

The language of silence



Pantomime Irshad Panjatan and director Aparna Sindhoor, who performed at Amol Palekar's theatre festival — *Theatre Beyond Words* — feel that silence speaks volumes

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It is only an artiste performance that can speak a thousand words without saying a single one. The fact was proven again as pantomime Irshad Panjatan and artistic director Aparna Sindhoor performed at Amol Palekar's theatre festival — *Theatre Beyond Words* — at Yashwantrao Chavan auditorium on Friday.

"When I make a particular piece, I go more by the story rather than adhering to a particular dance style," says Sindhoor as she justifies her style by giving an example. "In my play *The Incident and after*, I was to portray a scene where a girl was gang-raped. Bharatanatyam as a dance style does not include any gestures that can portray such a situation. At that time, with the help of the same techniques used in Bharatanatyam, I came up with certain movements that effectively portrayed the scene," smiles she explaining that even though the act was welcomed by theatre and woman activist groups, traditional dancers opposed the modifications.

A dancer and a theatre personality, Sind-

hoor is trained in Bharatanatyam for over 20 years including 15 years with Dr K Venkata-lakshamma, one of the foremost proponents of the Mysore style of Bharatanatyam where *Abhinaya* (facial expression) and graceful *Jathis* are emphasised. "I have always been a dancer but my mother was associated with children's theatre. I am thus an amalgamation of both— theatre and dance," says the artiste who believes in portraying social issues such as women's problems, racial discriminations, differentiations on the basis of caste and colour through her plays.

"The challenges are same in west and east. While portrayal of them in India in Bharatanatyam is easier because a lot of basics can be taken for granted, the presentations abroad are also welcomed with equal enthusiasm and interest," says she.

Another performance at the festival was that of Irshad Panjatan, a 77-year-old pantomime who has performed on stage after a long break of 15 years. "I agreed to work with Amol Palekar the moment I heard the name of the festival— *Theatre Beyond Words*," says the Berlin-based artiste who

did his first play as a pantomime in 1962 in Delhi.

Having learnt the art through experiences, Panjatan says that he does not have a guru. "I learnt the art from the reactions of children and critics. I believe that children are the best critics and they taught me a lot," says he. While a pantomime is commonly associated with the humorous aspect of life, Panjatan points out that theatre in general is a reflection of the society and emotions need not necessarily revolve around humour. "Charlie Chaplin films are a perfect example of this. What I like about his films is the fact that they first make you laugh and then make you realise that what you have laughed on is a silver lining on the cloud of sorrow," smiles he.

Silence, Panjatan believes, has the capacity to connect all emotions. "The most beautiful aspect of silence is that everyone can interpret it in a different manner. For instance, a child would be afraid of it, a thief would need it, a lover would want it, a saint would meditate in it and so on." The same silence it seems is the constant factor behind his changing faces as well.