

THEATRE WITHOUT WALLS

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Dr. Charles Fabri, in his article published in "Sangeet Natak" 4, makes a well-meaning suggestion that the municipalities in State capitals like Chandigarh and Bangalore, if not in smaller towns like Jullundur and Hoshiarpur, should come forward to erect civic halls for public entertainment devoted entirely to theatrical performances. He also pleads for initial help by such bodies to certain performing groups for a limited period of six to eight months just to give them a start, mentioning a particular amount to be spent on this patronage per mensem, humble enough to suit the coffers of any civic body. No one will disagree with this suggestion, except, may be, the civic bodies concerned. But the idea, even if it materialises, can serve only a limited purpose, and that too if the whole thing does not get entangled in bureaucratic routine and evolve a shape that could be the envy even of the ambitious Tagore Theatres, already yawning with the boredom of inactivity at some centres and fatigued with low rate 'socio-cultural' activity at others. It may take years to put the idea through, and then the resulting structures may well pass into the hands of indiscriminate self-seekers inflicting atrocities on people in the name of theatre. And again if a massive structure like the Tagore Theatre at the Ridge, with some of the 'finest technical installations' in and around, and the 'most modern (lighting) equipment', hanging along a huge panel like an array of bats, can be allowed, without any association with any theatrical activity of any sort, to stand as a monument to our ambitions without direction, how can

charge here, therefore, is not so much on the 'technical devices' to underline a particular meaning, as on the thinking constituents who add the dimensions of their own personalities to those of the given words and movements, to discover and reveal meanings, sometimes beyond their own comprehension. This on the one hand leads to greater simplicity in theatre, and on the other to greater complexity, making it impossible for any other form to compare with it, either in scope or in effect.

To my mind, a great detriment to the growth of theatre in this country is its growing dependence on technical sophistication, and the sooner it is liberated from this the better. I conceive of our evolving national theatre less in terms of big building and 'fully automatic equipment', and more in terms of well-trained imaginative groups that, with the minimum technical equipment available, can take their theatre to any part of the country, be it a small town like Hoshiarpur or a small village like Khat of Khat Kalan. I admire E. Alkazi for showing how good theatre could not only be transported to the most unsophisticated sites like Ferozeshah Kotla and Talkatora ruins, but also be made more live and effective there. Though I have not seen any of Utpal Dutt's roadside theatre, I have heard a great deal about the impact he could create thereby. I wish he had conceived his play like 'Angar' also in a manner that it could be carried to any odd place in the country and done with equal magic there without its high crane and flooding mines. I found the production of "Evam Indrajit" by a group of young artists in Calcutta quite fascinating with its complete lack of technical sophistication and with the dilapidated courtyard of an old building turned into an improvised hall. They could have managed even in the open if that courtyard were not available to them. There is nothing in that production that could not be done with equal effect at any other place; even at a street-corner in a congested locality.

This should by no means be construed to mean that I am against technical embellishment in theatre. It certainly has its place, but a subsidiary one. The point I want to make is that too much dependence on it is likely to defeat the very logic by which theatre can survive. We often complain of our theatre not having a solid backing of any audience in most parts of the country, including the Capital. Except for the few

theatre elite, there are hardly any regular theatre-goers here. The improved utilisation of the technical facilities during the recent years has not much changed the situation. Nor is it likely to do so with all the help that may be forthcoming from the state or civic authorities, until and unless we are able to create an audience-backing for our theatre irrespective of what those authorities do or don't do. This will not be made possible by waiting for more people to get 'attracted' towards our technically embellished theatre, but by taking theatre in their midst and making it possible to achieve high aesthetic standards even with the most ordinary facilities and at the least equipped of places. If a set of Yatra players can come and play at the Kalibari courtyard, why can't some of our enterprising young artists from the capital also undertake to do so? The other aspect of this proposition is that all the odd places outside of the 'well-equipped' halls may have their own potential for a particular type of theatre. Why not go and explore them every time a new play is to be put up?