

*Hi, I'm Ralph Yarrow, and I've worked with Jana Sanskriti for a couple of decades and more, doing workshops, editing Sanjoy's two books published by Routledge, plus the book on their ground-breaking production of Ibsen's A Doll's House; and writing the Routledge Performance Practitioners book on them (Jana Sanskriti: Performance as a New Politics). I've just been with them again and as always, seeing their work in action is inspiring.*

*As you can see from the brief summary of Jana Sanskriti's work presented here - and many of you will know from seeing it onsite - Jana Sanskriti has worked for over 35 years with rural communities in the very fraught political circumstances of the huge and complex state of West Bengal. Their work has led to radical change in community life, political structures, gender balance and agency. At the same time their engagement with indigenous dramaturgical practices has assured accessible, vibrant and evocative theatre work which has led to this profound rebalancing of community and equally profound validation of the individual intelligences which constitute it. Furthermore, Sanjoy and Sima's insightful and innovative reorientation of key aspects of Augusto Boal's Forum, Image and Legislative Theatre work has proved itself practically and pragmatically over and over again in the contexts of their Indian work, and also been widely recognised across the globe as fundamental to the understanding and delivery of how theatre process can restore and recognise the vital importance of embodied relationship at all levels of human society. What they and the Jana Sanskriti teams which they have nourished have achieved, is to anchor a caring practice of the body as the spiritual foundation of an activist ecology of learning, collaboration and challenge.*

*They don't stop.*

*In addition to maintaining the many 'satellite' teams throughout the state which they have trained and support, and overseeing the network of committees and community structures which have emerged from these and which underpin ongoing action, they are currently involved in new ventures:*

- *Working with a theatre group on culture, mythology, ecology and sustainability in the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans;*
- *Storytelling and performance interventions with adolescents in Purulia and South 24 Parganas, where art teachers (trained by JS) run weekly sessions for 15–19-year-olds to develop social and performative skills (art, dance, etc.), leading to 3-monthly festivals. The focus is on identifying and engaging with caste/patriarchy/religion etc. in order to develop questioning in and with community;*
- *Following their success with a Bengali version of Ibsen's A Doll's House (Khelar Ghor), preparing a further application to the Ibsen Foundation to develop a Bengali Forum version of Ibsen's an Enemy of the People, in the context of political corruption, entrepreneurial operation and media complicity in India;*
- *Delivering a series of workshops for the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation in other Indian states, introducing TO methods into social programmes/groups.*

*If you think 'theatre matters' (to quote the title of one of the seminal books on applied theatre co-written by Jane Plastow), Jana Sanskriti's bases in Badu and Digambapur, both of which as participants in the Muktadhara festival you will spend time in, are the place to experience what this means as a practice and as a lifelong commitment. Muktadhara also offers very specific training in the detailed practice of 'scripting the play' which has supported this kind of work in real-life applications. It works because it has been tested in those contexts, and you will also have the chance to see it and be a part of it in the (totally non-touristic) settings in which it occurs.*