, throw it away. Be it a part of the set or the backdrop or anything else. The flow of the story should not be hindered.' So telling the story was of utmost importance.

In fact most of the plays produced by Habib Tanvir run just like a story. Very real, fresh and down to earth. He did not believe in making pretty pictures on stage for the heck of it. The groupings in the scenes always had some definite meaningful motives behind them. He never theme.

Habib Tanvir saw many productions of 'Mitti ki Gadi' abroad and was dissatisfied but was fascinated with Shudrak's Sanskrit classic and wanted to produce abroad something or the other was always coming in the way of the flow of the story. He made twelve sets on paper which did not succeed in enhancing an uninterrupted flow of the story. He finally settled on a circular platform which worked perfectly. Here I would like to say that Habib as a student in a school was very good in geometry. He used to solve theorems with his own methods and the teacher was delighted to see this brightness in the young boy. Perhaps because of this, directly or indirectly, he arrived at his own discovery of a circular platform

which worked very well in this Sanskrit classical play. It was after this discovery that he read the Natya Shastra in the English translation, talked to the Sanskrit pundits (who later became his staunch friends after much controversy) and gained knowledge about the 'Rasa' theory of Indian dramaturgy. As you know, the 'Rasa' theory does not believe in the Aristotle theory of Time, Space and Action. All the three principles are broken so that the 'Rasa' of the story flows unhindered. With the circular platform the play flowed effortlessly and it worked very well with the folk actors who were excellent improvisers.

What Habib had to unlearn was that in the beginning he tried to groom the artists in Hindi. The folk artists had many problems in that language. Habib had seen them on the village stage in Chhatisgarh, in their 'Nacha' tradition (folk theatre of Chattisgarh) performing throughout the night with inhibition, and a lot of abandon in their acting improvising like blazes. Hindi they felt cramped, they were unable to improvise, in other words, they stopped feeling free. After several days, or perhaps weeks, Habib realized that this will not do. Why force them to speak in Hindi like? why not to try their own mother tongue Chhatisgarhi? The trial worked, and worked well Chhatisgarhi is a dialect of Hindi like Bundeli, Begheli, Malwi, Avadhi, Maithali, Bhojpuri etc. So, Habib gave up his urban approach and instead of creating play in the standardized language of Hindi, created a play in one of the sub-standard languages. Dialects were looked down upon in urban India especially in Delhi at that time. So were the people looked down upon (which spoke these dialects), by the urban educated society. So the audiences did not accept Chhatisgarhi actors or their dialect. It was a tough struggle for Habib. But his conviction was so strong that he did not care what the audience thought or commented, he persisted doggedly with renewed

determination and courage. It was a bold step he had taken which no one had taken before. A new, fresh approach to dramaturgy.

The question of why Chhatisgarhi dialect and why Chhatisgarhi actors was constantly on the lips of the Delhi audiences, to which Habib gave no concrete answer. He wanted to work, wait and watch. And he worked very very hard as if he were in search of something vital, something which provoked the questioning mind and hit your guts. He first broke ice in 1954 with 'Agra Bazaar' in 1958 with 'Mitti Ki Gadi' then after a long gap, in 1973 with 'Gaon Ka Nam Sasural Mor Naam Damaad' and in 1975 with 'Charandas Chor'. The other play-'Bahadur Kalarin', 'Sajapur ki Shanti Bai' (an adaptation of Brecht's 'Good Woman of Setxuan'), 'Sonesagar', followed in 1976, 1977, 1958 and 1981 respectively.

In 'Agra Bazaar' in 1954 there was a cast of 70 people with a donkey thrown in on stage. And the donkey even defecated on stage. It was a real bazaar with all its splendor, filth and odours. The play was written in a building called the 'Batla House' in Jamia Milla which had a thatched roof. Habib studied Nazir the Plebian poet on which the play was based as well as other Urdu classical poets like Ghalib, Meer, Zauq, Momin, etc. The play was written in chaste Urdu which was then spoken by the people of Delhi at the time. Habib researched in this manner: he went to the vegetable vendors, fruit vendors. Melewallas, iron smiths, and such like in Old Delhi and watched, listened and talked to them. He captured their vocabulary and prepared the script. In the rehearsals he had actual sellers and vendors on stage whom he groomed in acting to suit the play.

In 'Mitti Ki Gadi' he sat with the Urdu poet Niyaz Haider and together they created the songs for the play. Habib would sing the Chhatisgarhi tunes and Niyaz Haider would compose the poetry in simple language to suit those folk tunes.

'Gaon Ka Nam Sasural Mor Naam Damaad' was combination of three comedy stunts of the Chhatisgarhi Nacha tradition- 'Chehri Chhera', 'Burkwa Bihaav', and 'Dewar Dewarin' woven together to form one story.

Here one saw the musically rich Chhatisgarh come to the forefront. Sadly most of the songs have become extinct now. This was the first time Dewarins had been included in the troupe. 'Dewar Dewarins' are a nomadic tribe of Chhatisgarh who live outside the village in bamboo shacks. They are a combination of a very volatile nature on one hand and extreme talent in dancing, singing and acting on the other. The entry of Fida Bai and Mala Bai took place in 1973. An experiment, or I should say, a search in the folk rituals such as Gauri Gaura, where Shiva and Parvati are worshipped during Diwali time. During the songs of the songs of this ritual women fall into trance and start dancing with their tresses open. Colloquially this is known as Devi Chadna. This is very dramatic in its form. These traditions inspired Habib deeply and he so developed a vision relating life to art and art of life, and came to the conclusion that both were inseparable. He had his feet grounded firmly in his roots.

In 1975 he encountered Vijay Daan Detha, a story writer of Rajasthani folk tales. The name of the story was 'Sachhai Ki Biseat' in Rajasthan Habib had seen 'Thakur ro Rusno' - a comedy. One or two more folk theatre pieces were observed by Habib. He tried to rehearse the Rajasthani actors by the methods of improvisation in the story of 'Sachhai ki Biseat'. It did not quite work out the way he wanted it to. Since the story dealt with truthfulness, Habib went to Bhilai and

had a workshop with the ‘Satnamis’(the Satnamis are a sect in Chhatisgarh whose motto is to speak the truth). The end of the process resulted in a short skit called ‘Sachcha Chor’. Habib spoke to various Satnamis and asked about their guru Ghasidas and other gurus as well. The names did not quite go well with Habib. Finally a name struck him which would do justice to the theme. The name was ‘Charandas’ and so the name of the play emerged as ‘Charandas Chor’ and it stuck. He used the panthi dandcers in the play who were all Satnamis. The he started the preparation of the script. The former half of the play was improvised and the latter half was written and was formal in its structure. The emergence of this play was a big milestone in Habib Tanvir’s career.with the help of folk poet, Swarna Kumar sahu (Rajnandgaon).the songs were composed. In this play too the set was simple. It was a rectangular platform with the branch of a tree behind.

First the film was made by Shyam Benegal. The shooting took place in Chhatisgarh. The film was basically made for children. In the film after the thief’s death the story further continues- Charandas Chor steals in heaven. This was produced to the original story of Vijay Daan Detha. Habib disagreed with the end of the story. He felt that continuing the story after the death of the thief was an anticlimax,so he ended his play at the death creating a stunning impact on the audience who least expected death. The ritual of the white flag being worshipped at the end before the closing song was symbolic of Guru Ghasidas being revered. The play culminated with the motto of truth, giving it a feeling of completeness. The play became evergreen, is still running strong to this day is much demand. It is a rare example of a folk tale becoming a classic.

‘Bahadur Kalarin’ was a folk tale of Chattisgarh with Oedious complex as the theme, the mother-son fixation. A play on incest was a difficult theme to show in a tropiacal country like India. The script was written after much research in the

villages of Sorar, Chirchari, and Gangrel of Chattisgarh. Habib visited old temples and got stone artifacts from there which was not considered illegal in those years. The beautiful stone sculptures were desolately lying about hardly being cared for as historical pieces. Habib spoke to many people, the Sarpanch, Pradhans and the local men who gave him a storehouse of information about the story of Bahadur, the wine seller and her son Chhachhaan. Then many people he spoke to gave him several examples of incest between mother and son, father and daughter. After getting enough knowledge Habib started to write the script. Beautiful scenes created on a beautiful set of a wine seller's shop and an old well came into being. Here let me tell you that Kalar is a caste which makes and sells liquor. Kalarin is female wine seller. Habib worked very hard on Fidabai, his main actress and explained to her what he wanted; a mother who used to oil her son's body until he reached puberty and so the son developed a fixation for his mother. Fidabai understood perfectly and instinctively. She did a fine role of 'Bahadur Kalarin'. Her portrayal was unparalleled. Habib incorporated the Gond tribal dancer of Mandla, Madhya Pradesh to enhance the intensity of the story. To show Bahadur's son Chhachhaan's 126 wives on stage Habib took the help of a dance and the song sequence with 12-16 tribal dancers. After the 126<sup>th</sup> wedding the son realizes that he is in love with his own mother. The play ended in a tragedy, the death of the son and the mother. Those who have witnessed this play cannot forget it-it was so powerful that it took Kolkata audiences by storm. They loved it. The songs of the play were written by another Chhattisgarhi poet of Raipur - Ganagaram Sakhet who was guided by Habib. Ganagaram had scabies and then eczema, which was transmitted to Habib. Habib's clothes were boiled in a cauldron by mother in the city of Bareilly. So these illnesses and their treatment also went hand in hand during the work process. Not altogether a pleasant situation. It is strange, but true that an



artists works better and with more vigour in the midst of crisis in his life. It is a kind of a challenge he has to encounter.

In dealing with Brecht's 'Good Women of Szechuan', Habib read a lot of Brecht and about the theory of alienation (which so suited the Chhatisgarhi actors), the folklores which were clearly lifted by Brecht for his plays. For instance the water-seller in the 'Good Women of Szechuan', belongs to a Burmese story. Habib read this story very carefully.

Shakespeare for that matter also lifted stories from the East for his own plays. Writing the script of the 'Good Woman of Szechuan', adopting it and translating Brecht's songs from English into Chhatisgarhi and Hindi was an arduous task. The play was named 'Sajapurki Shanti Bai'. Habib worked day night as he did in the preparation of his other productions. He used to forget to eat, drink water or go to the toilet. He used to work very hard and carefully on his script, read out the manuscripts to the actors revise, rewrite, get their feedback, prune, ruthlessly prune, criticize his own script, correct, and after a long period complete the final script. A length of time was taken in casting of his plays. This was half the production done. During blocking improvisation was used in the initial stages which was a sure method of something concretely emerging.

The actors were told the crux of a particular scene and were asked to improvise freely keeping in mind the focal point of the scene. After several sessions like this the movement and gestures etc were then decided. By the time the final casting was done everybody knew everyone's role. The actors were taught through role, since they were illiterate. The ones who knew how to read and were asked to be learnt.

'Good of Szechuan' is about poverty and greed which the folk actors presented genuinely because they themselves came from deprived background. Here again

Fida Bai played a fine role of 'Shanti' the prostitute and her make believe brother the role of a man- a total transformation of characters. This play was a success, but its revival was a flop. Something had gone wrong somewhere.

'Sonesagar', folk balled of Chhatisgarh- is a pastoral story, a love story. The form is called Chandaini-the story of Chanda-the (heroine) Chandaini now has become very meagre- in Chhattisgarh. At that time i 1980-81 there was a wonderful balladeer who used to help him recite the story has passed away. He is still alive but his partner who used to help him recite the story has passed away. So I do not think Ramai performs any more.

Ramai was used very artistically in the play of 'sonesagar'. For instance the travelling of an arrow was very imagination shown in such a way that Ramai carried the arrow and during a musical interlude danced from one end of the stage to the other.

Habib discovered that this balled is prevalent in other parts of the country as well, such as Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra with different names like 'Loriki'(the lover) Lorikayan where Chand's lover is highlighted . in Chhatisgarh Chanda is the dominated character. The name 'Sonesagar' belongs to a she buffalo with golden horn. It was a very sweet play, musically very rich with a variety of Chandaini tunes and with much laughter.

I would like to mention here in that 1976-78 Habib hel a workshop in southern Orissa in the Ganjam District. We were in Berhampur and Gopalpur. Raghunath Satapathy had his Prahalad Ntak troupe and for the first time Habib saw much to his amazement that there was a very thin borderline between folk theatre and classical theatre(It was a spectacle to watch 30 manjoros simultaneously playing and the singers singing at a very high pitch and a lot of energy). The folk bordered

on the classical in terms of acting , stage decor, make-up and consumes,a very stylized form of theatre. He brought Raghunath Satapathy to Delhi and showed their Prahalad Natak to the audience there at the Rabindrabhavan Lawn in the premises of the Saneet Natak Akademy. The third region where he worked with folk artists was in Rai-Harayana(in 1974-75). He observed their ‘Swarg’ form ( folk theatre of Haryana). The form had very rich music like Rajasthani and Oriya music. The ‘Nagara’ was used to the hilt Two plays were done by the Harayanvis-their own folk tales. One was Shashi Lakanhara(the royal wood cutter) and the other was ‘Jaani Chor’done in Harayanni. Jaani Chor was also done in Chhasttisgarhi with our folk artists. In the swarg form the Harayann boys,dressed as girl ,jumped very high in thir dances with ghaghraas, kurtas and dupattas;again full of vigour(In rural India men dressed as girls in folk theatre-women never came on stage. Now that trend has changed).

I am telling you all this because Habib worked in three regions of the counry apart from Chhatisgarh,but what he found in Chhatisgarh he didnot find among the Rajasthanis, Harayanvis or the Oriyas;it was the sense of satire which all Chhatisgarhis possess with their excellent sense of satire which all Chhatisgarhis possess with their excellent sense of humour .

When we come to the mid –eightness and the nineties we see two different kinds of plays-one ‘Hirma Ki Amar Kahani’ and the second ‘Dekh Rahe Hain Nain’.’Hirma Ki Amar Kahani’was produced in 1985, in three years time. It was a part of the Jawahar Lal Nehru fellowship project which Habib had got in 1982. Hence also a lot of research was done regarding Praveen Chand Bhanjdeo of Orissa whose story has been portrayed as Hirma’s story.Lots of anthropological books were read,volumes written by Varrier Elwin,R.V.Russel. An intensive workshop in the Dantewara district of Baster was organized. In the village of

Jeripara which comes under the post office of Mokhpal about 25 to 30 kms from Dantewara, resides the Bison Horn Marias of Bastar. Their huts are scattered at long distances. We were there for about a week or ten days cooking and eating off leaf plates, discussing in the day-time and the preparing the shape of the play. A part of the script writing took place in Jeripara. In the evening, since there was no electricity and the tribals were free after their day-time work, we saw various Dandani(Bison-horn)maria dances and heard songs and joined the tribals in a long serpentine line in one of their most popular dances called the serpent dance. The tribals were shy but extremely friendly and full laughter. One or two songs for the play were also composed by Habib here.

One next junction was at Narainpur in the muria tribal belt of belt of Bastar. We saw dances in villages of Ramawand, Garhbangal, Deogarh. We settled for a few days in the village of jeeram tarai and worked there. The song ‘Thorik Ankhi Uthake Dekh Akash Ke Rang Hai Neela’ was composed here. The song happened after Habib had got inspired by C.V.Raman’s the physicist’s ,a statement which he read in some friend’s house in Delhi. The statement which the famous scientist had made was- ‘You have only to look up and you will see that the sky blue’. How poetically said! Only a scientist of C.V.Raman’s calibre and sensitivity can say something spiritual like this. So simply said yet so complex. So one evening we were just relaxing at sunset on a charpai in Jeeram tara and we saw the clear blue sky-unpolluted, peaceful and the first two antaras(stanzas)of the poetry were written. He always wrote in Urdu when he was composing a song or writing a drama script, even Chhattisgarhi was written in the urdu script.

In two or three days time the song was complete. Since the play was about the Bastar tribals, their exploitation by the govt. official, the venue of the workshop

was set the forests of Bastar. It was a very enriching experience for all of us including me, my mother and our Chhattisgarhi folk artists.

The play showed the tussle/conflict between feudalism and democracy. The protagonist, that is 'Hirma', is killed through conspiracy. Dr. Brahmadeo Sharma at that time was the collector of Bastar and when he saw the play in 1985 he was full of appreciation and warmth. The first show took place in Bilaspur in a stadium in front of an audience of 18,000 people.

An excursion of the 'Abhuj Mar belt in the hills of the Satpura Range of Bastar was also done at the same time. There the tribals are very primitive and little wild. They can shoot you with their bow and arrow. In one of the huts there was a big lump of a brownish white rock hanging from the ceiling in the middle of the room. My mother asked for man of this house- 'What is it?' The man replied 'That is our stock of salt for the year.' We were amazed and shocked at the poverty. Salt was difficult to get in Bastar. The tribals used to barter salt in exchange for chilies or tamarind or even paddy. Both the tribal groups were used in the play- the murias and murias.

'Dekh Rahe Hain Nain' or 'The eyes of my undying brother', as the original story is called, is a story written by the German writer Stephen Zweig. This story was told to Habib in 1956 by Elizabeth Gauba, a German lady who had married an Indian and had started a kindergarten school (where I had been as a child) in Delhi. Habib remembered the story and with quite some difficulty got hold of the English translation from the original German from a library. The play which he wrote is about action-inaction, deeds and their repercussion. It is a philosophical theme with the Gita-Govind a philosophy a totally different kind of drama. The Bastar Muria tribes were used in the play. The play also throws light on the circumstances of the slaves who are sold like cattle in the market. Scenes were created both in Urdu and

Chhattisgarhi were spoken on stage depending on the various character of the play. Songs were written and set to tune by Habib himself.

This play was also a tragedy as was 'Hirma Ki Amar Kahani'. Habib loved tragedies and crowded on stage. One sees/ observe that in this particular play 'Dekh Rahe Hain Nain' there is a big change in the artist's psyche. It was as if Habib was writing about himself. In this play was the song-'Ab Rahiye baith ek jungle mein sab kuchch tajkar bairag liye', a song about renouncing the material world. The song became popular and made people weep as did the production.

When 'Jis Lahore Nahin Dekhya Who Jamayai Nahin' was being prepared in 1990 with the Shri Ram Centre Repertory, a couple from Karachi, Sheema Kirmani and Shahid Ahmed, had come to Delhi and helped in the process of production. It is true episode- there was actually an old lady, a Hindu Punjabi who was left in Lahore during the riots and became a victim of the fundamentalist forces. The original script had nineteen scenes which were cut down to thirteen and then ten. This play became very popular in North India especially in Delhi and the Punjab. Most of the older couples watching the performance were victims of partition and had gone through the times of the Hindu-Muslim riots.

In 1992 Habib got a proposal for a BBC project to produce a Shakespeare play with the royal Shakespeare Company of England and his own folk actors of the Naya Theatre. It would be a collaborative effort and the performance would be shown in cities of the U.K. and cities of India. It was very exciting prospect indeed. So started the reading of the complete works of Shakespeare. Finally 'A Mid-Summer Night's Dream' was chosen, as it would go well with the Chhattisgarhi actors who could do the role of the mechanics and the English Shakespeare company could do Lysander, Demetrius, Helena and Helmer. So a reply was sent to

londo. They sent a reply back to say-‘ Go ahead with your version of the play and we will get back to you. ‘A long time passed our part of ‘A Mid-Summer Night’s Dream’ was ready. A verse to verse translation was done day and night and the Urdu cum Chhattisgarhi script was completed in eight days’ time.

The translation was done from blank verse to blank verse, rhyme verse to rhyme verse and what a translation it was in Urdu. Only the names of insects and the flora where changed to Indian names like Helgehogs to BirBahooti, Daffodils to Gulab, Chameli. All the tune of the twenty three songs were Habib’s. thetribalsweres used to depict the forest.

It so happened that the Royal Shakespeare Company was out of funds and they could not prepare there version of ‘ Dream’. So we had our version complete in itself like a whole play. Habib added the courts scenes at the opening of the play and at the end of the play to suggest that Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius at there. We had the premier in the month of November in 1993 the British Council in Delhi. What an audience it was!

The fragility of the play was kept intact and it has retained its dreamlike quality as it is in original. When we shifted to Bhopal in 1996 Habib revived a number of is old plays, among them was Vishakhadatta’s ‘Mudrarakshas was first done in 1968 in English with Aftab Seth as Chanakya. Aftab Seth later became the Indian Ambassador in various country including Greece and Japan. He was polished actor, a good orator and a good friend. In 1996 Habib added a poorvarang (prologue) to the play which was not there before and there was a mixture Chhattishgarhi and Hindi. The play was a success .

I would like to talk about the last production in 2005-2006,Tagore’sVisarjan. Habib had wanted to produce ‘ChirakumarSabha’ or ‘Chitrangada’. There were a

few reading of these plays in Delhi at our residence in the early nineties. Anyway 'Visarjan' was taken up and I would like to mention here that the group with which Naya Theatre troupe had worked in Kolkata did not give Habib his artistic liberty to work the way he would have, the production was a flop. Habib was not given a chance to explore,innovate or to create a new dimension at his own space.

So after a gap of few monthshe produced Visarjan exclusively with his own actors and gave his production a new name 'Raj-Rakt'. He combined the good things which suited him,from Tagore's novel 'Rajashee' and Tagore's play-'Visarjan'. He made a prologue a narrator teeling about the two children- Hasi&Tata(which are a part of Rajarshee), their reaction to animal sacrifice and bloodshed. This is the vividly described in Tagore's novel. The prologue set a strong foundation for the theme of the play-'Raj-Rakt'. So the tussle between the state head Raja Govindomanikya and the play religious head Raghupati could be shown with clarity' the end of 'Raj-Rakt' was different from the end of 'Visarjan';in Raj-Rakt,RaniGunabati marries the Raja's younger brother Nakshatra Ray after Govindomanikya and the religious head Raghupati and Aparna also go to exile and the animal sacrifice gets resumed as it used to be. So the play is a total tragedy. The production of 'Raj -Rakt' has become popular every where other than Kolkata which is sad. Unfortunately people do not want to see any changes in Tagore's play. But raj-rakt was produced after the copyright period of Tagore's works was over. Habib never without a motive, a significant reason.

This was his very last production after a big jerk in his life. He had lost his wife Moneeka. He had once upon a time wanted to dramatize a story by Italo Calvino-'The Clouser Viscount' Tees of the Urbervillers by Thomas Hardy and Buddhist story- 'Nangsaal' in Sikkim and Bhutan,but they were not to be.



Lastly , I would like to say that Habib had a life full of struggle and controversies. But he was a fighter with tremendous grit. He had a simplicity which was reflected in his work on stage. On the other hand his mind had a strange complexity sometimes difficult to fathom in his relaxation or leisure time he created Urdu poetry and sketched in his note books. He was a first class administrator of the Naya Theatre. And the person who influenced him most and was his right hand person, who started the NAYA THEATRE in a garage, who also choreographed some scenes of ‘CharandasChor’(the dearth scene) and scene in ‘Mitti Ki Gadi’ and assisted him in every way and made him get popularity(especially in Bengal) was his wife and my mother Mrs.Moneeka Misra Tanvir without whom Habib Tanvir would have been incomplete.

### **Note**

- 1.This paper is written by the author on the life & works of her father, the legendary theatre director-playwright of India, Habib Tanvir.
2. This paper was originally published in the English journal *Arghya* (Theatre Organ of Kasba Arghya) Issue II October 2010 titled as *The making of a legend*. Editor: Manish Mitra. Reprinted with permission.

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