

Traditional and New Drama

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I am finding great difficulty in preparing this speech for the Seminar. You may be surprised to know that I have already made six drafts, and having torn them up, I am now launching on the seventh. And this time I am determined to be satisfied with whatever gets written. Perhaps, I may consign it to the post without even going through it for corrections or alterations.

This is so because drama is an extremely vast and deep subject. So much can be said on every little aspect of this multi-faceted art, and that requires a profound study. And such study, permit me to say, can be best undertaken by people who are half inside and half outside the field of drama activity. They can see it from close as well as distance quarters, subjectively as well as objectively. But a person who has adopted acting as a profession in a very commercialized world gets little chance to continue regular study. He tends to get into the habit of giving greater and sometimes even undue importance to practice. He loves his art but is reluctant to talk about it. The fact that I have not been able to send this manuscript to my great and respected friend, Shri Sachin Sengupta, even by the end of February, while I had promised it by January, the fact that Durga Khote became scared even to the extent of not answering Shri Sengupta's letters and telegrams, testifies that there is some truth in my contention. I have come across similar reluctance among musicians and painters.

But such reluctance is not a good thing and must be overcome. Today our dramatic art stands on the threshold of a new birth. It has to develop and mature in all its aspects. Therefore, those of us who have gained a certain amount of experience in this field must share their ideas with each other. May be our expression is not adequate, may be we may sometimes speak off the mark, but still our words are bound to have some relevance.

And so I come to the first point which I wish to make.

There is no hope whatever of developing the dramatic art in our country unless and until our Government releases it from those ruthless and destructive shackles which the British rulers had put upon it during their days. While such shackles are still there, no pious speeches, conferences or seminars can be of any avail. It is a matter of disgrace and shame for all of us that the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, which the British promulgated after banning the patriotic Bengali play *Nildarpan*,* is still in force and with the same vigour.

* The play which provoked the British action was *Gajanan-o-Jubraj*, a satire on Jagadananda Mukhopadhyaya, a lawyer in the Calcutta High Court, who invited the Prince of Wales into the women's quarters of his house. It was staged at the Great National Theatre on 19th February 1876, and Governor-General Northbrook promulgated the Dramatic Performances Ordinance on the 29th February. The Ordinance became an Act on 16th December, the same year.

Leaving alone a few big cities like Madras, Delhi, Calcutta or Bombay, there is hardly any professional theatre existing in the country. We have Prithvi Theatre in Bombay, which is a matter of pride for us. But its economic stability is jeopardised at least twice a year. Besides, Prithvi has to stage morning shows perforce, because there are no theatre premises entirely at his disposal. The Opera House in Bombay was originally built for plays, but has now been converted into a full-fledged cinema hall. Prithviraj can stage his dramas only on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings which, as can be guessed, is hardly a satisfactory position. Besides financial perplexities, Prithvi is always confronted with a paucity of plays. Some of his productions are being repeated for the last seven or eight years for the simple reason that few really actable plays are being written in Hindi.

There are two or three other professional companies who sometimes stage adequate plays in Gujarati and Urdu. Queer enough, although the position of dramatic literature is much better in Marathi, I have not heard of a professional Marathi theatre company, although amateur movement is quite strong and excellent drama festivals are held annually. All the same, on the whole it is precarious going and the number of stage actors who are not constantly making the round of film studios for secondary roles is very small.

Perhaps, things are much better in Calcutta, fundamental reason being the insatiable love of the Bengali people for their own language and culture. Nearly a century ago, the Bengali intellectuals began to revolt against the cultural domination of the white man. A literature of protest made its appearance on the stage, nurturing this art at its very roots. Alongside of great writers like Bankim Chandra, Girish Chandra, Tagore and many others, a galaxy of truly modern and realistic players like Sisir Bhaduri, Durga Das, Chhobi Biswas, Tulsi Lahiri and others forged ahead and delighted the people with fresh values. Even then, if we take into account the vastness of Calcutta as a city, even this fine achievement is but a drop in the ocean.

It would indeed be true to say that the theatre, if it is being somehow kept alive, owes a solid debt of gratitude to the amateurs. It is owing to their efforts and agitation that in places like Baroda, Ahmedabad etc., some theatres exclusively for drama have been built. And it is owing to the genuinely democratic and inspiring efforts of organizations like IPTA and INT that a dramatic consciousness is growing among our people in towns and villages.

I have never been connected with any professional company. But for the last ten years, I have been writing as well as acting in amateur companies. Even now, despite my irregular film life, I do try to steal time for Juhu Art theatre, IPTA and other groups. I don't do it in a spirit of condescension, but for the simple fact that the atmosphere there is healthy. In the film studios, it is unhealthy. In the film world, money is the primary motive of labour. I don't mean to say that film world is bereft of art. Far from it, some excellent realistic work has been done in our films over the past few years. But, nevertheless, this atmosphere is commercialized and no matter how tempted a man be for artistic expression, he rarely fails to give his own self-interest the first place. With amateur dramatic groups, it is just the opposite. The amateurs constantly try to push individual egos to the background and collective

work to the fore. It is the precondition of their survival, and that is exactly why one feels that the future of drama in our country rests in their hands. It is a most lamentable fact, therefore, that amateur dramatic activity gets hardly any encouragement from the State.

The manner in which plays are censored in Bombay is by itself a good subject for a satirical comedy. According to the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, the plays must be censored by the police. We remember the sort of relations police kept with the people in British days, and thus no arguments are needed to convince us of the repressiveness of this measure. We expected that with the coming of independence, this humiliating law would be repealed. But, believe it or not, it still exists and there has been no organized protest against it either.

A few years back I was detailed by my drama group to expedite the censoring of a script. A copy had been submitted to the special branch, C.I.D. two weeks earlier, but they didn't seem to be doing anything about it. Unless we obtained the licence we could not book the theatre, because in case the play was not passed we would lose the deposit. Neither could we do any publicity, nor sell tickets in advance among our sympathising friends. In short, we were in a fix. I was instructed by my group to use all my influences and get the censoring done at the earliest, even to offer a bribe if need be.

The next day I presented myself to the inspector who had been appointed the arbiter of our fate. It was not difficult for me to see that he did not have the slightest desire to read our play. He had far more important things to do besides having to read a wretched drama to be performed by some cranky amateurs. Quite frankly he expressed his annoyance with us, because in his view we not only wasted our time doing childish things but wasted his too and added to his burdens. "What do you get out of it anyway?" he asked me.

"Nothing", I replied.

"Then you agree with me that you waste your own time, my time, everybody else's time."

"Yes". I could not possibly dare to disagree with him. We had been rehearsing the play for over three months under very difficult conditions. I must get the censor certificate, even if it meant falling at his feet.

"Look here," the inspector told me "I cannot find time to read this thing during office hours. Please come to my house at about nine in the evening and read it out to me."

I went to his flat at the appointed time. He was having his dinner. Half an hour later he appeared in the drawing room and said, "Let us go down to the *halwai's* shop and have some milk. He sells very good milk." So we went down, and much against my inclination I too had to drink milk. Then we went up again, and having talked of kings and cabbages for a little time more, we came to the play.

Instructions about setting, entries and exits happened to be written in English. As I read them the inspector said,

"You told me that the play was in Hindi."

"These were merely stage instructions," I said.

"Oh I see. Some part of the play is in Hindi and some in English."

"No, No. The play is in Hindi, only instructions are in English."

"Comes to the same thing," he said decisively.

At another place I read—

"Jugal enters singing a tune."

The Inspector asked "What tune?"

"I don't know; it can be any tune", I said.

"That won't do", said the Inspector, "I believe in orderliness. Whatever has to be said or sung on the stage must be clearly specified."

"But he does not sing a whole song, he nearly sings a line or two," I pleaded.

"That makes no difference. Comes to the same thing."

In the end, I wrote down the first line of a popular film song, which happened to come to my mind. The Inspector was pleased. The reading was resumed. But soon afterwards, as I looked up, I found his eyes closed. I couldn't decide whether he had fallen asleep or was in a state of unusual concentration. I went on reading. But when he began to snore vociferously there was no room for doubt.

I began to wait patiently for him to get up. It was eleven o'clock already, and I had to travel sixteen miles to reach home. Even then I could not possibly disturb his sleep. He might get annoyed and all the efforts that my comrades had put in for three months would go in vain. A quarter of an hour later the inspector woke up. He looked genuinely tired and I felt sorry for him. He apologized sincerely and made a concession.

"You needn't read the whole thing. Just tell me the story."

I did so and he asked me to call at the police station the next day. At last, after wasting another two days at the police station, I managed to obtain the license.

This is just one example to show how unwise in every way it is to entrust censorship of plays to police officials. They neither have the time nor the aptitude for it. If there is the slightest criticism of the Government or the existing social order, the police official gets thrown on the horns of a dilemma. His own job being precious to him, he passes the play only if some influential names are connected with that particular amateur society, otherwise he doesn't. Consequently, the licence is like a sword hanging constantly on the heads of amateur groups. Unless their aim is to provide purely escapist and shallow entertainment, they live in constant fear and keep on devising ways and means of dodging the censor.

In the British days, a play could be submitted to the censor a week before the day of performance. Now, in Bombay at least, it has to be submitted a month in advance. In the British days, a single copy was to be submitted, now no less than ten copies are asked for. If the group happens to take up an unpublished play, which is often the case, this alone can become a back-breaking problem.

A couple of years ago my group, Juhu Art Theatre, gave some performances of Gogol's *Inspector General* in a city theatre in a rather professional way. If I remember correctly, we had to obtain no less than ten licences—for the script, for the theatre, for selling tickets, for using mikes on the stage, for distributing handbills, so on and so forth. According to one of

the latest regulations, no female artist above the age of 16 can appear on the stage unless the premises are enclosed by a wall at least ten feet high!

Drama lovers can see for themselves that under such conditions no real development or expansion of activity is possible. The foreign rulers succeeded in destroying the dramatic arts in our country by instilling fear, by making it impossible for the artists to say what they really wanted to say. If, even after our country has gained independence, these fears have to continue, then there can be no hope of resurrection. We may build palatial theatres at the cost of millions of rupees, we may establish academies in every city, we may announce a hundred prizes and a thousand scholarships but unless we liberate artists from the old fetters, our bonafides as lovers of freedom, as genuine lovers of art, cannot be established.

What I have said so far is on the basis of my experience. Perhaps, it has no direct connection with the subject of my speech. I am happy that, in the shape of this Seminar, I have obtained a forum from which I can voice the feelings of my heart in the presence of my dear and respected fellow artists. I can appeal to the Sangeet Natak Akademi to use all its influence with the Government and secure the annulment of that obnoxious law of 1876. It should agitate for the formation of local committees composed of intelligent and responsible citizens for the purpose of censoring plays. Such committees should not merely sit in judgment on dramatic groups but should afford them every help and guarantee them the fullest freedom of speech, which is the birthright of artists in a free country. The censor's axe should only come down on cheap and vulgar presentations which do harm to the people by glamorizing sex, crime and violence.

In a true democracy, the theatre is not merely a diversion. On the contrary, it is an arena of polemics where progressive ideas engage in conflict with out-moded reactionary ideas and defeat them. If this was not so, playwrights like Moliere, Hugo, Shaw, Ibsen, Gorky and Chekov could never have been possible. And if we want to produce great dramatists in our own country then we have to first create a free and democratic environment.

Having said this, I shall now consider myself justified in addressing a few words of criticism at ourselves—the active workers in the field of drama; for we too have our responsibilities, no matter what conditions we work in. As a matter of fact, favourable conditions are very often created by the artists' own efforts.

The drama tradition of our country is perhaps the most ancient in the world. More than two thousand years ago men like Kalidasa, Bhasa and Bhavubhuti wrote plays which are to this day considered masterpieces. Our hearts swell with pride at the very mention of *Shakuntala*, *Uttara-ramacharitam*, or *Swapnavasavadattam*. But what is our attitude to those great masterpieces in practice? It is one of utter and extreme neglect. We have made no effort to translate these plays into modern languages, nor do we ever perform them with any degree of authenticity.

Perhaps, it will not be wrong to say that if ever *Shakuntala* has been performed authentically in any modern language, it has been done outside and not inside India. I am aware of the attempts made to present *Shakuntala* on the Indian stage as well as screen. Whatever

be the artistic merit of these presentations, one thing is clear that Kalidasa was completely absent from them. May be he contributed the bare plot, but even that is doubtful, because the play is after all based on a mythological story from the Puranas.

Classical Greek and Shakespearean plays are regularly performed in European countries, but we never hear of them being altered and mutilated at will. We never hear of scenes and dialogues being entirely re-written. No English producer has ventured to rewrite *Hamlet* or *Lear*. On the contrary, we hear of them taking meticulous care lest any injustice is done to the author, even in the smallest detail.

But in this country we not only murder Shakespeare, we also torture the souls of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti, despite the fact that we never tire of showering praises on our glorious ancient heritage.

Is this not a sad thing? Is it not essential that we workers of the drama field should make a unified effort for a scientific understanding of our traditional stage? Is it not our duty to carefully analyse this tradition, to sift from it what we have to take and absorb in our new drama, and what we have to leave?

Sometimes one meets people who say quite out-spokenly that we have nothing to learn from these classical plays, that they are better left where they are—in the library. Such people are, as a rule, inordinate worshippers of modern European drama. They want our country's art to follow faithfully in the footsteps of the West. No doubt their outlook is sincere but nevertheless it is barren, too barren for words. It warps their writing as well as their performance. Whatever dramatic work such people have done bears no comparison in artistic quality either to the modern drama of the West or to the Sanskrit drama of old, for it has no life—no life at all.

Then there are the purists who insist on playing Sanskrit plays in Sanskrit. Whether the audience follows anything or not does not disturb them. Historical changes or historic realities, they are indifferent to both. If it lay in their hands, they would unhesitatingly order Sanskrit to be the national language of India and completely forbid the use of such uncivilized tongues as Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu, etc. They would throw into dungeons any one who dared to say that Shakespeare's play have a greater depth of feeling than Kalidasa's. It is useless to argue with such people because they have neither studied Kalidasa nor Shakespeare. They believe not in study but in blind worship. Only recently I met a gentleman who asserted without the least compunction that whatever Stanislavsky has written is merely a repetition of the theories contained in Bharata's *Natyashastra*. The fact that I was rendered speechless convinced him that I was convinced.

The Sangeet Natak Akademi can do a great service to the nation if it promotes a sane outlook on these matters. Art in every country can prosper only if it grows on its national roots. We have a vast amount to learn from our ancient Sanskrit plays and from the *Natyashastra*, but not in theory only. We must get the available plays artistically but authentically translated. They must be played with the greatest possible sincerity and realism. These plays were not written merely to be read. Their dramatic quality has never

been in doubt. To stage them successfully, however, requires great labour and perhaps a lot of money. The fact that Sangeet Natak Akademi has come into being makes one hope that both will soon be available.

The rasa or the mood-rhythm theory which the ancients have bequeathed to us is indeed an invaluable asset, the richness of its content being only discernible in practice. It is strange yet true that a proper understanding of rasas is of even greater help to a film actor than it must be to a stage actor. At least that is my experience. The shooting of the film is a disjointed process. The length of the shots too varies. There are long intervals of idleness between shots. In order to cope with these difficulties the artist seeks to achieve a 'continuity of mood'. The mood of the scene becomes his compass, the foundation upon which he gives all other shades. Having picked up his mood-pattern (rasa) for the day's work, he set his mind at rest. This is a clear demonstration of the wisdom of rasa theory which the ancients taught us thousands of years ago. The ancient writers of drama mastered it. They built a whole play, lasting for several hours on the stage, upon a single predominant mood-rhythm. Drama writers of today need to make a deep study of this technique, because if in one thing their creations are singularly weak, it is mood-rhythm. They provide everything to the players, except the one thing the players need—rasa. One has only to read Rabindranath Tagore's plays intelligently to understand how much he owed his extraordinary excellence to the ancients. Indeed, the structural beauty achieved by Kalidasa and Bhasa in their work has not been equalled by a single one of our modern playwrights. It is a marvel how completely successful Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* is even as a radio-play and as a screen play, although these media are vastly different from the stage-drama.

Such statements are empty generalizations unless their truth is demonstrated practically before audiences, first on the stage, and then in other media also. To make this possible should be one of the noble aims of the Sangeet Natak Akademi.

Classical Sanskrit drama seems to have decayed after the fourth or fifth century A.D. Some people believe that the art of drama itself dwindled away, and they blame the Muslim invasions for it. But this is wrong. With the decline of classical Sanskrit, came the birth of our modern languages in the shape of regional *apabhramshas*. The traditions changed. The drama which was once dedicated to kings went into the hands of the people and new folk-forms appeared. They have come down to us in the form of Jatras in Bengal, Var in Punjab, Burrakatha in Andhra, Tamasha in Marathi, Nautanki in Hindustani. To study, understand and revitalize this tradition is another task of the drama lovers of the free India of today.

It is neither possible, nor is it my aim to depict the whole history of drama here. But I do want to mention that during the dark days of British domination, it is these folk dramas which have kept the theatre alive in our country.

But unfortunately the imperialist rulers drove such a wedge between town and country, between the so-called 'educated' and 'uneducated' that the Indians themselves began to look down upon these folk dramas, and helped in their decay. The imperialist has gone from

the country but the tendency still continues. Our system of education has not changed. It is still calculated to cut off the educated person from the spiritual life of his own people. He looks upon everything Indian as low and backward, and wishes to transplant Western institutions blindly here. Our present day drama workers too are very often suffering from this complex. They not only ignore their classical traditions, they ignore the folk tradition also. On the other hand, they avidly perform any Western play. They 'adapt' it, 'Indianize' it, and sometimes play it in English. But unluckily for them, it seldom comes to life.

It is only obvious that if we want drama to develop spontaneously in our country, we of the so-called educated class must re-establish our links with the people and their culture. We should learn the arts of the people and assess their value. We should learn to judge what is permanent in it and what is transitory, what is living and what is already dead. But we can earn the right to do so only if, like Gurudev's *Gora*, we first identify ourselves completely with the people.

Blessed are those groups and associations, in towns and villages, which are learning, preserving and developing the folk arts. I have myself belonged to one of them, IPTA, and have learnt fundamental lessons of the drama in its fold. We must give those groups fullest respect and support, which is only their due. We must recognize the achievements of the IPTA and the INT movement discarding all mental prejudices and win for them those facilities without which their work is being seriously hampered. Not only this, we must press the Government to give recognition and status to individual masters of folk arts in the countryside, whether be actors, jugglers, acrobats or ventriloquists. I have seen with my own eyes that in China such artists who, in the pre-liberation days used to perform on the road-side like beggars, are now honoured as 'artists of the people'. They are not only given financial security but great respect in society also, and facilities to fully develop their art to the fullest extent. This process must start in India too. The people's artists must not remain beggars any more.

Perhaps, I am giving the impression that I am an enemy of European art and culture—some sort of purist who wishes to protect Indian drama from any contact with the West. That is certainly not my intention. I fully believe in the principles that all good art is national as well as international. Ideas never wait for a passport. No one has been able to check their journey from country to country. They even take root and grow wherever they like. I have not the slightest hesitation to admit that we have learnt a great deal from Western drama and, in future, have to learn and absorb a great deal more. There is no objection to learning from any source. But there is objection to slavish imitation. Learning is good, copying is bad.

As a matter of fact, it is wrong to append the title 'Western' or 'Eastern' to dramatic arts. The development of drama through the ages is linked up with the history of human civilization, not with geography.

For instance, during the ancient period when drama flourished in India and Greece, humanity was passing through the age of kings and monarchs. That age had its own distinc-

tive features, its own social laws. And its drama too was influenced by these laws.

A study of Sanskrit drama reveals that women enjoyed the status of a virtual slave in ancient society. In every way she was dependent on her lord. She was not allowed even to speak Sanskrit, but only Prakrit.

In these plays, the hero is either a king or a god. He is above ordinary human beings. He is not depicted as a human being either but as an epitome of all virtues. He is good, he is brave, he is generous, he is noble, he is kind, so on and so forth. And his opponent, whether it is a demon or another king, is an epitome of all evil. He has no redeeming features in his character at all. In fact, there is hardly any 'characterization' in these plays at all in the modern sense. The characters are only puppets. The dialogues take place in a highly artificial, flowery and poetical language. The ordinary every-day style of speech is taboo. The plot does not develop organically through conflict of characters and situations, but is fixed beforehand by the writer. The climax is brought upon by fate. In brief, these are some of the distinctive features of the ancient Sanskrit drama.

In the fourteenth century, developed a revolutionary movement in Europe which was a landmark in the history of human civilization. As a political outcome of this movement, the crowns of kings and emperors began to totter and a new ruling class, the capitalist class, began to raise its head. This was made possible because of the advancement of science and its application to industry. Needless to say that it had tremendous repercussions in the field of arts, and came to be known as the renaissance. In our universities, the students of art and literature devote a great deal of study to this epoch-making upheaval.

Its impact on drama was most fruitfully illustrated in the works of Shakespeare. If we compare the plays of Kalidasa with the plays of Shakespeare, we shall find fundamental differences and it will be clear how the latter brought about a veritable revolution in drama technique.

Firstly, the women in Shakespeare's plays occupy a bold and equal place with man. She is no longer a toy. Secondly, Shakespeare's characters have a living throbbing humanity. They are not mere puppet personifications of good or evil. They are so realistic that we recognize in them the people we meet in day-to-day life. Nor are the main characters always kings and emperors. Even when they are, Shakespeare treats them as human beings and describes their follies with as much freedom as he does their virtues. He also describes the life of the common people with great truth, dignity and humour. Thirdly, in spite of the fact that he wrote the major part of his plays in verse, Shakespeare brought his dialogues astonishingly close to life. He detested pompousness of style and strove for sincerity to the utmost. Fourthly, in spite of the fact that like Kalidasa he borrowed his plots from history or mythology, unlike Kalidasa he developed the plot through the internal contradictions of the characters. The internal crises brought out external crises. The climax was not ordained by some outside fate.

"It is in us that we are thus and thus." We see, therefore, that Shakespeare's plays are qualitatively different from Kalidasa's. These two great masters wrote in two different ep-

ochs of human history and when their work is compared, this fundamental premise must be fully taken into consideration, otherwise the comparison can become not only superficial but also bana!.

Shakespeare broke the feudal traditions of drama and brought the realistic spirit into it. To him man was greater than gods. As the capitalist era developed, science made tremendous advances in all fields. So did industry. So did literature and art. From Shakespeare to Bernard Shaw is a grand golden age of modern English drama. And this drama has exercised a profound influence on dramatic arts in all countries.

We can have no hesitation in admitting that our dramatic writers and artists of today have learnt a great deal from the English drama of the past three or four centuries. And we still have a lot to learn, because the influence of feudal traditions is still quite powerful with us. Our playwrights of today still use, quite often, in films as well as plays, flowery sort of dialogues, removed from reality. They still create two dimensional caricatures rather than three dimensional characters. A seth always has a big stomach and gold earrings! A worker always goes on strike and gets a bullet in his chest! Whether the writer is progressive or reactionary, his characters are made of cardboard and thus, rarely serve the purpose of realistic development. Our film stories reveal equally plainly that we still have all the weaknesses of Kalidasa without having any of his strength. Instead of creating dramatic situations which may speak for themselves, we merely shout slogans and moralise.

In the meantime, history has turned another and still more glorious chapter. Over a third of the human race has overthrown the rule of the capitalist class and has ushered in the rule of the common man. The ideas of socialism have taken deep root among the artists and intellectuals of today. We can see with our own eyes that in England and France, the traditional commercial theatre finds itself bogged in a morass of sensualism, pessimism and empty formalism. On the other hand, we find a upsurge of optimistic and creative realism in the drama of socialist countries. Not only this, our own country, with its newly won freedom for 400 million people, has pledged itself for building socialism and ending capitalism. In this new period, the responsibilities of workers in the field of art are tremendous, and it is not difficult to imagine why it is so. In the shortest possible time, we have to sift the feudal as well as the capitalist heritage and then march on to the new socialist realism—not on the basis of empty slogans but through the school of life, through the active reconstruction of our country. Thus, in this period, nothing can be more foolish than to hang on to decadent principles of the bourgeoisie art of the West, to excessive and morbid individual psychotherapy, to pessimistic brooding on evil being the more essential part of man, to sensualism and empty formalism.

It is our bounden duty to understand the changes that are coming around us, to understand the new life and its needs. Only then shall we be in a position to create art which can answer those needs. Today, only that drama will go to the heart of the people which attacks feudal ignorance, superstition and fatalism, which educates the people and opens their eyes to the achievements of science, which at the same time ruthlessly criticises the in-

equalities and the injustices which beset the common man under the capitalist system, and impede his progress to a better life—to a life wherein, for the first time in history, he is the master of his own destiny. The worker in the field of drama has to think courageously over these things. Only then can the future of drama be bright in our country. Only then can lethargy and depression be overcome.

DISCUSSION

Balraj Sahni: My friends assembled here tell me that most of them have gone through my insignificant paper. I am proud of this expression of their affection for me. I refer to it because I wish to avoid repetition of what I have said in my paper. We have all agreed that we will no more waste our time and energy to establish how harmful to drama and theatre have been the Dramatic Performances Act of 1876, the pre-censorship of play-scripts and the thoughtless imposition of several taxes. We have demanded that they should go lock, stock and barrel if drama and theatre have to be made objects of national glory. The only thing I want you to keep in mind is that we must now completely free ourselves from fear-complex. We had been, in the past, withered by it. Fear of parents, fear of teachers, fear of the police, fear of this, that and sundry other things made us dumb and cold in heart. We must free ourselves from that, as we happen to be now free citizens of a sovereign State. We must now have freedom to shape our theatre as we, workers in the field, feel it should be. Every one of us present here may not feel that every move by the government is a move in the right direction, but every one of us assembled at this Seminar is a patriot and a law abiding citizen. None of us is an enemy of the people. We have a right to free expression and to a free growth. Unless we are free in our mind and soul, we will not be able to get drama and theatre out of the rut where we find them lodged today. We have been very free at this Seminar to criticise the government to cause headache to many a wise head. But no impartial observer could honestly report that we had spared ourselves of severe criticism. We have been honestly exploring all the weaknesses within us as we have been locating obstacles without us. We are looking for a condition congenial to our growth. That is why we are forced to criticise our own activities as well as those of the government in the field of drama and theatre, we have never been out of bound. We feel it our duty to understand the changes that are coming around us to realize what we need to fit in the coming pattern. Only then shall we be able to engage our arts to the nation's needs. I conclude my rather oratory observation and place myself at your disposal to clarify, if you need, any point I have raised in my paper.

Mama Warerkar: While speaking on our precious tradition in drama, Shri Balraj Sahni has made some sweeping observations which I find to be incorrect. In his paper, he has said, "more than two thousand years ago men like Kalidasa, Bhasa and Bhavabhuti wrote plays which are even today considered as masterpieces." No doubt, they are masterpieces. But they were neither writer in one particular period of history, nor were they as ancient as

Shri Sahni thought them to be. Of course, the tradition of our drama comes to us from a far distant age but not so the tradition of Kalidasa and Bhavabhuti. This statement should be corrected to stand the test of history. And then I object to his remarks made in the form of a question followed by the immediate answer he has himself given. He asked, "But what is our attitude to those great masterpieces?" He did not pause for a reply and concludes by saying, "It is one of utter and extreme neglect. We have made no effort to translate these plays into modern languages, nor do we ever perform them with any degree of authenticity." Both his statements are incorrect. We do not neglect them at all. Almost all the Indian languages have translations of these masterpieces. Many of these translations have been staged successfully. They are played in original Sanskrit also in many parts of the country. Bombay, Baroda, Bengal and Banaras and the whole of southern India give repeated performances of these plays in original as well as in translated forms. 'Utter and extreme neglect' in regard to them is a comment utterly incorrect and extremely irresponsible. He has further observed that, "If ever *Shakuntala* has been performed authentically in any modern language, it has been in England, Germany or France, not in India." I have not myself seen any of the productions of these plays in England, Germany and France. I am, therefore unable to say if they were authentic. But I have seen performances of *Shakuntala* in original Sanskrit and also in many of the regional languages. None of them may be described as absolutely rot. They were as much authentic as it was possible for them to be in the present age and under limitations our theatres have to face. I don't believe that artists of other countries can produce *Shakuntala* or any of the traditional Indian plays and dances more authentically than Indian artists are capable of doing.

Balraj Sahni: I am sorry that I made a sweeping remark in regard to the age of Kalidasa, Bhasa and Bhavabhuti. I am prepared to correct my remark when I get correct dates from authorities of history. Even now I do accept Mama Warerkar's views that I made an irresponsible statement. I thank him for giving me what I owe. But with regard to productions in translations or in original of the masterpieces, I do hold on to what I have said and declare that I have yet to see one such production which can give me satisfaction. I know the stuff known as translations and adaptations current in this country. They are new fangled absurdities making ludicrous what were sublime.

Ahindra Choudhuri: Shri Balraj Sahni has one advantage over me. And that is, he has witnessed all the British, German and French productions of Indian classical plays and also Indian productions in the several regions of India in original and in translations. I have not seen any such productions abroad, nor do I know who were those who had produced them in England, France and Germany. Shri Sahni has not given us any name. But I have seen *Shakuntala* as well as other plays rendered into Bengali and produced on the Bengali stage and never have I been ashamed of them. I can say in the same strain that translations from foreign plays and their adaptations are not few and far between to be produced on our stage. I have myself produced many of them and have performed them too. But never was I disgusted with them as our friend Balraj Sahni has been by witnessing or may be by performing and producing some of them. If we accept what Shri Sahni has said, I feel, we would be doing a great injustice to our great playwrights and renderers of plays. That would

not only be unbecoming of us, but would be an expression of our ungratefulness too.

K. Narain Kale: We don't exactly understand what you want to see. If it is authenticated production of Sanskrit plays, as you say the Westerners produce, I will tell you that you will never witness them in India. And if you want to see them produced as our ancients used to do, I will tell you once more that you will never witness it. Modern Indian producers will produce them as they think they should and you will have to rest content with it. You should not expect it to be otherwise as we have no idea of how our ancients used to produce them. Nor are the Westerners likely to have any idea of it. And while we talk of authentic productions, we want to enquire, are the texts authentic, are the techniques followed faithfully, are the costumes and properties represent the age the plays reflect? The Sahitya Akademi has taken up the task of bringing out an authentic version of Kalidasa. Once it is out you will get authentic texts. But the technique of production will still be left to everybody's imagination. Directions given in the texts of the plays are not found very helpful. Nor do we get hints enough from the *Natyashastra*. We are quite helpless in the matter. The rasa theory itself is perplexing. According to the rasa theory, certain emotions are stylized. There are different styles to represent different shades of emotions. There are only nine varieties of rasas. I fail to follow how all the emotions may be expressed by strictly adhering to the rasa theory.

Sachin Sengupta: I am afraid we are indulging ourselves to a discussion on a subject over which we have no clear knowledge. These very points we discuss now were raised and discussed at length in connection with the paper on Sanskrit Drama. We could not then discover how those dramas could be produced to give them any authenticity. In regard to Prof Kale's observation that he fails to realize how different shades of emotions might be stylized, I beg to inform him that the Chinese have retained the knowledge of it. The Peking Opera actors do actually give expression of one single emotion in various styles according to the demand of particular moments of a play. The Kathakali performers also do that. But I don't feel that we should make a fetish of such styles while we think of producing a play of Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti or Bhasha or any other Sanskrit Play. The dialogues in these plays are extremely suitable to recreate images and emotions if artists can only use them as they do use dialogues in any modern play. There is no harm if we produce ancient plays in modern modes of expression, particularly so when we cannot regain the lost styles. Shri Balraj Sahni has not asked us to discard Sanskrit Plays altogether. So far as I have been able to gather from his paper, he has two different propositions, one, that while performing original texts care should be given to authenticity as far as possible, and two, greater attention should be given to performances in languages and stress on good renderings so that modern drama may have some relationship with the traditional drama. He was asked to write on traditional drama and the new. That is why he lent his thought on authentic presentation. His comments on the defects of Sanskrit drama, and the conclusions he has arrived at in regard to the position of women from the female characters and the compulsion they were subjected to in the matter of obligatory use of Prakrit tongue are matters of opinion. We have authoritative opinion presenting us the other side of the shield also.

Mulk Raj Anand: I agree with the Director of the Seminar that we need not reopen the

discussion on the feasibility of producing Sanskrit plays in an authentic way. Of course, we know that attempts are being made to present plays of Shakespeare as he used to present them. But then you must keep in mind what difference it makes when it is a gap of four centuries and a gap of, say, fifteen centuries. The English had a continuous sovereignty and a continuous chain of theatres since Shakespeare, while we had repeated reversals due to conquests after conquests and not all the conquering people being tolerant to our culture. I, therefore, believe that the cry of producing ancient plays as our ancients used to produce would never materialize. While I say this, I do not mean to discourage any one from his guess for the authentic form. I believe a persistent research work is necessary to discover it, if there is any possibility of such a discovery. The proposed National School of Drama should have it as one of its objective. Apart from his paper, Shri Sahni has placed before this Seminar some concrete proposals. I do not think that any one of us has any objection to accept them. I thank Shri Sahni for his advocacy and request you to take up the next paper.