

Filmfare: April '91 x

C-2/22

2H

Bombay CALLING!

N. PRASAD



MUSIC

FILM

THEATRE



FILM FARE: April '91

NO S E E P L E A S E

Madhushree Datta. A lot has been written on her, in particular about her 2 a.m. misadventure with the police recently. Here the fiery NSD graduate discusses her first directorial venture, *Ab Pyar Bandh*.



Ironically, Madhushree Datta is in the limelight for all the wrong reasons. The media seems to be following her everywhere because of what happened to her at Borivali station that night. Although it is important that Bombayites know how *safe* women are here, despite the police, or, more significantly, as in this case, *because* of the police, in all the furore following the event, *Aaj Pyar Bandh*, her first full-length Hindi play running in the city, has been overlooked. Which is a pity.

Presented under the auspices of 'Majlis', a new theatre group committed 'to producing socially relevant and culturally innovative works of art', *Aaj Pyar Bandh* is a woman-oriented play adapted from

Tina has done
all her Maths
Home work!



Don't you think
she deserves GOLD
COIN for lunch at
school?

Ingredients

7 slices bread, 100 gm
potatoes, 50 gm french
beans, 25 gm carrots, 50
gm green peas, 15 gm
cornflour or ara flour,
coriander, finely chopped
onions, finely chopped
sev [gram flour vermicelli],
lemon, salt to taste.

Method

Boil potatoes, french
beans, carrots, green peas.
Add salt, lemon, cornflour.
Mix well and leave the
filling aside. Cut round
shapes from the bread
slices. Put the filling on
the slice and press well.
Deep fry. Garnish with
onions, sev, coriander.
Pack in Superwrap Pure
Aluminium Foil.

SUPERWRAP

KEEPS FOOD SUPERFRESH

Trikaya Grey 1A.1.91



the Greek dramatist Aristophanes' ancient comedy *Lysistrata*, penned in the 4th century B.C.. Aristophanes' 40 odd plays are strong comments on the socio-political reality of the times.

What is striking about *Aaj Pyar Bandh* is the universality of the theme which cuts across the barriers of time, place, culture, language and lifestyle. It revolves around an all-women international conference. The men are out fighting a war. The women are trying to arrive at a peaceful resolution of the conflict and are convinced this can be achieved by abstaining from sex. The play works. The plot is deceptively simple, detailing the experiences of the women as they try to cope with their new-found independence, turning everyday chores into instruments of domestic war. Defying their men, questioning them and finally making them see the futility of war and the significance of peace.

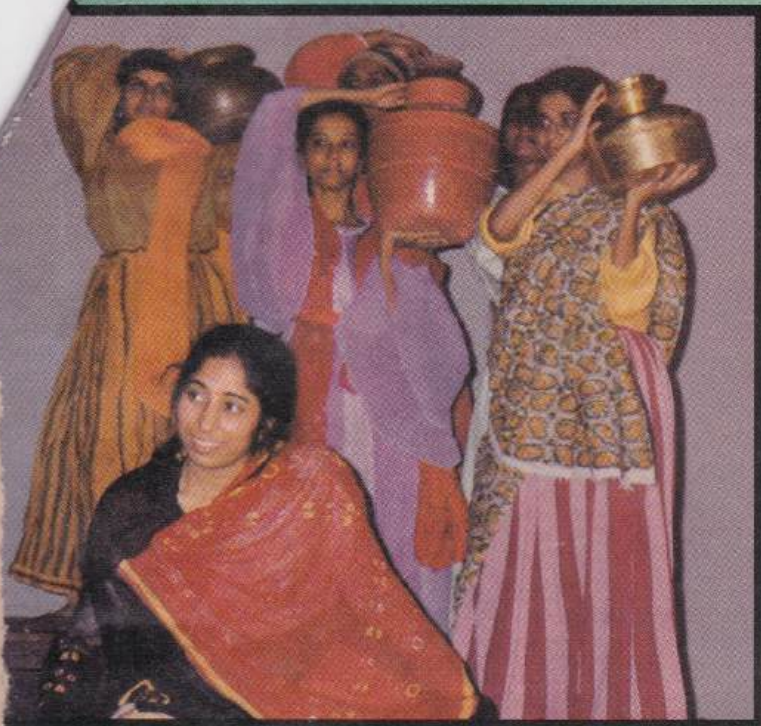
Says Madhushree, "I read the play five years ago. Rajendranath Shriram staged a single show of the play in Delhi in Hindi. I asked my batchmate Atul Tiwari to translate the play in

Most of my
actors are
seeing the
stage for
the first
time. We
rehearsed
everyday
for two
months.



English and then again in Hindi. I also suggested that he transform it into verse. The end result proved very interesting."

"I saw it as a violent play propagating a non-violent approach to life. It seemed topical because violence was sweeping across the country. Naturally it was a good subject for our



first commercial production. When we began, Saddam Hussain was nowhere on the scene. By the time the play was premiered, the world was at war with Iraq and the play became even more relevant."

However, a subject as serious as war is presented in the form of a comedy. Says the director, "That is because I wanted people to think and comedy has instant appeal. When you are serious the audience tends to get carried away. I wanted people to think and not just get carried away."

But the highly stylised approach began to irritate. "Is that so? I felt stylisation would be educating and entertaining at the same time. You have to keep the economics in mind, we wanted to at least break even. Besides I wanted to show that an educative, realistic play need not always be sombre and serious, that comedy could work too. Finally I thought stylisation would create and sustain the distance necessary for such a period play."

But given the so-called promiscuous

Who's saying that women are better than men, I'm only trying to question the taboos women are subjected to, like talking openly about sex.

Sunil has
promised not to
tease his
little sister.



Reward him with a DANGELA for lunch at school.

Ingredients

100 gm moong dal, 100 gm gram dal, 100 gm urad dal, 1 large bottle gourd (grated), a pinch of hing, salt to taste.

Method

Soak the dals and grind them. Add grated bottle gourd, salt, hing. Make balls from the batter, applying a little oil on both sides and flatten. Deep fry in oil, till brown. Pack in Superwrap Pure Aluminium Foil along with some ketchup.

SUPERWRAP

KEEPS FOOD SUPERFRESH



nature of men, is a banner put up by the wives across the bedroom door, 'No Sex Please, We Want Peace', really a workable solution? "Aristophanes' original play deals wholly and solely with abstinence and I wanted to be faithful to the theme. However, I have introduced a few variations because I did not want the emphasis to be wholly on sex. Where the promiscuity of men is concerned, in the Greek original even prostitutes joined the movement. I did not bring in prostitutes because there is very little information about the position of prostitutes during the time of Aristophanes. I did not wish to take too many liberties with the original."

One is surprised by the women's bold and straightforward approach to sex, their own physical desires. In fact, it was this that attracted Madhushree to the play. "I am not saying that women are better than men. I am only trying to question the taboos that women alone are subjected to, like talking openly about sex. I am trying to show that they are the grossly underestimated sex. Often

they are not aware of their own strengths. Not one contemporary or classical play has a woman as the protagonist in a positive sense, including the play *Aaj Pyar Bandh*. All plays choose to have men as the protagonists."

What about *Lysistrata* (played so forcefully by Meena Patel, a professional actress of the Gujarati stage)? Isn't she the protagonist? "All the inherent qualities of leadership, strength, determination and confidence are vested in her. Thus, she is a larger-than-life person and can only be a concept, not a real character," argues Madhushree.

Lysistrata and Meena Patel notwithstanding, the production values of the play are rather uneven. So is the performance of a large part of the cast. "That's because most of my actors are seeing the stage for the first time in their lives. And there is this a little thing like working on a shoe-string budget. We've put our own money into the play. And we have tried to be sincere. We rehearsed everyday for two months."

Aaj Pyar Bandh was preceded by a

W
hen
you are
serious
the
audience
tends to
get carried
away. I
wanted
people to
think, not
get carried
away.

very successful street play in Bombay, *Naari Ithihas Ki Talaash Mein*, which picked up five episodes in the history of women's movement in India. The Anti-price Rise movement (1970), the Chipko movement (1972), the Anti-rape movement (1980), Personal Law (1983) and Sati and Domestic Violence (1987). It had 25 shows.

Street plays are something right up Madhushree's street.

Years ago, in Calcutta, she did some street theatre besides staging experimental plays. "For the first time in India, our group staged Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage And Her Children* in Bengali and we travelled as a mobile repertory." In Bombay she assisted Sudhir Mishra with direction and Renu Saluja with her editing. Now she is directing a serial in Gujarati for Ahmedabad Doordarshan, penned by Dhiruben Patel on amniocentesis and she's planning two other plays for the 'Majlis'.

All her plays are bold and unconventional and *Aaj Pyar Bandh* especially so. Does she feel that it was responsible for the assault on her by the policemen. "What do they know about plays? What happened to me could have happened to any woman."

Shoma A. Chatterjee