



It also happens in Hindi films; scene from 'Ghasiram Driver'



One of the scenes from 'Lal Batti'



Adult only because of violence

# 'Hit and hot' plays in trouble

...ed in a big way during the late 70s. They had scantily labourers for audience. Last week a women's organisation didn't ban these plays. The government has given a producers who plan to go to court if their certificates are not issued. PRATIBHA PACHISIA reports.

**T**HE hero of the Marathi play *Ghasiram Driver*, Vilas Raj, looks like a broader version of the film villain Gulshan Grover and has mannerisms more exaggerated than Rajnikant. The heroine Jyoti Revankar, in a long, false plait and draped demurely in a sari snuffles at the least excuse—thereby you know she is a good girl. The side heroine, Surekha Takle, wears a cleavage-revealing sleeveless blouse and something which looks like a cross between a petticoat and lungi, and is apparently, having an affair with the hero so you know she is a whore with a pure gold heart. The shrewish aunt is clad in a garish sari and bellows throughout. The cleaner, Janardhan Lavangere, who is also the writer and director, looks perpetually drunk (though he is supposed to be only in one scene), but manages to get the maximum guffaws from the audience with his double meaning jokes. For instance, in one scene he's trying to make advances to Surekha and says "when the driver (the hero) is not available the cleaner drives the lorry." Another when Surekha retorts about his being lean he says "Once you sit in the lorry and I take up position, hold the steering and insert the handle (starter rod in old trucks), then you will know how the vehicle throbs into motion."

government didn't take any action. The theatre organisations, who have to have censor certificates renewed every month, were served a notice by the government in a warning of sorts that their plays may be banned after August 31. Sashi Tendulkar (no relation of Vijay) producer of *Lal Batti Cha Andharat* and *Aunt* says innocently, "I don't know why they are protesting. There is no hot scene in my play. It is only about gangs and all the other business that goes on in red light areas. I've got the adult certificate probably because of the fight scenes." But he admits that adult plays go fuller than those for family viewing or with U certificates but comedy dramas do better than the adult. The audiences comprise of the labour class who have been converted from seeing films. "They will have to re-issue our certificates or we'll proceed to court, all the adult theatre groups have united now," says Tendulkar calmly. In which case they are sure to win as obscenity cannot be proved in court. It is believed that these theatres do not enforce censor cuts, particularly in their tours around Maharashtra. They improvise a lot and when any officer is scheduled to see a particular show a cleaner version is performed.

There is one thing all these characters have in common—they couldn't act to save their lives! The story is convoluted and a take off from third rate Hindi films. The production and set is stark and shabby and one suspects it is more out of paucity of funds than artistic demands although the play by the group *Strait*, which had earlier produced *Zulum*, did its 173rd show this week. In fact, all the adult Marathi plays run to full houses. These 'hit and hot' plays which first started appearing around '77 are currently under a lot of flak from women's organisations who are protesting against the obscenity and crudity depicted in these shows. There are charges varying from rapes (shown on stage) to semi-naked women, to double meaning dialogues, to disparaging remarks on women.

"We have regular checks by the censor board and our timing would go wrong if we were to do such improvisation," says Ajeet Nikharge producer of *Ghasiram Driver*. The play allegedly had a woman undressing on stage and a rape. During last week's performance the drunk hero who watches the heroine undress (she changes her sari in the further end of the stage with her back to the audience) pounces on her and the lights go off. A few minutes later the lights are back with a remorseful hero and a weeping heroine and the 'rape' scene is over. Nikharge blames all this outcry by women on jealousy! "People are jealous of our success and spread rumours about us. The Shivaji Mandir (where it is being performed) management received two anonymous phone calls telling them to cancel the show as the court had given a stay order. *Lokatta* received two similar calls telling them not to publish the advertisements." The director, Lavangere, nods in agreement. Neelima (the aunt in *Ghasiram*), justifying the character's waspishness and extra-

marital affair, says, "You have seen it so far. Is there any obscenity? My nature is such because my husband is impotent." These actors will naturally not say anything unfavourable as their major earning is from this theatre. Their plight is rather pathetic and much more crudity and titillation is provided by Hindi and Malayalam films, so why not theatre? "Because live theatre has four times bigger impact than cinema," says Kamalakar Sontakke, director, cultural affairs. According to Sontakke the 'wave' was probably ushered in by Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Binder* sometime in '69-70. *Sakharam* is a serious play about man-woman relationship and it broke a tradition as till then subjects did not deal very seriously with relationships. Women's preparations had protested against it then but later turned in favour of it. *Sakharam* had censor problems as did *Gidhade* (The Vultures) also by Tendulkar. "This had a sensuous relationship. In this play a pregnant woman is kicked by her brother and there's a red blot on her sari—but because of protest by people and censors later performances showed a blue blot. There were ads in the papers saying the blue blot was to be taken as a blood dot. Tendulkar approached the topic almost scientifically but a chunk of the audience went for other reasons," says Sontakke.

This was the first major break from traditional theatre and for commercial benefit it was diluted. But the emergence of the 'hit and hot' plays in 1977 was ignored by serious playwrights who convinced themselves that the plays had nothing to hold on to and would die out soon. But as it went on for years traditional theatre suffered its first blow. A casual activity had almost become competition. The primary reason for the playwrights' confidence was that it was not the regular theatre-goer who attended these shows. It was spill-over audience from commercial films—rickshaw drivers, contractors in small cities, people with easy money who found no better way to blow it up. "Bombay is the stronghold, only 10-15 percent of these plays are produced in Pune. These shows are taken to mofussil areas and have at least seven to eight performances at each halt. The four major areas catered to are Vidarbha, Maharashtra, western Maharashtra and to some extent Konkan," informs Sontakke. By '73-74 a couple of these productions sprang up and by '78 rocketed to almost 25 percent of the total theatre productions. "No serious study has been done why it suddenly took off. The problem is that 80 percent of the time the censor board goes by criteria of the written script. As a theatre person I can tell you reverse visuals can be created without changing words. They can be very suggestive. These plays are toned down in presentation if they

know someone responsible is attending. There are different versions for different venues." Along with *Sakharam* there was a spate of other serious efforts which dealt with relationships. Mahesh Elkunchwar's *Vasna Kand*, which was about incest between brother and sister; *Party*, *Garbo*, *Yatna Ghar* (about lesbians) *Chinn* by Waman Tawde (also incest). "There cannot be a rigid criteria for judging theatre. In a democratic society and as long as it doesn't create nuisance value, we can't do a thing," says Sontakke. "It's like robbery, corruption. How can you stop different versions being staged? Officially there is no machinery to check it. In mofussil areas it's the DSP who checks it." It has been alleged that authorities in mofussil areas are paid to look the other way during objectionable scenes. But Sontakke says "there cannot be monetary compensation—these groups are too small and poor to afford such things." The posters and ads (for the 'hit and hot' plays) in the city may have a semi-naked man and woman holding each other in a vertical position—in mofussil areas they are made horizontal! "How can you check this?"

Even scenes of violence have a greater impression in theatre. Peter Gaskill's play *The Wolf*, about the assassination of a child, had a court case for four years in the UK; ultimately Gaskill won. Ravi Verma is perhaps the only artist to have shown the gods and goddesses naked. It created an uproar from every corner of society but he justified the context in which they were thus portrayed. "It's a question of intentions and motivations. These commercial producers sell what sells. They are just exploiting the situation. They're not rated in theatre history anyway. These playwrights, mostly Konkani Maharashtrians can laugh at life very easily and also they have monetary problems," explains Sontakke.

Opinions vary on whether these plays are affecting serious Marathi theatre in any way, but Dyaneshwar Nadkarni, critic, says, "It is not true that Marathi theatre is being affected. The audience is completely different. There is no fall in production and though not all of them are successful all the professional companies have survived. The experimental theatre movement by Shulbha and Arvind Deshpande at Chabildas has completely petered out. There is not enough audience for experimental theatre. I don't blame the hit and hot plays for this," Nadkarni says he has seen one such play which was completely 'innocuous'. Of all the women who are protesting against it, Nadkarni wonders, "How many of them have seen these plays? As an enlightened individual they don't attract me. They may exist but I'm not sure to what extent they are obscene." Nadkarni firmly believes it has no power to pollute serious theatre. "I don't believe art affects people's minds." About three-four years ago the Shiv Sena had created a lot of hue and cry about the 'hit and hot' plays but for some reason backed out after a while. It is alleged that it was because Shiv Sena had got financially involved with it. One sitting member of the legislative assembly had also tried to pressurise the censor into passing these plays. "A group of activists cannot be judge to theatre," says Pushpa Bhavte teacher in Ruia College and theatre critic. "If I protest against these, what *locus standi* do I have when people protest against *Sakharam Binder*? By protesting against these you give them more publicity. In the case of Ahilya and Mrinal Gore you cannot question their intention but I don't think I'll be a party to such demonstrations," says Pushpa. The women who work for these plays need the job and if they don't feel exploited how can we protest against exploitation of women. "They are trying to replace *tamasha* but it wasn't rabid like the commercial theatre. I don't think they are affecting serious theatre. People visit go to see a good play." Pushpa feels the posters and ads for such plays are more provocative. "In an inhibited society like ours it's bound to throw up these. Dual meaning dialogues have always been there. Dada Kondke's films are passed and there is nothing more vulgar than him. There is an audience which goes in for the 'hit and hot' theatre. But it will not last. If we assume that the same audience sees these plays again and again how long can they take it. There is nothing literary about these plays. The producers are in the truck business." It is just another way of making money.

## DR Censorship and theatre

IN the history of organised society the theatrical art has never been completely free of censor curbs of some kind or the other. Freedom of visual representation has differed from time to time and it was never unrestrained. The rules regarding what to and what not to show on the stage were laid down carefully by dramaturgists as well as administrators. The censorships thus envisaged were based on contemporary social norms, moral values and also on the aesthetics of the art form.

It is in Kautilya's "Arthashastra", written around 400 BC, that we find for the first time clear rules pertaining to the actor community and the art. In addition to paying tax per show the actor was supposed to behave properly on the stage. He was asked to avoid criticism of country, caste, family and copulation of man and woman in his recitations. If a person was hurt by the actor's eloquence or out-

raged by obscene manner and gesture adopted by the actor, the magistrate should impose an appropriate fine, says Kautilya. It would seem, then, that in Kautilya's time too, or even earlier, the state was not very tolerant of criticism of the system coming from theatre people.

And Bharata, the great dramaturgist of the second century BC, says with a grave face: "As a Nataka is to be witnessed by father and son, mother-in-law and father-in-law and daughter-in-law, all sitting together, showing certain things on the stage must be avoided." What are these objectionable things?

The most objectionable thing is woman appearing on the stage in scanty dress or a one-piece garment—Ekavastra. He further says, "This improper mode of dress will only suit women of the inferior type because of their inferior nature. But they too are not to be represented as doing what is improper."

Seeing scantily dressed dancing figures carved on temples, some scholars have concluded that on the ancient Indian stage, too, actresses appeared thus. Probably. But it was certainly against the prevailing code of censorship. A certain amount of dignity was expected of actresses appearing on the stage. Bharata says, "in representing the activities of women there should be on the stage no getting into bed by women, no bathing, no show of the use of unguents and collyrium, decoration of the body and doing of the hair." And bedroom scenes were strictly prohibited. If dramatic situations demanded showing such a scene there were to be no erotic details. Any immodest act—eating in public was an immodest act—and suggestive acts such as sporting in water were not to be portrayed. The ancient dramaturgists with their code of censorship tried to provide clean entertainment to the people. Agreeing with Bharata, in his Sahitya Darpana, Kavi Vishvanatha states that war, death, slaying, eating, besieging a city, bathing, anointing the body with sandal paste and love-making should not be shown on the stage. The authors of Natyadarpan, Ramachandra and Gunachandra, are opposed to showing the cutting off of limbs on the stage. They say that the hero should not be shown with blood oozing from wounds.

It would seem, then, that from ancient times onwards censor efforts have been made to curb excessive exploitation of sex and violence on the stage. War, death and gory details like severing and amputation were not looked upon with favour. Extreme and naturalistic representation of erotic behaviour was also not to be shown. These notions still persist. The modern code of censorship consists of more or less the same restrictions. And paralleling instances of violation of the code of censorship by ancient dramaturgists and stage artists are similar instances in modern times. The formulation and violation of such codes will go on for ever.

M. L. Varadapande



# दिल्ली रंगमंच

—अनु

## सरकार कला और संस्कृति के विकास के लिए रंगमंच के महत्व को समझे

—ई० अलकाजी

नई दिल्ली—नेशनल स्कूल आफ ड्रामा के निदेशक श्री इब्राहिम अलकाजी ने बताया है कि रंगमंच के व्यवसायिक विकास के लिए इस ओर सरकार का ध्यान आकर्षित किया जाये एवं उस पर पर्याप्त बजट भी डाला जाये। उन्होंने भारत में व्यवसायिक रंगमंच की व्यवस्था न होने पर खेद प्रकट करते हुए कहा कि इससे नेशनल स्कूल आफ ड्रामा के प्रतिष्ठित युवा मेधावी का सदुपयोग नहीं हो पा रहा है।

श्री अलकाजी ने रंगमंच के व्यवसायिक दृष्टि से मंहगेपन का विश्लेषण करते हुये उदाहरण दिया कि दिल्ली के फाइन आर्ट्स थियेटर का एक शो का किराया ६०० रुपये है। यदि कोई संस्था व्यवसायिक नाट्य प्रदर्शन के लिए एक महीने के लिए थियेटर ले तो उसका किराया उन्नीस-बीस हजार रुपये हो जाता है और एक सीजन (चार माह) के लिए यही राशि लगभग पौन लाख रुपये हो जायेगी। नाटक के प्रदर्शन में अन्य आवश्यक व्ययों के अतिरिक्त केवल किराये के लिए ही हजारों रूपयों का जोखिम उठाने का साहस कोई संस्था या ग्रुप नहीं कर सकता। अतः आज आवश्यकता इस बात की है कि राजधानी में निमित्त मात्र मुलक की अधिक रंगशालाएँ निमित्त हों। तभी हम रंगमंच के व्यवसायिक स्तर के लक्ष्य को प्राप्त कर सकेंगे।

श्री अलकाजी ने एक भेंट बार्ता में बताया कि सरकार ने कला और संस्कृति के विकास के लिए रंगमंच के महत्व को नहीं समझा है, हमें सरकार को इस ओर जागरूक रखना होगा। पश्चिमी देशों में नाटक के विकास एवं रंगमंचीय व्यवसाय की उन्नति का एक मात्र कारण उन्होंने बताया कि वहाँ उन्हें सरकारों का पूर्ण प्रोत्साहन और संरक्षण प्राप्त है। आधुनिक और प्रगतिशील सरकार का कर्तव्य है कि वो देखें कि रंगमंचीय कला के विकास के लिए प्रोत्साहन और पर्याप्त साधन उपलब्ध हो। पूर्ण विकास तभी सम्भव है जबकि रंगमंच आर्थिक दृष्टिकोण से भी लाभप्रद हो।

राजधानी दर्शन सेंट्रल न्यूज एजेंसी  
२३/९० कनाट सरकस पर  
भी प्राप्य है।

### मुसोटा

एक भद्रा सा चेहरा  
जिस पर दो गोल—  
आइने सी आँखें,  
लोग  
मुसोटा कहते हैं,  
उसे अक्सर,  
उन्हीं आँखों में भाँक कर !

—बृज साहनी

## प्रशासन नाटकों को सेंसर करना छोड़े !

—रनवीर सिंह

नई दिल्ली—दिल्ली प्रशासन द्वारा मनोरंजन टैक्स के नाम पर कला और साहित्य के क्षेत्र में प्रशासन का अनुचित हस्तक्षेप कला-जगत में खेद का विषय बना हुआ है। प्रत्येक नाटक मंचस्थ करने से पूर्व आपको दिल्ली प्रशासन द्वारा मनोरंजन टैक्स की माफी और नाटक की स्वीकृति के लिए नौकरशाही के दरवाजे खटखटाने पड़ते हैं। प्रशासन द्वारा नाटकों के सेंसर करने के अधिकार को चुनौती देते हुए नाटककार श्री रनवीर सिंह ने कहा कि यू. पी. मनोरंजन टैक्स एक्ट १९३० से० ६ (३), जिसके अन्तर्गत मनोरंजन टैक्स लगाया जाता है, में यह व्यवस्था नहीं है कि प्रशासन नाटकों का सेंसर करे। उन्होंने कहा कि सेंसरशिप के अनुचित अधिकार का प्रयोग सत्तारूढ़ राजनीतिज्ञ एवं लालकित्तावादी अधिकतर अपनी स्वार्थपूर्ति के लिये करते हैं। राजधानी में नाटकों के पर्याप्त विकास और रंगमंच को लोकप्रिय बनाने के लिए

इस प्रकार की बाधाएँ फौरन दूर की जानी चाहिए।

इस संबंध में उल्लेखनीय है गत वर्ष दिल्ली में दिशान्तर द्वारा प्रस्तुत श्री सुरेन्द्र वर्मा द्वारा लिखित नाटक "शोपनी" का एक संवाद जिसमें एक युगल पात्रों में बैठा बातचीत कर रहा है। लड़का-लड़की को किसी बात के लिए राजी करना चाहता है।

"सिर्फ पांच मिनट लगेंगे।"

"नहीं"

"मेरे पास वो चीज है; कुछ नहीं होगा।"

उक्त संवाद अश्लील घोषित कर दिल्ली प्रशासन ने दंड स्वरूप मनोरंजन टैक्स माफ नहीं किया। इसी प्रकार की ग्रन्थ घटनाएँ हैं जहाँ मनोरंजन टैक्स के अधिकार का दुर्पयोग किया गया।

भट्टा पब्लिकेशन के लिए प्रगोषा प्रिंटिंग प्रेस, दिल्ली-६ से प्रबन्ध सम्पादक श्री सुरेश बिन्दल द्वारा मुद्रित एवं प्रकाशित

कार्यालय : १६४५ कूँबा चेलान, सारी बावली, दिल्ली-६ सम्पादक—बाबूलाल शर्मा

