

MATSYAGANDHI

M.Sajitha



Portraying the pangs of a fisherwoman

- a one-act solo play on the travails of women from fishing communities
- Portrays the hapless fisher women are left to bear the brunt of the atrocities forced on their community by the ships owned by corporate giant
- explores the life of the fisherfolk who loses their connect with the sea at a time when the natural resources are being converted into commodity.
- The protagonist in the drama reflect the laments of the community.

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- Sajitha connects the myth of *Matsyagandhi* with a real-life incident which had acted as the major inspiration for the script—the rape of a woman in a fish market in broad daylight.
- “When I heard about this incident, I knew I wanted to do a play about her,” recalls Sajitha.
- The play also shows how the lives of fishers are being decimated by sea-walls and boundaries that cut them off from the sea, which they regard as their mother and is their primary source of livelihood.

Context

- The play was the outcome of an international collaborative theatre project, the Theatre for Africa project, that Sajitha was invited to participate in
- This was a part of the Earth Summit 2002 held in South Africa and focused on sustainable development in fishing communities.
- Six actors, including Sajitha, from six continents were invited to be a part of the project.
- During the nearly six-month duration of the project, the actors first performed for a month the solo performances that each had developed

The Relevance of the title *Matsyaganddi*



- **Satyavati** was the queen of the Kuru king Shantanu of Hastinapur and the great-grandmother of the Pandava and Kaurava princes
- She is also the mother of the seer Vyasa, author of the epic. Her story appears in the Mahabharata, the Harivamsa and the Devi Bhagavata Purana.
- Daughter of the Chedi king Vasu (also known as Uparichara Vasu) and a cursed *apsara*(celestial nymph)-turned-fish Adrika, Satyavati was brought up as a commoner – the adopted daughter of a fisherman-chieftain Dusharaj(who was also a ferryman) on the banks of the rivers Yamuna.
- Due to the smell emanating from her body she was known as *Matsyagandha* ("She who has the smell of fish"), and helped her father in his job as a ferryman.

- As a young woman Satyawati met the wandering rishi (sage) Parashara, who fathered her son Vyasa out of wedlock.
- The sage also gave her a musky fragrance, which earned her names like *Yojanagandha* ("She whose fragrance is spread for a *yojana* (8-9 miles)") and *Gandhavati* ("fragrant one").
- Later King Shantanu, captivated by her fragrance and beauty, fell in love with Satyawati. She was allowed to marry the Emperor Shantanu; by her fisherman father on a condition that her children with the emperor will inherit the throne, denying the birthright of Shantanu's eldest son (and crown prince) Bhishma.



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