

Indian National Theatre Celebrates C. C. Mehta's Amrit Mahotsav

On April 6, 1976, Chandravadan C. Mehta, a pioneer in dramaturgy in Gujarat and a well-known author, was seventy-five. The Indian National Theatre celebrated the occasion in a three-day function at Bombay from April 5 to 7. The celebrations were, doubtless, quite star-studded with some of the very best scholars, writers, musicians and theatre-people participating in them. However, even such concentrated glitter of a bright culture-galaxy is not entirely uncommon nowadays. What made these celebrations an event in the cultural life of Gujarati letters, or nearly so, was something else which one would like to separate out, observe and remember.

At seventy-five, Chandravadan Mehta is the grand old man of Gujarati theatre. But he is something more. Even now, as always, he is also its *enfant terrible!* The Indian National Theatre's celebrations gave participants, on both sides of the foot-lights, a memorable occasion to rejoice in the qualities of not only the grand old man but also the lovable child which C. C. always is. In this connection one is particularly reminded of the charming poem Uma-shankar Joshi recited on the second day: *Chandravadan, Ek Cheej!* On the same day Yashvant Shukla read a witty and perceptive paper, tracing the naughty yet innocent qualities of Chandravadan Mehta's prose to a school-time friend whose sketch C. C. penned in an autobiographical book. One was reminded of Huck Finn and Mark Twain!

Another aspect of the celebrations, one that made it memorable, was the sane and critical temper which reigned throughout. From the inaugural words of Damu Jhaveri to the concluding remarks by Pravin Joshi, the celebrations remained honest and credible; they succeeded in becoming an attempt at a fine and critical evaluation of the man, his work—in and for the theatre, and his literary output. The most outstanding moments of such discriminating evaluation came when Niranjana Bhagat read a brilliant paper on Chandravadan Mehta's poetry, demonstrating its basic limitations and in a seminar conducted by Ramprasad Bakshi, himself a profound scholar of Sanskrit dramaturgy. Bholabhai Patel read, in the same seminar, an ill-presented yet correct and scholarly evaluation of C. C.'s plays, showing dispassionately how they were not exactly as significant as they were made out to be. One wishes something more was said about C. C.'s radio-plays which are, doubtless, a contribution to the genre. Someone like Gijubhai Vyas of A.I.R. could have done justice to this topic.

On the first and the third day Chandravadan Mehta's own poems (including a Jazz-poem on New York) and excerpts from some of his plays, as well as a one-act play on him by Raghuvir Chaudhari, were presented. C. C. himself performed, presenting some pieces from his favourite playwrights. It was good idea to place the session of critical evaluations between these direct exposures to C. C.'s works. One does not live by bread alone and vice versa! C. C. is a great performer. It was when he brought to life, with great love and skill, some glorious pieces from the past of the Gujarati theatre, including a soliloquy from a play by Kavi Nanalal, that one knew what it was

all about. This, and the good-natured spirit with which he accepted the critical evaluations, helped one to understand why C. C.'s name has magic in it.

One is somewhat sad that the magic is not matched with reality. The three-day programme was also ably and finely tuned to this sadness. On the first day, Kshemu Divetia and other musicians and singers of repute gave an enchanting start to the celebrations. On the last day, with a subtle sense of lamentation, Pravin Joshi directed a play on C. C., his magic and his reality, written gently by Raghuvir Chaudhari. Between the two points, there was an event one will remember and, hopefully, try to understand.

This was an event, but, one may add, in spite of logic, that it was nearly so. The very sanity and credibility of the celebrations prompt us to add the phrase. One waits for the day when Gujarat will celebrate great dreams coupled with great art.

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