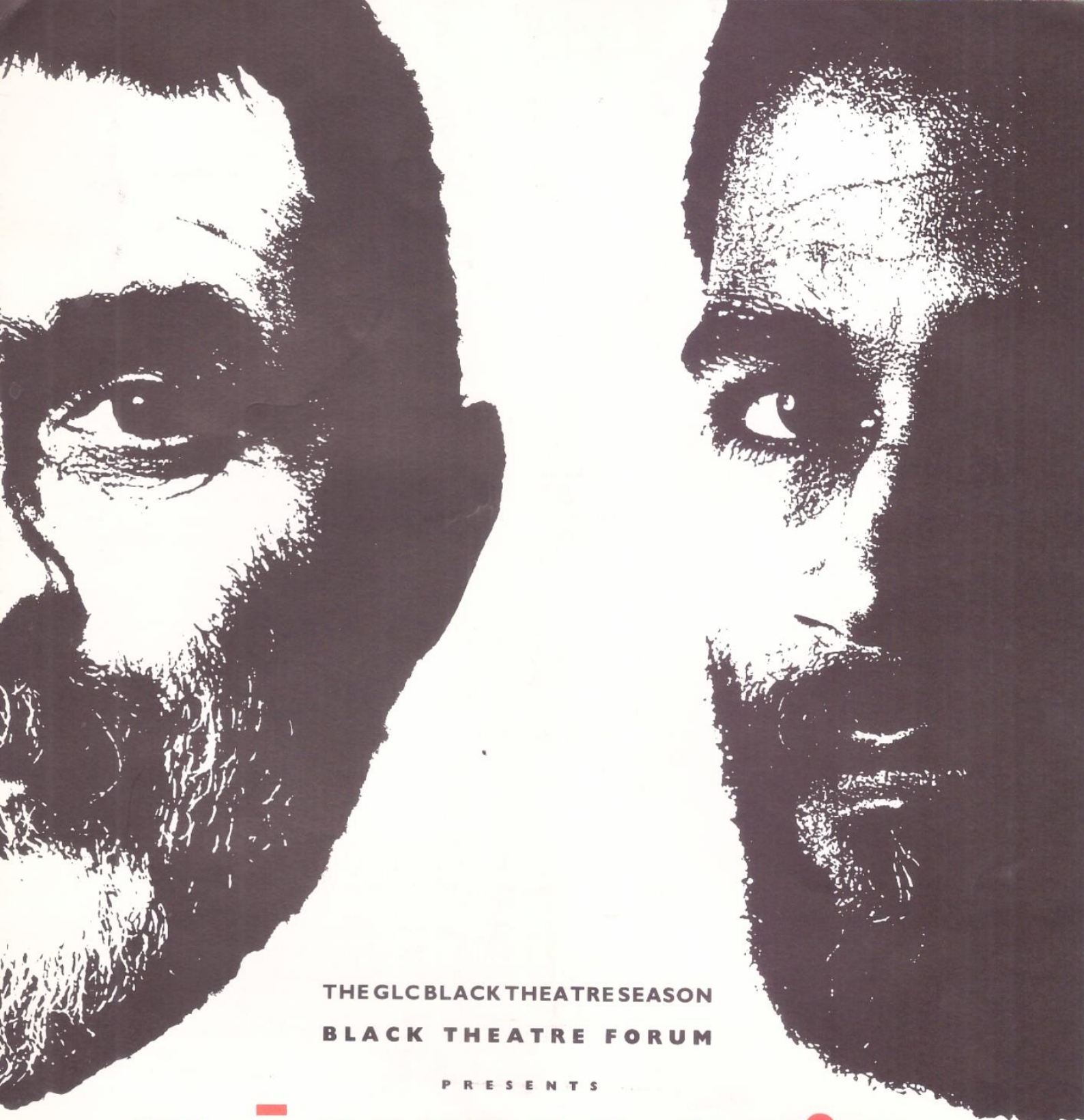




THE GLC BLACK THEATRE SEASON
BLACK THEATRE FORUM

P R E S E N T S

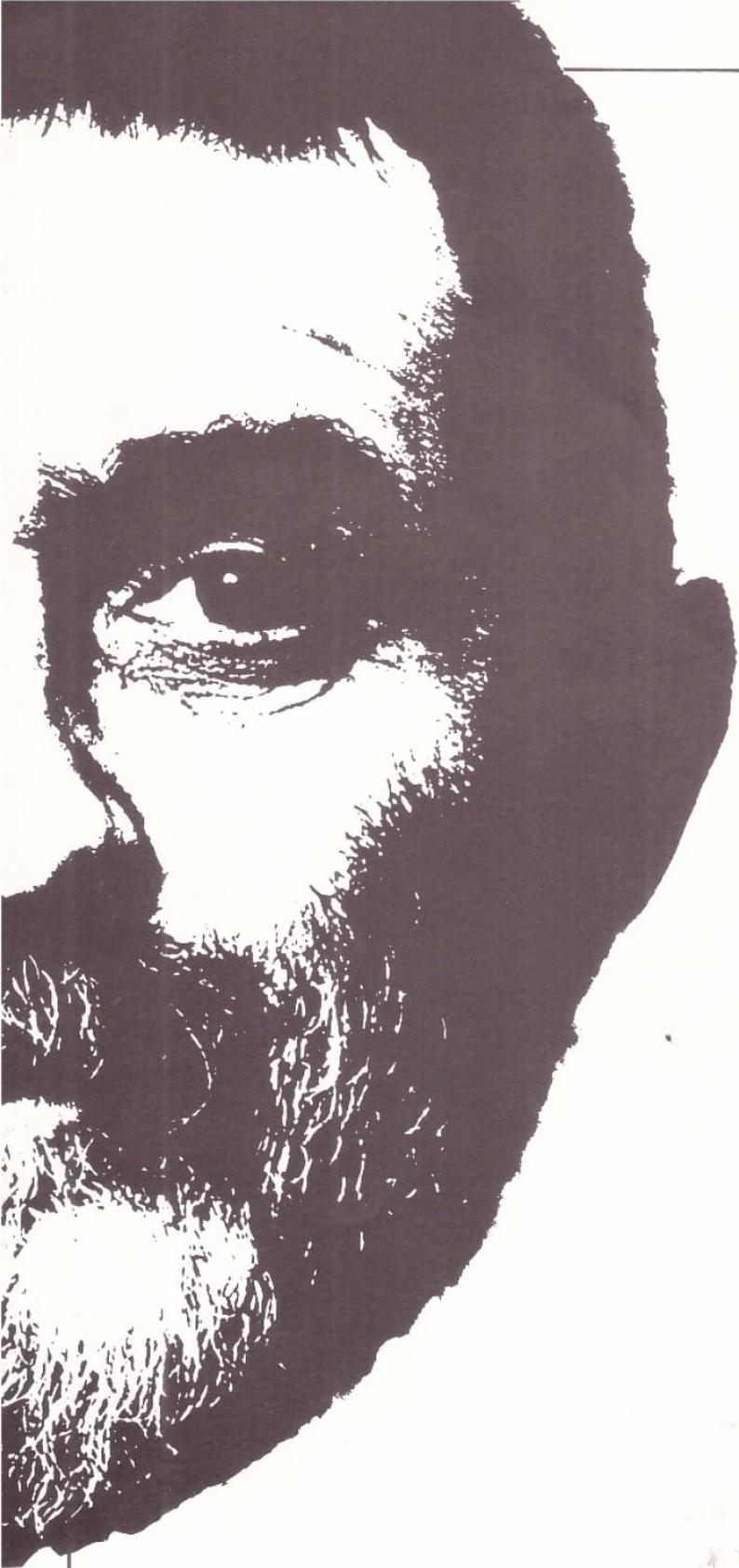
RĀKSHASA'S RING

B Y V I S A K H A D A T T A

THE ARTS THEATRE

DIRECTED BY ANTON PHILLIPS

Parminder Vir OBE BLACK & ETHNIC ARTS ARCHIVE
GLC
1981-1986
Working for London
archive.parmindervir.com



Background to the Play

Rakshasa's Ring (or *Mudra-rakshasa* in Sanskrit) is based on a period of history whose far-reaching consequences affected India's development right up to the present day. From our knowledge of Visikhadatta's status as an educated government official, we can presume that he was aware of the significance of this period, and with his interest in the "Artha-shastra" (Handbook of the King's Profit)* as well, that he was as much concerned with the politics of the play as with its worth as a work of art.

Chandragupta Maurya, and the Maurya dynasty as a whole, represented a vital change in the way India saw itself politically. From his meeting with Alexander the Great as a "stripling" in 326 B.C. through to his final victory over Dhana-Nanda in 321 B.C., he is just another ambitious young man taking advantage of people's dislike of a corrupt and despotic ruler to gain a small place in history. However, from 320 B.C., he expanded from the Nandas' kingdom to rule a previously unthought of area, eventually encompassing virtually the whole of the sub-continent, ending with the decisive defeat of Seleucus Nikator (the Greek ruler of Persia) in 303 B.C. This victory marked a turning point in his career, as he then concentrated on consolidating and administering his empire.

Chandragupta, with Kautilya advising him, by not going beyond India's natural boundaries created a precedent observed by Arrian, a Greek commentator of the time. "A sense of justice" he wrote, "prevented an Indian king from attempting conquest beyond the limit of India". This, coupled with religious tolerance (the first three Maurya kings were of three different persuasions), an efficient and wide-ranging administration and tax-system, and a period of over one hundred years in which there were no defensive wars, fomented the breakdown of tribal barriers and the creation of the *idea* of an *Indian* nation-state. That achievement was acknowledged in 1947 with the adoption of two symbols of Asoka Maurya (Chandragupta's grandson and a major figure in the early promulgation of Buddhism) as national emblems – the "chakra" (the wheel) on India's flag, and the three lions that are now the government's official seal.

It is clear that Chandragupta was to some extent the protege of Kautilya, his chief minister. Some historians have even seen the emperor as being his "puppet". There is also evidence that Kautilya had been a minister in Dhana-Nanda's court, and was exiled after an unsuccessfully attempted coup. The status of Rakshasa, however, is more uncertain. There seems to be no mention of him in historical records and his unlikely name leads one to believe that he serves as a theatrical device, particularly when one considers the play's use of double meanings and codes to convey important messages. Set against Kautilya's personal history, and the ferment of the time, this creates a fascinating piece of theatre.

*The play itself is clearly based on the "Artha-shastra". This book is a treatise on statecraft, similar to Machiavelli's "The Prince" in its advocacy of ruthless methods for the achievement and maintenance of power, and the candidness with which it expresses them, (for example, it suggests vast networks of spies monitoring everybody from the chief minister down to the common people in order to pre-empt any possible trouble). The book is commonly ascribed to Kautilya, though it evidently has been added to and edited in the version we have which was produced in c.400 A.D.

Chandra Sekar
The Roundhouse, 1986

Parminder Vir Dev
GLC
1981-1986
Working for London
archive.parmindervir.com

RĀKSHASA'S RING

by Visakhadatta

Directed by Anton Phillips

Cast

Rakshasa

Kautilya

Siddharthaku

Chandanadasa/Jiva Siddhi, a monk

Jajali

Emperor Chandragupta/Pupil

Servant of Rakshasa/Man in Park

Sakata Dasa/Vaihinari

Prince Malaya Ketu/Spy

Viradha/Wife of Chandanadasa

Wyllie Longmore

Renu Setna

Ronny Cush

Kaleem Janjua

Tony Wredden

Naim Khan

Anthony D Lennon

Elvis Payne

Aftab Sachak

Josephine Welcome

Designer

Lighting Designer

Production Manager

Stage Manager

Assistant Stage Manager

Props and painting

Costumes

Set construction

Administrator

Poster design

Printing

Marsha Roddy

Paul Armstrong

Witty Forde

Shangara Singh

Owen Case

Karen Wood/Cathy Ryan

Jo Staples/Glenda Whitehouse

J Warre/K Marples

Agnes Meadows

Jeremy Leslie

Holbrook Printing Co Ltd

There will be one interval of 15 minutes

The taking of photographs is not allowed

For their assistance, advice and time we extend our warmest thanks to:

Dr Bingle, The India Office, British Library

Timothy Wilcox, Indian Department, Victoria and Albert Museum

Drums supplied by Kudum, 164 Stockwell Road, London SW9



ANTON PHILLIPS *Director*

Anton Phillips initiated the idea of a Black Theatre Season in London's West End producing the last two seasons. He is co-ordinator this year for Black Theatre Forum. His production of *Two Can Play* (in the first season) transferred to the Theatre Royal, Stratford East where it had a very popular run. More recently he has been directing theatre-in-education plays for his company, Carib Theatre Productions and he has worked extensively as an actor in TV, theatre and radio.

WYLLIE LONGMORE

Born in Jamaica. Arrived in England in 1961. Trained at Rose Bruford College. Taught and directed in various London drama schools, and for four years in the Drama Department at Manchester University. Became an actor full time in 1981, since when he has done a couple of radio plays; had a minute part in a play on BBC2; spent three weeks with Leeds Playhouse Theatre in Education Company; worked at The Duke's, Lancaster, M6 Theatre Company, The Young Vic and Contact Theatre, Manchester. Most recent work: Jim in Trevor Rhone's *Two Can Play* at Liverpool Everyman, and the title role in Molliere's *Tartuffe* at Oldham Coliseum.

RENU SETNA

Renu Setna was born in Karachi (Pakistan) and came to Britain in 1950. Ten years later he won a scholarship to the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He has worked on radio, films and has over 250 TV performances to his credit. His work in theatre has been both extensive and successful and Anvil Productions (Oxford Playhouse) commissioned a play especially for him called *Trial Run* by Nigel Williams. He has also appeared in *The Indian wants the Bronx* (Glasgow, Guildford and London), *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (Cambridge Theatre), *On the Rocks* (Mermaid Theatre), *For the West* (Theatre Upstairs and Cottlesloe), *The Seed* (Studio Birmingham Rep Theatre), and, among many other theatrical performances he staged a special One-Man-Show, based on *The Prophet* by Khalil Gibran (Edinburgh Fringe Festival 1984).

RONNY CUSH

Theatre work includes the National Theatre in *Measure for Measure*, Old Vic, Bristol in *Night and Day*, Oxford Playhouse in *The White Devil* and he also played the leading role in *Br-Nanzi* at Nottingham Playhouse. Television work includes *The Bill*, *Frontline*, *By the Sword Divided*, *Minder*, *No Place Like Home*, *Tales of the Unexpected*, *Dempsey and Makepeace* and *Dr Who*. Film appearances include *Return of the Jedi* and *Britannia Hospital*.

KALEEM JANJUA

Kaleem Janjua trained at Northern College of Speech and Drama and took a Teacher's Certificate for drama specialists at Manchester College of Higher Education. He worked at the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, as an Asian Community Drama Worker. His professional work includes *Self Defence* (Crucible Sheffield), *Time*, *Gentlemen Please* (Coliseum, Oldham), *Proposal* (Theatre Royal, Stratford East). He has had many cameo parts on television including *Crown Court*, *Jewel in the Crown* and the *Black Silk* series. He will be seen shortly in a sit-com on ITV called *Langley Bottom* in a Central role. He is a devoted student of Eckankar, an ancient science of soul travel.

NAIM KHAN

Born in London, Naim has been working professionally for 5 years. He was involved in the formation of Tara Arts professional group. He has also worked with Live Theatre. TV

includes *Majdar* (Channel 4), and *Low Street* (BBC). This is Naim's first West End production.

ANTHONY D LENNON

Since leaving school, Anthony has worked with companies such as: The One-Off Krew; Activists; Old Vic Youth Theatre; Afro-Sax; Shiftwork; Carib Theatre; Two Tone; Four Seasons; Spring Theatre Group and Double Edge. Appeared in BBC TV's *Something's Burning*. Has taught Body Popping, Rapping and Breaking at Chelsea Dance Studios. Anthony also sings with a new soul group called *Take Five*.

ELVIS PAYNE

Elvis is a 27 year old Antiguan actor. He made his professional debut at the age of 13. Elvis became widely known as one of the presenters of the *Saturday Morning Show* for London Weekend Television. Other TV includes playing the lead in *Fords on Water*, seen last year on Channel 4. Of his many theatre credits, the most recent was *Split Second* at the Lyric, Hammersmith.

AFTAB SACHAK

Aftab trained at the Phildene Stage School. He appeared in several episodes of *Please Sir* (Thames) before moving to America where he played in various new works including the world premiere of *The Wall*, playing the Taxi Driver; Ishmov in *Shopping for Shoes* and R J Jones in *Penelope's Web*. He played a terrorist in *Barlow at Large* (BBC) and Jackson in *Topper* (Independent TV Film). He was recently at the Arts Theatre, London playing Feroze in *Vigilantes* and will shortly be seen in the new BBC series *King* in which he plays one of the leading characters, Riaz, for director Roy Battersby. He can also be seen as the Assassin in Kulwant Cambo's film, *The Last Days of Mahatma Gandhi*.

JOSEPHINE WELCOME

First appeared in *Pilgrim* a musical, touring with Prospect Theatre Co. Most recent theatre work has included *Gandhi* at the Tricycle Theatre, *Mother Courage* at Theatre Space, *Penthesilea* at the Gate Latchmere, *A Winter's Tale*, at the New End Theatre, and a double bill children's show *New Kid and Invisible Kid* at The Unicorn. Appearances on television: Indira Patel in *Agony* (LWT), The Mother in *An Arranged Marriage* (ATV/Central) and Miss Hassan in the second series of *Tenko* for BBC. To be seen in *Cat's Eyes* later this year. The one part Josephine Welcome has always wanted to play in the theatre is Mark Antony in *Julius Caesar* - "I'd change sex for it".

TONY WREDDEN

Tony Wredden started work as a professional actor in 1968. He has spent 10 years mainly in theatre, including repertory in Chesterfield, Chester, Greenwich, Windsor, The Tricycle and The Royal Court Upstairs. Associate Director of Unicorn at The Arts Theatre (1980-82). Television includes *Reilly - Ace of Spies*, *The Professionals*, *Mountbatten - The Last Viceroy*, *Honeymoon* (BBC Play for Today), *King of the Ghetto* and *Lovejoy*. Films - *Wildcats of St Trinians*, *Maila* (Channel 4), *Majdhar* (Channel 4) and *Lamb* (to be released this year).

MARSHA RODDY *Designer*

Marsha Roddy trained at Wimbledon School of Art. She has worked as a freelance designer on *No More Bribbles* for Bridge Lane Theatre, *The Tales of Hoffman* for London Opera West, *Barbarians* for the Man in the Moon, *The Girl Who Wished* for Carib T-I-E, *Slag* directed by Patti Love at the Drama Centre, co-designed *Intermezzo* at Greenwich. She is currently designing *Peacemaker* for the Unicorn Theatre.