CHAPTER XVI

HINDI DRAMA IN THE PUNJAB—EARLY PHASE.
It has been seen that Hindi Drama proper came to Panjab very late and was really never at home. Books of poetry like Hanuman Natak, Bashistha Natak, Parvodbhi Chander Natak, Raj Parvodbhi Natak etc. were not dramas, for when these were written in the Panjab, this land of five rivers had no idea of the stage. Moreover books written in Brij Bhaska (as these actually were) did not touch the masses. These were the affairs of the saintly people and the preachers mostly for self culture and edification.

Credit once again goes to the Parsi Theatrical movement for the introduction of Hindi drama in this province. It all started in the 1st World War (1914-18) and after it was over, the Parsi theatrical movement, after having surfeted the public with the romance of the Persian and Arabic sources, turned to the almost inexhaustible source of Pauranic Indian legend and semi-historical stories and in order to invest the plays with verisimilitude, their language had also to be modified and a large Sanskrit vocabulary was introduced to the exclusion of Persian and Arabic. This was not Hindi of the modern conception. It was the spoken Hindustani with the

1. The Vip Abhimanyoo by Radha Shyam Kathawachak was staged (1914) by New Alfred and was the 1st Hindi play to be staged by any Company Theatre. Other Hindi plays by him date much later 1925 and after Ved Pal Khanna. Hindi Natak Sanitya Ka Alokchatrak Adyan (1958) p.9.

necessary proportion of words of Sanskrit origin and this meant a visible departure from the pure Urdu idea which was fanatically advocated by the new critics. This criticism was more or less disregarded by the commercials almost from the very beginning. There was no linguistic ideal with the company manager. He had his eyes on his pocket and wanted to provide what carried a ready sale. When the subject demanded he had no hesitation, therefore to switch over to a new language pattern and diction and so it was that when plots came to be taken from the ancient Indian source, and the characters were also necessarily of the ancient Puranic stocks, the language of the dialogues and songs had to adapt itself in accordance with the spirit of the ancient times and a departure from the Urdu tradition was, therefore, necessarily called for. This happened in the case of Panjab also, although to a lesser extent, as people here had so unrestrainedly taken to Urdu in those days that the use of anything drastically different was sure to fail in its purpose; simply because puristic Hindi sounded foreign and queer to the Panjabis even if employed in the context of ancient Indian culture. Thus it was that the Company Theatre Hindi was only a Hindiised form of Urdu and failed to satisfy the purists of both the schools.

Since we have to confine ourselves within the limits of Panjab, we are not concerned directly with the birth of Hindi drama in the Company theatre but to be sure all the Hindi dramas written for the professional theatre anywhere in the country, e.g., The authors of Batak Sagar have nothing but contempt for the new brand of mixed language used by playwrights in their plays. Kishan Chand Zeba and Hansak Chand Ras (of Lahore) are thus charged with reducing their drama into veritable "trash." This is due to the theme of the plays and the language employed. —S.S.
to be staged in the Randoom of the Panjab, more definitely so after the end of the first world war and upto the end of twenties or a little later till the commercial theatre ceased to exist.

**COMPANY THEATRE AND RAM LEELA.**

Ram Leela Theatre, as I call the amateur dramatic clubs that had a much room growth in the soil of Panjab as a result of the traditional Ram, and more particular the Ram Leela form of popular theatre coming under the impact of the Parsi Company drama( the latter giving the former its box set stage, with wings and curtains etc. as well as the newly evolved dramatic technique) with the result that the commercial theatrical movement gave to the Panjab an offspring that has persisted and actually proved more lasting then its fostering mother, the Company Theatre. The Ram Leela Theatre has been treated earlier. Here I have to point out that besides Hindi playwrights of the Company Theatre, there were some others who wrote more for Leela Clubs and many (of whom we will talk presently) were wanted all over the province by them and their more popular plays have since been staged, year after year, till present times. These clubs have proved very conservative, they have not taken kindly to the new drama being written these days and are sticking doggedly to the old type drama of the company theatrical stage.

**AGA HANSHAR E. KASHMIRI.**

From among those who wrote and worked for the Parsi theatre, we will talk only of the persons of Panjab and of Panjab extraction and in this connection the name of Aga Hanshar Kashmiri certainly ranks at the top. He is the

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\text{Dr. Som Nath Gupta: Hindi Natak Sahitya Ha Itihas P.112.}
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of more than two dozen plays, one third of which were in Hindi Language. He is credited with the authorship of 'Sur Das', 'Ban Devi', 'Madho Kuril', 'Ganga Avtar', 'Sita Sambas', 'Shravan Kumar', 'Sansar Chakkar', 'Dharm Balik' or 'Garib Ki Dunya', 'Ankh Ka Hasha' and 'Bhisham Pratigya', altogether 10 Hindi plays, all of which were creations of merit and highly stage-worthy. They were, in fact inspired by the roaring success of 'Mahabharat' by Betab.

Although Hashar had endeavoured to keep up the standard of the language and employed chaste Hindi in his 3 Hindi plays, his workmanship in them is inferior to his Urdu dramas. Surya Vijay Theatrical Company of Kathiawar dealt exclusively in Hindi drama and some of the more important Hindi plays including those by Hashar belonged to the repertoire of this company. Hashar wrote 'Sur Das' for it and called it 'Silva Mangal'. 'Ganga Avtar' was also played by this concern.

Hindi dramas were technically similar to the Urdu plays, accept in the matter of the theme, which was in the beginning that of the miracle plays also. Some religious and moral teachings and in the later period, reform of the Hindu society was also added. This last type play of social reform, however, did not carry favour with the commercial theatre and

1. Dr. Som Nath Gupta: Hindi Betak Sahitya Ka It
2. Narayan Prasad Betab was the son of Maharaja Dhalia Rai settled in Delhi. He edited 'Shakespeare' Bombaygauri Urdu magazine. Among his more known are 'Mahabharat' (in three parts) gorkkh Dhanda', 'Ramayana' and 'Krishana Sudama'. Except the last, his plays were staged by Alfred Theatrical Company. Cowaji acted at Lahore in 1914. Betab almost gave up writing for the theatre. His Krishana Sudama was staged in 1922 and was very much successful. Aga Hashar wrote his 'Sur Das' inspired by the success of Betab's 'Mahabharat' on the stage but although, 'Surdas' was a superior creation literarily speaking, it could not compare with Betab's 'Mahabharat on the stage ---0.5.

3. "He uses his Hindi with conscious command and the effect is instantaneous for in songs or lyrics Hindi is infinitely superior to Urdu".

was the concern exclusively of the semi-professional or amateur stage, we have chosen to call Ram Lala Theatre.

The language aspect of the company drama began to show signs of change in the later teens of the 20th century when Persian saturated Urdu began to be substituted by Hindi vocabulary, more specially in the romances of ancient and legendary India which were coming more and more progressively into vogue everywhere in the country, including the Panjab, by this time. Hindi based plays were more restrained in their treatment of erotic scenes and their humour was also more sober and less vulgar. But the prevailing mood of the Company Theatre would have its effect at awkward junctures and loose expressions would break forth unwindingly even in the dialogues between gods and goddesses.

The use of 'Ganga-Jamini' language, as the Urdu purists derisively called it, was set in vogue by Aga Hashar Kashmiri but Hashar has a good sense of the Hindi language. Some of his followers had none. By and by this 'Hindi' drama tended to go exclusive, something meant for Hindu audiences alone.

Kishan Chand Zaba of Lahore is a typical example. He was a prolific writer who after writing a great deal for the stage like so many of his other contemporaries turned to the film line. He could have made a good dramatist had he worked intimates when stage had not as yet come in conflict with the screen and when the former was already losing ground. He saw 1, besides during the 19th century and Ist 15 to 20 years of the 20th century theatrical plays had Urdu for their dominant language.


2. See Chapter on Company Theatre.
was being pushed out of favour and the old drama was being supplanted by the talking film, with the result that Zeba and his like had to seek a new market for their dramatic writings and to choose a field comparatively safe from the inroads of the fast advancing new industry. This made them turn to religion and to the theme of Hindu social reform or in a less persistent manner to patriotism and nationalism. Stress came to be laid, however, on theatricality to the detriment of real dramatic quality and in view of the falling standards in the field of drama the tendency grew in favour of giving exaggerated concessions to the popular demands and art-side of the stage performance was completely neglected. Thus Kishan Chand Zeba is a typical case of a rash worker. There is a visible emphasis on the fixed scene, the spectacle, the song and dance, the aside and the longish monologue. All the vices of the Parsi Theatre are there, only in a worsened form. The language too leaves much to be desired. Everything points to slipshod and hasty composition.

Dr. Som Nath Gupt has enumerated the following plays in Hindi as written by Kishan Chand Zeba: 'Pati Brat', 'Patni Bhakti', 'Danvir Karna', 'Navin Bharat', 'Desh Deepak', 'Shahid Sanyasi', 'Zakhmi Hindu', 'Dharm Aadharm Yudh', 'Radman', 'Garib Hindustan', 'Bharat Darpan'. This by no means is a complete list. I have come across at least four plays by Zeba not included in the list. One drama is about the life and mission of Gautam Buddha and another, 'Kaya Palat' concerns the liquidation of untouchability. Dr. Guptas list does not include 'Zakhmi Panjab', a play by Zeba about Jallianwala Bagh. He calls his play Kaya Kalap, an interesting collection of poetry, prose and songs. See his Kaya Kalap (Rajpat Rai and Son, Lahore)-1935.
massacre of 13th April, 1919, which was proscribed by the British Government. Authors of Natak Sagar have made a pungent remark about Zebu which is that the fame of Zebu rests on the fact that 'Zakhami Panjab' was proscribed, but otherwise he was a 3rd rate dramatist. They rank him (alongside Nanak Chand Nas) a revivalist of the ancient Hindi culture for which according to them he reduced his drama to the level of 'Farhasan' or 'Bhan' or at the most 'Ras Mandal'. This however, is not quite true Zebu's plays are of unequal merit. That he was not altogether a Hindu revivalist and was also a protagonist of patriotism is borne out by his plays like 'Bharat Darpan' and 'Zakhami Panjab' 'Bharat Darpan' dramatises non-co-operation movement using highly suggestive symbolism. It is a bold departure from the traditional theme of the Company Theatre and exemplifies its dogged pursuit of the path of social responsibility and rejection of the theme of social and nati irresponsibility.

Tulsi Das 'Shaida', Hari Krishan 'Jauhar' and Sri Krishan 'Hazarat' are mentioned as Zebu's contemporaries by some historians of Hindi drama. It is not sure whether they, or some of them, belonged to the province of Panjab (although it seems very much likely) or wrote in Hindi originally. In all likelihood they wrote in Urdu and later dubbed it in Hindi, for their works are available in both the languages, in Urdu as well as in Dev Nagri scripts.

Like Urdu dramas written by Company dramatists, Hindi works also came to be staged in the Panjab. Thus Batab and
2. Ibid P.90.
4. Ibid.
DRAKA IN THE PANJAB

Kathavachak along with Hashar and Zeba were played and even now are played throughout the Panjab. After Company theatre breathed its last and Ram Leela Theatre grew up and flourished as a regular institution in all towns and cities of the Panjab and developed an amateur and semi-professional theatre, the Hindi Nataks by these pioneers are being played and are a rage with less educated city people, young and the old, even today.

1. The statement good a or the partition in respect of the Indian Panjab alone, = 0.8.