



Theatre journalism invented a new way to reach its readers - the inland-letters theatre journal. Reporting on the 100th issue of Anand Gupta's inland-letter journal, Abhinaya (1976 - 1981), Uma Vasudev writes in the Times of India, "Trust the theatre, with its sense of the dramatic and of course its usual paucity of funds, to come out with something as effective as inland-letter journalism. The famous adage of course applies here; necessity is the mother of invention".



THE TIMES OF INDIA

Inland letter theatre journalism

I HAVE been receiving copies of a Hindi theatre newsletter for years now. It comes almost regularly every fortnight. A number of times I forget and open it thinking it is a letter from a theatre group. It is printed indeed as an inland letter. The format is like that. There are only four pages. It is folded too like an inland letter, except that the flap is not pasted but pushed in between two covers and therefore becomes eligible for postal concession as a registered newsletter. It is one of the most ingenious ideas to have come out in a long time. It means theatre journalism which is inexpensive, capable of reaching a vast majority and, therefore, striking an independent stance so badly needed in every area of creative functioning. But that is not the only thing about Abhinay, whose

Drishya" which also adopts the inland letter style. There is Sutradhar in Kannada from Bangalore. This dispenses altogether with the effort to look like an inland letter. It uses actual inland letters and has its news, views, interviews and comments printed on them. This is a monthly.

Jawaharlal Nehru University has come out with a unique variation in content but uses the same format. It calls itself Haiku and is edited by Satya Bhushan Verma of the department of Japanese language. It gives Hindu poems in Haiku form and not only makes interesting reading, but also looks interesting with its short, succinct, intense three-lined poems spread over the pages. Finally, there is something as high sounding as 'Cultural Times' coming from Agra, but it is condensed in content to meet the constraints of this new framework of inland letter journalism.

Frankly I am not so sure that one should consider this framework as one with constraints. It poses a challenge which most editors would find, and do find, the most daunting — that of having to cut short to a pithy minimum all the rhetoric of over-enthusiastic literary fervour. Abhinay for instance includes in three pages, inland letter size, six columns and 12 items. "The hardest job", says Gupta, "is to cut everything down to get into that limited space." Harder still is to forge a new telegraphic style. But that is precisely what is happening. And it is all happening in Hindi here and in other regional languages down South.

I am sure it's the kind of thing that could be taken up as a communication medium for other

fields as well. Trust the theatre, with its sense of the dramatic and of course its usual paucity of funds, to come out with something as effective as inland-letter journalism. The famous adage of course applies here; necessity is the mother of invention.

Nothing could be more compulsive than the desire to communicate. So if the musician is feeling frustrated, the politician at a loss for a forum, the dancers and the painters full of things to say and nowhere to say them in, here is a way out — to reach out and beyond, with little money and a lot of imagination.

But if this sounds like easy communication at little cost, that's also not correct. Anand Gupta is already weighed under with the money required to keep this Abhinay going. They have introduced tiny little panels for advertisements in the middle pages, a little banner advertisement on the top, and a half-page advertisement for the bottom half of where one usually writes the address on an inland letter. Abhinay even manages to have special issues, the most memorable being the one on Mohan Rakesh. Its commemorative volume, more conventional and a staid 128 pages dramatically bound, in black and white, is the result of painstaking effort over the years in establishing a rapport with theatre people. But Gupta, like I am sure his counterparts in other areas, now feels the need for some support.

Where can it come from? A business house which wants to patronise theatre activity? Sangeet Natak Akademi? Sahitya Kala Parishad? The education ministry? Well, why not?

UMA VASUDEV

Cultural close-up

founder editor is the thin, bespectacled earnest-looking theatre man with a cause, Anand Gupta. Whereas Abhinay started in Delhi in March 1976 and has recently celebrated the publication of its 100th issue, it has provoked a veritable boom in inland letter journalism.

Till I saw some issues recently I had not realised that an inland letter magazine comes out from Lucknow called Balrangmanch, devoted of course to children's theatre. Lucknow has another monthly newsletter "Darpan