

ON BUILDING THEATRES

THE Tagore Centenary has resulted in one secondary but welcome manifestation. The poet was, of course, also a playwright—his genius encompassed a bewildering variety of subjects—and some of his plays areactable, others more suited for reading. He probably had little interest in the buildings in which they were performed—he, personally, preferred simple stages and simpler settings.

But the Ministry of Scientific Research and Cultural Affairs has very wisely decided that it would be fitting as part of the celebrations to sponsor and support the building of theatres throughout India. Thus the Central Government is to build a National Theatre and the State Governments, with generous central subsidy, will each build at least one urban and one rural theatre. Very commendable but...

The story of architectural efforts in post-independent India has, on the whole, been depressing. This is chiefly because of what appears to be a confusion of approach towards style—whether to be 'traditional', blatantly imitative of the West, or to combine, howsoever monstrously, the two. Then there is also confusion about the relationship between form and function. And so we have some buildings which are pleasing in form but totally inadequate for the function they were intended, while there are others which are extremes in functional values without any grace of form, and yet others without form or function. But in being inept in all categories government architects have been prone to show particular genius. Perhaps there is something in the bureaucratic mould all over the world which tends to induce passive mediocrity.

That is why since most of these projected theatres will be built under State auspices gratification over the prospect of new playhouses will be tempered by concern over the outcome from public works architects. A few theatres already built by them are sufficient to warrant alarm. For reasons which are not immediately

obvious most of these theatres are built against almost every basic principle of theatre planning. Beyond the fact that a theatre has a place for seats and a place to act upon few other considerations seem to have been borne in mind or even suspected of existence.

Obviously close collaboration between architect, producer, manager, sound and lighting man, not to mention other specialists, is required. But this seems to have been overlooked. Even those architects who have gone abroad to study theatre construction seem strangely reluctant upon return to put their knowledge and understanding to use.

Theatre construction requires not just the ability to rig up an architectural assemblage but a clear conception of what use the building is to be put to. Even with the assistance of specialists, the architect will need some awareness of the development of drama and some clairvoyance, as it were, of its future trends. His building will have to be flexible enough to accommodate not only the different modes of the present but forecastable transformations of the future. He may have to build not only for plays but for other forms of the theatre arts. And for plays he may have to choose between the rigid picture-frame and the free arena stage. Where do we stand? The future course of dramatic development in India may well depend upon the very physical form of our theatre buildings.

In this situation, the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, in an effort to stimulate thinking on theatre construction and to help architects in positive ways rather than merely disparage them, decided upon three courses: to organise an international exhibition of theatre architecture; to hold a symposium on different aspects of drama and the relationship between the needs of the theatre as an art and as a building; and to devote this special number of *Natya* to theatre architecture.

In this number, which does not claim to be exhaustive—the subject will probably recur in subsequent issues—authorities on theatre construction and those of lesser eminence but devoted to drama join in posing some problems and offering some solutions. There are also a few examples of buildings chosen either for their historical or functional significance or for their novelty.

This number would have been impossible without the continued inspiration, unremitting efforts, unflinching encouragement and guidance of the outgoing President of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh, Shrimati Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay. For her, the Editors place on record their warmest appreciation.



NATYA



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