

The Tradition of Hindi Theatre Criticism: An Overview*

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I

Theatre criticism, responding to and evaluating the play as script, as production (involving stage design, lighting, costumes, make-up, sound and music, etc.) and in terms of audience reaction, the three essential ingredients of the theatre experience as a whole, begins only after the work is done; and develops over a period of time, with the development of theatre in a particular region or culture. A particular tradition of theatre criticism evolves with the objects or experience that it evaluates, and acquires and defines its concepts and positions in the process.

Any critic, in any area of art and literature, must have a real knowledge of the subject, a feeling for artistic values, and an unbiased critical capacity. Theoretical knowledge must be enlivened by a capacity on the part of the critic to surrender to the experience of the art object and be absorbed in it. While these are features that are essential equipment for any critic, the evaluation of performing arts presents some more particular problems. A painting or a piece of sculpture or a book comes to the spectator or reader after the artist or the writer has completed his job, and the viewer or reader is free to appreciate and evaluate it as a finished product already located in eternity, whereas in the performing arts, the art object is in the making right in the presence of the audience, and one is expected to enjoy and appreciate the art as it is being created, being born, during the performance. As a matter of fact, a live performance is unique; it is not the same on every occasion. It changes from performance to performance in quality and intensity from several external and internal factors. The artist may be indisposed, may be happy or unhappy for some reason, his accessories may not come up to his satisfaction, the surroundings may not be congenial and, above all, the audience may not be receptive and he may find it difficult to give his best on a particular day. The same is true of the spectator and the critic also. For various reasons he may be disturbed, inattentive or distracted and may not be able to concentrate. One can thus see how difficult it is to evaluate a performance. Over and above these, there are personal values, commitments and positions that come in the way of an objective evaluation. As a matter of fact, there can be no totally objective criticism. One can only expect a good critic to rise above his personal bias as far as possible and look at things as they are and try to identify with the point of view of the playwright and the director in case of a theatrical performance and not press upon the production his own personal, political or ideological view. It is an uphill task but a critic has to aim at this.

It is against this broad critical ideal that we propose to study the tradition of theatre criticism.

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icism in Hindi, as it surfaces in the more substantial pieces of critical writing than in the cursory newspaper reviews that usually appear the morning after the show, and are hasty observations and first impressions that may or may not be correct. While the widespread staging of plays in the modern sense goes back in India to the middle of the nineteenth century, the modern Bengali theatre began in 1795, and in the Hindi belt modern theatre started with Bhartendu Harishchandra (1850-85). Though *Nahush* (1857) by Girdhar Das, and *Jānakimangal* (1876) by Shitala Prasad Tripathi had been staged somewhat earlier, for all practical purposes it was with the plays of Bhartendu that people were first drawn towards theatre activity. Lala Shrinivas Das, Balkrishna Bhatt and Radhakrishna Das were among those who joined him and carried on his work till the turn of the century. During this period, there were two clear divisions in the theatre world—the professional Parsi Theatre and the amateur. Amateur performances were held rarely, but whenever they took place, it was with great enthusiasm and pomp and show. They were covered by the newspapers and magazines published in the city where the performance took place or occasionally even elsewhere, thanks to some friend of the group associated with some newspaper being published somewhere else. When there was no newspaper or magazine in the city concerned or no friend elsewhere the performances did not get any coverage and remained only in the memories of the spectators till they went into oblivion in due course. Under the circumstances very little evidence of theatre criticism is available to us from the period under review, though we can form a notion on the basis of whatever scanty material we possess. *Hindi Pradeep* (1877-1910), the Hindi monthly published from Allahabad, makes a few references to plays between 1878 and 1903. Most of these articles/notes criticize with great severity performances by Parsi Theatre companies for the cheap entertainment that they offered and the way they corrupted the good taste of the people. The critic does not deal so much with the content or the production style but concentrates on the ill-effects that they would plague society in general with. Truly speaking, this attitude prevailed till when Moolight in Calcutta, the last Parsi theatre company, closed down in 1968. It is only in the last two decades that the acting style and rich production qualities of the Parsi plays have received sympathetic and serious attention.

In the January 1880 issue of the *Hindi Pradeep* there is a news item about the staging of *Randheer Prem-mohini* at Allahabad. The critic writes:

Millions of thanks to God by whose grace the members of the Prayag Arya Natya Sabha were inspired again to put up a play. The performance took place last month on Saturday, the sixth December, at the Railway Theatre. By a stroke of good fortune all the factors that make for good staging came together. As recognition of this achievement, Bhartendu Harishchandra came down from Benaras to witness the performance. Not only this, even the writer of the play came down from Delhi. The joy one feels at the revelation of real talent in a society is such a reward in itself that the distance of 600 miles did not daunt the playwright in the least. One does not need to describe how well the play was produced, because most of my readers would know that anyway. Still one has to recognize the worth of the portrayal of the wickedness of Sukhbasilal, the Marwariness of Nathuram and the naturalness of Jeewan. The *karuna* [compassion] in the fifth act did not quite surface, but at the close of the programme the staging of *Andher Nagari*, a *prahasana* in Parsi style, by the members of the group, compensated for the above shortcoming. All this was the achievement of the labour and hard work of Babu Durgacharan Banerjee and Pandit Udayram. So let the burden of our thanks rest on them.

[*Hindi Pradeep*, January 1880]

There are two or three points to note in the above piece. The critic appreciated the total impact of the play and though he criticized the lack of *karuna* in the fifth act, he approved of the inclusion of *Andher Nagari* staged in Parsi style. Obviously, critics in those days were against only the content of the Parsi plays and not the style. The use of the word 'again' in the beginning itself shows that the Prayag Arya Natya Sabha was staging plays from time to time and had a hold on the attention of contemporary society.

In the other Hindi-speaking regions plays were staged here and there from time to time. Bhartendu himself is once supposed to have acted as Lakshmana in the Ramlila of Ramnagar when the chosen actor had failed to make an appearance; and also to have played Harishchandra in Balia in his own play *Satya Harishchandra*. But Babu Radhakrishna Das (1865-1907), his first cousin and first authoritative biographer, who had spent most of his time working on Bhartendu's work and life, does not mention either of these incidents and as such one wonders whether these actually took place. There are very few references available to Bhartendu's plays being staged in the nineteenth century.

We have ample evidence of regular tours by the Parsi theatre companies in different parts of the country in the latter half of the nineteenth century. An entertaining story, light songs, humour and satire, cheap jokes, grand scenes and backdrops, and stage magic made people run after these. Wherever they went, they minted money, but the leaders of society were severely critical of these companies. One feels like quoting from a note published in *Hindi Pradeep*, April 1883, as a representative instance of this line of moralistic criticism.

The Parsi theatre was in full flourish this month in the town. The shows were held daily throughout the month. There were many who pawned their belongings to see the shows. The brokers, hawkers and other petty businessmen would hand over their whole day's hard-earned income to the Parsi *pandas* of the Parsi theatre just as the devotees part with their four annas for offering a calf in a holy place. It was suffocating from the heavy rush, people were on the point of choking from thirst, but there was not one who would leave the auditorium before the show was over. There was a lot of disturbance and hooliganism every time the curtain came down at the close of a scene. The play being cheap and entertaining, the hooligans of the city outnumbered the cultured and honourable gentry of the community. These Parsi companies have turned a powerful and effective medium for educating society like drama into entertainment provided by prostitutes and jesters. Theatre companies are interested in making money only and they do that by visiting the city once or twice in the year. In return they leave the people bent on mischief. They have no concern for the language either. By staging plays ourselves, we wanted to put a check on these cheap performances and turn the community towards good cultured entertainment, but how can our educative plays attract the general public when competing with the show-business and light entertainment of the Parsi plays? Plays done by the Bengalis are definitely praiseworthy. The National Theatre from Calcutta on its one or two visits to this city have given us proof of their good taste in both acting and productional values in sharp contrast to the way these Parsi companies have corrupted theatre and made it harmful to society.

Side by side with the criticism of the performances, theoretical criticism too made its appearance in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Bhartendu himself wrote a short book entitled *Natak Athawā Drishya-kāvya Vivechan* (Benaras: Medical Hall Press, 1883) on the basis of his close reading of a number of Sanskrit and English texts that included, by his own acknowledgement, the *Dasharūpaka*, the *Nāṭyashāstra*, the *Sāhityadarpana*,

the *Kāvya prakāśha*, Wilson's *Hindu Theatre*, *Lives of Eminent Persons, Dramatists and Novelists*, *History of the Italic Theatres* and *Aryadarshan*. Bhartendu had taken this task upon himself to educate the Hindi-speaking population in the aesthetics of theatre. How open-minded and generous Bhartendu was in his views is borne out by observations as the following:

Plays based on Western models and quite common in Bengal come under the category of the modern. The basic difference between the modern and the ancient lies in the continuous changes of setting. With this purpose, the playwright divides the act into different scenes because showing of different scenes has become very important these days. If the play covers five years of time the acts and scenes should be divided as follows — one act for every year and all the different incidents taking place during that year to be put in different scenes . . .

In the olden days, the playwrights used to write in tune with the condition and tastes of the people around them and thus entertain them. But in modern times the tastes of the playwrights and the people have changed a lot and as such it would not be sensible to write plays drawing on old ideas and principles...

It is not essential to abandon all the traditions and styles of the past while writing a play today, because all that goes with the taste and values of the modern people will remain acceptable to them. To establish the technical excellence of theatre, one should pay special attention to the period and the typical features of the characters of that period. The induction of supernatural or improbable incidents may not be as interesting to the modern spectator as it used to be in the olden day. . .

I am putting down below those of Mahamuni Bharata's rules for the writing of Sanskrit plays that have relevance for the writing of plays in Hindi and correspond to the taste of the audience of our times.

One can thus come to the conclusion that both theoretical and practical criticism of theatre were in vogue in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Society too was conscious of the importance of the writing and staging of plays, and saw in theatre a powerful agency for the enlightenment of society and the people. The critic would appreciate and support whole-heartedly whatever was conducive to such an assessment of theatre and would criticize severely whatever went against it. People were trying to understand the different aspects and technicalities of playwriting and play production and also wanted to give it a contemporary look and make it useful to society and the times.

II

The first half of the twentieth century was turbulent for the Indian people, Indian society and the country at large. After coming into contact with the British and the Western way of looking at life, the educated people of the country had started thinking anew. The importance of education was now widely accepted, and there was a systematic endeavour for the dissemination of education, which in its turn generated a fresh interest in different types of cultural activities and they soon came to contribute to their development. The religious and social reforms propagated by people like Raja Rammohan Roy, Swami Dayananda, Ramkrishna Paramahansadev, Vivekananda, Devendranath Thakur, and Vidyasagar had prepared the ground for a new sensibility and social concern. From the *Banga-bhanga āndolan* or the movement against the proposed partition of Bengal in 1905 till independence in 1947, the entire period was one of constant struggle, sacrifice, and a passion for building society anew and to live with solid ideals. The art and literature pro-

duced in India during this period echo this feeling and the Hindi belt was no exception to this. Calcutta was of course the major centre for all kinds of literary activities in the early twentieth century both in terms of quality and quantity. Writers, scholars and critics and editors like Bālmukund Gupta, Ambikā Prasād Vājpeyī, Banārsi Dās Chaturvedi, Shivapujān Sahay, Mādhav Shukla, Suryakānt Tripathi Nirālā and magazines like *Bhārat Mitra*, *Matawālā*, *Vishāl Bhārāt* etc. were products of Calcutta. Theatre activities in Hindi, both amateur and professional, were prevalent here. The last surviving Parsi theatre company Moonlight performed in this city till 1968. This is the background against which we will evaluate the theatre criticism in vogue during the period.

We have already taken note of the theatre activities in cities like Prayāg, Vārānasi, Calcutta, Bālīā etc. in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century it started taking a more definite shape. People started forming new institutions or groups in the first decade itself—Shri Jain Natak Mandali (1903), Shri Bhāratendu Nātak Mandali (1907), Shri Nāgarī Nātak Mandali (1906), all at Varanasi, and the Hindi Samiti (1908) at Calcutta were the pioneers in this project. Shri Ram Lila Natak Mandali started in Allahabad in 1898—lasting for ten years only—was also active during this period. The emergence of the Hindi Parishad in Calcutta in 1918 added to the Hindi theatre activities in the country at large. The main object of these theatre groups was not only to provide entertainment to the people but to educate them, to articulate a right way of thinking, to inculcate in them love for their country and to enlighten them in different ways. All these groups were amateur in character and would get together once in a year or two and stage a play on some occasion. Occasions varied—a session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, the annual session of the Indian National Congress, the annual function of the group itself or a fund-raising programme for some natural calamity like a flood or an earthquake could be an occasion for a performance. The people would take out some time in the evenings or nights after a whole day's busy schedule of work or business and assemble for the rehearsals. There were few rehearsals with the full cast. The Director had little to do with the production. Generally, there would be no Director and different individuals would take care of different aspects of production, such as the dress, the make-up, the settings, the music etc. One can well imagine what the productions would amount to under the circumstances. What gave importance to the production was the cast and the presence of celebrities in the audience. Though the basic purpose behind the staging of these plays was to enlighten society, we hardly find any reference to this aspect in whatever little criticism has come down from this period. It is a fact that very few reviews are available from this period. 'Hindi Nāṭya Jagat', an article written by Lakshmīkānt Bhaṭṭa and published in the *Vishāl Bharat* (year I, vol. I no. 3, Samvat 1984, corresponding to 1927-28), 'Adhunik Hindi Rangamancha' by Pandit Devendra Nath Sukul published in *Madhuri* (Magh, Samvat 1989, i.e. 1932), 'Hindi Rangamanch aur Uskā Bhavishya', published in *Veenā* (February 1932) are a few of the more important articles surveying the historical development of Hindi drama and theatre with reference to productions in different cities, often evaluated as successful or unsuccessful, and the people staging or performing in these plays appreciated or condemned according to their deserts. While Lakshmīkānta

Bhatta's article covered theatre activities in Allahabad, Sukulji's article focused on Varanasi and the article published in *Veena* centred on theatre activities in Indore, the critics naturally drawing on the theatre experience of the cities to which they belonged. We get an important piece of information from the article published in *Veena*, viz. that a Hindi play was staged by Sagun Vilās Sabha in Madras in 1931 on the occasion of Dashaharā. The article reported a performance of parts of *Durgadas* with Krishna Swami, an important official of the local Hindi Sabha, putting in a skilful performance in the female role of Mahāmāyā. Performers in the other roles included H. Ramarao, an eminent advocate, in the role of Durgādas, performing with beautiful *bhava-vinyas* and flawless Hindi pronunciation; K.P. Sarvottam Rao, also an advocate; and R. Krishnamachārya, B.A. as Gulnār. The article also refers to the establishment of the Nāṭya Parishad in Madras with a membership of 1500 people. The critic advocates theatre activities in all educational institutions, as "a proper aid to the proper understanding of the world".

In *Veena*, March 1932 again, an interesting article by Gopalram Gahamari, the noted writer, recalled that wit and humour of Pratap Nārāyan Mishra, the noted essayist, who made occasional appearances on the stage in comic roles. It was quite a common thing then to improvise new dialogues on the stage itself to make a display of one's own talent or supremacy. There was the occasion when a fellow actor on stage sang:

Where has my pack of snuff vanished? Where's my bottle gone?
That's what I have to take to run like a young pony.
Let's go to Delhi fast, to roam in the greenery there.

Pratāp Nārāyan Mishra, acting a fisherwoman, took it as a jest at his cost, and entered the stage, carrying the basket on his head singing:

The Brāhman, the Kshatriya, the Baniyā, the Agarwālās,
They are drinkers all
What bastard dares laugh at me, the fisherwoman?
Let's go to Delhi fast, to roam in the greenery there.

Actors like Mādhav Shukla (who shifted to Allahabad later) and Lalit Kumar Singh Natavar of Calcutta, Keshavrām Tandon, Govind Shāstri Dugvekar, Bīreshvar Banerjee of Vārānasi and Mādhav Bhatt of Allahabad figured in the evaluation of the plays as powerful actors but rarely was there an exhaustive evaluation of a play or the production. The article 'Prasādji-kā Chandragupta' by Thākur Mahadev Prāsād Singh published in *Sudhā* (16.4.1934) is extremely bitter, and damaging too, on the issue of the stageworthiness of the play *Chandragupta*. The writer is quite firmly of the view that the play cannot be staged and to press his point home he refers to the production by Ratnākar Rasik Mandal, Vārānasi. He says:

In the face of criticism for its inordinate length, Prāsādji himself shortened the play, retaining ten scenes in place of eleven in the first act, seven in place of eleven in the second act. The third act was kept as it was, whereas the fourth was totally omitted. Prāsādji himself wrote a farce to diminish the seriousness of the play but the

farce proved to be utterly worthless. It had no connection with the original text, yet it was pushed in between two scenes. The songs were changed. Only three were retained from the original, the rest of the twelve were new. The performance went on for 6-7 hours. People returned home at three in the night.

In a satirical vein, the critic suggests that the play could be put under the category of the *muktak*. He says:

Every scene stands independent. You can come in and leave at your wish, it won't make any difference. Even the chosen actors of Kashi could not make a success of the play. Whether it was because of the language, or the songs or lack of playwriting experience or acting or shortcomings in music or lack of emotions, there was one thing that was only too obvious, that *Chandragupta* is not at all suitable for staging. It was good that the generous actors and theatre lovers of Kashi proved this point once for all by spending so much of time, energy and money, and bringing this controversy to an end for ever.

The review of *Skandagupta*, another play by Prasād, staged on the occasion of the Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, published in *Madhuri*, November 1939, is equally harsh:

Skandagupta, a play by the late Prasādji, was very successfully converted into Nautanki [a folk form in a lighter and vulgar vein]. This Nautanki being literary, the big drums were not played. The person acting as Skandagupta was more like a eunuch and the others were only too close to the feminine gender. People reciting Prasād's poems seemed to be parodying them, the stage settings were barely a step ahead of Nautanki. I have a feeling that one needs to work harder than with other plays to make Prasādji's plays work on the stage. The actors spoke so loud that their voices could be heard at the Telegraph building outside—quite a distance away. The female characters, queens etc. looked like hobgoblins.

The controversy over the stageworthiness of his plays had surfaced quite often in Prasādji's lifetime itself. In utter disgust, he once said that it was more important for the theatre to develop to the point where it could cope with his plays than for his plays to be worthy of staging. It is more than fifty years now since Prasādji ceased writing plays, yet the controversy regarding the stageability of his plays rages still. Capable directors have taken up this challenge from time to time and have produced *Chandragupta*, *Skandagupta* and *Dhruvasvāmini*; the success or failure of these productions has been discussed every time but whenever directors have taken up the challenge, it has been more out of reverence for Prasādji than from inner urge and compulsion to do so. In my opinion, Prasādji's plays will always be a partial success on the stage because of their inherent structural flaws.

It is evident from the above pieces of criticism that in those days plays done by amateurs were amateur in every sense and not in any way like the more recent amateur productions which are done with professional proficiency. The people who staged the plays came to it for the sheer love of it or for some purpose and would spend as much time and energy as they could, and had the satisfaction that they were doing something useful for society. The success of a production in those days depended on powerful acting or powerful themes which were mostly mythological and historical. Actors revelled in ad libbing and throwing out lines on stage according to their sweet will, often slowing down or confusing a co-actor in the process. The critic would appreciate in superlatives or criticize the production without any consideration whatsoever. Truly speaking, there was little theatre activity in the Hindi region in the first half of the twentieth century and very little

authentic material is available about whatever activity there was. There is very little material available for reactions to performances by the Parsi companies, for educated and cultured people found it degrading and embarrassing to talk about them.

Some good examples of theoretical criticism from this period have been located in *Saraswatī* (1900), *Vishāl Bhārat* (1928), *Mādhurī* (1921), *Sudhā* (1927) *Veenā* (1926) etc. Two articles in this category, viz. 'Mrichchhakatik aur uska Rachanākāl kā Hindu Samāj' ('Mrichchhakatik and the Contemporary Hindu Society') by the famous linguist Bāburām Saxena, and 'Hindi-Nātak-Pātrōṅ ki Bhasha', by the famous grammarian Kāmātā Prasād Guru, both published in *Saraswatī* vol. 20 (1919), issues 4 and 6 respectively, deserve special mention. The articles show that scholars in other disciplines like literature, philosophy and history were equally interested in seriously discussing different aspects of playwriting and the language used in the plays. It is better to quote from the articles themselves.

Mrichchhakatik has a special standing among Sanskrit plays. Though it cannot claim the poetic beauty and the clever weaving of episodes as in Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* or the high pathos of the *Uttar-Rāma-Charita* by Bhavabhūti or the supreme patience of *Venisamhār* by Bhāṭṭanāyaṇ or the political dexterity of *Mudrārāshas*, yet it has its place with these and is read as widely as these. It draws its dignity mainly from the skill with which it slips into the text a portrayal of the then Hindu society. While in other plays kings and emperors appear as the central figures, *Mrichchhakatik* chooses an ordinary Brāhman for its hero. In other plays one would be taken around palaces and adjoining recreation grounds, whereas here the hero is content with a decrepit garden. *Mrichchhakatik* does not fulfil all the requirements of a full-length play, so it is regarded as a *prakarana* only; but that has helped the playwright who is thus enabled to write with greater freedom. The Western scholars have appreciated it more. The translations of Wilson and Rider are quite well known . . .

It is evident from this work that the state was prosperous and the people happy during this period. Prostitution, drinking and gambling, the natural voices of prosperity, were prevalent. Business was flourishing and the Indian businessmen owned ships. There were excellent arrangements for the security of the city, and thieves and bandits could not move about openly on the roads or in the lanes. The persecution of the police and their stratagems are not portrayed in the manner they are exposed in *Shakuntala*. At one place in *Mrichchhakatik*, Chandanak, a police official, goes to the length of releasing Āryak when he asks for forgiveness risking his own life in the process . . .

A lot of care and concern went into the administration of justice. The judges were not happy with their work and it was very difficult to find out the truth through evidence . . .

Everybody abided by the law and the judges had special authority to know the secrets. A culprit would have to admit his fault once the verdict was given on the basis of the evidence. There were different punishments for different crimes. The judiciary had to abide by the intricate rules laid down for them and they could not change the law according to their will. Assessors were also appointed but most of them would be only time-servers. People of the Kāyastha community would be employed in recording and documenting the legal process. Judges would prove the commission of the crime with the help of witnesses etc. They would send their observations to the king after this exercise and the sentence would be carried out only after the king had signed the order. The king was responsible for the security of his subjects, and had to function strictly according to the rules laid down by the scriptures. The king could be dethroned if he was found guilty of doing a wrong . . .

Gambling was widespread even then, but that was allowed only at specified places and under the strict supervision of specified officers.

Women were held in great respect and special care was taken to ensure that they did not suffer in any way. Men used to complain about their infidelity even then. The *pardah* was observed partially. Women from the upper strata of society did not seem to leave the house and would cover their faces before men from outside the family. Prostitutes could not enter the houses of the respectable . . .

Caste restrictions were not particularly rigid those days. . . . Brāhman would eat at the houses of bards and prostitutes. Brāhman even then were not inclined to take alms but there were still enough Brāhman who would

not hesitate to rush to a dinner invitation and would even compete with each other over eating. Religious rituals and *tarpan*s etc. were performed just like now. Women had great regard for fasting. There are references to *Abhiroopapatti* and *Ratna-Shashthi*. *Indramāh* and *Kāmotsava* are two festivals that are mentioned. Digging wells and tanks and laying out gardens (for the use of the common people) were considered acts of virtue.

Slavery was in vogue but the slaves were well provided with food and clothes. The money that they could collect would be theirs and they could gain freedom if the master so pleased on payment of a ransom for release.

There is a fine account of the art of stealing in this work. There were several books dedicated to this art in the olden days, going into points like appropriate time and place for stealing and the shape and size of the hole to be made. Such books are no longer available. There were masters who taught this art and some of them come to be mentioned in the play. Thieves used the sacred thread to measure the hole.

Shūdrak has thrown light on the history of the society of the time describing these in detail.

[*Sarasvati* vol. 20, part 4]

We rarely find such an elaborate and comprehensive study of the time, place and social background of a play by a critic. Shortly after this article came 'Hindī Nāṭak-pātron ki Bhāshā', an article written by Kāmata Prasad Guru. The points raised in this article do not relate only to the Hindi language or Hindi plays but have relevance for all Indian languages. Hence I would reproduce the complete text of the article. The article is important and the questions raised deserve consideration.

Speech Distinctions for Characters in Hindi Theatre

In Sanskrit, thoughtful and appropriate rules have been laid down for the speech practices of different types of characters in a play. Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi (Editor, *Sarasvati*) has compiled some of these in his book, *Nāṭya Shāstra*. Here are a few excerpts: 'In Sanskrit plays in accordance with their social classes, the characters were made to speak either in Sanskrit or in Prākṛit. Among the Prakrit languages Shauraseni, Māgadhī, Paishāchī and Mahārāshtrī were widely used. The hero, the sutradhar and highly placed learned people spoke Sanskrit: women used Shauraseni; servants Māgadhī, Rajputs and businessmen spoke Ardha-Māgadhī, the Vidushak, i.e. the Jester, spoke Prākṛit, while the ghosts, demons and uncivilized people used Paishāchī. Besides these the 'common men' characters used Drāvidī. Vālīhik, and Āvantik, depending on the regions they hailed from.

The author adds, 'These rules were meant for the olden times and cannot be followed now. Sanskrit is not much in use leave alone the use of old Prākṛit.' Dwivediji appears to be unhappy about the disappearance of these practices, yet he did not oblige us by suggesting in their stead a modern form. As for the modern use of languages he has only indicated that in a play the characters ought to use a speech befitting their situation in life. This short article of mine seeks to fill in that gap left by Sri Dwivedi. The use of the word 'situation' above suggests that the speech spoken by a character should relate not only to the temporal period the character belongs to, but also to the educational and social situation of that character. We can discuss on the basis of the above rules the issue of the speech the characters of the Hindi theatre speak.

We ourselves do not know whether the speech used in Sanskrit plays was that of the period to which the characters belonged or of the playwright himself. But while reading the majority of the Hindi plays in print, one sees that the playwrights have used contemporary speech even for characters from two thousand years ago. In a way it is the right approach; because it is difficult to know the speech of those old times. Therefore we shall presume that the characters will speak the language spoken in the period of the writer and the same shall be modified according to the 'situation' of the character. All that we should be concerned with is whether the characters in Hindi theatre speak the language according to their 'situation' or not.

In the Hindi plays of today, all characters starting from a king to a pauper and an old man to a toddler speak a language moulded in the same cast. The 'gatekeeper' in Raja Laxman Singh's play *Shakuntala* speaks a Hindi so chaste that even Hindi scholars of modern times will be put to shame. Similarly the old gossip maid-servant (Kutni) in Babu Radha Krishna Das's *Maharana Pratap Singh* blurts out in such Persian that I cannot resist quoting her, addressing Prithviraj's Queen:

Acchha Huzoor, ab idhar mulāhizā farmāyen. Yeh jauhrin ki dukān hai. Kaise kaise bebahā jawahirāt raunak bakhsh hain ki jinki chamak se sārā bāzār khil raha hai. (*Laughing and looking at the direction of Jauhrin*) Aur bi jauhrin ne to apne yakutlab jauhar-dāndanki āb ke āgey sabko māt kar rakhta hai.

The most difficult point to decide about Hindi plays is what language should be spoken by characters whose mother tongue is other than Hindi. In the play *Veer Puja*, a non-resident Bengali speaks Hindi just the way any Bengali person would, i.e. a Bengali-Hindi. But in the same play the Marathi characters speak pure Hindi. Now if a Bengali speaks Bengali-Hindi then logically a Marathi from Pune should speak Marathi-Hindi. In the given situation either all non-Hindi-speaking people should speak correct Hindi or each one should speak Hindi with the natural mistakes and touches of their respective mother tongues. One should give serious thought to this. However, if only one of the characters speaks an affected language in order to provide humour then it could be accepted.

The biggest problem is whether the Muslim characters should speak chaste Hindi, chaste Urdu or a hybrid language. In the play *Veer Puja* referred to earlier, Aurangzeb speaks to his sister in chaste Hindi:

Mere adharm sé! Mere adharm sé! Mugaloñ ki kirti ko mitānewali, Mugaloñ ki gaurav-lakshmi ka satyanāsh karnewali pāpin! Mere adharm sé!

It might appear to be strange to some that Aurangzeb could or did actually speak this kind of language. People from different parts of the land may speak a few words of Hindi but not Muslims. Therefore it sounds extremely odd to hear a Muslim speak in chaste Hindi. Only when a Muslim character happens to have learnt Hindi, is sympathetic towards the language and is not prejudiced against the Hindu religion, then a few words of Hindi coming from him may be acceptable. Going by the above notion, the character of Emperor Akbar may be permitted to use Hindi especially since he is considered to be a poet in the Hindi language as well. . .

The writer will face problems in determining the language of a character if he happens to be a Muslim of the opposite camp. Those writers who know Urdu shall not have any difficulty but what about those who don't? How will they use the correct dots? In any case, it is important to be absolutely careful while choosing the language to be spoken by the characters of a play.

The Hindi playwrights have also not put in any effort to determine the language of people from the lower strata of society. The lack of authentic speech in our plays becomes even more glaring in the case of such characters. In real life they either speak a regional dialect or a hybrid with frequent use of Hindi as is often found in the poetry of today. Besides, their unmixed regional or mixed speech has such a large proportion of the 'accepted language' that it can even baffle a grammarian. Despite this they are made to use the most artificial speech in the plays.

Sometimes European characters are introduced into Hindi plays. In the play *Maharana Pratap Singh* a Portuguese tells Akbar—

Khodāband, am Portuguese hai. Amārā nām Augustine hai. Amārā Goā ke Governor-né amko hujoor ke liye bahut sā najar lekar bhejā thā. Rāh mein Udaipur ke Rana-ne amko loot liyā, bolā amārē sivāyé bādshāh kaun hai; yeh najar amārā hai.

Here the European accent of the character suits the situation but he has been given by the playwright a grammatically correct language which is inappropriate. Foreigners not only speak a language affected with their native accent but also use a grammatically incorrect language. In any case such a language produces much needed humour in a play. Similarly it will also not be improper for a Muslim character to use a few mispronounced Sanskrit words.

The above scattered thoughts have been humbly presented before the playwrights in the hope that they follow some principles while determining the speech of the characters in their plays.

[Translated from Hindi by Yama Shroff]

In this context 'Bangeeya Rangamancha', an article written by Shivapūjān Sahay (*Mādhuri*, August 1927), deserves mention. The writer describes at length the high standards of the Bengali theatre and its actors and expresses regret over the condition of the Hindi stage which had few good plays to be staged anyway and even when there was a good production to appreciate or even talk about the fine actors there was none who surfaced in such a production. He resents the fact that stills of the performance and the per-

formers never appear in print. He says that these are things that encourage the actors, hence these should be ensured. The Nāṭya Parishad of Prayāg staged *Satya Harishchandra* on the occasion of the fifth Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan at Lucknow. Māhadev Bhaṭṭa, son of Balkrishna Bhaṭṭ in the role of Pāp and Mudrikā Prasād in the role of the Chāndāl put in excellent performances. The group of Mādhav Shukla again staged *Mahabharat* on the occasion of the sixth Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan. Shuklaji as Bhima, Rasbehāri Shukla as Duryodhan and Māhadev Bhaṭṭ as Dhritarāshtra performed well. But it is a pity that no detailed reference to these are available anywhere. The comedian Jagannath Prasad Chaturvedi, and G.P. Shrivastava, Madhav Shukla, Ishvari Prasad Sharma, Sūryakānt Tripathi Nirālā are among the finest actors of the early Hindi theatre. Photographs of renowned playwrights in Hindi are also not available. It is a fact that Hindi actors were greatly influenced by the Pārsi style. The author found some actors of the Bhārtendu Nāṭak Maṇḍali showing extraordinary talent in acting and was most distressed to find that they were not mentioned anywhere or ever praised. The Nāgarī Nāṭak Maṇḍali of Varanasi had money, Sāhayji found their acting not up to the mark. He wondered why the writers of Kāshi did not pay any attention to it. He further writes: "A few years back I had written an article in the now extinct *Lakshmi* published from Gayā, in which several plays from the Hindi sector were discussed. Some of my literary friends read it and reacted strongly, which did not discomfit me in the least" (*Madhuri*, August 1927).

Perhaps for the first time here was somebody who was keen to know about the actors and the people connected with theatre and felt the need for the collection and publication of their photographs. If Sahayji's suggestions had been taken, it would have been so much easier now to prepare a history of Hindi theatre.

In the Baishakh, Samvat 1987 (1930) issue of *Mādhuri*, there appeared an important article entitled 'Hamārā Rangamancha aur Abhinay Kalā' by Lalit Kumar Singh Naṭavar. The article had been originally read at the Koshotsava of the Nāgarī Prachārīṇi Sabhā. Naṭavarji was a director himself and residing in Calcutta. He had been a keen observer of the theatre activities in Bengal. Even as it offers a perceptive account of the Hindi theatre of the time, the article envisages an ideal state for the Hindi theatre and suggests ways and means to achieve it. According to him, scholars in Bengal, Gujarat and Maharashtra have contributed to enrich their dramatic treasury but the Hindi scholars have done little towards that end. The author mentions a few theatre groups in Hindi, viz. the Hindī Nāṭya Samiti of Prayāg, the Nāṭya Samiti of the Seventh Hindi Sāhitya Sammelan, Jabalpur, the Hindī Nāṭya Samiti and the Hindī Nāṭya Parishad of Calcutta, the Nāgarī Nāṭak Maṇḍali and Bhārtendu Nāṭak Samaj of Kāshi, the Manoranjan Nāṭak Maṇḍali of Ārrāh, the Nav-Yuvak Samiti and the Bālopakārīṇi Samiti of Muzaffarpur, the Shārādā Nav-Yuvak Samiti of Chhaprā, whose works have been noticed from time to time here and there, but none of them has been acknowledged widely enough. There were several non-Hindi-speaking actors acting in the professional companies. The author finds a dearth of plays in Hindi. *Mahātmā Īsā* by Ugra, *Mahabharat* by Mādhav Shukla, *Krishnarjun Yuddha* by Bhārtiya Ātmā, *Bhishma* by Kaushikji and *Chhotā Chandragupta* by Bhaṭṭaji are some of the few Hindi plays which he finds stageworthy.

Hindi theatre could take genuine pride in itself if the plays written in Hindustani by Agha Hashr Kashmiri, Narayan Prasad Betab, Hari Krishna Jauhar and Radheshyam Kathavachak could be freed from the domain of the professional Parsi theatres companies and brought over to their own free space in literature. This age of ours is one that is given to the making of our literature. While serious thought is given to and successful endeavours are made for the development of the different branches of literature, it is unfortunate that the art of acting gets little beyond nominal concern.

The author tells us that he had twice undertaken projects for a systematically planned development of Hindi theatre, but had failed to carry them through on both occasions for various reasons. He says:

Theatre is not something only for entertainment, it is a testing ground for literature and a useful and interesting medium for the development of our literature . . . While we have definite tests and rules for the other branches of literature, there is almost nothing for theatre. There are a few very small books on theatre written by the late Bhartenduji, and the revered Dwivediji, and one or two other persons, but they all stick to the old style, are based on Sanskrit texts, and are quite useless and anachronistic for modern times.

The author classifies Hindi playwrights into four categories — the mere translators; the entirely “literary” writers; writers for the professional companies, and the imitators. He complains that little attention is paid to the play or its production, so that costumes, music etc. remain “unnatural”. “The theatre space” he says.

Is divided into two parts, viz. the outer space, and the inner space, i.e. the stage proper. It is the stage that is supposed to be everything, and this itself is called the Rangamanch. The outer space of the theatre is treated as mere decoration or as a seating space for the audience. Yet, as a matter of fact, it is the facilities provided in the outer space that ensures the quality of the work in the inner space, for it is the collective response of the audience that is the real test of the success of a production. In other words, the real test of a production is in the majority of the audience sharing the same feeling about it . . . As in wholesome food, so in a production there should be the use of prose, poetry, songs, dances, satire, humour, edification, *rasa*, acting etc., all in right proportion. Excess in any one of these elements can bring to a performance the bitter taste that an excess of salt brings to a dish. In the same manner, if an element comes in at less than its desired proportion, the experience is too pale to give any pleasure. The acting of the Kirloskar Sangeet Natak Mandali of Pune is usually creditable . . . but when their kings and queens have to rise from their thrones and come down stage to the harmonium, the spectacle is quite anomalous . . .

As for *hasya rasa* or the comic element, I would prefer if it came in the plot itself, or through a character who would be categorized as a *vidushak*. The second choice would be in the form of farce related to the main theme of the play. The worst way is to use the comic unrelated to the play itself, which happens to be quite popular now . . .

At the end, even as I crave everyone's forgiveness for my limitations, I would plead ever so strongly once again with the great figures of Hindi literature, the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, and the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha to pay immediate attention to this and act on it. How wonderful it would have been if the new building of the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha, the foundation stone for which has been laid, could be named Hindi Natya Mandir, for it would be only fit for the ideal theatre for Hindi to be set up in the ground of the great temple for the national language. If possible, there should be an actor's company and a publication wing along with it. And if there could be a Hindi film company too to go with all these, there would be nothing more to desire.

In the article ‘Hamara Natyamanch’ by Ramchandra Tandon (in *Samālochok*, Shishir-Vasant issue, 1982-3 Samvat, corresponding to 1925-26), the author underscores the dearth of plays, and social plays in particular; the lack of communication between playwright and director; the paucity of good actors etc. Tandon suggested that an excess of songs, glamorous settings and incongruous costumes should be avoided.

Whether it was proper for women to act on stage remained an issue for debate for quite some time. In an article entitled 'Rangmanch par Striyon ka Sthan' (*Mādhuri*, Kartik, samvat 1988 i.e. 1930) Kumari Satyavati of the Kanya Gurukul advocated the cause of actresses on stage. Brajmohan, co-editor of *Madhuri*, protested in the Paush issue of the periodical,

I am seriously concerned with the preservation of the sanctity of the stage. There should be a committed endeavour to ensure it. With continuous effort in that direction, and with the adoption of all desirable means, I am afraid that it will take a long time to come anywhere near that end, and even then I have my doubts as to whether the theatre can ever be entirely a holy experience. Till now at least it has not been entirely holy, what it will be in future God alone knows. Under the circumstances, with all genuine sympathy and respect for Kumari Satyavati, I would submit that it is risky and most undesirable to involve young women from good families in stage performances.

C. Jinraj Das, in the September 1933 issue of *Veena*, made a strong case for women on stage. It was only too natural for him to take such a position, with the background he had, having been educated abroad.

Pandit Madhav Shukla passed away in 1945. In his lifetime he had worked hard towards the foundation of permanent Hindi theatres in Prayag, Calcutta and Lucknow. After his death *Vishāl Bhārati* carried on a campaign, calling for a proper memorial to him in the form of such a theatre.

In March 1932 *Veena* reported the publication of *Manch*, a monthly periodical devoted to theatre and cinema, published at Indore, with Rameshwar Dayal as its editor. While appreciating the quality of the first issue, the *Veena* commentator warned the editor:

The literary slant of the periodical is laudable, but the management should take note of the threat that Hindi theatre faces in this period from the spread of cinema and talkies, and should give more importance to theatre. There should be more material on theatre than on cinema or talkies. It would be particularly commendable if an attempt were made to press home the point that theatre is as a rule more beneficial than cinema.

III

The last decade of the first half of the twentieth century (1941-50) was a period of great turbulence, with the Quit India movement of 1942 that led to the arrest of most of the national leaders, the communal riots of Bengal in 1946, the independence of India in 1947, the great bloodbath thereafter, the assassination of Gandhiji in January 1948. Simultaneously the Indian sensibility had begun to show a serious concern with a wide range of problems bearing on the reconstruction of the country, its cultural creativity and development, individual and social life and national integration. With the directions and possibilities considerably clarified and defined by 1950, a lot of activity was visible in literature, the arts, society, and industry. New directions in Indian theatre, and fresh developments, were part of this general activity that affected Hindi theatre as well.

As we have seen already, performances in the Hindi belt were few and far between in

the first half of the twentieth century, and theatre criticism too naturally remained inconsiderable. After 1950 there emerged several theatre groups in the Hindi-speaking region, some of them achieving distinction in due course. Some of these groups formed in the fifties are still active, some have survived but are not quite active, and some have closed down. The foundation in the early 1950s of the central Sangeet Natak Akademi, and the Asian Theatre Institute (later renamed and reconstituted as the National School of Drama), were significant events; with both the institutions serving for the last forty years at least to provide directions to Indian theatre, to support its development, and to preserve and sustain traditional and folk theatre forms. Later the establishment of the drama department of the M.S. University at Baroda, the Rabindra Bharati University at Calcutta, and the Bhartendu Natak Akademi at Lucknow extended and popularized still further the theatre training project initiated by the National School of Drama. All these factors affected the Hindi theatre scene in one way or another, and brought to Hindi theatre criticism both depth and comprehensiveness. Such a lot of achievement of so many different kinds, and such a lot of study and analysis have enriched Hindi theatre in the last forty years that it is virtually impossible to document or assess it all within the span of a single article. Under the circumstances all that I can offer is an overview of the state of theatre criticism in Hindi, drawing on a selective reading of informative notes and comments, reviews and critical articles published in several publications and a few of the more significant books that have appeared over the period.

Kalpanā (Hyderabad), *Dinamān* (Delhi), *Sāptāhik Hindustān* (Delhi), *Dharmayug* (Bombay), *Animā* (Calcutta), and *Ravivār* (Calcutta) have played an important role in the development of theatre criticism in Hindi in the last forty years. Besides these large-circulation and more general dailies and periodicals, there were also the more specialist and not so regular journals like *Natarang* (Delhi, 1965 onwards), *Chhayanat* (Lucknow), *Nautanki Kala* (Lucknow), *Natyavārtā* (Calcutta), and *Rangyog* (Jodhpur). *Kalpanā* was probably the first periodical in Hindi to publish serious articles on drama and theatre fairly regularly over a considerable span of time. Between 1952 and 1960 it carried well thought out and well argued articles on subjects like the Asian Theatre Institute, competitions organized by the Sangeet Natak Akademi for the best play and the best production, Hindi theatre terminology, radio opera, university theatre, innovations in stage practice: nature and obligations. All except the one mentioned last, which was written by Lakshminarayan Lal, were by Suresh Awasthy. In the April and September issues of 1959, Dr Awasthy wrote exhaustive reviews of recent productions of *Macbeth*, *Mitti ki Gādi*, and *Mena Gurjari*. In fact, in the last paragraph of his *Macbeth* piece, Dr Awasthy touched on some of the issues concerning dramatic language and its *laya*, and the scope of the new theatre movement that were disturbing the theatre critics of the time:

The production has sparked off a new fundamental questions in my mind: viz. Do we really need verse plays at all? Have we developed in our blank verse a structure and a range of meaning and *laya* capable of serving as a medium for theoric dialogue? Is the spectator in the auditorium sophisticated enough to experience the *rasa* of the dialogue in verse to the same extent as that of the dialogue in prose? Is the play written in blank verse a natural development out of the nature and traditions of our theatre? Do we really need this new theatre movement in this renaissance of our theatre, and is it really desirable that we devote our limited energies and resources

to this trend as an area of priority? Several such questions are coming to the minds of those who think about theatre, and these are being debated over. Meanwhile the success and possibilities of these experimental productions have inspired the producers to go ahead with plans for the future. Perhaps the issue can be considered better after a few more performances, when new facts will surface, and some older facts will be further clarified and verified. [Kalpanā, April 1959].

In the same issue of *Kalpanā*, Dr Awasthy, in his critique of the Hindustani Theatre's productions of *Mitti ki Gadi*, raised similar issues about the staging of old plays:

The other aspect of the experimentalism of *Mitti ki Gadi* relates to its productional approach and raises a number of grave doubts. There are many problems that come up with every attempt to produce an ancient or classical play in terms of contemporary artistic trends and tastes. These problems come in several dimensions. We cannot bring the two together into any really balanced artistic integration until we have absorbed in its entirety the fundamental character of the original play itself, its artistic potential and subtle implications, and have been able simultaneously to identify clearly the demands of our modern life and our literary values.

Dr Awasthy complained that it was clear from the production of *Mitti ki Gadi* that the director had not quite understood the entire social and cultural implications of *Mrichchhakatikam*, and the ways and means that he adopts to give it a modern look appear ludicrous. Theatre is perhaps more conventional than other such art forms and can neither dispense with the old traditions and conventions, all at one go, nor absorb at once a lot of new elements and conventions.

In his article 'Hindi Nāṭya Shabdāvali' (*Kalpanā*, September 1958), Dr Awasthy went into the possibilities and limitations of a project aimed at developing a theatre terminology for Hindi. Dr Awasthy stands out as one of the major critics of the period, and one whose outlook gave a direction to Hindi theatre practice in the period.

The weekly *Dinamān*, published from Delhi, has played an important role in the development of Hindi theatre criticism. The theatre reviews that appeared in *Dinamān* in 1965-83 are, with a few rare exceptions, not credited to any critic by a byline. Besides reviews of performances by Delhi groups or groups from elsewhere performing in Delhi, *Dinamān* carried in the period under review introductory notes on puppet theatre, Greek theatre and the Noh theatre of Japan, and reports and commentaries of seminars, talks, theatre camps and workshops etc., and interviews. While the reviews are generally balanced, and offer perceptive and elaborate evaluations of theme, acting, stage design, costume, etc., there are occasions when the critics are ruthlessly disparaging; in one such instance, Balwant Gargi comes in for biting satire. This unsigned article, not in quite good taste, in *Dinamān* on 20 June 1965, attacks Gargi's Washington and New York productions of *Mrichchhakatikam* for their self-referentiality and the motive behind them, "to gain success by the back door in America, to gain a front door success in India", with "Gargi performing simultaneously as director and salesman".

Since this was the period when the National School of Drama was enjoying its first flush of glory through its repertory company, the *Dinamān* naturally focused a lot on the NSD productions, referring to Om Shivpuri often as a particularly powerful actor.

Dinamān, dated 25 February 1973, carried a piece by Sarveswar Dayal Saxena,

reviewing a modern play in the Nautanki style. His critique of the Yatrik production which used the conventional Nautanki metres of Doha, Chaubola, Daud, Sher etc. was cutting and droll, and closed with the admonition: "Please recognize the strength that the Nautanki style has. Give it some thought, my friend, try to understand what it is, learn it a bit, know it a bit. Please don't play with it in such an uncivilized manner. In fact, it would be better for you if you chose to give this up and while away your time, munching almonds."

In *Dinamān*, 1984-85, Nemichandra Jain was a regular contributor to the 'Rangamanch' column. A distinguished critic and discriminating observer of theatre trends in the country, Mr Jain was associated with the Sangeet Natak Akademi at the time of its foundation, and was a teacher for years at the National School of Drama. His deep insight into theatre and his capacity to see theatre activity in a broader perspective give his comments a special value. Along with his perceptive views on several issues like the distinctive forms of and relationship between urban and folk theatres, the need for theatre schools, the problems of staging Sanskrit plays, etc., Nemiji went on reviewing contemporary productions, his evaluations enriching Hindi theatre criticism.

There was a spate of seminars and workshops in the 1960s and 1970s, including one on Modern Sensibility and the Playwright, organized by the periodical *Nāṭya* in 1966; the East-West Theatre Seminar and Festival, sponsored by the International Theatre Institute, the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, and the Ministry of Education, Government of India; and the seminar on Theatre in Education, organized by the Bharatiya Natya Sangh and the National School of Drama. As more such seminars, workshops, and festivals came to be held in the Hindi belt over the following years, they were elaboratively and critically reported in the Hindi periodicals. The critics in the Hindi press took a positive view of these developments, and offered interviews with theatre personalities like Badal Sircar, B.V. Karanth and Vijay Tendulkar, and long reports on the theatre festivals held in memory of Prithviraj Kapoor and Mohan Rakesh, the National Theatre Festival organized by the Shri Ram Centre, workshops held at Bhopal, Pune and other places. The critics in this phase came back again and again to the problems associated with the development of a children's theatre and the need for theatre training as part of the general academic curriculum. Their recognition of the emergence of the Anamika Kala Sangam in Calcutta and the Jan Natya Manch in Delhi underscores their interest in new trends in theatre.

The publication of the quarterly *Natrang* in 1965 is a significant event in the history of Hindi theatre criticism. In his editorial in the first issue, Nemichandra Jain wrote:

The first issue of *Natrang* is in your hands. The need and the preparation for a theatre periodical like this have grown over the years. It was the encouragement provided by Sri Rambabu Lal, Director of the Braj Kala Kendra, at its annual session last year, that has led to the realization of the project. In its original plan, the Kendra had envisaged the publication of a periodical concentrating either on folk theatre or on Hindi theatre. But as a matter of fact, if the theatre of this country, and Hindi theatre in particular, is not placed in a larger perspective, there is no way its standards can be raised, no way one can give it the lasting dimensions of a rich artistic and creative expression of life. So it was resolved that *Natrang* would take stock of Indian theatre in all its strands, along with the traditions of folk theatre, and offer a platform for serious exchange of views and reactions, evaluations, creative inspirations and expressions.

It was clear that the editor aimed at making *Natrang* a vehicle for serious exchange of views and critical opinions, an objective that it has pursued consistently for the last 27 years. Though several problems have stood in the way of the regular publication of *Natrang*, and only about 54 issues have appeared in the 27 years, it can take pride in the way it has dealt with problems associated with language in theatre, the art of theatre, tradition and technology, modernism, East-West theatre values and their roots in aesthetic positions, through contributions by the country's foremost playwrights, thinkers and critics. *Natrang* has contributed substantially to clarifying the fundamentals of playwriting and play production, has raised new issues and provided opportunities for exchange of views on several significant topics. In an article entitled 'Hindi Playwriting: Some Problems', in the first issue, Dharamveer Bharati made some important points on the issue of the language of theatre:

If there is an overburden of poetic grandeur in a literary play, one can be sure that it is the work of a raw playwright, who seeks to cover up his poverty of expression by drawing on a stock of words rarely used. In the best plays, the words appear as an aspect of the situation itself, so that when the audience takes in the words or the dialogue, it takes in much more than that, for the situation shapes itself before his eyes through the words themselves...

But the widespread movement of New Poetry in the last fifteen years has brought freedom to the language. It is the everyday now—simple, and yet not shallow; poetic, but not decorative, ornate or showy. This extensive freeing of language was actually initiated by Bachchan and Dinkar, the process reaching its apogee in the New Poetry. Now at last we have a language that can give our playwriting and dialogue the kind of authenticity that Pirandello described as one in which our words are neither hard nor easy, but just the ones that are inevitable, and there can be no other words to convey that feeling in the situation.

When a play has really artistic dramatic qualities, and not a bookish literariness, it offers no problems at all to an imaginative director, who can face the challenge of providing satisfaction to his viewers through a bold production. Suggestions offered by a like-minded director or actor can be of great use to a playwright. Theatre is undoubtedly a collective art, but collectivity between a playwright and a director is possible only when they are at par in terms of intellect and genius, taste and aesthetic sensitivity. [*Natrang* issue, 1, January 1965]

Dharamveer Bharati, in his observations, suggests the need for the ideal balance between the verbal and the visual, between the non-literary and the over-literary, so that the text becomes true to the ideal implicit in the definitive term *drishya-kavya*, the situation assumes a concrete shape before the spectators, and the words are simple, easy and inevitable. Nemichandra Jain puts the same principle across in a slightly different way, when he says, in his article 'Hindi Rangamanch' Parampara aur Prayog ke Sambandh-sutron ka Anveshan' (Hindi Theatre: In Search of the Connections between Tradition and Experiment):

I would like to close by raising some issues concerning the language of theatre. Language remains one of the major basic problems of Hindi theatre. The traditional inheritance of Hindi theatre includes the languages of Bhartendu's plays, the Parsi theatre, and that of Prasad. The chaos will appear in all its complexity if one adds to this languages of textbook plays, broadcasting, and the dialogue of Bombay films. The words spoken on stage need to carry deep emotionality, poeticity, suggestiveness, symbolism and music. Simple intelligibility cannot be the measure of any artistic expression whatsoever. Nor can an adherence to any code serve the purpose. The directness and austerity, bearing intensity, subtlety and rich emotional suggestiveness, that has marked Hindi poetry and fiction in recent times, should contribute to the making of the language of Hindi drama. Divesting the language of all poetry and music and confining it to idiomatic colloquialism or a suffusion of traditional romantic vocabulary will not make the language theatrical.

The search for suggestively potent language should be part of the Hindi theatre's search for an identity of its own. [Natrang, issue 5, January-March 1966]

As a matter of fact, the Hindi theatre has yet to reach the end of that search. Hazariprasad Dwivedi, in his contribution to *Natrang*, 'Chaitanya ki Mahima ki Pratishtha' (Establishing the Potency of Consciousness), offers a more philosophical reading of the essential attributes of the good play:

What appeals to me most is the endeavour to draw man away by force from his grosser materialistic instincts to the awakening of his *chaitanya* [the eternal consciousness]. *Chaitanya* ever moves upwards. Materialism is a blind force that drags one downwards. What pulls down is the illusion of the earth. What tears one free from those bindings and gives *chaitanya* its upward propulsion is the inherent bliss of *chaitanya* itself. Whether the play locates itself in *prāṇatattva* [the principle of life] or *manastattva* [the principle of the psyche] or the *buddhitattva* [the principle of intellect], it must tear open the illusion of materialism and awaken the natural bliss of *chittatattva* [the principle of the spirit]. The deeper this sinks into our awareness, the more successful will be the play. This should be the chief concern of all theatre criticism. The entire artistry, the conventions, the decor, should all be considered in terms of this single point of reference. Truly speaking, a play reaches its point of excellence only when it is capable of destroying our attachment to a materialistic mode of thinking, a materialistic code of behaviour, and materialistic emotions, and implanting in our spirit the potency of the natural *chaitanya*. [Natrang, issue 3]

Even if Dwivedi's complete meaning eludes the reader, or even if one is not prepared to accept it in its entirety, one cannot miss how close he comes to the aesthetic of *rasanubhooti* or catharsis, the need to seek liberation from the fetters of private pleasures and sorrows, to rise above them and find a freedom and a pleasure beyond words and unique.

Jagdishchandra Mathur offers a more pragmatic approach to theatre criticism in his 'Natak ki Nijee Satta ki Khoj' (In Search of Theatre's Own Identity):

I cannot lay down any rules as such, but would expect the critics to be well read first of all . . . Before putting pen to paper, they should have read in a systematic manner a whole course of literature in the original and in translation . . . It is imperative to read Western plays for an understanding of the Hindi playwrights . . .

So when a critic looks for faults in the dialogue, the action or the situations of a play, on the score of naturalness, he should set parameters intrinsic to theatric convention rather than those that belong to life as it is lived. Cinema is a different matter altogether. The reach of the camera is so extensive that it does not allow for the distinction of *natyadharma* and *loka-dharma* [dramatic convention and realism]. The playwright has to take recourse to charged speech, sharp bends in the action, and heightening of emotions to hold together a larger span of reality in its limited space. The critic should keep this basic fact in mind to ensure that his criticism is balanced. [Natrang, issue 3]

These few excerpts drawn from *Natrang's* earliest issues should be enough to establish the correctness, the balance and the thoughtfulness that it brought to Hindi theatre criticism, and the values that it has consistently maintained through the years.

Chhayana, the quarterly published by the Uttar Pradesh Sangeet Natak Akademi, concentrates on dance, theatre and music activities in the State itself, paying considerable attention to the important personalities active in the State in these fields, the present situation of the Hindi theatre, its potentials, the works of its contemporary playwrights and directors, the folk theatre forms and their characteristics, the interactions between folk and urban theatres, and between the traditional and the modern. It has always upheld the need

to recognize and go to the roots of Indian theatre, and explore the potentials and capacities of the folk theatre.

In the two decades since those early issues of *Chhayanaat*, the questions that they raised have echoed and re-echoed all over the country in periodicals and at seminars—and it is fairly widely recognized now that it is no easy task for an urban artist to acquire the energy, the spontaneity and the vigour of the folk performer, qualities that are not part of the former's daily life experience. The assimilation of folk elements in an urban product demands considerable discrimination and care. The success of Habib Tanveer and his Naya Theatre can be attributed to the employment of performers from Chhattisgarh.

Natyavarta, a monthly theatre bulletin published by Anaamika, the Calcutta theatre group, had a short life span of four years, 1976-80, but carried a substantial stock of information on several theatre personalities and theatre groups in the Hindi theatre and other theatres as well.

A wide range of writing on theatre continues to appear in the more general periodicals and the popular press as well, besides the more specialist theatre periodicals. Several critics, who have pursued specific themes and issues in their contributions to the periodicals, have collected their pieces together and developed them further to make books of their pieces. While some of the books show a purely literary approach, there are others that evaluate productions and performances or trace the development of plays and one-acters.

For the present piece, I would confine myself to a few of the books that deal primarily with theatre and production. The hundreds of theatre publications that have appeared in the last 40-50 years in Hindi have dealt with theory, with theatre history, with productions, and with the merits and failings of specific productions. In the following pages I offer an introductory view of a selection from these titles.

Although a good deal of writing on theatre appears in magazines even today, since 1950 critics have been writing in detail on specific topics and publishing their writings in book form. Some of these books are literary evaluations of plays while some others deal with the historical development of full-length or one-act plays in Hindi. We are not discussing such books in this article. We are limiting ourselves to books which deal with plays which were actually produced. These books may be put in different categories. Some are of academic interest and discuss the forms and norms of theatre, some study the historical development of theatre, some evaluate plays from the point of view of production, and some others discuss the merits or demerits of specific productions. Of the hundreds of books written on theatre, we are introducing only a handful of books written during the past 40-50 years. These books are important as contributions to theatre criticism.

First of all let us take up the books written and edited by the well-known theatre critic Nemichandra Jain. The books authored by Nemiji include *Rangdarshan* (Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi, 1982) and *Bharatiya Natya Parampara* (Madhya Pradesh Hindi Granth Akademi, Bhopal, 1989); *Adhunik Hindi Natak aur Rangamanch* (Macmillan, Delhi, 1978), a collection of articles by eminent playwrights, directors and critics, was edited by him. I have already pointed out Nemiji's deep insight and wide experience of theatre. In the preface to the first edition of *Rangdarshan* he writes: "In this book an effort is made

to delve into the important aspects of contemporary Indian theatre and evaluate [the issues involved] from the point of view of the theatre worker today". The book deals with the different aspects of staging a play in chapters titled 'The Process of Playwriting and Stageability', 'Fundamentals of Play-production', 'The Theatre', 'The Audience', 'Theatre-training', 'The Search for an Indian Viewpoint on Theatre', etc. The writer had seen a wide range of plays and thus the whole evaluation is based on solid facts. *Bhartiya Natya Parampara* is the published version of three lectures given by Nemichandra Jain at Dr Harisingh Gaur University, Sagar; here he discusses the subject at length and pinpoints the salient features of the Indian theatre tradition till date. *Adhunik Hindi Natak aur Rangamanch*, the book edited by Nemiji, contains articles on both the ancient Indian theatre traditions of India and the present theatre scenario. One can have an idea of the variety of topics covered in the book by the titles of the articles: 'The Staging of Sanskrit Drama and Modern Theatre' (Shanta Gandhi), 'The Salient Features of Ram Lila' (Induja Awasthi), 'The Production of *Andher Nagari*: Director's Viewpoint' (Satyavrat Sinha), 'Surendra Verma: Playwright of the Beauty of the Sexual Relation' (Jaydev Taneja), 'The Production of *Suryamukh*: Some Aspects of Stage-design' (Goverdhan Panchal), 'Drama and Acting' (Sombhu Mitra). Along with these the thoughts and views of other important theatre personalities like Suresh Awasthy, Jagdish Chandra Mathur, Laxmi Narayan Lal, Virendra Narayan and Satyendra Taneja, etc., also have a place in the book. The 240-page book of 25 articles on different subjects by various writers is important because of its diversity, despite the scattered contents.

Playwright Laxmi Narayan Lal also wrote some important critical books together with his plays. *Rangamach aur Natak ki Bhoomika* (National Publishing House, 1965), his first book of criticism, was also the first book in Hindi evaluating the Hindi theatre in detail. Topics like tragedy, the auditorium and the audience are discussed in the book together with the Indian and Western concepts of theatre. The glossary of technical terms in English and Hindi given at the end is very useful. In *Adhunik Hindi Natak aur Rangamanch* (Sahitya Bhavan, Allahabad, 1973), the writer deals at length with subjects like modern drama, the Hindi theatre, the staging of plays, the relation between script and production, Western drama, translations available in Hindi, etc. *Parsi Hindi Rangamanch* (Rajpal and Sons, Delhi), discussing various aspects of Parsi theatre in detail, was also published by Dr Lal in 1973. The observations are based on the plays written for the Parsi stage. *Rangabhoomi : Bharatiya Natya Saundarya* (National Publishing House, Delhi, 1989) was his last critical work. The purpose of the book is to bring an Indian theatre dogged by Western conventions and idiom closer to its roots and to provide an exposition of the beauty of Indian theatre to contemporary theatre workers.

Jaydev Taneja has a special place among the later critics. *Laharon ke Rajhans: Vividh Ayam* (Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi) was published in 1975 when he was only 32. This was the first attempt to discuss in detail any well-known and well-staged plays from the points of view both script and production. Jaydevji succeeded in putting the play *Laharon ke Rajhans* in a wider perspective by including in his book the complete production details and the views of the directors. Jaydev Taneja's second book of the same kind was *Andha*

Yug aur Bharati ke Anya Natya Prayog (Nachiketa Prakashan, Delhi, 1981) in which he gathered a lot of data and discussed the productions of *Andha Yug* on their basis. The charts in the appendices of the books are useful. His three other books are *Samakalin Hindi Natak aur Rangmanch* (Takshashila Prakashan, Delhi, 1978), *Aj ke Hindi Ranganatak : Parivesh aur Paridrishya* (Takshashila, 1980), and *Hindi Rangmanch : Dasha aur Disha* (Takshashila, 1988). In these books Jaydev Taneja has discussed almost all the plays, translations, stage adaptations of novels, etc. written and produced during the last four decades. In the first two books, the subjects have been seriously expounded. About the third book the writer says: "This book is neither fully a piece of literature, nor journalism, nor criticism, nor history, nor memories, nor diary—I take this as an eyewitness account of Hindi theatre in the last decade". The three books, taken together, offer a good picture of Hindi playwriting and play-production in the last forty years.

Some important books were also written dealing with the life-outlooks of various playwrights and the productions of their plays. *Hindi Rangmanch aur Pandit Narayan Prasad Betab* written by Vidyawati Namra (Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1972) deserves to be mentioned first among such books. Narayan Prasad Betab was one of the major playwrights of the Parsi theatre. As conservative opinion looked down upon Parsi theatre, there was no literary discussion of the achievements of the playwrights and actors of the Parsi stage in an earlier era. In her book Vidyawati has extensively discussed the life and achievement of Betabji and outlined the contemporary and long-term significance of his plays. Another book of this kind is *Agha Hashra: Vyakti aur Kriti* (Samir Prakashan, Kanpur 1980) edited by Dr Agyat. Seventeen articles on the personality and achievement of Agha Hashra, another playwright of the Parsi theatre, are collected in the book. The contributors include Paripurnanand Verma, Master Fida Hussain, Ganapat Lal Dangi, Chandulal Dubey, etc. The book is useful. *Master Fida Hussain : Parsi Theatre Mein Pachas Varsh* (Natya Sodh Sansthan, Calcutta, 1986), edited by Pratibha Agrawal, is a detailed account of the life and work of an actor-director of the Parsi stage. Based on a long interview with Master Fida Hussain at Natya Shodh Sansthan, the book has the authenticity and intimacy of a biography; it mainly consists of excerpts from the interview.

The plays of Prasad have been the most discussed both in literature and the theatre. Though the literary value of the plays has always been widely acknowledged, questions have continued to be raised about their stageability. A lot of writing has appeared in periodicals, even books have come out on the subject. Among these *Prasad ke Natak tatha Rangmanch* by Sushama Pal Malhotra (Rajpal and Sons, Delhi, 1974), *Rangmanch aur Jaishankar Prasad ke Natak* by Rita Rani Paliwal (Sahitya Nidhi, Delhi, 1984), and *Rangmanch aur Jaishankar Prasad ke Natak* by Satyendra Taneja (Sanmarg Prakashan, Delhi, 1988) deserve special mention. In the first book the writer has discussed all the elements of a play, the assimilation of these elements in the plays of Prasad, and the stageability of the plays. The study is more of theoretical and academic orientation than practical. The second book was originally a thesis and as such the wider background of the plays of Prasad has been discussed in detail. Together with this, the themes, characters,

rasa, and dramatic language of Prasad are all discussed from a theatrical viewpoint. Both the books carry substantial bibliographies which are very useful.

Prasad ka Natyakarma by Satyendra Kumar Taneja is the more practical and useful of these books. The writer has discussed in detail the questions that have been raised over the last sixty years about Prasad's work, and has substantiated his arguments by citing various productions of Prasad's play. It is an important book, it has depth, and is worthy of attention.

Among the theses on Prasad, 'Jaishankar Prasad, Jagdish Chandra Mathur aur Mohan Rakesh ke Natakon ka Rangmanch ki Drishti se Adhyayan' by Shashi Bharti Mittal was submitted to the University of Delhi for a Ph. D. in 1983. I had the opportunity of seeing the dissertation as examiner and still retain a typed copy. I am not aware if the work has been published. The writer has emphasized the inseparability of the script and the stage and has evaluated the plays of the three eminent playwrights. The evaluation is done with insight, and a lot of effort has gone into it. The work is also important because very little has been written till date on Jagdish Chandra Mathur.

Mohan Rakesh by Pratibha Agrawal, published by Sahitya Akademi in 1987 in its Makers of Indian Literature series, gives a short account of the life and work of the playwright. The books in this series are translated into various Indian languages and as such the non-Hindi reader was kept in view in the writing of the book. The subject is not expounded in great depth or detail. Rather, Rakesh is introduced in brief in a manner which would be enjoyable to the general reader and would help him assimilate the information without the benefit of a detailed background.

A number of books have been written on the history and development of Hindi drama and Hindi theatre among which *Hindi Natya Sahitya aur Rangmanch ki Mimansa* (Vol. I) by Kunwar Chandraprakash Singh (Bharti Granth Bhandar, Delhi, 1964) and *Hindi Rangmanch ka Itihas* (Vol. I) : *Hindi Natak Mandalion ka Itihas* by Chandulal Dubey (Jawahar Pustakalaya, Mathura, 1975) deserve mention in the first place. Although neither of these histories was completed (only the first volumes of both works were published), they are important as pioneering efforts in the huge task of writing a detailed history of Hindi theatre. The information in these books, though incomplete, may well serve as the basis for a full-fledged history of Hindi theatre in future. *Parsi Theatre: Udbhav aur Vikas* by Somnath Gupta (Lok Bharti Prakashan, Allahabad, 1969), *Paramparasheel Natya* by Jagdish Chandra Mathur (Bihar Rashtrabhasha Parishad, Patna, 1969), *Hindi Natak aur Rangmanch: Pahachan aur Prakash* by Indranath Madan (Lipi Prakashan, Delhi, 1975), *Kashi ka Rangaparivesh* by Kunwarji Agrawal (Vishwavidyalaya Prakashan, Varanasi, 1986), and *Parsi Theatre* edited by Ranabir Singh (Rajasthan Sangeet Natak Akademi, Jodhpur, 1990) are some other important books which provide authentic information on Hindi theatre, as well as theatre in general.

Another book deserves special mention: *Hindi Natya Sansthaen aur Natyashalayan* by Vishwanath Sharma (Kalamghar Prakashan, Jodhpur, 1973). It is the only book of its kind. This, too, is an incomplete work but marks an important beginning. The *Natyashastra* issue (*Natyashastra Visheshanka*) of *Natyavarta*, the theatre magazine published by Anamika, Calcutta, later published in book form, is also an important contribution to theatre criticism in Hindi.

It is a difficult task to discuss the Hindi theatre and, simultaneously, the critical evaluation of theatre groups and theatre workers active in three metropolitan cities (Calcutta, Bombay and Delhi) and six States (Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh). In the beginning the activity was smaller in volume and therefore it was easier to talk about the trends. After independence, Hindi theatre grew apace, and a great deal came to be written about the new directions it had taken. But after the spurt of multifaceted activity during the 1950s and 1960s, things have become rather static. Although there is a great deal of theatre everywhere, one feels we are jogging on one spot and are not really moving ahead. Most of the people connected with theatre are unhappy today. The playwrights are dissatisfied because their plays are not staged and what is the point of writing plays if they are not staged. The directors complain that there are no new plays worth staging, how can a thriving theatre develop depending on adaptations and translations. The actors are dissatisfied because they cannot make a living out of theatre—in spite of their attachment to theatre, they have to switch to television or cinema. The spectators complain that there are such few good plays which one would want to see and recommend to others. The theatre groups complain about rising costs—how are they to do a new production? So there are neither good plays, nor good actors, nor a place for rehearsals, nor a suitable stage or other amenities for the audience—one hears or reads these remarks all the time. For the last two decades or more, the burden of the song has been the same: the Hindi theatre has become static, and we are not moving ahead.

As a matter of fact, it is not only the Hindi stage which has become static. This is the state of things in every field in the country, be it politics, culture, the arts, society or our everyday life. Hindi theatre is connected with the country and with society, it is part of a larger whole, and thus it is not surprising that it has reached an impasse. In the circumstances, it is also not surprising that theatre criticism in Hindi has become static. In the last few years, a lot has been written, a number of questions have been raised, but the writings neither touch our hearts nor compel us to think nor inspire us to do anything. There does not seem to be any possibility of any important change in the near future. The present uncertainty in the country, religious and communal conflict, dissatisfaction, violence and corruption are at a peak. Nothing seems to be certain today, any idea or judgement may collapse tomorrow. We wish for renewed activities for the all-round development of the Hindi theatre, we are waiting for people who will give new directions to the Hindi theatre by their thoughts and their work, we are eagerly looking for critics who by their clear insight, extensive knowledge and experience, balanced views and critical judgement, will give directions to the Hindi theatre and make it more meaningful. □