

# Role of Aaj (Society of Visual & Performing Arts) in the Progress of Rajasthani Contemporary Art & Artist

## Abstract

Rajasthan has a great tradition of visual and performing miniature painting; architecture and the music from Rajasthan have already been acknowledged throughout the world. But unfortunately, the contemporary art traditions have not yet found their right full place in the history of Rajasthani art. Contemporary traditions are eroded by the influence of traditional paintings.

**Keywords:** Organization, Particularly, Recognized

## Introduction

'AAJ' was set up in 1979 by an organisation of eminent artists in the field of visual and performing arts.

The objective was to evolve an indigenous idiom for the contemporary Indian art. It was felt that to create a national culture, it was necessary to interact at the grass root level of society and assimilate the indigenous cultural experiences.

AAJ has been able to achieve this objective, Particularly in the field of painting, printmaking and theatre, AAJ has produced works which were results of a long drawn interaction with the rich traditions in the respective fields. These works have received acclaim at the national and international level for their freshness and ingenuity. Some of the members of AAJ, like Shail Choyal, Bhanu Bharti, Basant Kashyap, Kiran Murdia, Surjeet Kaur and Abbas Batliwala have been recognized for their distinct contribution in the field of visual and performing arts. AAJ has always aimed at this interaction between the present and past for the creation of a new future<sup>1</sup>.

In a short span of a decade, AAJ has carved out a place among the premier art institutions in the country. Apart from channelizing the energies of its members towards a pursuit of indigenous idiom of artistic expression, AAJ has also organized camps, seminars, symposia and workshops at the national level for wider interaction and participation. Even tribal performers and rural potters have been part of these interactions.

Today, AAJ has a full time theatre repertory, a graphic workshop and a rich documentation of folk and tribal arts and crafts available in the region of Mewar in Rajasthan. The society has also acquired an old Haveli in the heart of the city of Udaipur to house its various activities. The Haveli has an enchanting architecture and provides a magnificent view of the entire city<sup>2</sup>.

In future, AAJ plans to build a regular Art gallery a theatre, studios, workshops and archives. It also aims at regular theatre performances and art shows not only in Udaipur but other places as well.

P.N. CHOYAL<sup>3</sup> - b. January 4, 1924.

Painter, academician and educationist, P.N. Choyal had his early art education in the disciplines of wash, tempera and the miniature schools. After his diploma from Jaipur school of Arts he pursued his studies at J.J. School and then at the Slade College, London. Beginning from the miniature School, wash and tempera, he journeyed to the western academicism, impressionism and the stylised transformation of images. In seventies he evolved a style using thin lucid and luminous colors with controlled brush strokes. Thereafter, he painted series on the themes like women, window, wall, perceptions of Bundi, Udaipur, Chittor and Mandu, etc.

The stunned and shattered human bodies on his canvases appear to represent the modern world of violence and loss of human values. His women are middle aged. Obsessed with protruding tummy around which are thrown sarees carelessly hugging on to the round forms. He interpolates the tragedy of a woman's body and vehemently underlines the ugly truth.

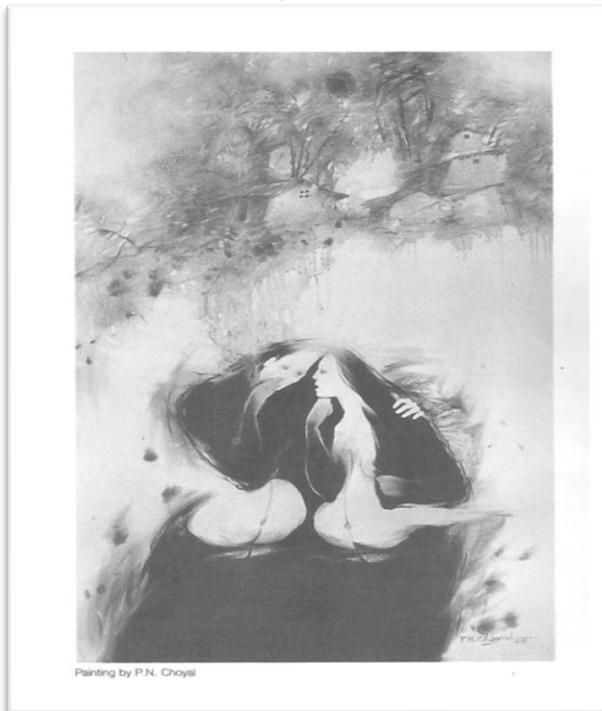
**Yogendra Singh Naruka**  
Lecturer & HOD  
(Drawing & Painting)  
Government S.A.L.P. Deaf  
Dumb Institution, Jaipur  
Rajasthan

**Rajiv Garg**  
Rtd. Principal,  
Govt. P.G. College,  
Tonk, Rajasthan

In perception series, he has painted the decaying past with a feeling of tyranny and bitterness creating a strong tactile and visual impact.

A veteran, P.N. Choyal has held several also shows in different capital cities of India, received ten prestigious awards including the Lalit Kala Academy award in 1987 and has participated in innumerable group shows in India, Algeria, Japan, Moscow, Sao Paulo, Lisbon and Cuba. He has extensively toured the European, Latin American, and the South East Asian Countries. He visited Bulgaria in 1968 as a cultural delegate and Cuba as an Indian commissioner in 1989.

He was the head of the Department of Drawing and Painting Sukhadia University, Udaipur, till his retirement as an associate professor in 1984.



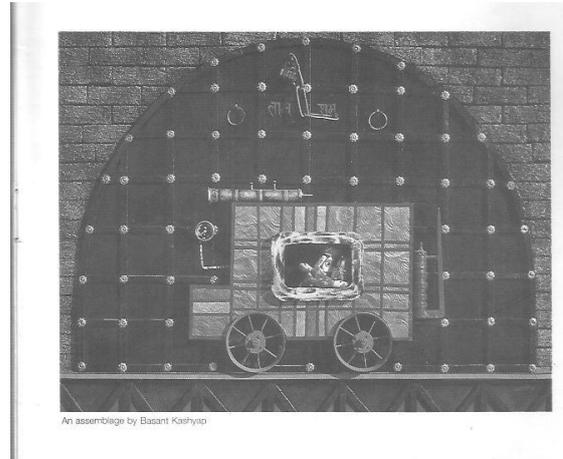
Painting by P.N. Choyal

### Basant Kashyap<sup>4</sup> - b. January 20, 1952

In a short time, Basant Kashyap has earned a considerable reputation in the Indian art world for his unusual compositions of robust, decorative and dramatic exuberance. He uses extremely simple imagery from the rural settings, but his treatment is dramatic. By mixing the real with the imaginary and melting the solid into abstract and turning the abstract into solid he achieves a surrealistic effect which is unique of him.

Kashyap acquired his Master's degree in painting from University of Udaipur in 1974. He has participated in several art exhibitions which include the shows abroad organised by National Gallery of Modern Art, 6<sup>th</sup> Triennale, and National exhibitions by LKA and all India Exhibitions. He has participated in several Art camps at various Places and has till now. Received 12 prestigious awards in different exhibitions. Including the Lalit Kala Award in 1986. Recently, he has been deputed as one of the

international Commissioners to compile Indian section by 7<sup>th</sup> Bushan Biennale Authorities, Korea.



An assemblage by Basant Kashyap

### Shail Choyal<sup>5</sup> - b. November, 9, 1945.

Painter, printmaker and a teacher, shall choyal is known for a distinctive miniature style of his own through which he has carved a niche for himself in the contemporary art scene in the country. Exploiting the inherent aesthetic motifs and the multitier division of space of Rajasthani traditional painting, he has evolved a nostalgic art with an utmost modern sensibility.

Having completed his Master's degree from the University of Udaipur. He went to study printmaking at the Slade College, London and after return to homeland did his Doctoral thesis on "Nathdwara Painting.

Recipient of the National Scholarship from the Ministry of Culture, and British Council Fellowship, Shail Choyal has won 22 awards in various prestigious exhibitions held in India, which include the National award from Lalit kala Academy, New Delhi. He has held several one man shows in India, London, France, U.S.S.R., and Indonesia. He has also participated in Group and Travelling Exhibitions held in Western and Eastern European Museums and Galleries organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, India Festival in U.S.A. India Through Prints, Tropen Museum, Amsterdam and several other prestigious and celebrated exhibitions like Cannes Sumer Festival, France, 3<sup>rd</sup> Havana biennale, Cuba, 6<sup>th</sup> Asian Art Festival, Tokyo, 1<sup>st</sup> Asian Art Festival, Indonesia, and International Exhibitions at Japan, Korea and Latvia.

He has extensively toured Europe, U.S.S.R. and South East Asia.

He has participated in innumerable Art Camps and Workshops in India, Indonesia and Soviet Union.



Oil painting by Shail Choyal

## Neel Kamal<sup>6</sup> – b. 1949

After obtaining M.A. in painting from the University of Udaipur, Neel kamal teaches art at a School in Udaipur. She was honored with the awards on Teacher's day in 1975 as well as women's year in 1975. She held her solo show in Agra and has participated in several art exhibitions and group shows since 1974

Neel kamal's imagery is derived from the simple life around her. She accentuates on blues, greens and yellows attempting to capture the mysterious impact of nature and its aesthetics.



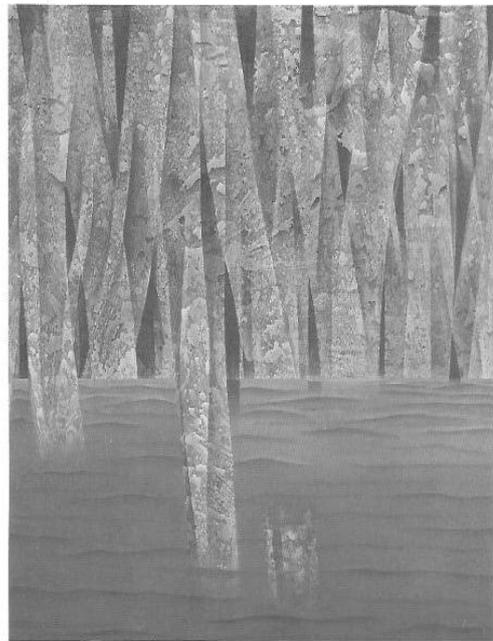
A painting by Neel Kamal

## Prabha Shah<sup>7</sup>-b. January 12, 1947

Prabha Shah has acquired a considerable place in the field of contemporary art scene of India. Deaf and dumb, Prabha Shah's soundless serenity, soundless turmoil and her innate tranquil vision reveals to us a

psyche of isolation. Her continuous search and yearning for the visual phenomenon of sound explores the truth which is unique in its sensibility. In the beginning her visual vocabulary was drawn from Rajasthani architecture and the human life around but with the passage of time, She developed and incessant love for the geometric and rhythmic patterns. The centrifugal points in her works are accentuated by an abstract delineation of tiny twinkling flora. Her compositions, therefore, have soothing and subtle nuances which enhance the aesthetic pleasure.

Prabha Shah has earned around fourteen awards and honors in different exhibitions and has held several individual and group shows in India and abroad. She also received a scholarship from the Ministry of Culture and research grant from Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi.



Painting by Prabha Shah

## Abbas Batliwal<sup>8</sup>-b. Sept. 18, 1959-Udaipur

Born in a business family, Abbas has astonished art lovers and fellow artists by his keen artistic expressions.

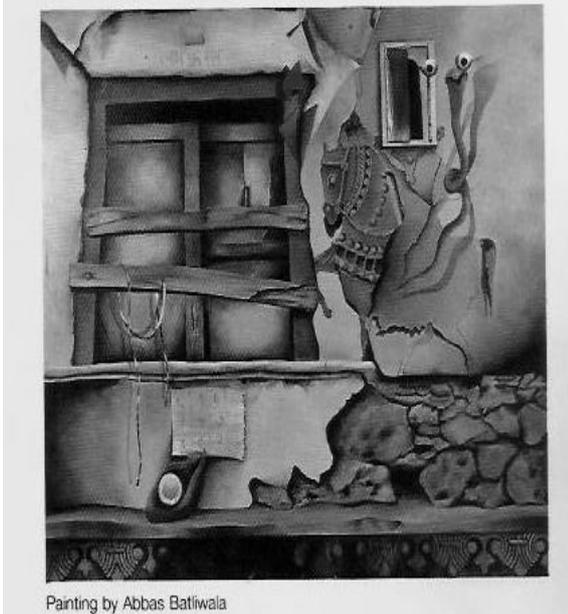
He journeyed from the abstraction to the present symbolic representational imagery deriving the inspiration from the tribal sculpture and rural setting. His palette is warm and lucid, the shapes are simple and bold, but unlike folk art his compositions are non decorative and complex.

His imagery is simple and easily found around the town of Udaipur. In his works, an archaic stiffness is affected with an arbitrary rejection of naturalistic drawing creating desired distortions.

Abbas acquired Master's degree from the University of Udaipur in 1980 and has earned some of the prestigious awards which include the VII Triennale

award. He has been participating in all the important exhibitions held in the country.

He is a freelancer with an incessant, unquenchable thirst for search.



Painting by Abbas Batiwala

### Surjeet Kaur<sup>9</sup> - b. September 24, 1948

A Photo realist, Surjeet Kaur attempts a psycho thematic expression through a very personal world of fantasy. Yet her paintings have a definite social comment. A very ordinary locale transcends into a rarer artistic experience.

After passing her post-graduation in painting in 1969 from the University of Udaipur, She pursued her studies at the M.S. Faculty of fine arts at Baroda. She has participated in all the major art exhibitions held in the country and has won awards at Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy, Academy of Fine Arts, Amritsar, mahakaushal Kala Parishad and "Nehru and Women" award conferred by the Airports Authority of India, New Delhi. She has attended several art camps and has toured several European countries.



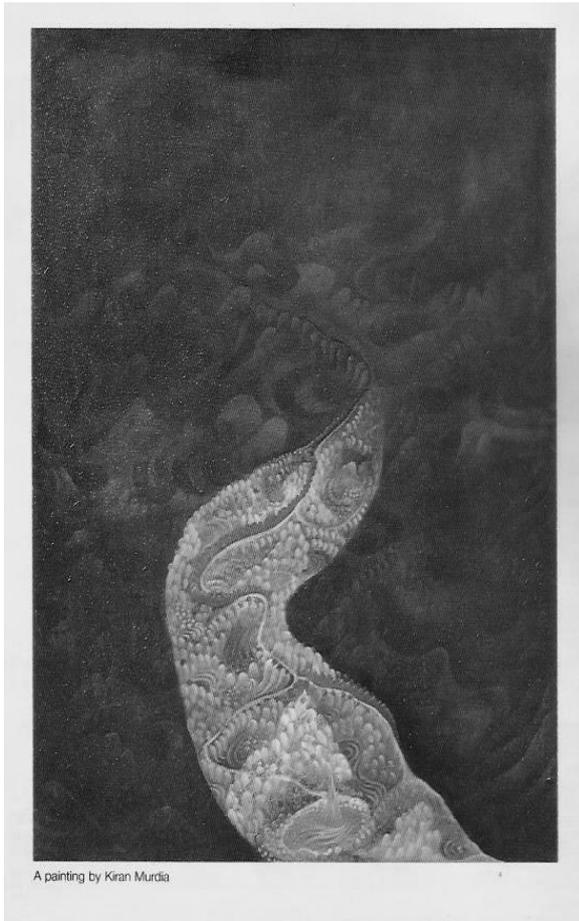
Painting by Surjeet Kaur

### Kiran Murdia<sup>10</sup> - b. March 26, 1951, Udaipur.

Over the years, Kiran Murdia has been able to develop a distinctive style of her own, mainly based on the inherent values of traditional Rajasthani painting. Through the subtle use of multitier perspective and miniature like delineation, she evokes the tender effect of nostalgia for a visionary romantic place i.e., Udaipur, which has nurtured her psyche, as well as personality. In her present works she has established intimate contacts with the beautiful objects such as hills, rocks, boulders, water springs, the flora and fauna of Udaipur region.

She received her Master's degree in painting from the University of Udaipur and has earned awards from Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy and National award from Lalit Kala Academy, new delhi.

She has attended several art camps and seminars, participated in 3<sup>rd</sup> Triennale, Bharat Bhavan Prints biennale, "Nature and Environment" exhibition on Nehru Centenary by LKA and Bangladesh Biennale. Recipient of the research grant by LKA in 1985-86, Kiran Murdia has workshops on print making convened by Prof. Piontack who, later, invited her for a solo show of her paintings and prints at Berlin.

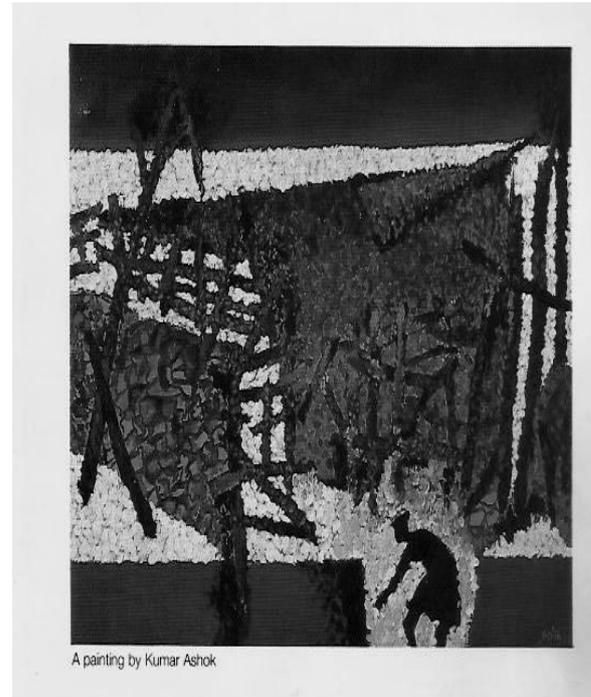


**Kumar Ashok<sup>11</sup>-b. 1961**

Kumar Ashok obtained his Master's degree in Drawing and Painting from Sukhadia University, Udaipur in 1984.

Since childhood, Ashok has helped his uncle in executing folk murals on the walls of Udaipur and had acquired a considerable spontaneity of brush and rhythmic vitality even before he started pursuing his studies in art. Using elephants, horses and fairies as his main motifs, Ashok has been able to blend beautifully the folk vigor in his paintings.

Ashok has participated in national and State Art exhibitions group shows and art camps. He has received the awards of Rajasthan Lalit kal Academy and inter-college competitions.



**Om Chauhan<sup>12</sup>-b. Jodhpur.**

Om Chauhan's Predilection for non-representational art vouch for intuitive search of expressive images which do not exist in the visible world. His imagery is the result of a spontaneous, intuitive and even accidental delineation. His ultimate interest is to create a language of pure form and color for which he has chosen the technique of viscosity.

Om Chauhan did his post-graduation in Drawing and Painting from University of Udaipur in 1978 and has taught art at the Department of Painting at Nathdwara College. He preferred to shift over to banking service for his livelihood and he has participated in all the known exhibitions including the National Exhibition of Art.



**Trilok Shrimali<sup>13</sup>-b. Kankroli, October 22, 1961.**

In Trilok's work, natural images are not the focus of interest. The motifs are broken up, stylized and attenuated and turned into almost all the All India Art Exhibitions, group shows and has won four awards in various competitive exhibitions.

Trilok Shrimali obtained his Master's Degree in Painting from Sukhadia University. He has been participating in almost all the All India Art Exhibitions,

group shows and has won four awards in various competitive exhibitions.

Trilok is a recipient of the cultural scholarship from the Ministry of Human Resources, Government of India. He has attended many Artist Camps also.

**Harsh Chhajed<sup>14</sup>-b. March 13, 1949.**

The elements of time, motion, space, optics and perception are the innate concerns of Harsh Chhajed who has a deep interest in optical art. His sculptures seem to lead to abstraction, yet, all his works evoke a unique reciprocation from the viewer. Mostly, his optical sculptures emerge from the pedestals but at times they also hang or protrude from ceilings or side walls. Harsh has always used monochromatic palette as principal colour for his paintings and sculptures. He creates multiple views and facades by using slopes, slants, cubes, cones and cylindrical shapes.

A self taught artist, Harsh Chhajed has exhibited in almost all the known exhibitions and has won awards. His works are in the collection of the National Gallery of Modern Art, Lalit Kala Academy, Rajasthan Gallery of Modern Art, Rajasthan Lalit Kala Academy, New Delhi, Hindustan Zinc Ltd. And in several private collections in India and abroad.

**Abha Murdia<sup>15</sup>-b. June 12, 1952, Udaipur.**

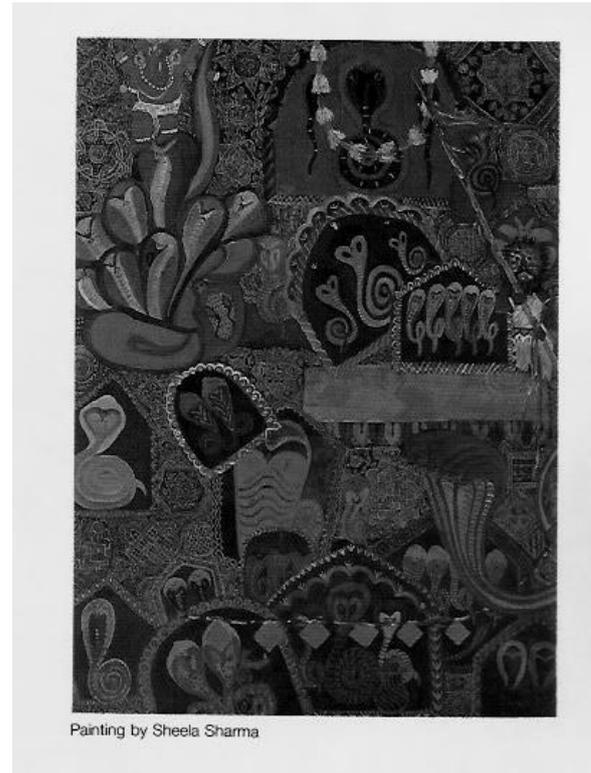
A Graduate in Philosophy, Abha Murdia developed an interest in drawing in the company of her painter sister, Kiran Murdia. She started drawing as a Sunday Painter, But got seriously involved. By 1983, She received the state Akademi Award and participated in several national exhibitions.

Abha draws her pen and ink drawings most minutely and with meticulous care. Unlike other figurative painters of AAJ she is abstract and non-figurative in her approach. One can read her work from corner to corner or cross to cross. Her tiny shapes created by the point of the pen spread on a wide field where the viewer's eye can wander through and form his own interpretation of each vertiginous shape. Abha has participated in several group shows and camps. She runs a commercial Art Gallery at Udaipur.

**Sheela Sharma<sup>16</sup>**

Sheela Sharma draws her imagery from the folk and tribal settings in Rajasthan. Being the wife of an anthropologist, she has had innumerable chances of wandering in tribal dwellings which inspired her creative imagination. Her delineations are bold and robust. Her preferences for linear delineations motivate her to build the archetype forms using almanac like ornamentation all over the picture surface. Her naïve treatment of figures evokes the ethos of folk and tribal vigor.

Sheela Sharma did her post-graduation in Fine Arts from Sukhadia University and her Ph.D. on the Arts and Crafts of Tribals in Southern Rajasthan.



Painting by Sheela Sharma

**C.M. Mishra<sup>17</sup>-b. 1938, Dehradun.**

A palynologist by profession, C.M. Mishra derives his interesting imagery from the genes and germicides. A painter, sculptor and a printmaker, Mishra fathoms into rhythmical movement of sperms transferring the linear shapes into solid forms. His expression interacotta is subtle, spontaneous and innovative as he finds clay most plastic.

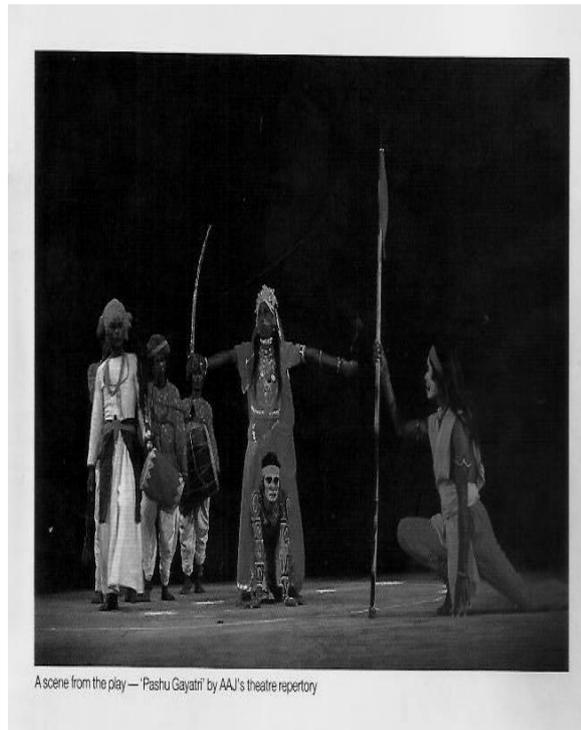
C.M. Mishra has held six solo shows at Dehradun, Sibsagar, Jodhpur and has participated in most of the exhibitions in India including the NEA. He has also served on the General Council of Rajasthan Lalit Kala Akademi.

**Bhanu Bharti<sup>18</sup> – b. 1947 Ajmer, Rajasthan**

most eminent people in the theatre world of India today, Bhanu Bharti was born in Ajmer, Rajasthan in 1947. After graduating from the National School of Drama, New Delhi, in 1973, he studied traditional Japanese theatre in the University of Tokyo.

AAJ is not merely his theatre group, it is also his mantra for life, a continuous struggle for interpretation and creation. With over fifty productions to his credit, and a long string of honours, including the Sangeet Natak Academy Award, Bhanu Bharti does not cease to experiment. And his dedication to theatre does not fail to inspire. "Look at me," he says—"three decades and still struggling."

Bhanu Bharti has directed several national cultural programmes such as the mega event in Delhi's Vijay Chowk on the 50th Anniversary of India's Independence, the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas celebrations for the Indian diaspora in 2006, the Bharat Utsav in Delhi for the celebration of India's 60th Anniversary of Independence, etc.



A scene from the play — 'Pashu Gayatri' by AAJ's theatre repertory

Every year, Aaj Theatre Company has been presenting a theatre festival of its own productions in Delhi. Its reputation has spread internationally and Bhanu Bharti is now viewed as one of the most innovative directors of his time.

#### Reference

1. Shail Choyal, Kal-Katha, Disha Natya Sanstha and AAJ, Udaipur, 1999, p.9
2. Shail Choyal, Udaipur ek Kalaitmak Smwad, AAJ, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1995, p.4
3. Rekha Pancholi, Kala admi ko abhivyakti deti hai- Parmanand Choyal, Aabhar-State Academy of Art, Jaipur & West Zone Cultural Center, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1998, p.41-49
4. Narendra Estwal, Basant Kasyap ke Abhinav Paryog, Aakriti News Bulletin -State Academy of Art, Jaipur, Rajasthan, May-1992, p.7-8
5. Dr.Mamta Chaturvedi, Samkalin Bhartiya Kala, Rajasthan Hindi Granth Akadamy, Jaipur, 2008, p.112
6. AAJ Brochure, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1994, p.4
7. Vikram Dutt, Rango ke jariye Prbha Shah, Aakriti-State Academy of Art, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Nov.-Dec.1992, p.4-5
8. Dr.Sumahendra, Rajasthan ka Samsamyik Kala Aandolan, Aakriti Yearly-State Academy of Art, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 1991-92, p.67
9. Narendra Kumar, Canvas ki sima ko todne ka upkaram, Aakriti-State Academy of Art, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Dec.1991, p.7
10. Dr.Devdatt Sharma, Prakriti ke virat roop ka amurt chitran, Rajasthan Sujas, Department of Information and Public Relationship, Jaipur, Rajasthan, Oct.2000, p.76
11. Editor- Samuel Abraham, AAJ, AAJ Publication, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1990, p.18
12. Editor- Samuel Abraham, AAJ, AAJ Publication, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1990, p.19
13. AAJ Brochure, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1987, p.7
14. Dr.Vidhyasagar Upadyay, Rajasthan ke Rang, Jwahar Kala Kendra, Jaipur & State Academy of Art, Jaipur, Rajasthan, 1998, p.65
15. Editor- Samuel Abraham, AAJ, AAJ Publication, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1990, p.23
16. AAJ Brochure, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1994, p.4
17. Editor- Samuel Abraham, AAJ, AAJ Publication, Udaipur, Rajasthan, 1990, p.25
18. Om Saini, Rang Karam ke Pryay-Bhanu Bharti, Rajasthan Sujas, Department of Information and Public Relationship, Jaipur, Rajasthan, July-2012, p.58-59