



Ordinary People: A Street Play by Gursharan Singh

Translated by Sandeep Tokas

Introduction

Born on 16 September 1929, Gursharan Singh, popularly known as Bhaji, spans a career of motley-coloured commitments to the people of Punjab. Conferred with prestigious awards such as Sangeet Natak Akadami Award in 1993, Kalidas Samman in 2004, Shiromani Natar Award and Punjab Sahitya Akadami Award Bhaji is known to be the catalyst in reviving and reworking the People's Theatre in Punjab. Establishing Amritsar Natak Kala Kendra in 1964 Bhaji is said to have taken theatre from its urban space to the rural Punjab which he believed to be the real place of the lived experiences of the people. He took theatre to the villages of Punjab believing in its radical and revolutionary potential and impact as a discourse and medium of social, political and cultural change for the marginalized and dispossessed people. This can also be said to be the reason why Bhaji's theatre is called Awami Theatre, a theatre for Awam (People). Authoring around 200 plays Gursharan ji invariably created an audience for theatre in Punjab along with the collaborations from professional and rural theatre artists and activists which also resulted in founding and umbrella organization Punjab Lok Sabhayachar Manch in 1981. Some of his plays are *Baba Bolda Hai* (1984), *Bhand Canada Aye* (1985), *Katha Kehar Singh Kisan Di* (1986), *Nawa Janam* (1987). Gursharan ji passed away on 27th September 2011 and this day since then has been commemorated as Revolutionary Theatre Day.

Translation of *Sdharan Log* (Ordinary People)

1. The Devil One (in the garb of a Sikh)
2. The Devil Two (in the garb of a Hindu)
3. An ordinary Sikh
4. An ordinary Hindu.

These four characters are standing with their back to the audience.
(The play starts with the ordinary Sikh and Hindu turning and addressing the audiences)

Sikh: I am an ordinary Sikh, I am a Sikh because I am a Sikh, because I was born in a Sikh family.

Hindu: I am an ordinary Hindu, I am Hindu because my parents are associated with the Hindu Religion.

Sikh: I wake up in the morning, I worship my Guru and go to work in the field.

Hindu: I wake up in the morning. I worship my God and I open my shop.

Sikh: Life was going well at its own pace.

Hindu: Life was pulling on.

Sikh: Then suddenly there was an explosion, the earth shook.

Hindu: There was a storm, there was an earthquake.

Sikh: My life went topsy-turvy.

Hindu: It became difficult to stand still on the ground.

(A loud noise of clouds thundering. Devil One and Devil Two enters. They start circling around Ordinary Sikh and Hindu in a musical rhythm. Both the Devil gazes upon them as a hunter upon a naïve prey. They restrain them (act as if putting a nosebar on them like on an animal) and pull both Sikh and Hindu towards themselves. Both Devils mime lifting the Sikh and Hindu, they act as if infusing them with hatred: expressions of Ordinary Sikh and Ordinary Hindu changes slowly, their eyes have reddened visiblizing anger and hate.

On the rhythm of horror music, Devil One and Two takes big strides and reach their respective spots on the stage. Ordinary Sikh and Hindu are no longer the same old people whom we have seen awhile longer. Now they have bitterness in their utterances. They look at each other and start conversation which has now been transformed into a certain kind of war cry.)

Sikh: I am a Sikh.

Hindu: I am a Hindu.

Sikh: I have Ten Gurus from Guru Nanak to Guru Gobind.

Hindu: Ram and Krishna are my Gods.

Sikh: I am the native of Punjab, which is a part of Hindostan.

Hindu: I am the native of Hindostan of which Punjab is a part.

Sikh: My mother-tongue is Punjabi, Hindi can be my national language.

Hindu: Hindi is my national language, Punjabi can be my mother tongue.

Sikh: I have no hesitation in declaring no love for Hindi.

Hindu: I have no shame in declaring that no one considers Punjabi as a cultured language.

Sikh: Punjab gives wheat to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives Iron to Punjab.

Sikh: Punjab gives cotton to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives coal to Punjab.

Sikh: Punjab gives oilseeds to Hindostan.

Hindu: Hindostan gives kerosene oil to Punjab.

Sikh: You want to suppress us with your numbers.

Hindu: You want to lower us with your fanaticism.

Sikh: You are an expansionist.

Hindu: You are a separatist.

Sikh: You are deceitful.

Hindu: You are uncouth.

Sikh: You are cheat *Baniye*.

Hindu: You are rash/stupid jatt.

Sikh: Our Guru Gobind Singh has taught us to pick up the sword to

defend our rights.

Hindu: We also have been first-fed by Parsu Ram and Shiva.

Sikh: We will make it difficult for you to live in Punjab.

Hindu: We will squeeze your neck in Haryana.

Sikh: We give a sound thrashing to the enemies in the battlefield.

Hindu: We, too, do not go to the battlefield with bangles in our arms.

Sikh: We called for a *Punjab Bandh* on February 8th.

Hindu: We called for a *Shop Bandh* on February 14th.

Sikh: Punjab was closed on February 8th.

Hindu: On 14th February all businesses were shut down.

Sikh: On 8th no untoward incident happened.

Hindu: That was because of the civility of the Hindus.

Sikh: There were incidents of lawlessness and riots reported.

Hindu: This was the mischief of the Sikhs.

Sikh: On 14th February 1984, the model of The Golden Temple was broken at Amritsar Railway Station.

Hindu: On 14th December 1983, the idols of our God at Ram Thirath Mandir were also found in same condition.

Sikh: On 14th February 1984, the picture of Guru Ramdas was torn at Amritsar Station.

Hindu: On 14th December 1983, the pictures of Gods and Goddesses were burnt at RamThirath Mandir.

Sikh: (Loudly) We are Sikhs.

Hindu: (Louder than Sikh) We are Hindu.

Sikh: We have no association with you people.

Hindu: We too denounce to have any relation with fools like you.

Sikh: We are Sikhs.

Hindu: We are Hindu.

(The two poses as if in a fight and entangled, and then withdraw. The curfew siren goes off. On the loudspeaker, an announcement of 'city in danger' can be heard. A sound of music is intensifying the already tensed milieu. Streets are deserted and markets are empty. Domestic conversations between Husband and Wife can be heard "there is no

atta”, “then what should I do”, “go to the bazaar”, “go to bazaar and get shot”

Note: These snippets of conversation establish the background of curfew. Meanwhile, the Ordinary Sikh and Hindu return back to their ‘real’ Ordinary states as portrayed in the beginning.)

Sikh: I heard you did not go to the work today?

Hindu: You too are here.

Sikh: This curfew has made life very difficult.

Hindu: Even my savings are almost exhausted.

Sikh: What do you think, till when we won’t be able to work?

Hindu: Till the time fight is not over.

Sikh: But what is this fight all about?

Hindu: The fight is over the fact that you are a Sikh and I am a Hindu.

Sikh: But we were Sikhs and Hindus before also, so what’s the fight about.

Hindu: The fight is that I understand I live in Hindostan of which Punjab is also a part, and you say that you live in Punjab which is a part of Hindostan. That is, I should take the name of Hindostan first and you should take the name of Punjab first.

Sikh: But what’s the fight in that? If Punjab progresses Hindostan progresses, and if Hindostan progresses Punjab progresses. So what is the fight?

Hindu: you do not know? You yourself proclaim.

Sikh: What do I proclaim?

Hindu: That Punjabi is your mother tongue and Hindi *can* be your national language.

Sikh: You too have been saying something similar.

Hindu: What have I been saying?

Sikh: That Hindi is your National language and Punjabi *can* be your mother tongue. Now if we both say that Punjabi is our mother tongue and Hindi is our national language, it won’t affect our

health.

Hindu: it does not affect.

Sikh: What else for the fight is then?

Hindu: Hindustan does not acknowledge the favour that Punjab bestow by giving it wheat and Punjab does not understand the importance of the supply of coal and iron from Hindostan.

Sikh: But it is true that Punjab gives wheat to the rest of Hindostan and it is also true that Punjab is supplied coal and iron from other parts of Hindostan, if we accept the truth to be true, does it change anything?

Hindu: it does not.

Sikh: One more thing *Yaar*.

Hindu: What is it?

Sikh: We are all landed farmers, which is why our work will be agriculture.

Hindu: Most of us have capital only which we need to sustain ourselves and this is the reason we will have to work at shops.

Sikh: We have to do farming, you have to run your shops, quite a straightforward thing. Then why do we taunt each other with *uncouth jatt* and *baniye*.

Hindu: Yes a very straightforward thing indeed.

Sikh: That means we can share things and live together.

Hindu: Yes, we can live together.

Sikh: If I read the *Bani* of my Ten Gurus and keep my appearances according to the instructions of the Tenth Guru, do you have any problem?

Hindu: No I have no problem. And if I read Ramayana or Bhagwad Gita, do you have any problem?

Sikh: No, what problem can I have?

Hindu: The why do we fight amongst ourselves? Why do we shout slogans against each other? Why do we smash down each other's skull? Why do we burn each other's shop? Why do we drag off each other from the bus and beats mercilessly?

Sikh: We do not even realize the moment when we are *made* and

we *become* fools just sitting around.

Hindu: Yaar, we are fools, there is no doubt about it now atleast.

Sikh: If we were not fools we would have given it a thought that in 20th century man has reached the Moon but we are being made to live in inhabitable, underdeveloped, utter filth.

Hindu: Yes, we should give it a thought as what kind of society we live in where the one who works most is deprived the fruits of his labour? But there is one more thing to think about?

Sikh: What is it?

Hindu: We are not fools, we are made fools.

Sikh: It is something we have to think about.

Hindu: In our daily lives, we understand the smallest of things. In our business and agriculture, we understand profit and loss. We know everything, then why we do not understand that fighting with each other only amounts loss.

Sikh: That means we are not fools.

Hindu: We are just Ordinary People. Our crime is we starts flying like thatch and matchsticks in any storm.

Sikh: If we would have stayed firm, we would not have been sitting slumped.