

Editorial

Traditional Idiom in Contemporary Theatre

One of the most significant developments in modern Indian theatre during the last one decade or more is its increasing interaction with the traditional theatre forms of different regions. This has affected all aspects of our theatre activity—including playwriting, staging methods, acting and scenic design—and has produced some outstanding plays and performances. Yet there is considerable difference of opinion among theatre practitioners as well as critics and other perceptive observers about the value or even the desirability of this development. While some consider it the only creative course for our theatre, some others are apprehensive of it as a retrograde step likely to lead to the growth of obscurantism and worse. Quite a few are also uncertain about its impact or potential.

In any case, though an excited debate on the pros and cons of attempts to draw upon tradition for contemporary theatre work seemed to be constantly on at various levels, there was hardly a forum where this could find proper articulation.

It was therefore a very welcome opportunity when the Sangeet Natak Akademi invited me to guest-edit a special number of its journal on this theme. I accepted the invitation and the present issue is the outcome.

In the various articles collected here, a sincere attempt has been made to present as many shades of opinion on this aspect of our theatre as possible. While a number of eminent practitioners and critics did not respond, or found it difficult to send their views even after accepting the invitation, those who did write represent a very significant segment of the current theatre scene.

I do not consider it necessary to comment upon or indicate what various distinguished contributors have said in their articles, which are eloquent enough. But a word about the general pattern or layout of the material may not be inappropriate.

Among the practitioners, i.e. the playwrights and directors, some

have chosen to make a personal statement of what they consider to be valuable and relevant or otherwise in tradition; a few have examined one specific aspect or a single theatre form; some others have tried to assess the scene in their own region or area of activity. Among the critics or other observers of the scene, most have confined themselves to the assessment, evaluation or survey of theatre in their own languages, though a few others have also tried to look at Indian theatre as a whole in interaction with tradition. There is also a detailed examination of one of the most well-known traditional forms, Jatra, as affected by modern development. In addition, a review of two important publications on traditional Indian theatre by two eminent scholars and a document on the Sangeet Natak Akademi's Natya Samarohs of 1984 and 1985 in a way complete the picture.

If this material provokes further debate and examination of various issues in depth and in relation to wider cultural and social perspectives, I would consider my effort amply rewarded.

I am greatly indebted to all the contributors for their kind response to my request in spite of their various other preoccupations. I should also like to take this opportunity to express my gratefulness to Shri Keshav Kothari, Secretary of the Akademi, and Shri Abhijit Chatterjee, Editor of this journal, for patiently bearing with the unusual delay in preparing this issue.

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