

Criticism, Critique, and Translation

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I am going to read only some portions of my paper and with the rest of the text I am going to pick up on specific points. I also want to pick on few things that have been said in the last couple of days. On that the talks by Sainath and Akshar were examples of critical intelligence brought to bear on political and cultural issues and the subject of my talk today is criticism and critique. And in both cases what they were engaging in was critique. So we can quite easily keep those two talks as models of the kind of activity we are talking about in terms of responding to theatre. I also want to say something that to me seems to be a widespread misuse of the word theory. There have been statements to the effect that people don't do theory or are not interested in it. And others including Shiva and Sudhanva and Sunder argued yesterday that there is a great need to articulate theory, that theory is not something that is incompatible with action and activism. Let's be clear about this. Theory is the articulation of principles that underline practice of any kind whether it is artistic, cultural, social or political. There is no practice without either an explicit or an implicit theory. In my view the apparent in theory is a sign of a less reflective practice. Just as the apparent absence of politics in art is a sign of a less overt politics. There have been a number of writers including fiction writers and poets who argue that our work is not political. What that means is that the politics is not overt, the politics is not that are openly engaging with or articulating. So when people say that they are not interested in theory, what they mean is that they are not primarily concerned with articulating the ideas underline their practice. They do not want to verbalize it, they do not want to reflect on it, they do not want to intellectualize it. And that at first seems a perfectly legitimate position. I am arguing with it because theatre artists have different priorities and different styles and I think it is the case in general that people who are engaged in the performing arts hold this position much more frequently than those who are engaged in the print literary form. I think what is problematic is the assumption that practice can be disengaged from other kinds of activities. As I have argued in my paper also that it becomes a self-sufficient activity and an end in itself. That's when I think the problem starts. Cultural forms like theatre and performance have multiple modes of existence that unfold simultaneously. Some kind of theory precedes and practice. Practice creates history in its way, that's what in relation to theatre the discipline of theatre is all about. And practice endures because of the attention it receives in criticism. So theory has to be in criticism the necessary co-relate to practice. And that's true to theatre and literature in general. A long time ago in the 1940's there was a study called- theory of criticism, by Rene Welleck and Austin Warren and there was the argument that- theory, history, criticism and practice in literature are simultaneous. You cannot separate one from the other. The same argument applies to considerations in theatre. That been said my main focus here will be on purposes and varieties of criticism.

The caveat about language that I have at the beginning of my paper is essential. I don't want to make fallacious assumptions about the state of theatre criticism in languages that I do not

read myself. In Marathi and Hindi I do know that the state of criticism is better than in English and I find this ironical for two reasons. One that the state of criticism should be weaker in what by choice and default has become the link language in India. We have all been discoursing in English. A lot of work is being translated into English. The work that I am engaged in and also a lot of work that other people are doing is bringing theatre criticism from Modern Indian languages all together. All these is been done in English. Yet the state of criticism in English is weaker than in most languages. The second irony is that English in this way should be a weak medium for theatre criticism. When it is the vehicle, already in India, of extremely sophisticated social science, history, philosophy, political science, journalism and literary criticism. So every other field seems to have flourished with English as its medium and I am only talking of the critical use of English, and not the creative use of English. We all know what has happened to the South –Asian writers especially those who belong to the global Diaspora. These are ironies and they need systematic reflection.

Now I come to the text of the paper and I reproduce six anonymous passages. What I want to do is to talk about what comes out of these commentaries on the function of criticism. You know that Mathew Arnold has a function of criticism at the present time in 1865 and Elliot had a function of criticism sometime in the early 1920's and Terry Eagleton had a function of criticism as the title of a whole new book recently- Introduction to Anatomy of Criticism. These are all indicative of the fact that there is something that people keep coming back to at regular intervals because the task of criticism needs that kind of self reflection.

The following is an anonymous selection of comments on the act of criticism, in random chronological order and without cultural identification. In the passages below, replace “reader” with “spectator” and “literary” with “theatrical” or “performative.” The more adventurous among you may be inclined to try and identify the authors, but that’s not vital to our discussion.

1. In the Age of Enlightenment the concept of criticism cannot be separated from the institution of the public sphere. Every judgement is designed to be directed towards a public; communication with the reader is an integral part of the system. Through its relationship with the reading public, critical reflection loses its private character. Criticism opens itself to debate, it attempts to convince, it invites contradiction. It becomes part of the public exchange of opinions. Seen historically, the modern concept of literary criticism is closely tied to the rise of the liberal, bourgeois public sphere in the early eighteenth century.
2. I conclude with what I said at the beginning: to have the sense of creative activity is the great happiness and the great proof of being alive, and it is not denied to criticism to have it; but then criticism must be sincere, simple, flexible, ardent, ever widening its knowledge. Then it may have, in no contemptible measure, a joyful sense of creative activity; a sense which a man of insight and conscience will prefer to what he might derive from a poor, starved, fragmentary, inadequate creation. . . . Still, in full measure, the sense of creative activity belongs only to genuine creation.
3. We may comment for a moment upon the use of the terms “critical” and “creative” by one who . . . overlooks the capital importance of criticism in the work of creation itself. Probably, indeed, the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting combining constructing expunging correcting testing this frightful toil is as much critical as creative. I maintain even that the criticism employed by a trained and skilled writer on his own work is the most vital, the highest kind of criticism; and that some creative writers are superior to others because their critical faculty is superior. . . .

One reason for the value of the practitioner's criticism [is that] he is dealing with his facts, and he can help us do the same.

4. The function of criticism seems to be essentially a problem of order too. I thought of literature then, as I think of it now, of the literature of the world . . . of the literature of a single country, not as a collection of the writings of individuals, but as "organic wholes," as systems in relation to which, and only in relation to which, individual works of literary art, and the works of individual artists, have their significance. . . . A common inheritance and a common cause unite artists consciously or unconsciously: it must be admitted that the union is mostly unconscious. Between the true artists of any time there is, I believe, an unconscious community. And as our instincts of tidiness imperatively command us not to leave to the haphazard of unconsciousness what we can attempt to do consciously, we are forced to conclude that what happens unconsciously we can bring about, and form into a purpose, if we made a conscious attempt.

5. My larger debt . . . is to the makers of contemporary theatre in India—the playwrights, directors, actors, technical artists, and managers whose stunning collective achievement makes the deficiencies of theory, history, and criticism all the more baffling . . . Critics should recognize that the event of political independence marks the beginning of a highly self-conscious, self-reflexive period in Indian theatre during which most practitioners are engaged in creating a "new" theatre for the new nation, whether they locate the sources of novelty in the precolonial past or the postcolonial present The most striking aspect of this [self-reflexive] commentary is the practitioners' close involvement with broader contemporaneous developments: in India, the activity of theatre has fostered a powerful sense of community among contemporaries. Self-reflexive authorial comment and the reciprocal dialogue among practitioners have thus emerged as valuable critical resources, and they should become an intrinsic part of the methodology for dealing with Indian theatre as a subject.

6. It is . . . important to acknowledge that this abundance, this opportunity to examine ourselves publicly and together, is also part of a new critical consciousness that has entered the contemporary arts in general in this country. . . . As more and more is written about Indian theatre (whether we treat the term as singular or plural), it becomes mandatory that each analytic project have a new angle, a new way of seeing the same, now familiar texts and contexts.

Written in different places and at different times, the passages above present a range of arguments about criticism that may be summarized as follows:

(i) Criticism is a key mode of debate and intellectual exchange in the modern open not private sphere.

(ii) The creative act is primary and the critical act secondary, but the latter is not second-rate, subservient, or dispensable. In fact, for many writers the critical faculty plays an important role in the act of writing itself. And I am sure the same is also true of theatre practice. It is not possible to create anything unless you yourself are reflecting on it in various measures, not everybody does it to the same extent. This happens all the time, in the act of creating, whatever your medium.

(iii) At a given moment in culture, the collective output of artists constitutes an interrelated system, and artists benefit if they move from an unconscious to a conscious sense of community. Here there is a need to generate a sense of community . All the first generation playwrights and directors I met during my work on Indian theatre, have all said that they are nostalgic of the 60'S AND 70's and talk about how energized they were because they were

so closely in touch with each other. They all felt that movement has got dissipated because of the media of mass reproduction- film and television. It has dissipated a lot of energy out of theatre. And criticism is vital to this because it makes this consciousness possible. How do we relate to each other except through that open exchange of ideas and debate?

(iv) Post-independence Indian theatre was marked initially by a great deal of self-reflexive criticism and a powerful sense of community. But those energies have begun to dissipate, and restoring them should be a priority for both practitioners and critics. And it is very interesting that in some respects there were more theoretical and critical energies in relation to theatre amongst figures like Bhartendu Harshad in the late 19th century, Rabindranath Tagore, Jaishanker Prasad, than we have seen in a sense in the post IPTA period, the 40's upto about the mid 1950's The IPTA manifesto was an absolute explosion of critical energies and even the Drama seminar had some seminal essays by Alkazi and Shombhu Mitra and Mul Raj Anand and others.

(v) Theatre criticism in India lags conspicuously behind theatre practice, and must discover new methodological perspectives if it is to bridge the gap.

Beside these propositions, I want to place some of the responses I have had from leading theatre directors during the last eight months, as I have criss-crossed the country to gather material for an edited collection of modern Indian theatre theory in all the theatrically significant languages. That these comments have come from directors rather than playwrights or other theatre professionals is an interesting circumstance in itself. It underscores the extent to which (male) directors have come to occupy the center of contemporary performance culture and become its primary spokesmen, even as the directing function has fostered a kind of intellectual complacency and squeamishness that produces a spate of unexamined assumptions and facile generalizations. In the discussion that follows the list below, the directors are referred to as D1 through D5.

1. Eminent director # 1: You have not actually seen any of the work I did in the '60s and '70s? Please leave my room immediately! I don't know you, and this meeting never happened.

2. Eminent director # 2: I don't mind talking to you as a friend, but I have no use for your methodology. You're going to recirculate the same nonsense that has done so much harm to theatre. Anyway, if you want to understand my work, you have to come and spend time with me again and again, over a period of months and years.

3. Eminent director # 3: I no longer care about how history represents me, because I'm absorbed by very different things now. I'm meeting with you because X [a close mutual friend] asked me to give you some time. In any case, your work is very Delhi-centered. You have to forget about Delhi, because nothing of importance happens there.

4. Eminent director # 4: I never write anything down, just speak from notes when I have to. Why don't you transcribe your notes from this interview and send them to me. I'll dictate something to my secretary, who'll transcribe the text and send it back to you.

[Notes faithfully transcribed and sent. Answer awaited—perhaps it'll be a long wait].

5. Eminent director # 5: You'd like to talk to me about my work? But that has been very fully documented by [institution X]. Why don't you just look up those files?

6. Eminent directors #s 6-20 or so: Sorry, we've done theatre for thirty or forty years, but have never written anything down—not even a substantial Director's Note. We're doers, not thinkers!

In Practical terms it is simply not possible and it is not true that this is the only genuine mode of knowledge and if you want to take this argument to its logical conclusion you would need theatre history because as all theatre history does is to revisit the past and represent the theatrical past. If you cannot have any knowledge of the past without actually watching anything, then there cannot be a discipline of theatre history. Another very problematic assumption is that criticism should only serve the cause of that theatre that we would like to promote. Another is that theatre criticism should be exclusive not inclusive and again that the knowledge is only possible when one immerses himself in a particular kind of theatre and evades all the other kinds being practiced. And I think that attitude is very well entrenched at the idea that really all I need to do is to be interested in myself because to be interested in others is a distraction. Then there is the assumption that if you are not interested in talking about your work not one else should be interested in talking about your work. So the lesson from that is that the whimsy of practitioners cannot determine critical considerations of a theatre work. If our task is a critical task then we should persist irrespective of the indifferences, dismissal and evasion we encounter.

Many of the problems that have sapped contemporary theatre practice of energy are implicit in these comments. D1 asserts that the actual experience of a live performance is the ONLY source of genuine "knowledge" about plays and directors. At one stroke, out goes the whole discipline of theatre history, which is about retrieving and representing the theatrical past. (And if you were too young to watch theatre in the '60s and early '70s?—too bad, you get ordered out of the room anyway!) D2 cannot accept the idea that in a collection of modern theories of theatre, the editor's role is not to censor or suppress the positions she dislikes, but to represent the field objectively, so that the full range of theoretical positions may come into view. One assumption here is that criticism should only serve the cause of the kinds of theatre we would like to promote. Another is that critical assessments should be exclusive, not inclusive: true knowledge is possible only when one immerses oneself in a particular kind of theatre, and consciously evades all the other kinds being practiced at any given moment. D3 forgets that he may not care about history, but history is compelled to care about him. (I value his work enough to travel a thousand miles for our meeting, despite all the discouragement. And if he actually looked through my book, he would discover that this so-called "Delhi-centered" work deals with theatre in eight languages, and documents performances in fourteen different cities.) D4 has elevated his antipathy towards the written word to the status of a virtue. D5 considers even a short face-to-face conversation with a visiting scholar pointless. The rest of the doers are fully aware that a little more of their work is lost every day, but their response rarely proceeds beyond a few gestures of regret.

Creativity does not flourish in a vacuum: it dies without a commensurate critical effort. The indifference of most current theatre practitioners to the afterlife of their work is

problematic enough, but to dismiss ALL concern with that afterlife as superfluous is a thoroughly self-defeating, anti-intellectual move.

There is a growing tendency in India to regard live performance as a self-sufficient event and an end in itself. But to last beyond itself, performance needs a parallel discourse that reflects on what is being performed, why, and for whom. The following descriptions point to the difference such questions can make to the ultimate value of performance.

1. The 10th Bharat Rang Mahotsava organized to celebrate the golden jubilee of the National School of Drama took place in Delhi from 3-20 January 2008. After an inaugural ceremony culminating in a performance of Ratan Thiyam's Prologue, audiences were offered an average of 4-5 performances per day for seventeen days in six different locations. The gap between performances in different venues was often 15-30 minutes, so that audiences were literally running from one play to another. The principle of selection for the Indian entries was that NSD alumni should direct them, or have alumni in leading roles. There were, in addition, invited productions from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Britain, Iran, Afghanistan, and Mauritius, in addition to the South Asian conclave of Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. At every venue, there were impressive displays of larger-than-life color photographs and posters, marigold garlands, bouquets, and flower-petal arrangements on the floor. On the NSD campus there was also an exhibit relating to the school's history, and a live installation called the Glass House Project, which involved a student living in a transparent structure for the duration of the festival.

There were, however, no occasions for playwrights, directors, and performers to talk with each other or with the audience. An ad hoc noontime discussion forum began a few days into the festival and continued erratically for two weeks, but without the visible publicity that would bring in the viewing public. There was no discussion of the nations, cultures, languages, and regions represented at the festival, or of the range of texts, forms, and presentation styles. At the National SCHOOL of Drama, there was no assimilation of a two-week event to any pedagogic goals or special activities relevant to students. At the end of seventeen days, the individual viewer was left with a small pile of programs, brochures, and ticket stubs, free to reconstruct the event in whole or in part as he/she pleased.

2. The 3rd Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards Festival took place in New Delhi from 29 February to 5 March. Ten plays, selected by a four-member committee from a total of ninety-five submissions, were performed over six days at the Shri Ram Centre and Kamani auditoriums. A distinguished five-member jury evaluated the plays in a total of twelve categories, and the awards were presented on 6 March at a lavish five-hour ceremony at the Taj Mansingh hotel. In comparison with the NSD festival, the Mahindra program was both more modest and more rigorous, since a smaller number of plays competed for awards in closely contested categories, and the jury deliberated over each entry. Within three years, this annual event has also established itself as a coveted and important showcase for "the best in contemporary theatre"—the total support it extends to the ten finalists is invaluable in a marketplace of scant resources.

But on the whole the Mahindra festival remained, like its NSD counterpart, an unreflective succession of performances. Neither the selection committee nor the jury—all of them major practitioners or scholars—commented publicly on their choices and decisions.

There was again no contact between the producers and consumers of theatre, no opportunity for comment, debate, or discussion. All of the extra-performative energy was focused on the five-star awards ceremony where a Mumbai-based compere unconnected with theatre “kept things light,” the names of plays and performers were routinely mispronounced, and the lack of coordination between written lists and video clips turned the announcement of nominees within each category into a circus. The festival organizers have already garnered such extravagant praise for the event, however, that its format is also unlikely to change in the near future.

3. From 29 February to 15 March, the Department of Theatre and Drama at the University of Wisconsin-Madison produced Lydia Diamond’s stage version of Nobel laureate Toni Morrison’s novel, The Bluest Eye. This is the fourth play the department has produced under the auspices of the Lorraine Hansberry Chair, which commemorates Hansberry every alternate year with the production of a play by an African-American woman playwright. After the performance on 1 March, University Theatre (the department’s production wing) organized a talk with the playwright and the director. On 6, 7, and 10 March, there were formal lectures by experts in African-American studies, American drama, and professional dramaturgy. On 9 March, there was a panel discussion in the morning with three speakers, and a post-show discussion with a professional dramaturg and three graduate students from the Department of Theatre and Drama. A poster detailing these events is attached to this draft.

The difference between the University of Wisconsin events and either the NSD or Mahindra festival is not a matter of material support—if anything, the resources of a Theatre department at a large American state university are considerably more straitened than those afforded by government or corporate patronage in India. It is also not the difference between a professionalized academy abroad and the domain of popular culture at home—serious theatre is not a “popular” institution in either India or the US, and any institution of theatre training can be as “academic” as it chooses. Rather, it is a difference of approach and attitude that creates a different overall cultural position for theatre by valuing ALL its modes of existence, textual and performative. All the way from community and university theatres to regional repertory theatres and Broadway, American performance is surrounded by a discursive text that consists of print materials, discussion, commentary, and audience outreach (programs, brochures, study guides for students, director’s and dramaturg’s notes, panels, symposia, talkbacks, etc.). I have cited a specific example of this approach not to demonstrate the “superiority” of American methods, but because as a member of the Theatre department at Wisconsin I know first hand the gruelling collective effort it takes to put on our annual season of nine productions. There is nothing glamorous about this effort, and it involves no patronage beyond the fact that we are all paid employees of the university. The attached poster, in short, graphically represents the critical prising open of performance—a process that Indian theatre-in-performance has to begin following in greater measure if it is not to dwindle into an empty spectacle.

Next I would go on to the unexplored varieties of Criticism

Question: How many critics does it take to screw in a light bulb?

Answer: All of them, because some will criticize the shape of the bulb, others will complain about the quality of the light, and the rest will claim that they could have done it better themselves. [or

something to this effect]

This was one of the many “lightbulb” jokes at the Mahindra awards ceremony, which I attended mainly out of curiosity about the emerging corporate face of Indian theatre. The cliché it recirculates has been around at least since the seventeenth century in English—that a critic is an ignorant egotist whose only goal is to launch a mean-spirited and pointless attack on a worthy object. In India this popular image has also become largely performance-oriented and journalistic, with the “theatre critic’s” job consisting mainly of performance reviews and interviews with practitioners that appear in periodicals of various kinds. The other frequent site of criticism is a Preface or Introduction to a collection of plays, especially plays in translation.

With these more or less occasional forms of criticism occupying a dominant position, contemporary Indian theatre seems to be a field full of unexplored critical modes and occasions. Only a handful of major playwrights have written prefaces, forewords, or introductions to their own work, or produced manifestoes, memoirs, and polemical essays. Only a few actors have produced autobiographies, memoirs, or acting manuals. Only a few directors have theorized a full-fledged aesthetic of performance. Very few set designers, lighting and sound designers, costume designers, and stage managers have been heard from. Similarly, only a few theatre critics have produced anything beyond performance reviews, book reviews, Introductions, and random essays. In Indian theatre, authors do not appear to speak regularly to their audiences and readers, and critics do not display any common understanding of what constitutes a responsible act of criticism. The reductive notion of “criticism” as merely the rhetoric of praise and blame also obscures the other functions of criticism: explication, interpretation, analysis, comparison, retrieval, and documentation, to name some. Indian theatre criticism would take on a different identity if even just theatre history and interpretive criticism were taken up seriously.

One particular mode of criticism—namely, critique—has become even more important in the current climate. Critique is a focused way of debating ideas of cultural significance: a pointed exercise that considers the positive and negative effects of specific aesthetic beliefs and cultural practices. Historically, this mode has been significant at every stage in modern Indian theatre. Urban commercial theatre established itself in the late nineteenth century by critiquing the “vulgarity” of forms such as the Jatra and Tamasha; the IPTA critiqued colonial theatre in the 1940s; and the proponents of theatre in the 1950s critiqued the IPTA. In more recent decades, the “theatre of roots” movement has critiqued urban realist theatre as a remnant of colonialism, while the adherents of urban realism have critiqued the theatre of roots movement as a form of revivalism. There are at present at least three issues in contemporary theatre that would benefit from systematic scrutiny:

(i) The so-called “abolition of the playwright” because a growing number of directors prefer to develop their own scripts for performance, often in collaboration with their actors. During the NSD and Mahindra festivals, the publicity materials prominently mentioned the directors of plays, but not the playwrights. Of the ten plays at the Mahindra festival, only two had authors who were not also the plays’ directors. Delhi has already acquired the dubious reputation of being a metropolis inhospitable to playwrights. There needs to be more discussion of this trend in theatre forums of various kinds.

(ii) The adaptation of novels, short stories, and other prose narratives for the stage, especially by Delhi-based directors. In Delhi this practice has been theorized as “kahani ka rangmanch”: not an “adaptation” or “theatricalization” of a narrative but a literal “staging” which retains the text, structure, and atmosphere of the original. Whatever the name and particular technique, novels and stories are appearing in increasing numbers on the stage in every major theatre language. We need to consider the artistic, rhetorical, and economic implications of this trend, and ask if the colonization of the stage by prose fiction is an appropriate or effective direction for theatre.

(iii) The continuing over-dependence in the urban repertory on translations and adaptations of foreign plays. As the next section will show, this practice has a historical and ongoing significance in modern Indian theatre. But in the early twenty-first century, the continued preoccupation with Shakespeare, Moliere, Ibsen, Brecht, Miller, Dario Fo et al. is beginning to look like a compulsive derivativeness.

Again, a critique of these practices does not necessarily mean attack or rejection. But they are altering the face of contemporary theatre in profound ways, and we need to initiate a serious conversation about them so that theatre does not change merely by default.

Translation enters this discussion about criticism because it is a critical act in several respects, and has functioned as such in modern Indian theatre for a hundred and fifty years. The selection of a text or performance for translation recognizes its importance in the original language of composition, and even more so, the important work it can do for readers and viewers in the target language. A successful translation requires equal facility in both languages, and involves consistent critical choices relating to meaning, form, tone, and texture. Furthermore, translation creates an open-ended life for a text or performance well beyond its original location in time and space.

Because of the diversity of languages on the subcontinent, India has been a “culture of translation” since the post-classical period. But the activity of translation has undergirded the very formation of a print and performance culture in the modern period, since the decisive nineteenth-century cultural encounter between India and the West depended heavily on the “carrying across” of works from one language to another: from European languages (especially English) to the modern Indian languages; from Indian languages (especially Sanskrit) to the European languages; from Sanskrit to the modern Indian languages; and from one modern Indian language to another (across a spectrum of about twenty important languages). Where drama was concerned, this multidirectional traffic highlighted the twin canonical figures of Shakespeare and Kalidasa, and placed the innumerable modern versions of their works at the core of a “national theatre” in the colonized nation. By the late-nineteenth century, the texts for performance in urban Indian theatre included plays in English, European plays in English translation, English and European plays in Indian-language translation, adapted and indigenized versions of Western plays, translations of Sanskrit plays into the modern Indian languages, and new Indian-language plays, performed both in the original language of composition and in translation.

In the post-independence period, the translation of older Indian plays and of foreign plays from all languages, cultures, and periods has not only continued but also grown

immeasurably; but the translation of new Indian plays into multiple Indian languages has acquired unprecedented momentum and significance. The last five decades have demonstrated that in Indian theatre the prompt recognition of new plays as contemporary classics does not depend so much on publication or performance in the original language of composition, as on the rapidity with which the plays are performed and (secondarily) published in other languages. The process of selection has a vital critical element because it establishes the value of a given play, and keeps it in constant circulation among readers and viewers, creating the layers of textual meaning and stage interpretation that become the measure of its significance. This method of dissemination also generates--and has already generated--a body of nationally circulating texts and performance vehicles that offers more convincing evidence of the existence of a "national theatre" than any other institutional, linguistic, or bureaucratic conception.

In their formal recommendations to the Sangeet Natak Akademi, the participants at the 1956 Drama Seminar had suggested that "there should be a special programme of translations of well-known and stageable plays of the different languages of India into the regional languages enumerated in the Constitution," and that "these plays should be made available at moderate prices." This program of translations did not materialize, perhaps because it involved sixteen or more languages. But the nationwide theatre movement of the 1960s, which began the first major transregional initiatives, gave high priority to the translation of important new plays, and succeeded in forging strong connections between the Indian languages within a few years of the event orchestrated by the Akademi. The movement brought leading playwrights and directors from different languages together through workshops, fellowships, roundtable discussions, and collaborative productions, and one of its important effects was to lead playwrights to translate their own and each other's work, so that major new plays could reach a larger audience of spectators and readers. Girish Karnad translated Badal Sircar's classic Evam Indrajit into English, and Vijay Tendulkar translated Karnad's Tughlaq and Sircar's Evam Indrajit into Marathi. Since 1972, Karnad has also translated all his own major Kannada plays for publication in English, diversifying his objectives as a translator, and demonstrating the importance of making drama-as-text potentially available to national and international audiences.

The total translation activity of the last five decades now makes up a daunting field, even if we consider only Hindi as the target language. The following two Tables offer selective information about the translation of foreign and Indian plays into Hindi, highlighting the significant authors as well as translators.

TABLE I: CONTEMPORARY HINDI TRANSLATIONS OF FOREIGN PLAYS

AUTHOR/S	TRANSLATOR/ADAPTER
Chinghez Aitmatov and Kaltai Mohammejanov	Bhishma Sahni
Pierre de Beaumarchais	J. N. Kaushal
Jean Anouilh	Ranjit Kapoor
Bertolt Brecht	Kamleshwar
	Jitendra Kaushal
	Neelabh
	Amrit Rai

Volker Braun
Goerg Buchner
Albert Camus
Anton Chekhov
Helene Cixous
Euripides
John Galsworthy

Henrik Ibsen

Ben Jonson
Federico Garcia Lorca
Maeterlinck

Arthur Miller

Eugene O'Neill

Luigi Pirandello

Jean Racine
Jean-Paul Sartre

William Shakespeare

August Strindberg
Three modern Hungarian playwrights
Ernst Toller
Leo Tostoy
Herman Wouk
Lu Xun

Ramgopal Bajaj
J. N. Kaushal
Sharad Chandra
Rajendra Yadav
Anu Aneja
Jitendra Kaushal
Premchand

Yashpal
Jitendra Kaushal

Rameshwar Prem
Raghuvir Sahay
Jainendra Kumar

Pratibha Agrawal
Jitendra Kaushal

Upendranath Ashq

Jitendra Kaushal
Usha Ganguli

Krishna Baldev Vaid
J. N. Kaushal

Rangeya Raghav
Amrit Rai
Neelabh
Harivansh Rai Bacchan
Raghuvir Sahay

Mohan Maharshi
Raghuvir Sahay
Firaq Gorakhpuri
Jainendra Kumar
Vishnu Prabhakar
Bhanu Bharati

Coda: Important Translations of Foreign Plays into Other Indian Languages

Bertolt Brecht

C. T. Khanolkar (Marathi)
Badal Sircar (Bengali)
Vyankatesh Madgulkar (Marathi)
K. V. Subbanna (Kannada)
Surekha Sikri (Urdu)

Anton Chekhov	P. L. Deshpande (Marathi) Anwar Azeem (Urdu) Vaidehi (Kannada)
Dario Fo Jean Giradoux Nikolai Gogo Henrik Ibsen Federico Garcia Lorca	Maya Pandit (Marathi) Surjit Patar (Punjabi) K. V. Subbanna (Kannada) Adya Rangacharya (Kannada) Surjit Patar (Punjabi)
Moliere	Habib Tanvir (Urdu) K. V. Subbanna (Kannada)
Luigi Pirandello	Adya Rangacharya (Kannada)
William Shakespeare	Vinda Karandikar (Marathi) K. V. Subbanna (Kannada) H. S. Shivaprakash (Kannada) Vaidehi (Kannada)
Tennessee Williams	Vyankatesh Madgulkar (Marathi)

TABLE 2: TRANSLATIONS OF NEW INDIAN PLAYS INTO HINDI

AUTHOR	TRANSLATOR/ADAPTER
Satish Alekar Bijon Bhattacharya Jaywant Dalvi	Vasant Dev Nemichandra Jain Kusum Kumar
G. P. Deshpande	Vasant Dev Vijay Bapat Jyoti Subhash
Utpal Dutt Mahesh Elkunchwar	Santvana Nigam Vasant Dev
Chandrashekhar Kambar	Vasant Dev B. R. Narayan
Girish Karnad	B. V. Karanth Ramgopal Bajaj B. R. Narayan
Vasant Kanetkar	Kusum Kumar Vasant Dev
C. T. Khanolkar	Kamlakar Sontakke

	R. S. Kelkar Sarojini Varma
Debashish Majumdar Shombhu Mitra	Santvana Nigam Nemichandra Jain
Adya Rangacharya	Nemichandra Jain B. V. Karanth B. R. Narayan
Madhu Rye	Jyoti Vyas Pratibha Agrawal
Vasant Sabnis V. V. Shirwadkar	Usha Banerjee R. S. Kelkar
Badal Sircar	Pratibha Agrawal Nemichandra Jain Yama Saraf Ramgopal Bajaj/Rati Bartholomew
Rabindranath Tagore	Hazariprasad Dwivedi Bharatbhushan Agrawal S. H. Vatsyayan
Vijay Tendulkar	Vasant Dev Sarojini Varma
Mama Varerkar	R. S. Kelkar

Table I is impressive because of the concentration of literary talent: aside from the original authors, the list of translators reads like a “Who’s Who” of the Hindi literary world in the post-independence period. Furthermore, although the translation of both foreign and Indian plays has a close link to performance, the published versions display a degree of critical engagement with author and work that is unmatched by plays published in the original Indian languages. Most translations carry a Foreword or Introduction that contains biographical information about the original author, reflects on the translation process in general and specific terms, and underscore the artistic and critical importance of bringing the play to Indian audiences. Many translations carry notes and annotations. This critical material offers insights into the theory and practice of translation on such a scale that, ironically, the act of translation rather than original composition emerges as the more significant critical occasion in contemporary theatre.

Table II is equally important because it encompasses a partnership between authors, directors, and translators that has vitally shaped contemporary theatre culture. The “post-independence canon” has come into existence because a handful of directors made a conscious commitment in the 1960s to concentrate their resources on the production of important new Indian plays, and commissioned translations specifically for the purpose of

performance from theatre enthusiasts, associates, and even partners. The directors' commitment was matched by the obvious dedication of such translators as Vasant Dev, Santvana Nigam, Pratibha Agrawal, Nemichandra Jain, and B. R. Narayan to the task of expanding the audience for new Indian plays. A comment by Satyadev Dubey about his "obsession with original plays" best sums up this process: "Besides finding in them a lot of things [I have] wanted to say without having to take the trouble of writing them, [I have] had a sense of continuous contemporariness which makes me feel that I am not alienated from society, at least the society which believes in theatre" (Contemporary Indian Theatre 100-101).

Beyond the specifics of translation, multilingualism and circulation in their post-independence forms have had a profound effect on dramatic authorship, theatre theory, and the textual life of drama. Playwrights who conceive of themselves as literary authors write with the anticipation that the original text of a play will soon enter the multilingual economy of translation, performance, and publication. Vijay Tendulkar, Govind Deshpande, Mahesh Elkunchwar, Satish Alekar, Chandrashekhhar Kambar, and Mohit Chattopadhyay are among the authors who have collaborated actively with translators to make their plays available in other languages (especially Hindi and English), for performance as well as publication (again, especially in Hindi and English). As translators of the work of other contemporary playwrights, Tendulkar and Karnad stand apart in their understanding of the importance of transregional routes in theatre, and by rendering his major plays into English, Karnad has applied that understanding to his own work. All these playwrights construct authorship and authority as activities that must extend across languages in order to sustain a national theatre movement in a multilingual society. Similarly, playwrights who function actively as theorists and critics of Indian drama do not limit themselves to their "native" linguistic-dramatic traditions, but aim explicitly at creating a "nationally" viable body of theory and critical thought. They construct a framework for contemporary Indian drama and theatre in which regional theatrical traditions interact with each other, and are available for use beyond the borders of their languages and provinces. Significantly, although playwrights such as Tendulkar, Elkunchwar, Kambar, Deshpande, and (with some qualifications) Karnad write their plays exclusively in their respective regional languages, much of their criticism appears directly in English.

For both authors and audiences, the total effect of active multilingualism and circulation has thus been to create at least four distinct levels for the dissemination and reception of contemporary Indian plays--the local, the regional, the national, and the international. But multilingualism is a collective activity, another possible casualty of the strategies of insularity and in communication.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION:

AKASHARA: I have one question and some observations to make. You mention that in the 1956 Drama Seminar IPTA was erased. It was not mentioned at all. I am very curious about this. It is extremely important. Why do you think this happened? Secondly the point you made that short stories, novels and poetry being staged in an unprecedented manner in Indian Theatre and the dependence in that. This is something that has been bothering many of us and it has been bothering me in the past 10 to 15 yrs and to see the number of people depending on it. You see the

dramatic imagination is different from the story telling imagination or the poetic imagination. So Drama is essentially poetry but the dramatic imagination or the dramatic poetic imagination is different from the lyrical or epic narrative imagination. Much dramatic writing follows stories. Like Greek writers, Shakespeare, all based their writings on stories. Shakespeare takes things from all over and puts it together and it undergoes a sea change. It is not a one to one putting together of dramatic work and the literary work. That is something that people seem to have entirely forgotten. So I just pick up a story and put it on stage like in the Kahani Ka Rangmanch or I commission someone to do it. Then this work gets referred to as a script, like script written for T.V. or serials. Often I see that you take up a story, divide it into some rudimentary scene division, then put it on stage, rehearse it. And because the truly dramatic imagination is not at work, it leads to dependence on technology, which impoverishes the cause of writing, acting etc. This is something that is extremely problematic.

Dr Ajay Joshi: Aparna I have a concern of a very different kind that doesn't seem to be addressed in your paper at all. You speak of occasional criticism and the kind of work you talk of is very detailed, evaluatory, analytic kind of work, which comes out more in the form of books, journals, seminars etc. I am concerned about the kind of criticism or journalistic writing which is coming up in Newspapers, and the constraints on critics. These writings do in a way affect the performances. Should we just wave off these writings as not criticism or should criticism should only be as you put it. What was written in the earlier years, at least about the Marathi theatre was good analysis but what we see now, the whole new breed of so called critical writing, needs to be addressed.

Vikram Iyengar: I agree with what Ajay says and would like to add to it. I started writing for the English Daily Hindustan Times in Kolkatta after I read this ridiculous review of a play, which I had seen and quite liked. It was an amateur, young production but doing interesting things. But the review had not been not very complimentary. Later on enquiry I realized that it had been written by some college kid. I objected and told the paper that if you are going to review a play then it should be done by someone who has some background in it. You have to give the play its due respect. But this is increasingly happening for theatre and dance in Kolkatta.

