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Theatrical Talk

The Doon School Weekly spoke to **Naseeruddin Shah** after a performance of *Antigone* staged by his theatre group, **Motley**

The Doon School Weekly (DSW) – Do you prefer acting in films or in theatre?

Naseeruddin Shah (NSS) – That's a difficult one to answer, though it's very easy to ask. Firstly, I'd say that you can't earn a living in theatre except maybe in Marathi or Gujarati. On that basis, I would prefer films. But, what is more important is, to get across to the people watching. In theatre you manage to make somewhat of a living contact with the people, which is the best way to communicate with the audience. Movies detract from the purity of heart. So, I'd say that I prefer theatre, but, practically, I cannot confine myself to it.

DSW – There were so many other plays you could have chosen, why particularly *Antigone*?

NSS – In theatre it is the human being that is of paramount importance. To me the magic of theatre is not having a fancy background and costume changing. That is supposed to be done in films and theatre cannot possibly copy that. *Antigone* is one such play that is an example of theatre of magnificence and is not one of those plays where the beauty is shown in the sets. These kinds of plays are popular in Europe and England. *Antigone* gives the audience a chance to see that theatre is not cinema, as it fits in the philosophy of theatre.

DSW – Do you perform in regional dialects in theatre?

NSS – No, but I do act in regional films as it is much easier because there are only two or three lines to deliver at a time. It is very difficult to perform in different languages in theatre as it is very complicated to learn lines of another language.

DSW - What do you think of the state of theatre these days?

NSS – The state of theatre is what it was and what it will be. I've often been asked whether theatre can be compared to cinema. I say no because, as I mentioned earlier, films are too different from theatre. Films, I could say, are like junk food which we watch for fun, but theatre is healthy food that makes a greater impact on us.

DSW – Do you think the impact of theatre is more when you have a smaller, concentrated audience?

NSS – Yes, it definitely is; when you have lesser people you can be much more communicative. In a film you somehow get engrossed in the film the way the audience does and react the way the audience does. In the past when plays like *Antigone* were performed, the audience was more concentrated as they believed what they saw. But these days, the audience is far more convinced of the truth and it is difficult to transfer our message.

DSW – Is it a small triumph that theatre is still alive?

NSS – I think it very much is. It's mainly because human beings still understand the need to communicate even when there is so much ease in entertainment today, with electronics where you can carry hundreds of movies in your pocket. The television, YouTube etc., are replacing personal contact. If this contact is abolished, then I feel theatre will die out. Let's hope it doesn't, but I feel it will.

DSW – What are your views on theatre based on tragedy?

NSS – I feel modern play-writing on tragedy is the most difficult as now people hardly find any difference between horror and humour as its distinction has been completely thinned by the movies which are being made these days.

DSW – Do directors refrain from taking bold initiatives because of reactive governments and audiences?

NSS – Yes, the first move is the key. No one is willing to make the first move. In the movie *Khuda Ke Liye*, the director has shown some sort of leadership in making a movie based so much on Hindu fundamentalism, that too in Pakistan. Today, the mullahs in Pakistan are completely against him, though I think the movie he made would definitely bother anyone. Even in India, which is a liberal country, no one would take the risk of making a movie of that sort, especially with the kind of reactive audience we have. No one would take the initiative to take such a step that could put your life in danger.

DSW – Can you pick out five of your favourite plays?

NSS – My favourite plays are *The Zoo Story*, *Waiting for Godot*, *Hayavadana*. I also like *St. Joan* by Bernard Shaw and *Inherit the Wind*.

DSW – Finally, what do you think about the acoustics in the Rose Bowl?

NSS – They are fantastic. We still had to use microphones as that play is more of an undertone and we could not risk not being able to communicate. Otherwise, it is an absolute magical place to perform. I really enjoyed it. It is absolute bliss with the greenery around and the mud under your feet.

News-in-Brief

SWIMMING SUCCESS

The School Swimming Team visited the **Pathways School, Gurgaon** for an invitational swimming meet. Sixteen schools participated in the event, and The Doon School was placed third, overall. Pratham Mittal was awarded two gold medals and Dushyant Sapra was awarded one. Rahil Rai Puri, Aaditya Bishnoi, Aayushya Bishnoi, Devrat Patney, Angad Bawa, Kanishka Gupta, and Aditya Gupta won a silver medal each. Netesh Dev and Shivam Katyal won a bronze medal in their respective events. Nikhil Narain got two bronze medals in his events. Rahil Rai Puri, Aditya Bishnoi, Aayushya Bishnoi and Devrat Patney also got a bronze medal each. Congratulations!

CREATIVE WRITING

The result of the **Shankar Dayal Sharma English Essay Contest (Juniors)** is as follows:

1st: Revant Nayar

2nd: Piroune Balachandran

Well done!

IN STEP

Ambar Sidhwani has been appointed the **School Dance Coordinator** for this year. Congratulations!

IN TIME WITH THE MARKER

The result of the **72nd Inter-House P.T. Competition** is as follows:

Junior Cup:

1st: Jaipur House

2nd: Kashmir House

3rd: Tata House

4th: Hyderabad House

5th: Oberoi House

Senior Cup:

1st: Oberoi House

2nd: Tata House

3rd: Jaipur House

4th: Kashmir House

5th: Hyderabad House

House Cup:

1st: Jaipur House

2nd: Kashmir House

3rd: Tata House

4th: Oberoi House

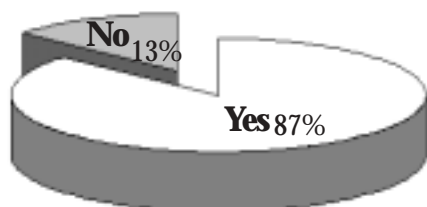
5th: Hyderabad House

Shantanu Garg won the **Best P.T. Leader** award. Congratulations!



Opinion Poll

Do you think the IPL will be instrumental in fueling the popularity of 20-20 cricket?



(316 members of the community were polled)

Next Week's Question: Do you think that 'Socials' actually help in developing communication skills with the opposite sex?

CAREER CALL

The Careers' Notice Board will focus on **Robotics and Embedded Systems** as a career option this week. All those who are interested should check it out.

The Month That Was - Chandbagh in April

Himmat Dhillon

"April is the cruellest month" so said the poet. Suffice to say that I, in no way, subscribe to this notion and that for me, April is as happy a month as August. However, I am sure that the great poet had his reasons! Perhaps, he was referring to the passing of the resplendent iris – that heavenly messenger of the Gods that rides on the rainbow connecting heaven and earth bringing a message of love to the earth we live on. After all, isn't this reason enough to be known by the appellation 'the eye of heaven.' In Kashmir, where it is known as *mazar posh*, it is grown on the graves of loved ones – literally a covering for the graves of the dead. In the shape of the *fleur-de-lis* it graced the royal coat-of-arms of French royalty. April is a time when the magic of spring has outdone itself and spiked into a zenith and Mother Nature is wearing her Sunday best. After this there shall be a harsh and unforgiving Indian summer.

This is the month when one can spot the tangerine-tinted flowers of the True Asoka in full flower in our very own Chandbagh. The tree itself is an evergreen, its height is about 25 feet and it is pleasing in shape as well as in aspect. However, it is the flowers that are spectacular – they grow in fragrant bunches —orange-yellow at first and, then, later, a resplendent red. In fact, as one exits the MPH after Assembly, one can see these lovely blossoms decorating a tree at the bottom of the Headmaster's garden. In Sanskrit, the name Asoka means 'without grief'. Truly, the prince amongst trees, when the True Asoka is in full flower, it presents a sight that is fit for a king. If it is possible that there can exist a poem as beautiful as a tree, it has to be a verbal facsimile of the True Asoka. It has a plethora of medicinal uses. In South-East Asia it is regarded as a holy tree. It is said that the Buddha was born under this tree at Lumbini. Another interesting legend has it that Mahavir passed on under an Asoka at Vaishali. The epics refer to a meeting between Hanuman and Sita at Asoka Vatika. Known to our more botanically-minded brethren as *Saraca Asoca* or *Saraca Indica*, one thing is for certain – this is a tree that gives us all ample reason to celebrate the month of April.

Unquotable Quotes

Mr. Vahin and Mr. Khosla, what are you up to?

RSF, seeing double.

I am a good photography.

Nilesh Agarwal, photography boy-in-charge-to-be.

Why you make problem? Let they come from there.

MLJ negotiates.

What it is is that ICSE knows that students get confuse?

ADN, if you can't convince, confuse.

I would like to thank the valuable judges for taking their busy time out of their schedule.

Vivek Santayana, the chairperson, stumbles.

You are abandoned from the RC!

VRW ensures discipline.

I sprant and jumped into the ladies' compartment.

Aman Dhar, oops!

It is not 'came' it is 'comed.'

Shashank Peshawaria, has a 'tense' moment.

Antigone, or, The Silent Scream

Sreemoyee Banerjee reviews Jean Anouilh's adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* performed by the theatre group, Motley

"Pray no more; for mortals have no escape from destined woe."—Sophocles, *Antigone*.

It is this implacable authority of destiny that lends human choices and sacrifices their poignancy and dignity. However it reduces human beings to puppets in the hands of destiny and hence the autonomy of one's decisions is strictly relativized. What seems to be an independent choice for an individual is actually unavoidable in the register of destiny.

In Motley's adaptation of Anouilh's *Antigone*, a very important role is played by history. This history goes beyond the myth and highlights the deeply personal aspects of the characters whereby they acquire tangibility and relevance to the modern audience.

Motley's adaptation of Anouilh's *Antigone* reinterprets and at the same time redefines the genre of tragedy. Aristotle in his *Poetics* defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude; in language made pleasurable, each of its species separated in different parts....effecting through pity and fear the purification of such emotions."

The first act of Anouilh's *Antigone* is reminiscent of Sophocles in a number of ways. Through the heated exchange between Antigone and Ismene, the action seems to take its turn in the expected path towards being 'admirable' and to 'possess magnitude'. However, from the very outset, Anouilh's *Antigone* differs markedly from Sophocles'. The latter's clarity of vision regarding her choices is not replicated in the former. Significantly we see an additional character in Anouilh's play—the nurse. As we see her chiding Antigone fondly and tying her shoe laces and dusting her skirt, Antigone emerges as a kind of amalgamate of a number of female characters in world literature. Her effusions about the beauty of the day-break and being the first person to be awake bring to one's mind Flaubert's Emma Bovary and Austen's Marianne. But most importantly, she reminds one of Ibsen's Nora who was the 'doll-wife' of her husband Torvald and the 'doll-child' of her father. In Anouilh's play Antigone communicates the indignation and bitterness of a woman forced into a protracted childhood and hence trying desperately to be herself, to finally refuse to 'understand' things she cannot make sense of and to find some purpose in life itself. According to Aristotle, tragedy "is an imitation of people better than we are." Sophocles' *Antigone* might legitimately have been better than 'us'. Her choice had been difficult given that she had to choose between two different transgressions—one against the gods and the other against the king. Choosing not to offend the gods earned her the wrath of the king which was to culminate in death. An average person could not possibly have managed to rise above his quotidian desires and needs to make this choice.

Is Anouilh's *Antigone* too faced with such a choice? The second act puts the magnitude of Antigone's crime in perspective and undermines the so-called inevitability of her death. If Creon condemned Antigone to death it would only be a political strategy on his part to strike terror into the hearts of the people and hence reinforce his position as the king of Thebes. The scene with Creon and Antigone is interesting especially because of its revelatory nature. Creon's

words bring forth reminiscences on the part of Antigone which ultimately blur her own sense of purpose behind her deed. The stage space momentarily seems to transform itself into an analyst's chamber where Antigone becomes the subject of Creon's analysis. Bereft of its tragic grandeur Antigone's transgression is reduced to what seems to be a piece of headstrong, childish willfulness.

Anouilh provides Etioeles and Polyneices with their own respective personal histories—something we do not find in Sophocles. The unpleasant facts about her brothers that Creon uncovers before Antigone ultimately succeed in dissolving the polarities of good and evil, of right and wrong, of ethical and unethical completely. The audience is also considerably unsettled by what starts looking like a great misunderstanding and something that could be cleared up without the intervention of catastrophe. But the choral commentator had prophetically asserted that the 'wound up spring' must necessarily 'uncoil' of its own accord—the run of events must culminate in the unavoidable predestined end. So the question of Antigone's loyalty to a dead sibling at the risk of political transgression fades out altogether and the thrust of the play shifts from the classical tragic to the existential. Antigone thus questions the purpose of life itself and refuses the share of worldly happiness about to be doled out to her through marriage and children. The Greek word for happiness, *eudaimonia*, had an altogether different connotation as opposed to the 'happiness' that Creon talks about. According to Aristotle "every art and every scientific inquiry, and similarly every action and purpose, may be said to aim at some good. Hence 'the good' has been well defined as that at which all things aim." But when life seems to be on the whole a meaningless, arbitrary affair, one wonders whether the classical *eudaimonia* is not just as irrelevant as the bait of mediocre bourgeois happiness that we often succumb to and with which Creon in a way tries to allure Antigone back to life.

Antigone communicates the indignation and bitterness of a woman forced into a protracted childhood and hence trying desperately to be herself, to finally refuse to 'understand' things she cannot make sense of.

The play is marked by a significant absence—that of Haemon. He is referred to from time to time but does not appear on stage to be an active part of the action. Given the play's shift of register Haemon becomes superfluous. He cannot be pitted against Creon for the sake of Antigone in the Sophoclean vein. We just hear of his suicide and his contempt for his father in the end from the messenger.

The chorus of the Theban elders in Sophocles is here shrunk to a single person whose exact relation to the other characters is not specified. He serves the traditional choral function of being within as well as without the play and communing as much with the characters as with the audience. He is however more emotionally involved with the characters but less judgmental than the Sophoclean chorus. In an interesting way, he bears echoes of another character in Sophocles omitted by Anouilh — the blind prophet Teiresias. Thus the first act ends with the commentator's prophetic words about the heavens falling down and humanity screaming in anguish

(contd. overleaf)

and shock.

According to Aristotle “.....one cannot undo traditional stories but one has to discover for oneself how to use even the traditional stories well.” In Motley’s adaptation of Anouilh’s *Antigone*, a very important role is played by history. This history goes beyond the myth and highlights the deeply personal aspects of the characters whereby they acquire tangibility and relevance to the modern audience. At the obvious visual level the play remains faithful to the unity of place. But corresponding to the different entries and exits, the space acquires an elusive, transitory quality. The choral commentator is not present constantly. His intermittent absences give one the illusion of multiple spaces existing parallel to each other which conveys a sense of dichotomy between the private and the public, the personal and the social. Sometimes space acquires an intimate and intensely personalized quality say, for instance, in the scene with Antigone and her nurse.

The play also disorients the audience’s sense of time. The action proper adheres to clock time beginning at daybreak and ending with the onset of evening. But the play depicts the vast historical chasm that actually separates Anouilh’s *Antigone* from Sophocles’ *Antigone*. Thus the personal histo-

ries of Creon, Antigone, Polyneices and Etioles are given a deliberate anachronistic quality whereby their remoteness from the Sophoclean world and their closeness to the world of the modern audience is emphasized.

Talking about personal histories, one must not forget the three guards who till the end remain thoroughly immune to the catastrophe. Produced, as the play originally had been, in the thick of World War II in Nazi-occupied Paris, these desensitized guards come closest to the reality, the backdrop of which is constituted by the death and destruction that war inevitably brings. The trio of guards have a long literary legacy. They reiterate the lines of Shakespeare’s witches and are reminiscent of the porter in *Macbeth*. They do provide us with comic relief. But the word relief is to be understood in its architectural sense—it underscores the magnitude of something else in contrast.

So at the end of it all, the guards continue to be absorbed in their drunkenness, gambling, and incomprehension. The audience would much rather not confront its own incomprehension or maybe the unsettling comprehension of life that the play induces. This, possibly, is the better way. Otherwise, the only thing left to us would be to scream silently in anguish...

* * *

Creating a Splash

Varun Agarwal and Raj Khosla share their experience at the Inter-School Swimming Meet held at Pathways World School

On Thursday, April 24, sixteen boys comprising the school swimming team, and SJB, set off for Pathways World School for the 2nd Pathways Invitational Swimming Meet. The team was both anxious and excited as this was the first time that The Doon School was being represented in this tournament.

We arrived at the school at 4.30 pm, to be met by Mr. Dushyant, the PE-in-charge, and Rishabh Dev Sen, our student escort. We were taken to our boarding house, named Amazon, which was extremely comfortable and home-like. All of us were eager to get going, and we made our way to the pool, only to find out that it was being cleaned for the events that were to be held on the next day. So, instead, we set off on a tour of the school. The infrastructure of the school was impressive. Most of us decided to rest in the comfort of the boarding house, while some decided to play basketball, and some, soccer. At 7.30 pm, we were escorted to the dining hall for dinner. That night, we were introduced to the school swimming captain of Pathways. He added to our tension by revealing to us the excellent timings of the swimmers in Pathways.

Next morning, at 9 am, sixteen teams gathered at the pool. The Headmaster of Pathways, Mr. Sarvesh Naidu,

declared the Meet open. We were at a disadvantage as we were being represented in only two of the ten events, though the teams performed exceptionally well in those we *did* take part in. The highlight of the first day was winning the 4X50m medley relay by one whole length of the pool. We exceeded our own expectations by winning two gold, four silver, and four bronze medals on the very first day.



Buoyed by our opening-day performance, we made our way to the next day’s events with our morale high. The performance of the team did not drop on the second day, with a tally of one gold, four silvers and three bronze medals. Pratham’s close win in the

50m backstroke was exciting to watch. In the last and concluding event of the day and the Meet, the freestyle relay team emerged victorious, beating the host school by seven seconds. We were placed first in the ‘under-sixteen category,’ and third overall. It was most surprising, though, to be presented a gift voucher from *Planet Sports* for being the best-dressed, and the most disciplined team.

Overall, it was an enriching experience to participate in an event we had never taken part in before, and we hope the school swimming team continues to get such exposure in competitions outside the School.

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