

A New Leaf

A renowned name in the field of *jhadi-patti* theatre — a popular folk art form in Vidarbha — Devendra Dodke has now turned filmmaker, with Marathi film *Te Don Divas*

AASHAY KHANDEKAR

TILL 2012, Devendra Dodke, who hails from Nagpur, was happy being an integral part of the *jhadi-patti* theatre, a theatre movement in Vidarbha that promoted traditional folk art. However, in 2012, when he worked under Telugu director K Raghavendra Rao in *Shirdi Sai*, his perception about the craft changed drastically, so much so that he decided to don a film director's hat. His debut Marathi film *Te Don Divas* (*Those Two Days*), which features prominent actors like Mohan Joshi, Alka Kubal, Arun Nalawade and Vilas Ujawane, is slated to release on April 17. The film's cast, along with Dodke, was present in the city on Tuesday.

Te Don Divas is a family-drama that delves into the deeper realities of parenthood. The plot revolves around a family of four and goes on to show how ideal their lives are, until one day, when everything falls apart and the parents have to shoulder the burden to keep their daughter away from desolation. "The son of middle-class Ratnaparkhi family, who aspires to be a cricketer, falls unconscious on the cricket ground. However, the family decides to keep the news of mishap to themselves and not disclose it to their daughter, whose HSC exams are just two days away. The movie is about those two hardest days, which test their parenthood thoroughly," says Dodke, adding that while Joshi and Kubal essay the roles of the parents, Prasiddhi Aiyalwar and Chinmay Deshkar play the siblings. The cast and the crew of the film, which has been shot in Pune too, is primarily from Nagpur.

The story was written by Nagpur-based primary teacher Devendra Belankar, who is also one of the producers of the film. "When Belankar narrated the story, I felt it needed to be told in the form of a movie. In our lives, practicality has grown to prominence, due to which emotions have become secondary. And when it comes to exams of the students, parents obviously become over-protective. But what if a situation occurs, where you can't keep it to yourself? This story attempts to answer that question," says Dodke, who has acted in films such as *Miss Lovely* (2012) and *Taani* (2013), other than Telugu film *Shirdi Sai*. Under *jhadi-patti* theatre, which is also referred as the 'Broadway of Rural India', Dodke has done more than 2,200 shows of 150 plays in the last 17 years — including *Majha Ghar-Majhi Mansa*, *Pathirakha*, *Sunbai Jara Japoon*, *Bayko Number One* and so on.



Actors Alka Kubal and Mohan Joshi in a still from the film *Te Don Divas*; (left) Devendra Dodke

Drawing a parallel between *Te Don Divas* and an incident happened to him in real life, Dodke recalls, "My mother passed away on the day I had a theatrical show 200 km away from my town. After her cremation ceremony, I immediately

left for the show and performed. As an actor, I couldn't compromise with my duty. I had to bear all that pressure and stand tall because I didn't want my co-stars and the audience to face the consequences," says Dodke, who also penned songs for the film, in addition to its screenplay.

Joshi, one of the most senior actors of the Marathi industry, and also the protagonist of *Te Don Divas*, is all praise for Dodke, with whom he has worked in various plays in the past. "He is a very good friend of mine. It's his sincerity as an actor that appealed me a lot. I remember we used to have many detailed discussions backstage on serious topics whenever I visited Nagpur. When I came to know he is turning to direction, I immediately said yes for the project. I am really pleased with how professional things have been, despite the film being his first attempt," adds Joshi.

Guess Who's Back?

Gaurav Raina and Tapan Raj of Midival Punditz on their latest album and partnership rules



Gaurav Raina (left) and Tapan Raj have introduced folk elements in their new album *Lights*

SOMYA LAKHANI

IT WAS the late '90s. Clubs and shows on TV played Bollywood music, uninspired remixes and indie pop. Bored with the stagnant music scene, two Delhi boys — Gaurav Raina and Tapan Raj — decided to take the situation into their own hands. And in 1996, Midival Punditz was born.

That they spearheaded the Indian electronica movement is no exaggeration. Now after a gap of six years, they are set to release their fourth studio album, *Lights*. "All our past records have had a certain approach and style. With this one, however, we were trying to re-discover our sound and change our approach. That took time," says Raj, at their Hauz Khas Village studio in Delhi. In the meantime, Raina began work on a solo project called GRAIN and Raj opened a technology company.

Mixing electronica with Indian classical music is their signature but the upcoming nine-track album has a different sound. "This time we have shifted the focus to 'folk', instead of Indian classical. It wasn't a conscious decision. The songs we prepared just sounded better with folksy elements, the kind we were listening to at the time," says Raj. Malini Awasthi brings UP folk into *Nadia*, while Baiju Dharmarajan (guitarist of Motherjane) adds a Carnatic touch to *Rushing* and then there are Kutle Khan's Rajasthan tunes as well. "It's more cinematic and cerebral, with a tinge of darkness," says Raina.

In two rare occasions with promotions but even then their gigs are packed. Talking about the explosion in the dance music scenes, Raina says, "It's a jungle out there with a lot of noise; we only concentrate on music and it reaches the right ears." To this, Raj adds, "When we started 18 years ago, there was no way you could survive only by making music. You needed another source of income. But now, it's possible to just be a musician. These are good times," he says. They have their list of favourites among the young music producers in the country. They rattle off names such as Nucleya, Kohra, Nicholson and Your Chin.

Childhood best friends, Raj and Raina have managed to make this partnership work for almost two decades. That it was absolutely smooth is a big lie, they say. "If it's smooth, it's boring. But in our case, we have grown up together and have similar influences. That's why there is more sync, and less distinction. If one of us is not convinced about something, it doesn't make it to the track. We don't force music down each other's throat. Never," says Raina.

Line of Thought

BETWEEN the Lines, a contemporary play by CinePlay, will be staged today at Gyan Adab, 7 pm onwards. The play, which stars real-life couple Nandita Das and Subodh Maskara, explores the complexities in the life of an urban couple, both of whom strive to maintain a balance between modern trends and the trappings of tradition. Maya and Shekhar are law professionals, who have been married for 10 years. While Shekhar is a top-notch criminal lawyer and attends to high profile plaintiffs, Maya, much like most working women in our society, attempts to balance work and life, simultaneously drafting routine contracts for a law firm. As the play takes an interesting



Subodh Maskara and Nandita Das

turn, both end up arguing on opposite sides of a criminal trial, resulting in the blurring of their personal and professional lives. Founded by Maskara and Das, CinePlay endeavours to be a mirror of compelling stories told through theatre.

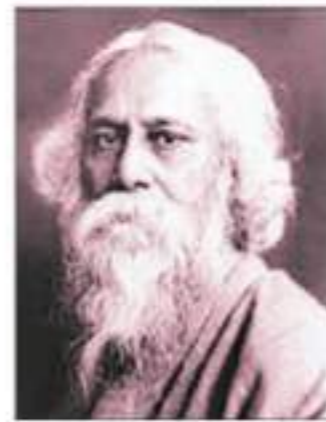


Masters at their Art

FURTADOS School of Music is conducting a workshop on Cuban music today, at the Furtados store in Koregaon Park, which will be conducted by international artist Van Merwijk's Music Machine. The event will be held between 3 and 4 pm. Band leader Lucas Van Merwijk has been at the forefront of European jazz, Latin and percussion scene for 25 years and has won the prestigious Global Act Award 2010. A quartet from the Netherlands, comprising percussionist Merwijk, accompanied by Cuban master pianist Ramon Valle, Bert Boeren on trombone and bass player from Venezuela, Samuel Albert Ruiz, they will be playing a repertoire of Cuban Golden Classics. Entry to the event is free.

Tribute to Tagore

DISHARI, a Pune-based cultural organisation, will present Roshayani, a dramatic adaptation of Rabindranath Tagore's short story *Laboratory* on April 10 at Maharashtra Cultural Centre, Tilak Road. *Laboratory* is one of the most widely acclaimed short stories by Tagore. It was a progressive mix of 20th century feminism with an orthodox Indian mindset. Dishari's primary mission is the promotion of drama and art forms of Bengal as well as to share a platform with the local cultural milieu. Over the past few years, Dishari has produced several plays, organised national and international theatre festivals, workshops, *shrutinatalk* festival, and children drama festival in Pune. Dishari has also participated in several theatre festivals.



How a Bangalore-based NGO is tackling the fear of Mathematics across the country through its meme-fied campaign #MathinIndia

'Mere Paas Maths Hai'

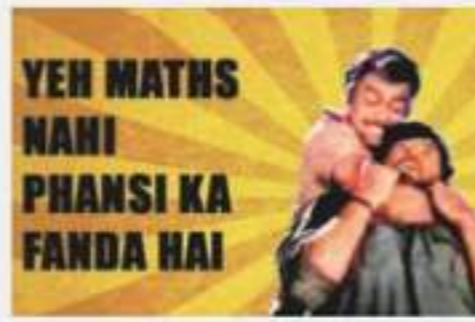
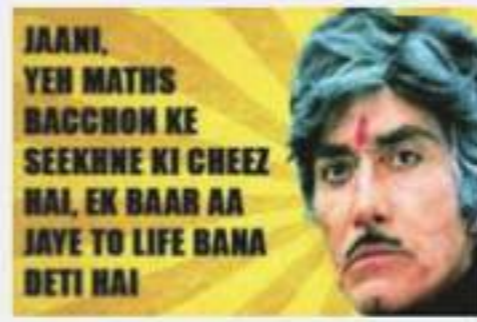
JASKIRAN KAPOOR

WHEN Ashok Kamath came across the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) this January, it left him disturbed. The fact that only 25.3 per cent of children studying in Class III could attempt a two digit subtraction, or that the percentage of children studying in Class II who could not recognise numbers up to nine had increased from 11.3 per cent in 2009 to 19.5 per cent in 2014, upset Kamath.

The declining Math-learning levels were enough for him to sound the alarm and kickstart a campaign to draw attention to this "much feared subject". The result — a "Make in India" initiative by Kamath's Bangalore based Akshara Foundation, called #MathinIndia.

A pan-India social awareness and advocacy project, it's a conversation-starter initiated to sensitise a larger audience on the issue of low learning levels among children about Maths in the country. As a part of this project, Akshara has leveraged Bollywood and come up with a set of education memes, which are catchy dialogues by popular Bollywood characters addressing the fear of maths.

So, where Amitabh Bachchan jokes, "I can talk maths, I can walk maths, I can laugh maths, because maths is a very *phunny* subject", Babuji Alok Nath preaches, "Beta, maths *se bhagna sanskari nahi hai*". The meme-fied versions carry on with a twist to famous dialogues, with late superstar Rajesh Khanna saying "Pushpa, I hate Maths",



Shah Rukh Khan announcing "Don't underestimate the power of Maths", and Shashi Kapoor claiming, "Mere Paas Maths Hai". Not only this, before the memes came a song, composed free of cost by this

year's Grammy winner Ricky Kej, in both English and Kannada. Numeracy and literacy/reading are considered the core skills, and while Akshara has been addressing and monitoring both, other non-

profits such as Agastya work and address the gaps in science learning. The cause of the fear, says Kamath, is best explained by Indian-origin mathematician who won the prestigious Fields Medal, Manjul Bhargava. He had said, "how in schools, mathematics is taught as a rote subject, where you solve artificial-sounding problems via a sequence of dull memorised steps". "Student can't even fathom what a dot below and a dot above a little horizontal line means, even though they can intelligently divide up their entire class to make up two competing cricket teams," notes Kamath, worried with, for instance, the all India (rural) figures for basic arithmetic that have remained virtually unchanged over the last few years or the ability to do division among Standard VIII students that has been dropping since 2010.

"Stars with their mass appeal enjoy a greater mind share. It is not likely that a Manjul Bhargava in a meme will catch the attention of a child over a Shah Rukh Khan," he adds. He has capitalised on superstars, iconic dialogues, social behaviour and cultural references apt

to this age group. Akshara also runs a mathematics program called Akshara Ganitha to aid Maths learning among children in government schools using an activity-based approach.

Apart from capacity building to teachers and community-school relationships, Kamath aims at more innovative ways. "Like the University of Illinois that hosts a MoSAIC Math + Arts Festival (MoSAIC stands for Mathematics of Science, Art, Industry, and Culture).

Berkeley and Columbia have held festivals to creatively activate centers of a child's brain he/she wouldn't usually associate with mathematics," he says.

Kamath plans to touch base with organisations working in the field of education and Teacher Training Institutes to promote memes as a teaching aid and an ice breaker. From stickers, book marks to fridge magnets to be distributed free of cost is also in the pipeline. Children book publisher Pratham Books has tied it with their Happy Maths series books which can be downloaded. For more log on to www.akshara.org.in.



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