SUMMARY OF THE PROJECT: The Architect of Modern Indian theatre: Pandit Satyadev Dubey

Most persons who have witnessed or participated in the revival of the modern theatre in our country, during the seventies and the eighties, will understand the importance of Satyadev Dubey. His has been the major role. Born in Bilaspur [M.P] Satyadev Dubey is the man for more than 30 years has sustained Hindi and English theatre in India and continues to generate life into it.

The two decades bear a stamp of four major playwrights Vijay Tendulkar, Badal Sear, Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh, who probed into the existential problems of mankind. They examined issues through genres which varied from mythological, historical, social in a style, which was realistic or non-realistic. As Tendulkar and Karnad have acknowledged, they are grateful to the broad shoulders of Satyadev Dubey, thanks to which they could access audiences all over the country.

Here it is interesting to note: The Marathi theatre in the 20th century had translated or adapted most plays into Marathi. Beginning with Shakespeare and Shaw, the list includes Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Thornton Wilder, Harold Pinter, Saire, Picandello, Loera, Camus and others. Once again, Dubey played a leading role in such a project with play production of Shaw and an excellent translation on Pinter’s Caretaker.

The changed atmosphere at the state drama competition and the ‘Chabildas Natyagriha’ in Mumbai, the mushrooming of theatre groups all over the state, plus theatre acting workshops organized in remote places underline the theatrical ambience that was prevalent.

There was a change in stagecraft. The sets, lights, music, costumes became vital to theatre production. For the theatre activists, sets and props and décor formed the language of the theatre. This transition saw the emergence of the director in Marathi theatre.

Here, Pandit Satyadev Dubey, the director, took center-stage.

Dubey is undoubtedly one of the directors par excellence at the national level. Despite his utmost regard for every word the playwright pens, he has always claimed to have understood a play more than the playwright could. That has given him courage to edit and re-work play scripts to enhance the productions. For example, he had two actors playing Tuglaq in the two acts of Girish Karnad’s play. The playwright was upset with Dubey for turning his play on its head. This was in the seventies.

Actors, who had been directed by him, tell you, rehearsals are a rigorous theatre training workshop, Dubey’s forte is voice and speech. He does not favour having an excess of technical wizardry and razzmatazz. He is perhaps the only director whose actors can dispense with microphones and be heard by the grand old lady in the last row.
Dubey was the first ever theatre person to organize a workshop for playwrights. G.P Despande, Shankar Shesh, Satish Alekar, Rajeev Naik, etc are some of the playwrights who read their plays. Despite being a staunch swayamsevak of RSS Dubey was a comfortable with G.P Despande who is a leftist. According to him, so far as G.P Despande wants the world to become a better place it doesn’t matter what his politics is!

Dubey was instrumental in giving Shyam Mahnohar, C.P Despande, Chetan Datar recognition as playwright.

Gidhade, Wada Chirebandi, Band Darwaje, Ilarevede Pratishimba, Mithu Mitha Popat are some of the plays that give an idea of Dubey’s range.

Again like the other directors, who because there were not any plays directing, preferred to stay at home, Dubey put his pen on paper and wrote plays like Like Aada Chautal, Sambhog Se Sanyas Tak, Insallah, and Ek Bekar ki Bakkak London Mein.

But then there were times when Dubey didn’t have play at his hand; he presented poetry in a theatrical format. Once, his young budding actors gave an impressive reading of Bernard Shaw’s prefaces. Dubey accepts that at times he fails to understand the nuances of language, but then, he claims to have a good ear for the internal rhythms.

Then there is the re-stain, blue stain anecdote, which was Dubey’s retaliation, when the censor board had come down heavily on Gidhade? Therein flashed the ‘Never say die spirit.’

The fact that playwrights such as Vijay tendulkar, Badal Sircar, Girish Karnad and Mohan Rakesh, Shyam Manohar, C.P Despande, Chetan Datar, and actors such as Amirish Puri, Amol Palekar, Naseeruddin Shah, Sareeram Lago, Sulabh Deshpande, Sunita Pradhan, Bhakti barve. Kishore Kadam, have worked with Dubey speaks for his theatrical eminence over the past three decades.

His Prefaces to G.P Despande’s Andhaar Yatra he has stressed the importance of progression in dialogues and the English translation of Evan Indrajit are examples of his literary acumen.

Dubey’s actor are reported to have said, they are NSD students, in that they are National Satyadev Dubey Actors. The lightness of the remark not withstanding, it Justifiably suggests that Dubey has been responsible for creating and spreading a thriving and vibrant theatre culture in the country.

Hilda David
Dept of English, Symbiosis College of Arts and Commerce.
Trees have changed and theatre in India has undergone tremendous change and experimentation. It had started in India as a narrative form using all the expressions of art—reciting, dancing, singing etc. Since it has a very rich past it has been able to blend the affluence of literature, mime, dance, music etc and carve a niche for itself.

In spite of the invasion of films and television and the belief that theatre has had a major setback it is not so true. Working on my minor research project on a man who has blended himself with English, Marathi and Hindi proves the diversity of the art. The post independence Indian playwrights had made an effort to bring forth the concept of national theatre by breaking barriers of region and language. With time these barriers were set aside and good work was produced by famous playwrights like Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Panit Satyadev Dubey, Sirish Karnad, Satish Atkar etc.

The new generation has come up with experimental theatre doing away with the old methods of stage craft and introducing new concepts, themes and promoting a different face to theatre. However the Three R’s that Dubey practiced still remain. The discipline he has used in his stage craft, production and direction are concepts which will not fade. For many young playwrights Dubey has been a learning experience every single day. Dubey I found has swayed from radiant to mediocrity and plays which have made a landmark. I found that he loved to get about a reaction from his audience and critics and nothing fazed the old man. He continues with the same vigor as he had when he was a young man. One can love the man or hate him.

The apathy is that in spite of being such a famous playwright and director he has not been featured in the TDP’s 1985 EDITION OF Rang-Antarang, which has interviews with directors and writers. One reason for this negligence could be the hot-blooded nature of his which kept people away, Dubey was known to fight with men and women be it his best friends or his enemies.

This research did help me do some documentation on Satyadev Dubey as he is a man who hated anyone doing anything on him. This business of being on record was not what he appreciated.

This project enabled me to meet some who were willing to talk about him with passion and some who did not want to be interviewed. Most of the bigwigs did not have the time nor the
Times have changed and theatre in India has undergone tremendous change and experimentation. It had started in India as a narrative form using all the expressions of art-reckoning, dancing, singing etc. Since it has a very rich past it has been able to blend the affluence of literature, mime, dance, music etc and carve a niche for itself.

In spite of the invasion of films and television and the belief that theatre has had a major setback is not so true. Working on my minor research project on a man who has blended himself with English, Marathi and Hindi proves the diversity of the art. The post independence Indian playwrights had made an effort to bring forth the concept of national theatre by breaking barriers of region and language. With time these barriers were set aside and good work was produced by famous playwrights like Badal Sarkar, Mohan Rakesh, Vijay Tendulkar, Panit Satyadev Dubey, Girish Karnad, Satish Alekar etc.

The new generation has come up with experimental theatre doing away with the old methods of stage craft and introducing new concepts, themes and promoting a different face to theatre. However the Three R’s that Dubey practiced still remains. The discipline he has used in his stage craft, production and direction are concepts which will not fade. For many young playwrights Dubey has been a learning experience every single day. Dubey’s found has swayed from radiant to mediocrity and plays which have made a landmark. I found that he loved to get about a reaction from his audience and critics and nothing fazed the old man. He continues with the same vigor as he had when he was a young man. One can love the man or hate him.

The apathy is that in spite of being such a famous playwright and director he has not been featured in the TVP’s 1989 EDITION OF Rang-Antarang, which asks interviews with directors and writers. One reason for this negligence could be the hot-blooded nature of his which kept people away. Dubey was known to fight with men and women be it his best friends or his enemies.

This research did help me do some documentation on Satyadev Dubey as he is a man who hated anyone doing anything on him. This business of being on record was not what he appreciated.

This project enabled me to meet people some who were willing to talk about him with passion and some who did not want to be interviewed. Most of the bigwigs did not have the time nor the
inclination to talk about Pandit Satyadev Dubey and ironically he has trained many of them. This project enabled me to travel and interact with young people - attend Dubey workshops, go for his exhibition watch his plays and chat with at the P-shiv café. I also learnt the way he made sure to change what he has said and he did as he felt that was the method and purpose of theatre. A man of that stature believed for him what was important was 'fame and women' for other the motivation could be money, fame and women.

The experience of this minor research project was exciting and yet a little difficult to reach out to people. What I have managed is to gather information from playwrights, directors, actors and students and from the man himself. Interacting with the Tanveer award winner and being with controversial man itself gave me a boost to do a lot of work. A man who came from Bilaspur with a lisp to play rocket landers in theatre and proved to be one of the great teachers for voice modulation.

I would like to thank UGC for giving me this opportunity to this project.

Hilda David