

TWENTIETH CENTURY SANSKRIT DRAMA:
SOME NEW TRENDS AND TENDENCIES

Sanskritists are generally believed to be tradition-ridden. True, they are to a very great extent. All along the course of Indian history they have been following the dramaturgical rules of the ancient sage Bharata in letter and in spirit. There has been little deviation from them. The net result of all this has been that the Indian drama in the ancient and the medieval ages, and even down to the beginning of the twentieth century was very much a stereotyped affair so far as language, technique and style were concerned. It is only in the twenties and the thirties that a Sanskritist has ventured to bypass, or ignore or even flout the rules of Bharata and loosen his stranglehold on the drama. A fresh wind of change is sweeping over the Sanskrit world where a break with the past is clearly discernible. The twentieth century Sanskrit playwright living in and working in the modern scientific and technological age is well disposed to making experiments and introducing certain changes in his plays in keeping with the demands of the age. There are clearly visible certain trends and tendencies in it which point to Sanskrit drama shedding off its rigidity of exterior and developing a pliability which goes well with a class of literature which is growing and developing incorporating into it many changes and yet maintaining a continuity with the past.

The honour of having written, published and staged the maximum number of Sanskrit dramas in the present century goes to the late Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri who wrote as many as twenty seven Sanskrit plays. Closely following him is Smt. Leela Row Dayal who has written twenty five Sanskrit plays. Dr. Roma Chaudhuri, wife of the late Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri and Ex-Vice-Chancellor of the Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, follows with her twenty-two Sanskrit plays, only some six of which have seen the light of the day. Sri Srijiva Nyayatirtha of Bhatpara, W. Bengal too has published and staged the same number (twenty two) of Sanskrit plays. Sri S. B. Velankar of Bombay has published some fourteen plays of which one is a translation.

Dr. Raghavan has published twelve plays a few of them being operas and ballets (*Prekṣaṇakatrāyī*, *Lakṣmīsvayamvara* etc.).

Sri Jaggu Vakulabhushan of Melkote (Mysore) too has written twelve plays, only four or five of which have been published so far. Generally he has written his plays as the *pūrva* or *uttara bhāgas* (preludes or sequels) of the well-known ancient Sanskrit plays, e.g., *Adbhutāṁśukam* as the *pūrvabhāga* of the *Veṇīsaṁhāra*, *Prasannakāśyapa* as the *uttara bhāga* of the *Abhijñānaśākuntala* and so on.

The late Sri Y. Mahalinga Sastri wrote and published ten Sanskrit plays. He seems to be at his best in humour which is very often pungent and incisive. Out of his ten plays six are farces.

There are writers who have written just one type of drama. Thus Sri Nirpaje Bhima Bhatta has written only political plays: *Kāśmīra-sandhānasamudyama* on the problem of Kashmir and *Hyderabadavijaya* on the merger of Hyderabad, both published in the *Amṛtavāṇī* of Bangalore; Sri Mulshankar Maneklal Yajnik, only historical plays: *Saṁyo-gītāsvayamvara*, *Pratāpavijaya* and *Chatrapatisāmṛājya* on the historical personalities like Prithviraja Chauhan, Rana Pratap Singh and Chatrapati Shivaji; and Sri S. B. Velankar, generally speaking short, Radio-plays or political plays: *Kāliṇḍī*, *Kailāsakampa*, *Svātantryalakṣmī*, etc. the only exceptions being the *Kālidāśacarita* and the *Saṅgītasaubhadra* which is a Sanskrit rendering of the Marathi play of the same name by the celebrated Marathi playwright Annasaheb Kirloskar.

There are a few others who have kept up their accent in one line, deviating from it only occasionally. Among them we may mention Sri Haridasa Siddhantavagisa of Calcutta; three out of his four plays *Mivā-raprātāpa*, *Sivājīcarita* and *Vaṅgiyapratāpa* are historical while the fourth one, the *Virājasarojinī* has an imaginative theme. From Calcutta again there is Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri, whose twenty-four plays out of his twenty seven are devotional in character dealing with mythological or saintly personages or great leaders, the remaining three being translations of Shakespeare's well-known plays *Merchant of Venice* and *Othello* and a play *Mahimayabhārata* on the irrigation policy of India. Three out of the five plays of Bhatta Mathura Prasad Dikshit, are historical, *Virapratāpanāṭaka*, *Gandhivijaya* and *Bhāratavijaya* and two others *Bhūbhāroddharaṇa* and *Saṅkarvijaya* being mythological.

In the study of contemporary Sanskrit dramas one thing that strikes one most is that the maximum activity in this direction has taken place in Eastern, Western and Southern India only. The leading names in the field of contemporary Sanskrit dramatic literature such as those of Dr. V. Raghavan, Sri Y. Mahalinga Sastri, Sri Jaggu Vakulabhushan, Srimati Leela Row Dayal, Sri S. B. Velankar, Sri Haridasa Siddhantavagisa, Sri Srijiya Nyayatirtha, Mm. Kalipada Tarkacharya, Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri, Dr. Roma Chaudhuri and Dr. Siddheshwar Chattopadhyaya, all belong to these areas. Between them, these areas account for a little

over two-thirds of the entire literary activity in contemporary Sanskrit drama. The cities of Calcutta and Burdwan between them account for more than a hundred Sanskrit plays, 83 by six writers alone, Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri 27, Dr. Roma Chaudhuri 22, Sri Srijiva Nyayatirtha 22, Dr. Siddheshwar Chattopadhyaya 5, Sri Haridasa Siddhantavagisa 4, and Mm. Kalipada Tarkacarya 3, and the rest by miscellaneous writers. Maharashtra and Gujarat account for some ninety plays, sixty two by six writers alone, Smt. Leela Row Dayal 25, B. G. Dhok 9, Mm. Shankar Lal Maheshwar 8, S. B. Velankar 14, Shri Mulshanker Maneklal Yajnik 3, Skand Shankar Khot 3 and the rest by miscellaneous writers.

Madras, Mysore, Andhra and Kerala account for some 70 plays, 40 by five writers alone, 12 by Dr. V. Raghavan, 12 by Sri Jaggu Vakulabhushan, 10 by Sri Mahalinga Sastri, 3 by Sri V. K. Tampi and 3 by Sri K. T. Pandurangi and the rest by miscellaneous writers. This may just be taken as one of the freaks of history. Or else how can one explain as to why there is not even one noted contemporary Sanskrit playwright in States like Delhi, Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab and Haryana, whose contribution to other forms of literature in Sanskrit is quite substantial.

Now something may be said about the new trends and tendencies that mark out the new Sanskrit drama. The first striking feature is the freedom from rigidity and the growth of a pliability which goes well with a class of literature which is growing and prospering, incorporating into it many changes and yet maintaining a continuity with the past.

Bharata lays down the use in a play of Prakrits by certain characters like women, jester, servants etc. This was when the different Prakrits were spoken and understood along with Sanskrit. Sanskrit playwrights in obedience to this rule made Prakrits an essential and inseparable part of their plays even long after Prakrits had ceased to be effective media of expression. Sanskrit continued to be patronized by people (though their number was not very large) while Prakrits comparatively fell into disuse. Of late a tendency is visible in Sanskrit dramas either to avoid Prakrits or to replace them with modern vernaculars. In his *Bhūbhārōddharaṇa* Pt. Mathura Prasad Dikshit puts Hindi in place of Prakrits. In another play the *Bhāratavijaya* he uses Newari (the language of Nepal) instead. In the *Pāṇinīyanātaka* and the *Nārījāgarāṇanātaka* Pt. Gopala Shastri Darsanakesari employs Bhojpuri in place of Prakrit.

With regard to Sanskrit too there is a tendency to shed off puritanism and incorporate into it the necessary foreign words either by Sanskritizing them, e.g., *prataila* for petrol or adopting them as they are, as for example, *badminton*, *tennis*, *police*, *radio*, *station*, *bus* etc.

In technique too some Sanskrit dramas present a deviation from the past. Like the Western dramas the acts have now come to be divided into scenes. The examples are the *Karuṇāpārijāta* of Sri Sudarshan Pathi, *Lālāvaidya* of Sri Skanda Shankar Khot, and the works of Dr. J. B. Chaudhuri. The *Nāṇḍī* and the *Bharatavākya*, once an indispens-

able part of a drama have now come to be dropped by some. The trend which considers Prastāvanā to be superfluous is now visible. On account of the increasing preoccupations of the modern age, the playwrights in all languages are inclined to write shorter plays, especially one-act plays, to entertain the audience. The Sanskritist too is not unaffected by the tendency. The one-act plays have become more frequent. Radio plays have now come to be written and broadcast over the various stations of the All India Radio.

Gone are the days when a Sanskritist looked to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Mahābhārata*, or the *Purāṇas* only for his themes. With his creative intellect freed from tradition by the very force of the age, he is constantly in quest of newer and newer themes and has no dearth of them. There is a growing tendency among Sanskrit scholars to adopt the burning problems of the day as their themes.

It is as a result of this that we have come to have such plays as *Kāśmīrasandhānasamudaya* and *Hyderabadavijaya* by Sri Nirpaje Bhima Bhatt on the problems of Kashmir and the merger of Hyderabad respectively, *Susāmhatabhārata* by Sri P. Ramachandrudu on the problem of integration of India, *Kailāsakampa* by Sri S.B. Velankar on the Chinese aggression on India, and *Mahimayabhārata* by Dr. J.B. Chaudhuri on the irrigation policy of India. On the social problem of dowry we have a play *Parivartana* by Kapiladeva Dvivedi and on the awakening among Indian women *Nārījāgarāṇanātaka* by Pt. Gopala Shastri Darsanakesari. On the little out-of-the-date topic of Hindu Code bill we have a play *Vidhiviparyāsa* by Sri Srijiva Nyayatirtha. « Gandhian philosophy has apparently inspired Sudarshan Pathi in his *Karuṇāpārijāta* wherein he refers to the plough and the charka as the twin weapons for the destruction of the abject poverty of the teeming millions of India and speaks of the awakening among Adivasis and the establishment of the Panchayat Raj ». In *Bhāratavijaya* we have a complete history of India from the coming of the East India Company down to the attainment of Independence in 1947. In *Pariṇāma* of Pt. Chudanath Bhattaraja, a tragedy in contravention of the rules of Bharata, we have a very illuminating discussion on the philosophy of such Western stalwarts as Kant and Hegel as also on Communism, Socialism and Democracy showing the author's intimate knowledge of the various systems, Eastern and Western. In his *Anārkalī*, Dr. V. Raghavan has not only taken up an Islamic and historical background and story, but has incorporated the ideas of religious and cultural harmony which Akbar tried to propagate through his Din-i-ilahi.

There is an increasing awareness on the part of modern Sanskritists to enrich Sanskrit with Indian and foreign classics or their adaptations. It is this which is responsible for giving us the Sanskrit translations of the plays of a great Western playwright like Shakespeare, which have been described in detail by Dr. V. Raghavan in Contemporary Indian Literature of the Sahitya Akademi. Dr. Shama Shastri of Mysore has

translated into Sanskrit the German play *Amelia Galetti* by the well-known German writer Lessing.

Among the adaptations we may mention S.N. Tadapatrikar's *Viśva-mohana* which is based on Goethe's immortal classic, *The Faust*. Similarly based on the *Cup* of Tennyson is the *Kamalāvijayanāṭaka* of Venkataramanayya. Among the translations or adaptations of the Indian classics mention may be made of the translations in Sanskrit of Tagore's plays referred to in the Bibliography in *Saṁskṛita-ravindra*, the Special Number of the *Saṁskṛita-Pratibhā* edited by Dr. V. Raghavan, which includes the editor's own translations of *Vālmīkipratibhā* and *Naṭirpūjā* both of which he also produced. *Unmattakīcaka* is a Sanskrit rendering by K. S. Nagarajan of the well-known Kannada classic *Kīcaka* by Tyagaraja Paramasiva Kailasam and *Saṅgītasaubhadra*, a Sanskrit rendering by S. B. Velankar of the original Marathi play of the same title by Anna saheb Kirloskar. The *Prṥhvīvallabha* by Shri Balakrishna Limaye has for its theme one of the Gujarati stories of Sri K. M. Munshi.

Before we conclude we should like to stress that the Sanskrit dramatic literature produced in Italia, in the present century deserves serious study, by reason of both its quantity and quality; it is sure to bring us face to face with the urges and aspirations of the contemporary Sanskrit playwrights and enthuse and inspire even the hardened pessimist about the glorious present and the still glorious future that awaits Sanskrit.