

reality prepares for art by identifying and working over something shared, held in common by performers as well as the audiences. But art goes beyond to generate a process in the minds of the audiences who receive-perceive and then create a world of their own. It is not true to say (at least not entirely), that art creates its

own world. A truer statement would be "art helps all related parties to create and recreate their own respective worlds". Compared to art both communication and expression are confining.

—Ashok Da. Ranade

Gujarati Theatre

The Theatre Development Centre tries to take into consideration the multiple theatre traditions operating in the western zone. The effort to cover a range of aspects of Gujarati Theatre is continued in this issue.

PERSONALITY

Chandrika Shah

INFORMATION CARD

Theatre Personality

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is remembered. Did you have, family tradition of interest in theatre?

Shah: We belong to the Brahmakshatriya caste, which is for reforms. Chimanlal and Bulbul Desai of Sagar Films were in my relation. In other words films and theatre were in the air. However my theatre-madness was not exactly favoured!

I was educated in the Fellowship School which encouraged studies in arts. Then Elphinstone College. Acted in *Kashinath* (of Sharadbabu) and *Nagabawa* by

Chandrika Shah

Bio-data

<i>Name</i>	: Chandrika Lalu Shah
<i>Date of Birth</i>	: 25 December 1922
<i>Birth Place</i>	: Broach
<i>Residential Address</i>	: Warden Court, 4th Floor Flat No. 43, Cumballa Hill Bombay 400 026
<i>Profession</i>	: Actress, playwright and producer
<i>Education</i>	: B.A.
<i>Languages known</i>	: Gujarati, Marathi, Hindi and English
<i>Language of theatre work</i>	: Gujarati
<i>Awards/honours</i>	: Munshi Gold Medal, 1959

Excerpts from audio-video interviews:

Bhayani: Chandrikaben, in your long career spanning a period of about 45 years, you have performed in 90 plays. Your role of mother in *Abhishek*, a social play,



C. C. Mehta. Got acquainted with Lalu Shah. Participated in the 1942 movement. For a time I felt my life would never be the same. However resumed my college studies and graduated in 1945. Kailash Pandya and Yashwant Thakkar of the IPTA invited me to act in *Allabeli* in 1946. I was allowed to act but was not permitted to go on tours. I complained and cried a lot. So it became easier at the time of the next play, *Kalyani*. While doing the IPTA plays I also played Shayambai in *Molubhai ni Patni* by Gunwantra Acharya . . .

I was born in Broach but I am a Bombayite. I have four sisters but I am the only one dramatically inclined. Nikhilesh Thakur, my brother, is to some extent related to theatre administration. I got married to Lalubhai in 1953. He was a Jain and hence our inter-marriage created some flutter.

Bhayani: Though IPTA was shaping Gujarati theatre, it also used theatre for political propaganda. What is your response?

Shab: *Kalyani* was based on *Inspector Calls* by J. B. Priestly. Lalubhai too had a role in it. During the rehearsals we sensed that IPTA wanted to pursue the communist line under the guise of cultural work . . . IPTA at that time had received an invitation to stage *Kalyani* from some conference taking place at Junagadh. But the IPTA authorities decided to send Dinaben's propagandist play in the *bbavai* style. This was written by Ramesh Sanghvi, Dinaben's first husband and Habib Tanvir had also helped them. Lalubhai naturally inquired why *Kalyani* was being replaced. The given answer was "Because the replacement agrees with our thinking". That decided us. Dinaben and Ramesh, their communist views and their work in Xavier's College . . . were known to us but we resented politics being brought in theatre . . . In addition Lalubhai and I were connected with 1942 movement . . . With Pratap Oza, Leela Jariwala, Chapshibhai and Vishnubhai we left the IPTA and found Rangabhoomi. Amar Jariwala, R. K., Hansaben, Madhukar Randeria and Jayanti Patel also joined us . . . All worked without remuneration as we believed in the doctrine 'art for art's sake'. Naturally we were distanced from the *juni rangabhoomi*. All of us were college-educated and hence influenced by plays in English. We avoided the unrealistic theatre of the Deshi Natak Samaj. Realistic story, one set etc. Thus fired by some definite ideas we were out to attract more and more people to our views. All artistes rehearsed etc. after their office/business hours. We sold tickets by going from door to door. We even went to canvass in the Sewri market! This was around 1949-50. At that time people had seen 'working women' but had not seen women interested in stage acting, canvassing for shows and insisting on ploughing back money into theatre! Quite often we had to suffer insults and snubs . . . We used to hold

rehearsals in Prof. B. R. Deodhar's Music School. After 8 p.m. when he had finished his coaching. After the rehearsals all the actors were kept busy in putting up posters as that was the only medium of theatre publicity. We used to do everything ourselves, including make-up, fetching of property etc. Today actors insist on special items of clothing, shoes etc! We were always keen on realistic set design. While staging *Apaghta* (accident) by Gunwantra Acharya, to show Chowpatty sands and the inevitable chanewalla we also brought in a petromax . . . In 1955 we staged *Narbanka*, for which we were awarded. Followed *Ranicha Baug* and *Bhadotri Pati* in Marathi, *Idariyo Gadhb . . .*, *Aavya Gaya . . .* Then onwards we decided to discontinue with the door to door canvassing. We felt people should come and purchase tickets . . . The idea succeeded. We had twenty-five performances, an extraordinary event in those days. However production expenses went on increasing, even though no artiste asked for an honorarium . . . Lalubhai often spent a lot from his own pocket and this was taxing.

Bhayani: It was at this juncture that you joined the Kalakendra?

Shab: Yes, Girish Munshi and Navinbhai Khandwalla invited us. They had capital, theatre, an institutional infra-structure. Music was looked after by Avinashbhai, Adi Marzban and Pesi Khandalawala ran the Parsi wing. We were to do plays in Gujarati . . . *Prithvivallabb* by Shri K. H. Munshi and *Kaka ni Shashi, Vabre Main Vab, Dr. Madhurika* etc. were produced. In addition I adapted into Gujarati, Adi's plays such as *Sacha Bola Jboothlal, Balwant ni Baby, Phoolchandbhai Gaya Phasai . . .* My adaptation of *Asking for Trouble* as *Jo Jo Modba na Padta*) was my first such effort. This too notched up twenty-five shows.

In Kalakendra we worked on co-operative basis. After every performance 30% of the proceeds went to the Kalakendra and the rest was distributed among others, including the backstage workers. A contract show of *Bhaduti Pati* in Ahmedabad on one occasion went off so well that each one of us was paid a royal sum of Rs. 125/-! Today even Rs. 1,000/- appear to be less. Though this may not mean that dedication to the theatre has diminished.

Bhayani: What frustrated the Kalakendra system?

Shab: To be frank: Leelavati Munshi's desire to increase her importance! For example Vasant Kanetkar's *Prema Tujha Ranga Kasa* was being adapted in Gujarati as *Padbo Re Popat Bol Prem Na . . .* Now Mrs. Munshi demanded that the name of the play should not include the words 'bol prem na' . . . you know Mrs. Munshi's love marriage had raised controversies. Because of this background or because she had recently lost the election in Broach . . . she was

*Chandrika Shab
and Visbnu Kumar Vyas
in Baburoopi's
Visamo, 1974.*



adamant. We had to toe her line. Later when Prof. Kanetkar had come to see the play Mrs. Munshi all of a sudden, upbraided him for writing on 'love and such subjects' . . . This set us thinking. Soon we found that any request to fund a production was refused under the excuse of providing money for the Sanskrit 'classes'.

Bhayani: What do you think of the inter-collegiate competitions?

Shab: These gave a lot to the Gujarati stage. A new writer like Prabodh Joshi, director and light designer such as Ramesh Zamindar . . . Kanti Madia, Arvind Joshi, Bharat Dave, Shailesh Dave were products of the competitions.

Datar: The breakaway socialist group from the IPTA had found INT. Why did you not join it?

Shab: Firstly, the INT never invited us even though they knew the background and secondly Lalubhai had an ambition of his own . . . INT kept Madhukar Randeria, Vanalata Mehta, Feroz Antia and others on the payroll . . . In reality this was to turn an amateur theatre into commercial! . . . We found Bahuroopi around 1967. Kanti Madia proposed that we produce *Atamne Ojbalma Raakbma* (an adaptation of *Ash-runchi Jhali Phule*) for Natyasampada. However Kanti Madia never divulged that he was a partner in that organization! Hence after hundred shows Lalubhai dissociated himself from the production . . . The point was that while Lalubhai's intention was to work for amateur theatre his services were deceitfully used for commercial purposes . . . Hence the foundation of Bahuroopi. Under its auspices we produced *Abhishek*

(1968). Recorded hundred performances, a record of a kind. My role of Ba-saheb in this play won acclaim. Padmarani, Vijay Dutt and Deepak Gheewala were the other artistes. This was followed by Haribhai Mehta's *Visamo*.

Bhayani: Baburoopi undoubtedly created a tradition of social plays on the Gujarati stage. This is Lalubhai's and your contribution . . . How did you select a play?

Shab: Both of us were inclined to social plays. Lalubhai also believed that drama mirrors society.

Bhayani: And yet you produced a historical play (Abhimaan), a mystery (Kevadano Dankh) and a political play such as Kissa Kursi Ka. Why?

Shab: Chiefly because Lalubhai wanted to do something new. He liked to take risks. In *Abhimaan* we did not have good actor-singers. He tried playing back recorded music from the wings with actors 'lip-sync'ing . . . Though we had seventy-five shows we failed at the box office . . . *Kissa Kursi Ka* was a political play set in *bhavai* style. This had many contracted shows.

Bhayani: Your presentation of John Osborne's Look Back in Anger (as Lohino Rang Kalo) appeared to be a step in the direction of experimental theatre. But . . .

Shab: The Gujarati audience is not yet ready to see such plays. *Lobino* . . . could be performed only 5-6 times.

Bhayani: In your opinion which is the best play of Baburoopi?

Shab: If you go by the number of performances, then

Jeevan Saathi which notched up 225 shows. We had prepared two sets for the play because sets could not be carted away quickly enough for the following performance. Often we have given three performances daily . . . even out of Bombay . . . Still I feel that our best play was *Anukampa* based on Somerset Maugham's *The Sacred Flame*. I adapted it and also played the main lead.

Bhayani: *It touched upon the problem of mercy-killing.*

Shab: Yes, mind you—twenty years back! People liked it so much that we gave 50 shows of it.

Bhayani: *You have accompanied Lalubhai in every way! Working with him in the Elphinstone College, IPTA, Rangabhoomi, Kalakendra and finally Baburoopi. Which of Lalubhai's contribution seems important to you?*

Shab: He was a very good manager. He was never affected by the ups and downs of theatre. Maybe because he was connected with the share market! He was not an escapist. Was always keen on using innovative techniques. He did not hesitate to use the bioscope technique in Hareen Mehta's *Dhoop Chhaon* (1973). In *Abhimaan* (1974), a play based on Tansen's life, he spent Rs. 1,15,000/-! He acted with me in *Allabeli* and *Kalyani* but his first love was to manage the institution.

Bhayani: *After his death you managed the institution courageously. Why did you not succeed?*

Shab: Frankly speaking because I lack Lalubhai's management skills. Lalubhai could be a father-fig-

ure . . . He could be strict when required . . . I cannot do that.

Bhayani: *Something about your own acting now, who influenced/coached you?*

Shab: When I performed in *Allabeli* there were no microphones. Jaswantbhai Thakkar taught me how to project voice. Pratap Ojha acquainted me with stylised speech in historical plays. Adi Marzban trained me in movement and composition. How to move naturally, without jerks and avoiding concealing/obstructing other characters . . . In addition Adi motivated me to adapt plays. To do so for our stage requires many changes.

Bhayani: *In Bombay, we have theatre in Marathi, Hindi, English and Gujarati. Where would you place the Gujarati theatre?*

Shab: Gujarati audience sees theatre only on Sundays and holidays and for entertainment . . .

Bhayani: *In respect of acting, direction etc?*

Shab: We have made some progress. We spend a lot on production.

Bhayani: *What is the future of Gujarati theatre?*

Shab: It is bright. Though for a while television caused empty theatres. People have realised the live-quality of drama. A play like *Chanakya* is drawing houses. I pray that soon we would be in a position to perform dramas everyday!

*Interviewed by Shri Utpal Bhayani
& Shri Chetan Datar*

Chandrika Shah: Performance Index

Sr. No.	Name of the play	Institution	Producer	Year	No. of Shows
1	Allabeli	IPTA	—	1946	6
2	Kalyani	IPTA	—	1948	8
3	Dhruvraser	Rangbhoomi	—	1949	1
4	1942	Rangbhoomi	—	1949	4
5	Duniya Shun Kaheshe?	Rangbhoomi	—	1950	6
6	Bhaduti Pati (Sarla)	Rangbhoomi	—	1951	12
7	Narbanka	Rangbhoomi	—	1953/ 1955	7 (2 shows for Bombay State Drama Festival)
8	Aapghat	Rangbhoomi	—	1954	4
9	Rakhna Ramakada	Govt. Festival	—	1954	1
10	Idariyo Gadh Jitya Re	Rangbhoomi	—	1955-56	10
11	Aavya-Gaya	Rangbhoomi	—	1955	25

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Name of the play</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Producer</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Shows</i>
12	Vad Ane Teta	Rangbhoomi	—	1955	5
13	Rani No Baug	Rangbhoomi	—	1955-56	10
14	Sumangla	Rangbhoomi	—	1955	10
15	Bhaduti Pati	Kalakendra	—	1956	12
16	Nasogoso	Kalakendra	—	1957	8
17	Dr Madhurika	Kalakendra	—	1957	4
18	Ghungat Pat	Kalakendra	—	1957	10
19	Pankajni Patnio	Kalakendra	—	1959	13
20	Kavtaru	Kalakendra	—	1960	9
21	Bhaduti Pati (Sarla Malini)	Kalakendra	—	1960	80
22	Kaka Ni Shashi	Kalakendra	—	1961	4
23	Jo Jo Moda Na Padta	Kalakendra	—	1961	25
24	Mathe Padela Mafatlal	Kalakendra	—	1961	10
25	Ek Soneri Savare	Kalakendra	—	1961	6
26	Sacha Bola Juthalal	Kalakendra	—	1961	18
27	Chai Chai No Chamatkar	Kalakendra	—	1961	8
28	Padho Re Popat	Kalakendra	—	1962	25
29	Vah Re Main Vah	Kalakendra	—	1962	2
30	Prithvivallabh	Kalakendra	—	1962	8
31	Balwant Ni Baby	Kalakendra	—	1963	40
32	Rani Baug	Kalakendra	—	1963	8
33	Motni Mulakat	Kalakendra	—	1964	9
34	Fulchandbhai Gaya Fasai	Kalakendra	—	1964	8
35	Sambhalo Mari Vaat	Kalakendra	—	1965	4
36	Mari Venima Char Char Phool	—	P. Mehta	1965	10
37	Samayna Vahen	Gujarati Natya Mandal	—	1965	2
38	Vevishal	Kalakendra	—	1965	6
39	Wrong Number	—	Vijay Dutt	1965	6
40	Vidya Varidhi Bharvi	Desi Natak Samaj	—	1965	2 (Festival)
41	Katha Tari, Vyatha Mari (Replacement)	—	Upendra Trivedi	1965	3
42	Maha Papi, Maha Bhiru	INT	—	1965	2 (Festival)
43	Mangal Fera	—	Chimanlal Trivedi	1966	30
44	Sasro Khole Betho	Rang Raag	—	1967	105
45	Atamne Ojhalma Rakhma	Natya Sampada	—	1967	15
46	Dhanine Dhakma Rakho (Replacement)	—	A. Shamsir	1967	2
47	Jami Padela Jamairaj	Rang Raag	—	1967	26
48	Janam Janam Na Jamai (Replacement)	—	Mohan Kheraj	1967	1
49	Navi Gilli, Navo Dav	—	Mohanbhai	1968	4
50	Dhanini Dhamal, Bairini Kamal	—	A. Shamsir	1968	8
51	Aage Aage Gorakh Jage	Rang Raag	—	1968	2
52	Adapalun	Nila Theatres	—	1968	6
53	Abhinay Samrat (Replacement)	—	Upendra Trivedi	1969	10

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Name of the play</i>	<i>Institution</i>	<i>Producer</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>No. of Shows</i>
54	So Dahada Sasuna	—	Mulraj Rajda	1969	6
55	Aradhana	—	Meena Joshi	1969	10
56	Madhpudo (Replacement)	—	Bhadrakant Zaveri	1969	2
57	Bullet No. 022	—	Mohan Merchant	1969	2
58	Janat Me Aayo Re	—	—	1969	2
59	Abhishek (Replacement)	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1968	6
60	Dharam Ni Patni	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1969	110
61	Anuraag	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1970	84
62	Aandhi	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1970	22
63	Abhilasha	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1971	72
64	Anukampa	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1971	60*
65	Dhoop-Chhaon	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1973	152
66	Kevda Na Dankh (Replacement)	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1973	10
67	Visamo	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1974	145
68	Gamtane Gajvama Nakhman	Natraj	Mulraj Rajda	1975	12
69	Ghungat (Replacement)	—	Bhupendra Desai	1975	2
70	Vat Bahar Jay Nahi	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1975	22
71	Mandavani Jui	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1975	42
72	Bandhan	—	Anil Mehta	1975	4
73	Jog-Sanjog	—	Mahendra Trivedi	1975	2
74	Karvat Badle Laash	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1976	15
75	Rangilo Raja (Replacement)	—	Madhukar Randeria	1976	2
76	Adhikar	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1976	47
77	Kotha Ni Kabutari	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1977	126
78	The Growing Pain	Theatre Group	—	1977	3
79	Dhamadham Masta Kalandar	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1978	20
80	Jeevan-Sathi	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1978	223
81	Satyano Chahero	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1979	50
82	Ranchhod Rangilo	Little Theatre	Namdeo Lahute	1980	10
83	Ekaki Manna Ughadya Kamad	Bahuroopi	Lalu Shah	1980	36
84	Abhishek (Revived) (Role: Ba-saheb-Mother)	Bahuroopi	Chandrika Lalu Shah	1981	70
85	Sambhav-Asambhav	Bahuroopi	Chandrika Lalu Shah	1982	72
86	Ek Hati Roopli	Pravin Joshi Theatres	Sarita Joshi	1984	12
87	Hatheli Par Badbaki	Bahuroopi	Chandrika Lalu Shah	1985	73
88	Eva Re Malela Manna Mel	Nila Theatres	Jagdish Shah	1987	12
89	Prem-Trushna	Vatsalaya	Natkhat Jayu	1988	15
90	Agni-Path	INT	—	1989	110