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### *The Marathi Theatre Today*

Nowadays when one feels the impact of a play, one does not regard its writing and its production as two different stages of an experience. Nor does one try to define their relationship in terms of an original idea and its elaboration. Today we tend to treat a production as an audio-visual performance. The visual image is equated with a poem enacted in space and an utterance (not just the written word) becomes a sound image. It is through these elements that the director projects his experience of the play.

An important landmark in this direction was Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* and particularly so on account of the imaginative shaping given to the text by its director Jabbar Patel and the able support it received through Bhaskar Chandavarkar's meaningful music. Rhythm was the language of the total production and a traditional form was employed in a new context.

Two of our young directors, Amol Palekar and Dilip Kolhatkar, also seem to have devoted serious attention to the concept of the play as an audio-visual enactment. They have not just done some abstract thinking on the subject

and then injected it into a production. Their style has evolved in the actual process of their response to a text. Instead of employing the usual phrase 'directed by' for his production of Achyut Vaze's *Chalre Bhopalya Tunuk Tunuk*, Amol Palekar uses another rendering: 'Visualised and Designed by Amol Palekar'. The other plays in this category include: Sadanand Rege's *Gochee* directed again by Amol Palekar; Vrindavan Dandavate's *Bootpolish* directed by Dilip Kolhatkar; Satish Alekar's *Mickey and Memsahib* directed by the author himself.\*

The inventiveness displayed in the directing of the play *Gochee* and the acting talents of the cast evoked general interest and acclaim. The word *Gochee* has now become part of the vocabulary of some of our urban youth; it has come to signify the hurt that people experience in modern times. This experience itself is such that it cannot be mirrored through an event, because it is not really affected by time. Man feels stifled in this tiny body, inhabiting a vacuum of time and space. This body-frame creates its own relationships and its daily routine; man feels trapped in it, in its trivial details, in the movements of the hands of a clock. He becomes a cog in a huge mechanism. He cannot find another being in this mighty roar to whom he can communicate what he wants to say. This is an abstract experience and demands a different sort of skill on the part of the director who seeks to project it. Amol Palekar, who edited the script, depended almost wholly on tableau effects. There were no props as such and their function was fulfilled by the varying shapes formed by the actors' bodies. The two figures of the boy and the girl, dressed in dark tights, glided and danced through that free space and structured not only different visual compositions through their bodies but also accomplished the role of a chorus. They uttered simple words and sentences like spells and this device turned out to be quite effective. There was no dependence on mikes for amplification; one heard only a blend of human voices in a wooden monotone. The cast managed an excellent balance of stylized and spontaneous gestures.

Vrindavan Dandavate's *Bootpolish* is a good example of 'group theatre'. The work is not just a reproduction of the life of street urchins. At one level it depicts this stratum with its *dada*, and those passers-by who try to enter this world. At another, it explores the ties of family, social status, the new face of woman, and the tensions between father and son. At a third level it pinpoints the image of the woman as female, a dream designed to entertain the well-to-do classes. Even the lives of these vagabonds on the footpath have their own kind of shape. This is what was suggested by the group movements designed by the director. The non-metallic sounds of the brush and the bootpolish box were the right kind

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\*GOCHEE by Tadoz Ruziwich, translated into Marathi by Sadanand Rege, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1974, Rs. 5.00.

BOOTPOLISH, Yugavani, Diwali Number, 1973.

MICKEY AND MEMSAHIB by Satish Alekar, Neelkantha Prakashan, Pune, 1974, Rs. 4.00.

of accompaniment to the satirical note in the chorus song and this heightened the dramatic quality of the production.

Achyut Vaze's *Chalre Bhopalya Tunuk Tunuk* says that the man in search of nothingness is also tethered to the trivia of life. He thinks he has grasped something new only to discover that others have found it long before him. The songs conveyed the tempo of existence in an industrial



*Dilip Kulkarni and Anuya Palekar in Gochee*

whirl. The non-hero's humor had a Chaplinesque slant and the fluidity of the play's structure itself points to the new contours of Marathi drama.

*Mickey and Memsahib* explores the psychological problem underlying the domination of one human being over another (Achyut Vaze's *Shadja* had tackled a more or less similar theme). The bondage imposed by one partner on another as a result of the sexual tie; the relationship between the Professor and the mouse (Mickey), whom he is using as a guinea-pig for his experiments; between the Professor and his student; between the student and

Mickey—all these help to build the form of the play. But both the script and the production has far too much of a 'finished' feel, considering the terrifying quality of the subject.

*Ek Asato Raja* and *Ek Ande Phutle*, two plays by the young playwright, Dilip Jagtap, put both spectators and critics into somewhat of a quandary. His style betrayed the influence of C.T. Khanolkar and a marked tendency to overwrite. Even so the attempt to project the clash between authority and the common man in *Ek Asato Raja* shows germs of definite promise.

The work of these young playwrights reveals a sharp awareness of the possibilities and power of the dramatic form. Production techniques and decor seem now to be influenced by non-representational painting and sculpture. A new generation reared on the work of Vijay Tendulkar and C.T. Khanolkar, and non-Marathi dramatists like Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar is now growing up. These young theatre people prefer original plays to translations and adaptations. Both in writing and in direction, the trend is towards the group. A hero and a heroine are not as significant as the team. They are serious-minded lot, these young people. Though they are alive to trends from the West, they also realize that the folk drama and the folk dance offer rich potential. Sometimes these new experiments appear difficult or obscure, partly because spectators have not learnt to appreciate the medium's possibilities or because of the division in the minds of theatre practitioners. The new trend has to find its own feet yet. In their predilection for the visual they tend to neglect the spoken word. Even so, these theatre people are dedicated to the medium and their efforts will certainly enrich the Marathi stage and carry it beyond the realm of entertainment and narration.

—PUSHPA BHAVE

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