

## **Criticism, Critique, and Translation**

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**[Draft only; not for quotation]**

The following “not-a-seminar-paper” for “Not-the-Drama-Seminar” is a sequence of thoughts, propositions, and observations intended to generate discussion. My sabbatical-year schedule of archival research, meetings, and travel has not left much time for a more formal paper—which would perhaps be out of place in the Heggodu gathering in any case. Each section below is relatively self-contained but also connected to the rest because of a central concern with the subject of criticism in general and Indian theatre criticism in particular. I feel strongly that those who practice theatre and those who write about it have to arrive at a better understanding of the purposes and varieties of criticism in order to make a genuine difference to the contemporary theatre culture in which we are all deeply invested.

A caveat about language is necessary at the outset. My comments apply to contemporary discourse about Indian theatre in the medium of English, and the apparent lack of agreement therein about the nature, purpose, and value of criticism. I do not have an intimate knowledge of theatre criticism in other Indian languages, and in any case English has become, by choice and default, the link language in which a national conversation is possible--among the participants at Heggodu, for instance. I do have enough familiarity with Hindi and Marathi to know that both languages have far more robust traditions of modern theatre criticism, including a great deal of theoretically significant commentary by playwrights, directors, actors, and other theatre professionals. The same is true of Bengali, and perhaps in a lesser measure of such languages as Kannada, Malayalam, and Gujarati. Yet among urban theatregoers none of these other languages has the currency and accessibility (some would say the cachet) of English, and reflecting on the state of criticism and critique in this language thus has a self-evident relevance.

### **I. The Function of Criticism**

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.*

## II. Summary Dismissals: Evading Criticism

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 public 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.
- (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.
- (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.
- (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 centre 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!

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.

### **III. The “Self-Sufficiency” of Performance? Three Events**

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 10<sup>th</sup> 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 they should be directed by NSD alumni, 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 colour 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 noon-time 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 3<sup>rd</sup> 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.

#### IV. 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.

## **V. Translation And/As Criticism**

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 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	Ramgopal Bajaj
Goerg Buchner	J. N. Kaushal
Albert Camus	Sharad Chandra
Anton Chekhov	Rajendra Yadav
Helene Cixous	Anu Aneja
Euripides	Jitendra Kaushal
John Galsworthy	Premchand
Henrik Ibsen	Yashpal Jitendra Kaushal
Ben Jonson	Rameshwar Prem
Federico Garcia Lorca	Raghuvir Sahay
Maeterlinck	Jainendra Kumar
Arthur Miller	Pratibha Agrawal Jitendra Kaushal
Eugene O'Neill	Upendranath Ashq
Luigi Pirandello	Jitendra Kaushal Usha Ganguli
Jean Racine	Krishna Baldev Vaid
Jean-Paul Sartre	J. N. Kaushal

William Shakespeare

Rangeya Raghav  
Amrit Rai  
Neelabh  
Harivansh Rai Bacchan  
Raghuvir Sahay

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

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)  
P. L. Deshpande (Marathi)

Anton Chekhov

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**

Satish Alekar  
Bijon Bhattacharya  
Jaywant Dalvi

G. P. Deshpande

Utpal Dutt  
Mahesh Elkunchwar

Chandrashekhar Kambar

Girish Karnad

Vasant Kanetkar

C. T. Khanolkar

Debashish Majumdar  
Shombhu Mitra

Adya Rangacharya

Madhu Rye

Vasant Sabnis  
V. V. Shirwadkar

**TRANSLATOR/ADAPTER**

Vasant Dev  
Nemichandra Jain  
Kusum Kumar

Vasant Dev  
Vijay Bapat  
Jyoti Subhash

Santvana Nigam  
Vasant Dev

Vasant Dev  
B. R. Narayan

B. V. Karanth  
Ramgopal Bajaj  
B. R. Narayan

Kusum Kumar  
Vasant Dev

Kamlakar Sontakke  
R. S. Kelkar  
Sarojini Varma

Santvana Nigam  
Nemichandra Jain

Nemichandra Jain  
B. V. Karanth  
B. R. Narayan

Jyoti Vyas  
Pratibha Agrawal

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 incommunication.