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BLACK
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SEASON

TARA ARTS GROUP PRESENTS



The Little Clay Cart

Adapted from 8th Century classic

मीटी की गाड़ी मٹی کی گاڑی
भाटी नी गाडी மட்டி கி காடி
ਛਾਉਣੀ ਗੱਡੀ मिटी ची गॉडी



*Never before in the West End
spectacular action-packed drama
for all the family!*

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WEEKLY
Gleaner

United Kingdom-Caribbean-Jamaican News

FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 1986 VOL NO: 1803

**A classic
Art date**

by HERMA DIAZ

THE classic Indian play, *The Little Cart*, written in the 18th century by Shudraka, is being performed at the Arts Theatre, London, by the Tara Arts Group until February 1, as part of the Black Theatre Season.

Indian drama, less familiar to Western audiences than Indian dance, is a mixture of speech, movement, song and music — not unlike Greek plays with their commentators and chorus.

The story is of the virtuous merchant Charudatta, impoverished by a wicked king, and his love for Vasantasena, an equally virtuous courtesan who is lusted after by the King's villainous brother-in-law.

A host of characters are played by a cast of eight backed up by two musicians who punctuate the action on the table, sitar and dilruba.

The whole cast is versatile and polished in speech and movement. The charm and poetry of Naushaba Khan as Vasantasena, Yogesh Bhatt as a glorious villain and Nizwar Karanj as a would-be thief are irresistibly funny.

Right, a triumphant moment for *Sansthanaka* in the Tara Arts production of *The Little Clay Cart*.
Full reviews appear on Page 4.



THE GUARDIAN

Printed in London and Manchester

Tuesday January 14 1986

25p

ARTS GUARDIAN



A taste of India . . . Tara Arts' lively reworking of *The Little Clay Cart* at the Arts Theatre.

Picture by Douglas Jeffery

ARTS THEATRE
Kenneth Rea

The Little Clay Cart

OPENING the GLC's Third Black Theatre season in the

West End is Tara Arts' lively re-working of the eighth century Sanskrit play *Miti Ki Gadi* by Shudraka. The fascination of this rarely performed play is that it gives a sharp and witty portrait of an ancient Indian society where good deeds struggle to surface in a mire of corruption.

A courtesan is smitten with love for a young merchant who has recently lost all his wealth. She sets out to win him but gets both of them into all sorts of trouble: he is almost executed and she is half strangled by a rival admirer. Somewhat awkwardly intertwined with this is a sub plot about the escape of a peasant who had been thrown into prison because it was predicted that he would one day be king.

Jafinder Verma's prose adaptation is crisp without losing some of the poetic qualities of the original and his production shows a company of Asian performers growing in skill and discipline. Among them, Nizwar Karanj, doubling as the merchant's servant and a long-winded executioner, stands out for his fine sense of comic timing.



A taste of India... Tara Arts' lively reworking of *The Little Clay Cart* at the Arts Theatre.

Picture by Douglas Jeffery

sort of rhetoric for these works. Multi-noted Sorabji glittered brightly, while the huge climaxes of the Scott sonata and the fugue with its elaborate counterpoints were graded and timed with excellent judgment.

Katey Thomas also showed a good sense of theatre in Berio's *Sequenza* though like many young flautists she is overkeen to prove the flute an expressive instrument at all costs. But Dutilleux's delightful *Sonata* with Grahame Jackson, as her excellent pianist was stylishly played.

ARTS THEATRE

Kenneth Rea

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What problems there are stem from the question of how you play Sanskrit drama today. The traditional aesthetic of "rasa", where the main concern is the emotional flavour of each scene, would be pointless for audiences brought up to look for psychological conflict and dramatic climax.

Jatinder Verma has wisely opted for something halfway between stylisation and realism. This works best on the physical level where much of the action has been ably choreographed in traditional South Indian style by Shobana Jeyasingh. But the production still lacks lightness. A faster pace and a less declamatory style of acting from some of the cast would make the story both clearer and funnier.

NEW HORIZON

LONDON, December 31, 1985

January 9 — March 29, 1986

3rd GLC BLACK THEATRE SEASON **TARA ARTS GROUP presents**

The LITTLE CLAY CART, adapted from the 8th Century A.D. original.

The merchant CHARUDATTA has been out-cast from society because the king has made him poor. The rich courtesan, VASANTASENA, falls in love with CHARUDATTA but . . . the king's Wicked brother-in-law, SANSTHANAKA, lusts for VASANTASENA! And, behind the scenes of this fitful Romance, peasants, gamblers, servants, thieves, soldiers and monks are stirring against the tyranny of the king and his Wicked brother-in-law.

This epic fable of Romance and Revolution is one of the finest examples of classical Indian theatre — which flowered between the 4th and the 10th Centuries, A.D. The play was originally written by Shudraka.

TARA ARTS GROUP celebrates *its 10th year* by producing — for the first time in London's West End — its adaptation of the *Clay Cart*. The production will feature choreography by Shobana Jeyasingh — one of the finest Bharata Natyam dancers in the country — and music by Baluji Srivastav — a classical Indian musician from Agra. This production will *launch the 3rd GLC Black Theatre Season*.

Cast includes: Bhaskar, Yogesh Bhatt, Sudha Bhuchar, Ayub Khan Din, Rezaul Kabir,
Nizwar Karanj, Naushaba Khan, Mala Sikka

THE LITTLE CLAY CART will be staged from January 9 to March 29, 1986 at the
ARTS THEATRE, Great Newport Street, London WC2.
BOX OFFICE: 01-836 2132 — TICKETS: £4, £3, £2 (concessions)

CITY LIMITS MAGAZINE

10-16 JAN 1986

CITY LIMITS •

THEATRE

NEWS & REVIEWS

PROMPT CORNER

■ In to '86 with the Fringe looking as if it has just bet its last buck on revivals. The Lyric Hammersmith have last year's **Go Go Boys** (reviewed this week) doing great business in the studio and in February Doug Lucie's **'Progress'** (first seen at the Bush) gets a revival after a year of chasing a West End theatre. Over at the Drill Hall Siren Theatre Company's lesbian thriller

'Pulp' is back, while at the Tricycle Kerry Crabbe's **'Flann O'Brien's Hard Life'** hopes for as great a success as it had last October. Opera Factory have revived **'La Calisto'** which is in rep at the Royal Court with a new opera **'Hell's Angels'** (reviewed this week). Also at the Royal Court Anne Devlin's **'Ourselves Alone'** makes a welcome reappearance. Even the Black Arts Season at the Arts theatre kicks off with a revival of Tara's **'Little Clay Cart'**.

Hull Truck bring **'Bouncers'** back to London (Donmar) at the end of the month. Stephen MacDonald's **'Not About Heroes'** will be at the Cottesloe in February and Wet Paint open their new venue the Victoria with **'Planet Suicide'**. Non revival goodies to look forward to include Billie Whitelaw at Riverside at the end of January in **Beckett Trilogy** (Footfalls, Rockaby, Enough). Nick Darkes' **'Oven Glove Murderers'** (Bush from Jan 22). Rose English in a new show at the ICA in early Feb. Howard Barker's adaptation of Middleton's **'Women Beware Women'** (Royal Court, early Feb).

THEATRE

NEWS & REVIEWS

PLAYBACK

Irish playwright SEAMUS FINNEGAN, author of 'JAMES JOYCE AND THE ISRAELITES' reports on Israeli Theatre...

A wet Saturday night in darkest Islington. I attend a performance of 'The Story of the Eye and the Tooth' by the Palestinian Company El-Hakawati who perform their parable play with wit, enthusiasm and, notwithstanding the odd Jewish caricature, considerable understanding. What most impresses me is that 'folk-theatre' can, in its simplicity, remind us of the essences of human predicaments which are clouded by more convoluted explorations of situations like the Middle East, so immersing us in political conundrums that we forget the human story underlying the 'chassis'.

But there were two performances at the Almeida Theatre: the impressive, sincere Palestinian one on stage and the unworthy English poseur-play being enacted by certain members of the audience. How debased is the psychology of the English coloniser who, scarcely blameless for events in the Middle East today, now recolonises and makes the suffering of others into a Western fashion fad: nonchalantly strutting around clad in brand new black and white and red and white checkered kefiyahs, smoking Camels.

The same trendy 'revolutionaries' incidentally would retreat to a Monday Club type political position at the mere mention of 'the struggle in Ireland'. But then Ireland is neither 'exotic' nor far enough away for these political mavericks to flagellate themselves over.

As I angrily re-emerge into the Islington night I consider that a week ago I was in Jerusalem, home of El-Hakawati. There they were spoken of in complimentary tones by a leading figure in Israeli theatre. Hardly remarkable or particularly salutary in itself, but indicative of an intellectual openness and generosity I consistently encountered in Israel—qualities which are not easily found in today's world (and that includes Ireland lest those fashionable 'revolutionaries' feel got at).

Recently, Michael Billington, in the Guardian, upon reviewing two plays at the Belfast Festival, wrote how he felt that theatre there was the experience of a society addressing itself—an element missing he felt in most London productions. It is not absent in Israel; it is the essence and thrust of Israeli theatre. The many Israeli playwrights, actors, directors and critics of multifarious political persuasions I met impressed me with their spirit of controversy and invigorating ferment.

Yehoshua Sobol and Hanock Levin are among Israel's best known playwrights and they have—according to Eran Baniel (himself a playwright, and dramaturg of the Habima Theatre, Israel's National)—also managed to break into the European market: Levin's 'Suitcase Packers' was seen in London last year at the Lyric, Hammersmith. Levin, according to Jerusalem Post theatre critic Uri Rapp, has created a new type of Israeli character—the Israeli exile in Israel. It is also with Levin, Rapp claims, that scrupulous self-examination of Israeli life began, as far back as 1968, after the watershed of the Six Day War in 1967.

I asked Rapp why he thought such painful self-agonising occurred in Israeli society. He sees it as part of a Jewish tradition stretching back to the self-

contrariness of Talmudic debate. He gave me a wonderful example of another kind of contrariness; it concerned the banning of a play (something which has only happened three times in the history of Israeli theatre) by the Supreme Court. The play, 'Friends Tell About Jesus', was prohibited because it could be construed as offensive to Christians!

Sobol, author of 'Soul of a Jew' and 'Ghetto', has his latest play, 'The Palestinian' or 'Shooting Magda', playing at the Cameri Theatre in Tel Aviv in a production by the Haifa Municipal Theatre (touring is an integral part of theatrical life in Israel). 'Shooting Magda' explores relations between Jews and Arabs as seen through the life story of Samira—a Palestinian Arab girl. It's a sensitive, brave attempt to confront Israel's most pressing agony and as Uri Rapp writes, 'It is not the task of art to answer political and social questions; its task is to question the answers'. (Oh, that English theatre critics

would adopt this as their motto when reviewing plays about N Ireland.)

Young Israeli playwright Motti Lerner's latest play, 'Kasztner', is about a Hungarian Jew who allegedly did deals with Eichman to ensure the release of some Hungarian Jews. It has aroused considerable controversy and, talking to Lerner, it became obvious that his play and others like it are part of a current movement of young Israeli writers who are re-examining their land of heroes and martyrs. Historical revisionism? Maybe. But speaking with Lerner reminded me of similar re-examination and analysis of national myths which is occurring amongst some writers in Ireland (albeit not on the same scale).

But what is distinctive about such Israeli self-questioning is that it forces a critique of the mothers, fathers and grandparents of people like Lerner. To challenge your parents is one thing; to do it in a country founded by your parents and whose existence is under threat, is either courageously foolish or foolishly brave. Whichever, it is being done in Israel by writers like Motti Lerner.

There's not space to record Yossi Alfi's explanation of how Community Theatre in Israel operates; suffice to say that by comparison, British attempts at such forms

'look ideologically and practically pre-historic. Nor is there room for Eran Baniel on working conditions and payments for playwrights (they get twice as much up front as a good commission fee here).

I'd also like to explain that all this radical, challenging theatre is totally state subsidised and that Israeli theatre audiences are the highest in the world. At the risk of gross understatement, Israel has many problems but if the health of a nation's soul is reflected in its art, then Israel is one of the few places in the world that still has a soul!

NT/RSC

■ 'Othello' (Barbican)

Seldom have an Othello and Iago been so well balanced as Ben Kingsley and David Suchet. Bound by an invisible cord, these two are more alike than different—both disappointed, embittered outsiders, isolated from the Venetian oligarchy (Othello an Arab, Iago a Tuscan); both fatally paralysed by jealousy and ultimately united in the abyss of intense physical and mental anguish. Terry Hands' production is refreshingly direct (despite perplexing black and amber disco-fever perspex designs and preposterous pseudo-psychological programme notes that lead you to fear the worst), allowing the text full uncluttered reign and relying more upon the clarity and power of Kingsley and Suchet than on any strong—or imaginative—directorial stamp. (Lyn Gardner)

■ 'Les Liaisons Dangereuses' by Christopher Hampton (The Pit)

It is easy to admire Christopher Hampton's unpleasantly plausible and waspishly witty adaptation of Laclos' 1782 novel of sexual intrigue, depravity and revenge in the ancien regime. It is more difficult to like it. 'I often wonder how you managed to invent yourself' says Le Vicomte de Valmont. 'I had no choice, did I, I'm a woman' replies La Marquise de Merteuil. This promising exchange is never really developed (despite Hampton's protestations of Laclos as a feminist), so that what follows is a familiar scenario in which women are deceived into losing their hearts, spreading their legs (Lesley Manville as the 16 year old convent schoolgirl, Cecile, and the marvellously passionate Juliet Stevenson as the virtuous Madame de Tourvel are the notable casualties) and the cruel game goes on. True, La Marquise de Merteuil (a glitteringly dangerous Lindsay Duncan) is the instigator, holding the aces in this game of mortal combat, and her well matched adversary Le Vicomte (the languidly seductive Alan Rickman) her final victim. But to admire her strength and independence is akin to extolling Mrs Thatcher as a feminist role model to your daughters. Bob Crowley's rumpled, light filtered designs and Howard Davies' production capture the right sense of ennui laced with growing external tumult but Hampton's script so lacks (or equivocates) a moral stance that ultimately the mantis appears more alluring than its prey. (Lyn Gardner)

FRINGE

■ 'First Time Caller' by Julius Lang (Adbrook Arms)

A short play about a notorious man-of-our-times, Dennis Nilsen. Set in his infamous bedsit in Muswell Hill, we are treated to a parade of his obsessions as he tries and tries again to get through to a phone-in radio show. He is full of hatred: for women, for 'Brian' the radio presenter, for himself and his homosexuality. His repressed personality—which a UK radio presenter in Mark Vincent's performance—numbly his hatred and anger with horrific results. And the rest is history, which is a bit of a problem. For, although clearly quite well researched, the play doesn't offer any new information or insight into Nilsen as a man or as a phenomenon. (Alix Lee)

■ 'The Little Clay Cart' presented by the Tara Arts Group (Arts Theatre) Working for London I don't know whose excellent idea it was to give the characters better names.



Yogesh Bhatt and Nau Shaba Khan in Tara Arts production of **THE LITTLE CLAY CART**, part of the Black Arts Season at the Arts Theatre and reviewed this page

THEATRE ARCHIVE

January 9-15 1986
No. 803 75p

Time Out



The third GLC-sponsored Black Theatre Season gets off to a rousing start at the Arts Theatre with an action-packed adaptation by the enterprising Tara Arts Group of the 8th century Indian classic *'The Little Clay Cart'*, a story of skulduggery, romance and revolution.

'Julie' (by Catherine Kilcoyne, Duke of Wellington and Hoxton Hall)
This Julie is no Miss Julie, although she too can play the mantrap for all its worth; the trouble is, she's not sure if she's a Ms Julie either, as 'sleeping with men is a hard habit to break'. So is she is asexual, bisexual or homosexual? Is she Julie, Judas or Jules? In the course of this raw and honest 45 minute monologue which confronts the crisis of sexuality, cabaret artist Karen Parker proves she knows how to work an audience — although perhaps bearing in mind the essentially committed nature of her audience, the tone is unnecessarily defiant at times. Catherine Kilcoyne's script admits little light or shade; her images as well as her emotions are mainly jagged and violent — 'like powdering one's nose with strychnine and broken glass' — and though it's crude, yet it's ambitious writing. Maggie Ford directs with a wary eye and a restrained hand. (Christine Eccles)

TIME OUT 85

LONDON



**The Magazine for
Anytime!**

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MAGAZINE

**ISSUE 200
JANUARY 20 1986**

A courtesan comes to grief

THE LITTLE CLAY CART opens the G.L.C.'s Third (and final) Black Theatre Season. A 'morality' play by the Indian eighth-century playwright, Shudraka, it has sex and violence as its main ingredients. It is about a pauperized merchant who is loved by the richest courtesan of the kingdom.



The king's brother-in-law lusts after the courtesan and 'contrives' her death when she does not submit. An entire sub-culture of revolutionaries, thieves, gamblers, holy men etc., is revealed as the play comes to a 'happy' though provocative ending.

Good performance by the Tara Arts Group, which was formed to dramatise the Asian experience in Britain through original plays in English. Let this not put you off: the entire performance is immensely enjoyable, combining classical Indian dance, music and song with words, which although conveying images strange to Western eyes and ears, is nonetheless beautiful.

THE LITTLE CLAY CART at the Arts Theatre, Great Newport Street (01-836 2132). Tickets £4, £3, £2 (concessions)

Leicester Square — Mon-Sat 8.00pm.
Runs until Saturday 1st February 8.00pm

Tony Nayager

Parminder Vir OBE BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE
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DANCE/ Tara Arts Group

THE ANCIENT classical theatre of India—like its counterparts in China and Japan—had its origins in dance, and there was a corresponding stress on stylised expressive movements: footwork, gestures, facial expressions and so on.

In his fascinating production of "The Little Clay Cart"—being performed by Tara Arts Group at the Arts Theatre until Feb. 1—the director Jatinder Verma has given splendid vitality to this piece (created in the 8th century AD) by bringing together aspects of ancient Indian *natya* which survived in the dance-dramas of south India and in folk traditions of many parts of India. He has given each character his own movements, and in particular a characteristic gait derived from dancing—thus making it possible for each performer to do two or three roles; and even scenery and props are suggested by the movements of the artists. Musicians sit on stage, accompanying the action.

Though Verma draws a good deal on surviving Indian classical dance styles, he uses them in a very simplified form, and lays main stress on folk traditions. Except in a few scenes, he transforms the ancient classical pieces into hilarious broad comedy.

Three artists are outstanding in their versatility, their grasp of total theatre, and in their split-second timing, so essential in comedy. Sometimes we see Yogesh Bhatt in the traditional role of the *Sutradhar*, who introduces the piece and comments on it; at other times he becomes the wicked *Sansthanaka*, over-acting in the delightfully melodramatic way traditional in Indian folk theatre. Nizwar Karanj moves through a variety of roles, being equally convincing in each, and Bhaskar does well in the famous burglary scene, suggesting by a combination of Indian *Abhinaya* and Western mime that he is cutting a hole through the wall of a house—later transforming himself into an officious court clerk.

None of the female artists shows such versatility; but Naushaba Khan gives vitality to the central role of the courtesan Vasantasena—courtesans being highly respected in ancient India.

The music, played on sitar and tabla during most of the action, adds to the atmosphere, even though it remains simple and unobtrusive.

Fernau Hall

LONDON STANDARD
13.1.86
Lynda Murdin

MYSTIQUES and mysteries of the East are magically embodied in *The Little Clay Cart*, an adaptation in English of an eighth-century Indian classic.

A vivid and stylised blend of drama, music, poetry, mime and comedy, it is an extraordinary event to find in the West End and comes to the Arts Theatre as the first of three productions in the GLC's third Black Theatre Season.

Richly peopled, the ancient story reconfirmed how fallible humans remain basically unchanged through centuries, although the unjealous trio of husband and two wives makes an unlikely happy-ever-after ending for Western audiences.

Unique in Indian classical theatre because it deals with ordinary folk, the production nevertheless follows traditions of staging which make it likewise unique in London's theatreland.

Gestures and movement at times turn it into a slow-motion ballet; the eight actors don't walk, they do what could perhaps be described as the Delhi glide. Then they strike the attitudes of carved statues in Hindu temples, their bare feet almost as expressive as their hands.

Sitar, tabla and chants add to the exotic atmosphere, as do costumes—a dazzling display in the colours and fabrics of India against a contrastingly inadequate set. The actors each play a number of roles and take turns at narration with varying degrees of competence.

In three parts, Bhaskar achieves a mesmerising range of facial expressions, and Nizwar Karanj shows skilful comic talents. As the King's wicked brother-in-law, Yogesh Bhatt, an astounding green-faced apparition, summons such a sense of exaggerated evil that you want to hiss him like a pantomime baddie.

A main reason for regretting the forthcoming demise of the GLC is the end of its backing for the arts and unusual events such as this.

Nevertheless, one could do without the GLC-style crass overstatement which mars the conclusion. Tragic though racial attacks are, Waltham Forest cannot have featured in the original Sanskrit. Audiences should be trusted to draw their own parallels.

GUARDIAN
14.1.86
Kenneth Rea

OPENING the GLC's Third Black Theatre season in the West End is *Tara Arts'* lively re-working of the eighth century Sanskrit play *Miti Ki Gadi* by Shudraka. The fascination of this rarely performed play is that it gives a sharp and witty portrait of an ancient Indian society where good deeds struggle to surface in a mire of corruption.

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What problems there are stem from the question of how you play Sanskrit drama today. The traditional aesthetic of "rasa", where the main concern is the emotional flavour of each scene, would be pointless for audiences brought up to look for psychological conflict and dramatic climax.

Jatinder Verma has wisely opted for something halfway between stylisation and realism. This works best on the physical level where much of the action has been ably choreographed in traditional South Indian style by Shobana Jeyasingh. But the production still lacks lightness. A faster pace and a less declamatory style of acting from some of the cast would make the story both clearer and funnier.

DAILY TELEGRAPH
11.1.86
Fernau Hall

THE ANCIENT classical theatre of India—like its counterparts in China and Japan—had its origins in dance, and there was a corresponding stress on stylised expressive movements: footwork, gestures, facial expressions and so on.

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The Little Clay Cart

ARTS

9 January - 1 February 1986

THE LITTLE CLAY CART

Adapted by JATINDER VERMA from
the 8th Century classic by SHUDRAKA

Tara Arts Group
(Black Theatre Season)

Courtier/Sharvilaka/Clerk.....Bhaskar
Sansthanaka/Storyteller.....Vogesh Bhatt
Madanika/Masseur/Judge.....Sudha Bhuchar
Charudatta/Mathura/Viraka.....Ayub Khan Din
Gambler/Driver.....Rezaul Kabir
Maitreya/Chandanaka/Executioner.....Nizwar Karanj
Vasantasena/Aryaka.....Naushaba Khan
Radanika/Storyteller.....Mala Sikka

Directed by Jatinder Verma
Decor: Ann Hubbard
Lighting: Paul Armstrong
Choreography: Shobana Jeyasingh
Musicians: Baluji Srivastav, Yousuf Ali Khan

LISTENER

23.1.86

Jim Hiley

Less rounded talents are to be seen in *The Little Clay Cart*, with which the Tara group kick off the GLC's third—and last—Black Theatre Season at the Arts. But they work to more cohesive effect, thanks to Jatinder Verma's rigorously inventive production.

Verma himself has adapted an eighth-century play by Shudraka, the elaborate tale of a dispossessed merchant's sufferings at the hands of his king's villainous brother-in-law, with romantic intrigues, robberies and the odd feigned death thrown in. The nice, humbler people come out on top, though not before a succession of setbacks which grow a mite too oppressive for my taste.

An epilogue challenges the tone of Gandhian forbearance on which the play proper ends, arguing that it won't stop Asian children being burned in contemporary East London. I wouldn't quarrel with that, but this coda fits awkwardly on to a story that's so relentlessly of its time.

Still, the evening offers an exhilarating blend of folkloric knockabout and danced formality with vaudeville and wry Brechtian commentary. It confirms my belief that Tara is one of our most rewardingly improving companies. Jatinder Verma is becoming a stylist to be reckoned with, what's more, and true directorial stylists are thin on the ground. He should turn his attention to musicals...

TIME OUT

16.1.86

Christine Eccles

This eighth century Sanskrit play tells of a courtesan in love with a merchant, himself the enemy of a despotic King and of a peasant who, it is prophesied, will overthrow that King and rule in his place. Though the play comes from far away in time and place, its resonances are more familiar than not. The folk-tale plot (mistaken identities, stolen jewels, comic double-act) would serve any panto; only the wife's unsettling equanimity at her husband's dalliance and the peasant leaders' Ghandi-like forbearance point to another culture. Jatinder Verma's attempt to place the traditional values under a Brechtian search-light results in a failure of tension; a subdued experience that feels like a very long evening. His more successful use of highly patterned music and movement compensate through a powerful sense of ensemble. Invidious though it is, Anne Hubbard's design with her magnificent use of colour and Nizwar Karanj's wonderfully wily go-between (one day he must play Azdak) cry out for particular mention.

CITY LIMITS

17.1.86

Andrew Dickson

I don't know whose excellent idea it was to give the characters in this 8th century Indian Classic personalised silly walks but it works a treat. Written to portray community life at the time, it's a cheerful parable with traditional musical accompaniment, about a prostitute who falls for a recently destitute merchant though pursued by an evil king's evil brother-in-law. Costume, gesture, speech and walks are traditionally stylised but allow for easy identification of an Albert square full of thieves, peasants, courtiers, servants, monks, gamblers and Uncle Tom Cobblies that people the plot. The most endearing quality is the unexpectedly (for me) dry humour and moments of farce that ridicule the stiff formality and custom to which the bulk of the play conforms. I found the attempt towards the end to infer from the play a moral relevant to the Asian community's reaction towards recent racist attacks unconvincing, tacked on as it is to a very enjoyable, unconventional costume melodrama.

JEWISH CHRONICLE

17.1.86

David Nathan

The third Black Theatre season at the Arts opens with *The Little Clay Cart*, an eighth century play by Shudraka in which a rich merchant, impoverished by a wicked king, loves — and is loved by — a courtesan who is desired by the king's brother-in-law.

With music and highly formalised movement, the happy ending, which also involves the merchant's wife, is reached. There is much comedy; a thief breaks into a house according to a rule-book and there is a Gilbertian performance, rich in comic detail, by Nizwar Karanj. It is an unexpected treat.

BBC RADIO LONDON

18.1.86

Nick St George

An evening of 8th century classical Indian theatre may not immediately strike you as a barrel-load of laughs. But *'The Little Clay Cart'*, in a new adaptation (and a relatively faithful one by all accounts) by director Jatinder Verma, is great fun.

It's the story of a kingdom stricken with poverty thanks to the machinations of an evil king and his tyrannical brother-in-law. There's a prophecy that a peasant shall become king (emphasised somewhat more here than in the original attributed to one Shudraka), there's a glamorous courtesan in love with a married man, a winging brahmin, a masseuse who becomes a monk and a thief with artistic tendencies. The whole thing is woven together in Verma's imaginative, stylised production into a lively tapestry of movement, music, dance and drama. Not only is it great entertainment — with moments both moving and hilarious — but the text and sympathetic period interpretation give us some genuine insights into the roots of more recent theatrical forms: alienation, commedia dell'arte — and its descendant pantomime, for example. On a bare stage, the glorious costumes and Paul Armstrong's colourful and apposite lighting (what a change to see primary colours in a lighting design) married to the human pictures Verma makes with his company mean the show is a visual treat as well.

All unfortunately is not well though. Most of the cast are splendid — their enthusiasm and commitment is a shining example to many a company. But there are some declamatory vocal performances which get a bit wearing after a while, and there's a weak link in Mala Sikka as a narrator, who sadly fails to bring alive her section of the story. But worst of all, a totally unnecessary and heavy-handed bit of late 20th century politicking — complete with a reference to events in Waltham Forest — has been tacked on the end. It's almost as if the company felt guilty about 'merely' giving us a good time. In fact, the energy and vitality of the cast — plus the underlying, albeit naive, ethics of the original — are a strong enough positive political statement on their own right. But this is, above all, a good night out, and certainly puts to shame some of the 15-quad-a-head shows just up the road.

1981-1986

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Community News

Theatre

The Little Clay Cart

by Shudraka
directed by
Jatinder Verma
presented by Tara
Arts Group, 8th
Jan-1st Feb
Arts Theatre, Gt
Newport Street
WC2

THE THIRD and final
GLC sponsored Black
Theatre Season kicked
off with this hugely en-
joyable production of a
classic 8th century
Sanskrit drama.

Combining Indian
classical music, Bhar-
ata Natyam-inspired
choreography and
gorgeous costumes with
a vivid and often up-
roariously funny story,
the talented cast made
their audience feel quite
at home in the world of
Charudatta, the mer-
chant ruined by a wick-
ed king, Vasantasena,
the courtesan who falls
in love with him, and
Sansthanaka, the wick-
ed king's even wickeder
brother-in-law. When,

having allowed us to
enter fully into this rich
and vital world, the cast
remind us at the play's
conclusion of the rejec-
tion and violent
persecution Indians
suffer in this country,
we can only feel
ashamed. (Sasha
Braddell)

Black Theatre Forum
present the second pro-
duction in this Season,
also at the Arts Theatre
(836 2132/3334),
Rakshasa's Ring,
another Sanskrit classic
drama, 5th Feb-1st
March.

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NEWS

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Parminder VIRSING BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE

The Stage and TELEVISION TODAY

No 5467

JANUARY 23, 1986



THE STAGE

Play Reviews

PETER HEPPLE on a 'thoroughly enjoyable' Indian tale

Tara Arts set the black cart rolling

ARTS

The Little Clay Cart

IT IS a salutary lesson to London theatre-goers that the third Black Theatre Season at the Arts should begin with Tara Arts Group's production of "The Little Clay Cart", for this Indian folk tale by Shudraka represents a tradition going back much further than anything in Britain.

The story was written in the 8th century AD; the basic principles of Jatinder Verma's production are contained in the *Natya-Shastra*, the treatise on theatre compiled around 500 BC.

Greatly to Tara Arts Group's credit is the fact that the play is not an example of theatrical archaeology but thoroughly enjoyable entertainment. It does conjure up a world in which the role of the courtesan was greatly respected, and one in which a wife can look on with compliance as her husband engages in a love affair with a courtesan close to the king himself. We are introduced to a colourful collection of royals, nobles, thieves, gamblers and petty officials, as alien to modern India as to ourselves.

True, there is some updating of language, but that firm anchorage in the past still holds good. The choreographer, Shobana Jeyasingh, has helped to create this modest spectacle, each character being given his or her own dance movements and stance, to illustrate the inseparability in Indian theatre of words, music and movement. It enables instant character identification, and also permits considerable doubling and trebling of roles by the talented company. Even the hero Charudatta (Ayub Khan Din) and heroine Vasantasena (Naushaba Khan) can switch in a trice to a completely contrasting role. But what impresses most is the



YOGESH BHATT and VAVSHABA KHAN backstage at the Arts Theatre

bubbling humour which is always coming to the surface, represented chiefly by Nizwar Karanj as the bent-kneed grumbler Maitreya, always ready with a put-down, Yogesh Bhatt as the royal brother-in-law Sansthanaka, a bumb-

ling avenger, and the versatile Bhaskar, equally adept on both sides of the law. Fascinating and exotic though "The Little Clay Cart" may be to Western eyes, it still works for London human nature.

Working for London
archive.parmindervir.com

THE BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE

THE TIMES FRIDAY JANUARY 10 1986

THE ARTS

Theatre

The Little Clay Cart Arts

Translations from the Sanskrit are far from common on the London stage. Generally concerned with the mighty deeds of gods, there is one splendid exception, chosen by Tara Arts Group to open this Third Black Theatre Season.

Attributed to King Shudraka, a shadowy figure of the Eighth Century AD, there is not an immortal in the cast. Nor a wonder-working hero. Not even a miracle, if you discount the happy end that allows the main character to marry both the women he loves.

In colourful, witty language the play tells of a handsome but impoverished merchant and a famous courtesan, "love's juiciest dish". A grotesquely villainous brother-in-law to the king interferes with their joy, and their paths are criss-crossed by an unexpectedly rich variety of eccentrics. A thief who breaks into houses according to a book of rules, a masseuse who renounces her passion for gambling to become a Buddhist monk, daft soldiers, nervous lawyers, a proverb-quoting Brahmin down on his uppers.

The company here consist of eight players and two musicians (sitar and tabla). Music accompanies many of the incidents, attractively building suspense and occasionally doing duty for props. The clay cart itself is the one visable prop, a toy belonging to the hero's son. But all the boy's friends have gold carts and he wants one too. This is the sole, brief reference to the cart, and for that reason it spreads a curiously reverberating power over the remainder of the story. Desires bring discontent yet good peasants should replace bad kings.

There is a fine impression of lusciousness by Naushaba Khan and the decent young hero is pleasantly played by Ayub Khan Din. But the most enjoyably comic performance is given by Nizwar Karanj as the hopelessly poor and timid Brahmin. With a rapid delivery of his dotty lines, deadpan delivery of insults and his permantly aghast moon-face, this is an irresistibly comical creation.

Jeremy Kingston

Time Out

THEATRE

FRINGE SHOWS

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TARA ARTS GROUP
PRESENTS

The Little Clay Cart

*Adapted from
8th Century classic*



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Time Out

GUIDE

The Jamaican Weekly

Gleaner

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MONDAY 27 JANUARY 1986

A classic Art date

by HERMA DIAZ

THE classic Indian play, *The Little Cart*, written in the 18th century by Shudraka, is being performed at the Arts Theatre, London, by the Tara Arts Group until February 1, as part of the Black Theatre Season.

Indian drama, less familiar to Western audiences than Indian dance, is a mixture of speech, movement, song and music — not unlike Greek plays with their commentators and chorus.

The story is of the virtuous merchant Charudatta, impoverished by a wicked king, and his love for Vasantasena, an equally virtuous courtesan who is lusted after by the King's villainous brother-in-law.

A host of characters are played by a cast of eight backed up by two musicians who punctuate the action on the table, sitar and dilruba.

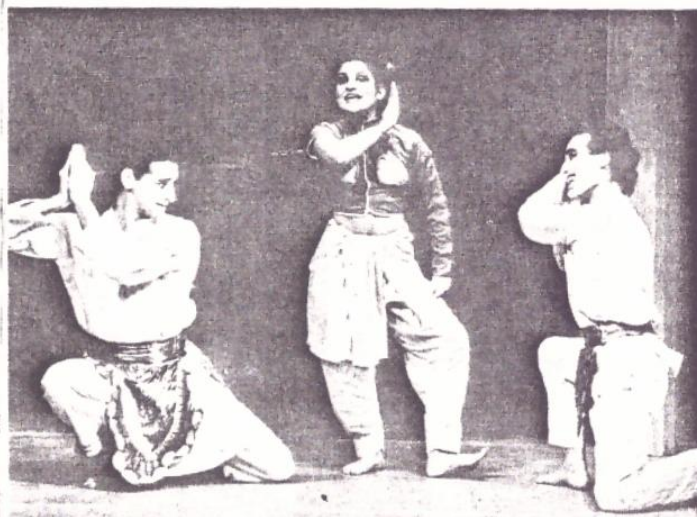
The whole cast is versatile and polished in speech and movement. The charm and poetry of Naushaba Khan as Vasantasena, Yogesh Bhatt as a glorious villain and Nizwar Karanj as a would-be thief are irresistably funny.

What's On & Where to go

23-29 JAN. 1986

IN LONDON

50p



Rezaul Kabir, Sudha Buchar, Ayub Khan Din in 'The Little Clay Cart' at the Arts Theatre.

Engaging

Now at the Arts Theatre in Great Newport Street is the first play of the Black Theatre Season, sponsored by the GLC. The season continues until March 29, and is likely to be the last of this commendable programme, since the Greater London Council will vanish in April. The current play, *THE LITTLE CLAY CART*, is an Indian epic translated from the Sanskrit by Shudraka and dates from the 8th century. This means that it comes near to the end of the period known as The Golden Age of Indian Classical Drama, and is the sole known work of the playwright. It is unique in not being about the upper classes alone, but shows a section of society from aristocrats to thieves. The title is almost incidental – except in a telling way of making an oblique comment. What emotions are stirred if one child has a toy clay cart while those of his friends are made of a precious metal?

The Asian performers of this play are eager and willing to unfold the long and complicated story, if not always as well tuned in their performances as they might be. Indian companies spend much time in rehearsal and preparation – I recall one Indian artist describing how much time he spent simply on exercising his eyeballs – and probably this extraordinary dedication is difficult for a British based group such as Tara Arts to achieve. They move and dance with ingenuity and an obvious pleasure in performance, and are good at presenting the more melodramatic characters such as the King's brother-in-law and the old Brahmin. All the actors are onstage at the same time, as they would be in a performance in India, whether in a hall or round a village's open fire, and they all sing and dance to the music of sitar, dilruba and tabla.

Most of them take several roles in this complicated story, and particularly good are Bhaskar as a scheming factotum, very funny when he plans to knock a hole in a wall; Nizwar Karanj as a questioning old man; Ayub Khan Din in the rather thankless role of a poor merchant; and Naushaba Khan as a courtesan in love. There is no director as such – credit is given to choreographer Shobana Jeyasingh. And what play could end with the hero happy with two contented and un-jealous wives, but in India?

M.L.

January 16-22 1986

No. 304 75p

Tommy

THEATRE

NEWS & REVIEWS

FRINGE

'The Little Clay Cart' (Arts Theatre)

This eighth century Sanskrit play tells of a courtesan in love with a merchant, himself the enemy of a despotic King and of a peasant who, it is prophesied, will overthrow that King and rule in his place. Though the play comes from far away in time and place, its resonances are more familiar than not. The folk-tale plot (mistaken identities, stolen jewels, comic double-act) would serve any panto; only the wife's unsettling equanimity at her husband's dalliance and the peasant leaders' Ghandi-like forbearance point to another culture. Jatinder Verma's attempt to place the traditional values under a Brechtian searchlight results in a failure of tension; a sub-

dued experience that feels like a very long evening. His more successful use of highly patterned music and movement compensate through a powerful sense of ensemble. Invidious though it is, Anne Hubbard's design with her magnificent use of colour and Nizwar Karanj's wonderously wily go-between (one day he must play Azdak) cry out for particular mention. (Christine Eccles)



A fine impression of lusciousness by Naushaba Khan

Rich in eccentrics

The Little Clay Cart

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In colourful, witty language the play tells of a handsome but impoverished merchant and a famous courtesan, "love's juiciest dish". A grotesquely villainous brother-in-law to the king interferes with their joy, and their paths are criss-crossed by an unexpectedly rich variety of eccentrics. A thief who breaks into houses according to a book of rules, a masseuse who renounces her passion for gambling to become a Buddhist monk, daft soldiers, nervous lawyers, a proverb-quoting Brahmin down on his uppers.

It is a pity we know nothing about the author to help us understand how he could break the mould of India's traditional drama to come up with this compound of jokey romance, social criticism (a peasant leads a revolution and kills the king) and low farce.

Production and performances are not yet all they should be, even allowing for this West

of the effects aimed for. The framing commentary is the weakest area, where wife and villain step a little way out of their parts in the story to point to the issues involved. I cannot say if this framework appears in the original but the conclusion is clearly modern. The question whether enemies should be forgiven in times of social stress is left uneasily unresolved — though I daresay it supplies a talking-point for audiences up and down the country before whom the Tara Arts Group performs its repertoire.

The company here consist of eight players and two musicians (sitar and tabla). Music accompanies many of the incidents, attractively building suspense and occasionally doing duty for props. The clay cart itself is the one visible prop, a toy belonging to the hero's son. But all the boy's friends have gold carts and he wants one too. This is the sole, brief reference to the cart, and for that reason it spreads a curiously reverberating power over the remainder of the story. Desires bring discontent yet good peasants should replace bad kings.

There is a fine impression of lusciousness by Naushaba Khan and the decent young hero is pleasantly played by Ayub Khan Din. But the most enjoyably comic performance is given by Nizwar Karanj as the hopelessly poor and timid Brahmin. With a rapid delivery of his dotty lines, deadpan delivery of insults and his permanently aghast moon-face, this is an irresistibly comical creation.

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THE ARTS

Theatre

Donald Cooper



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Jeremy Kingston

The LONDON STANDARD

Monday, January 13, 1986

20p

Incorporating the **Evening News**

The Critics

Doing the Delhi glide...

by **LYNDA MURDIN**

MYSTIQUES and mysteries of the East are magically embodied in *The Little Clay Cart*, an adaptation in English of an eighth-century Indian classic.

A vivid and stylised blend of drama, music, poetry, mime and comedy, it is an extraordinary event to find in the West End and comes to the Arts Theatre as the first of three productions in the GLC's third Black Theatre Season.

Richly peopled, the ancient story reconfirmed how fallible humans remain basically unchanged through centuries, although the unjealous trio of husband and two wives makes

an unlikely happy-ever-after ending for Western audiences.

Unique in Indian classical theatre because it deals with ordinary folk, the production nevertheless follows traditions of staging which make it likewise unique in London's theatreland.

Gestures and movement at times turn it into a slow-motion ballet; the eight actors don't walk, they do what could perhaps be described as the Delhi glide. Then they strike the attitudes

of carved statues in Hindu temples, their bare feet almost as expressive as their hands.

Sitar, tabla and chants add to the exotic atmosphere, as do costumes—a dazzling display in the colours and fabrics of India against a contrastingly inadequate set. The actors each play a number of roles and take turns at narration with varying degrees of competence.

In three parts, Bhaskar achieves a mesmerising range of facial expressions, and

Nizwar Karanj shows skilful comic talents. As the King's wicked brother-in-law, Yogesh Bhatt, an astounding green-faced apparition, summons such a sense of exaggerated evil that you want to hiss him like a pantomime baddie.

A main reason for regretting the forthcoming demise of the GLC is the end of its backing for the arts and unusual events such as this.

INTERVAL

Theatre

Compiled by Brenda Emmanus

January sees the commencement of the Greater London Council's third **BLACK THEATRE SEASON**. With the demise of the GLC, this important season within London's theatre calendar marks the culmination of three years work to showcase the talents of Black and Asian writers, directors, designers, performers and technicians. It has also proved the major stimulus in the formation of the Black Theatre Forum who are the producers for this season.

The theme of this third season is to present the classics of Indian and Afro-Caribbean stage, bringing to public attention traditions of theatre which offer alternatives to the Greek/Western notions of theatre. Black theatre is therefore not only of contemporary concern but a development in form.

The whole season is to take place at **THE ARTS THEATRE**, Great Newport Street, London, WC2. Tickets £4, £3, £2 (concessions). **'THE LITTLE CLAY CART'** by Shudraka is the first production which previews on 8th January and runs until 1st February.

Performed by **TARA ARTS** and written around the 8th century A.D, this play is unique in the canons of traditional Indian theatre in having an entirely secular theme. The production, in English, will follow the

traditions of Indian stagecraft; the presentation of stories using the elements of costumes, make-up, movement, music and speech, thus offering an insight into one of the oldest theatre traditions in the world.

The **BLACK THEATRE FORUM** presents the second productions, **'RAKSHASHA'S RING'** by Visakhadatta. Running from 5th February until 1st March, the play is a fable based on the "Artha-Shastra", a classical Indian treatise on the art of Government, and is a powerful precursor to Machiavellianism in its portrayal of the political manoeuvrings within a state. The Black Theatre Forum's production will involve for the first time ever in Britain, and certainly in London's West End, an integrated cast of Afro-Caribbean and Asian performers, and will be in the first presentation of this classic in Britain.

The final production by **TEMBA THEATRE COMPANY** is **'THE PIRATE PRINCESS'** by Barbara

Glouden. This Jamaican pantomime has achieved the longest pantomime run ever, when it ran for 121 consecutive performances from Boxing Day until late May in 1982. It will be the first professional production of this popular form of Jamaican theatre in Britain, and it is hoped that it will establish this tradition of theatre in Britain and attract many people of Caribbean origin to the theatre. A musical, colourful extravaganza, the production will include professional Afro-Caribbean performers within Equity and also non-professionals from

youth drama groups in London.

All performances run from Monday-Saturday and start at 8pm. For more information ring the box office on 836-2132.



Paul Bhattarjee
Nayshaba Khan in
'THE LITTLE CLAY CART'



Yogesh Bhatt in The Tara Arts group **'THE LITTLE CLAY CART'**

THEATRE

Effortless crossing of barriers

Claire Armitstead at the Arts

JUST occasionally a show comes along that leaves one feeling enriched. Tara Arts do this with *The Little Clay Cart*, the curtain-raiser to this year's third and final GLC black theatre season.

The play is based on an 8th century classic by Shudraka which, we are told in the programme, is unique in traditional Indian theatre for having an entirely secular theme. It is about kings, thieves, lovers and gamblers — virtue rewarded and tyranny overthrown.

The presentation is appropriately traditional — an extravagantly costumed blend of mime, music, dance and drama — with a theatricality that sails effortlessly across the cultural barriers.

Parts of its success lies in the translation, which hits just the right balance of formality and colloquialism; part lies in Jatinder Cerma's tightly controlled direction, and part in the characterisation.

From Sansthanaka, the king's flamboyantly evil brother-in-law, to Charudatta, the virtuous merchant (who is not so virtuous that he is above railing at his poverty — or conceiving a passion for a rich courtesan), and my own favourite, the wily old brahmin Maitreya, the characters are drawn with a richness and an acuteness of observation that brings them right up to the minute.

The cast of eight make the most of the humour, but the laughs are never cheap or laboured. Doubling or trebling as characters distinguished by nuances of movement, gesture or accent, they retire between scenes to a semi-circle around the stage, to become part of the musical accompaniment, singing and clapping along with the two musicians on sitar, tabla and dilruba.

This is highly sophisticated theatre form which allies present political awareness with an ancient cultural heritage. Whether that needs to be spelled out, as it is at the end, by puncturing the story-telling convention to focus on racist attacks in Britain, I am not so sure.



● Navshaba Khan
Ayub Khan Din in *The Little Clay Cart* ... pro
political awareness n
ancient heritage.

5509 FRIDAY, JANUARY 24, 1986

THE *Journal*

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Exotic

●AYUB KHAN DIN, another ex actor from the Mountview Theatre, played the leading role of the merchant Charudatta in the Indian play, 'The Little Clay Cart' at the Arts Theatre.

This exotic, colourful production had suitable music and

choreography to help tell the charming, amusing story, and a quite splendid clear-speaking cast who had the correct style for this specialised form of theatre. This period entertainment was delightful.

for Sansthanaka in the Tara Arts production of The Little Clay Cart. Full reviews appear on Page 4.

