



## **The Theater of Bhartendu Harishchandra: The Iconic Journey**

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### **Abstract**

The paper highlights the theme of the rejuvenation of Hindi language as a Deus Ex Machina of the nation in the times when the nation was roiled by the exigencies of the suppressive and exploitative British Colonial rule. The paper also highlights the idiom of the impact of the word theater and specifically how the plays written by Bhartendu Harishchandra played a key reformative and enhancing role in the engendering of nationalism and patriotic ethics in the larger land, its hoi polloi and across the largesse of the larger length and breadth of Bharat in those tricky and unfree times for the nation. The paper also weaves in a slight theoretical backgrounder as far as the literary device of Bhartendu's theater and the generic nature of plays in the larger sense of the term is concerned.

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### **Introduction**

Theatre has always been an aesthetic pet peeve for the humans as far as the concern of human ebullience and growth and progression. If we delve inside the theme of the, “Theatricals” then we naturally arrive at the theme that the morphing of what is present in the narrative and the text of the literary piece, needs a subtly and sometimes hugely different treatment and a practicalisation oeuvre in order to recreate and respawn the content, nature and the tenor of the literary text.

In a manner, what playwrights writes needs a very subtle sleight of hand and imagination if the actual verve and the attendant translation in the medium is concerned. Additionally, good, satiating and psychically edible theater needs an effervescence of the translation of the theme of the play along with the “Deus-Ex-Machina,” which, gradually becomes the order of the day as far as the “cropping” of the written text of the play is concerned. The story and the narrative might or might not be real and actual but how that narrative and the textual annotation and sentient sentiment has to be enlivened before a live audience, is what the idiom and the vocation of the Theater is all about.

“Broadway,” happens to be one of the Theatrical benchmarks, as far as a West and American domineering perspective of the playwriting and its enactment are concerned. Historicity of the Broadway also happens to be an enigmatic and a proactive rendering of the tumult and the progression in the United States. “Act One, is a landmark memoir that influenced a generation of theatre-goers, dramatists, and general book readers everywhere. The book eloquently chronicles Moss Hart's impoverished childhood in the Bronx and Brooklyn and his long, determined struggle to his first theatrical Broadway success, *Once in a Lifetime*. One of the most celebrated American theater books of the twentieth century and a glorious memorial to a bygone age, *Act One* is filled with all the wonder, drama, and heartbreak that surrounded Broadway in the 1920s and the years before World War I.”

Thus, the term, “theater” further amounts to be an artform along with an attendant physical and tangible space where the amalgamated ethics and etiquette of music, movement, character's play acting and the movement and the dressage of the players brings to life before an audience, the live razzmatazz of the literary text through an instrumentality of enhanced pragmatic imagination. In general language in the Indian and the Bharatiya context, the term. “ Theatre” refers to a “ Rangshala” or a building and a concrete space which bears the performance factor of the players before a live audience where the spontaneity of the performers/ players makes all the crucial difference between being a misfit effort and being a imaginative performance, keeping intact the ecosystem of the times, decades and the history of the space through the enactment of the literary text.

### **Theater: The Bhartendu Way**

Bhartendu Harishchandra happens to be a popular, iconic and master poet, writer and an ace playwright who has become immortal through his several plays, Dramas and numerous biographical sketches. Way back in the neophyte and fledgling days of the nineteenth century, he is considered and his seminal work is cherished as the grand old man and the founding father of Hindi literature in more senses than one.

Nandi Bhatia writes in his highly acclaimed work on the context of the Modern Indian theatre. It can be contended conveniently that, “Since the late nineteenth century, theatre has played a significant role in shaping social and political awareness in India. It has served to raise concerns in post-Independence India as well. *Modern Indian Theatre: A Reader* sews together reflections from the myriad and variegated historical narratives which theatrical exercises. “

The author further writes that, “These facets were of the order of-colonization, socio-cultural repression in Bharat and appropriation, the cultural matrices ushered in through the instrumentality of the colonial force majeure, and an astute representation of the myriad and diverse socio-political themes encapsulating the hopes and failures of the historical Independence struggle.” Akin to

theatre in other parts of the World system, it can be argued that some consonances and commonalities abound with the Hindi theatre. But, the transformative zeal of the social political, cultural economics of the times and the exercise of bring about a change in the time epoch where the play is situated happen to be one the stand out ramifications of Indian Theatre.

The volume addresses pertinent questions like how drama influences social change, the response of drama to the emergence and domination of mass media and the proliferation and influence of western media in India, and how mediations of gender, class, and caste influence drama, its language, forms, and aesthetics. When one delves inside the theme of Hindi or any other theatre then the “Dramatic” and the, “Melodramatic” part of the narrative and the subsequent rendering on the stage becomes an imperative and inedible part of the play acting and enacting exercise.

Getting back to Bhartendu Harsichnadra’s work, it may be commented that, ”Patriotism, social change, anti colonialism along with the myriad facets of reinstating the Hindi language as the linguistic instrument of mass learning and knowledge dissemination along with restoring the Cultural pelf of Hindi language happened to be the stand out facets of Bhartendu’s work.” One also needs to stress and underscore the fact that which had a metamorphosing impact upon not only the Hindi language but also upon the attendant dynamics of his writings. His ardent patriotism, anti-Imperialism along with his instilling a sense of pride in the votaries of Hindi language militated against the use of the Urdu language in the Hindi heartland as the official lingua franca. It amounted to his own strivings due to which the modicum of Khari Boli Verse, that, Hindi became the state and official language of the Indian nation.

Surendra Kumar Gupta writes that, “Drama was in a kind of twinning a key element in his literary strivings as a writer and to his reflections on literature led transformation and change. The beauty and the verve of his plays and writings lies in an indelible and inseparable primeval and historic instruments and familiar conventions yet flexible and able to arouse a range of emotions and carry new political and social meanings, which could connect conveniently to the quantum of live audience, his paly wright potential and efforts in the realm of Hindi literature served as an quintessential genre for reflecting and ruminating upon the larger context of the his times. As far as his play’s transformative potential is concerned Bharatendu strived with a melange of myriadly different genres of plays, utilising the modicum of Hindi to translate from the larger cornucopia of plays and literature from sources and creations as varied as Bengali, Brajbhasha, and Sanskrit, before initiating his own mini plays with contemporary social, political and cultural relevance., farces, and composite plays.” “

It can be argued that, “In his late essay Natak, the Hindi playwright and laureate stressed upon mixing Sanskrit and European frameworks and dwelt upon the erotic, comic, and a spectacular and loud change, but also constituted of social change and nationalism as the various shades and reflections in his dynamic and eclectic theatre..” It can be further contended that, “ His recurrent use of satire and allegory are specifically praiseworthy and as an attendant fact indicate and reflect that apart from his genre of fiction and the novel – his plays also subserved as the able and potent instrumentalities of patriotism and country love for Harishchandra and his Hindi contemporaries, thus, needing an educated and aware audience.. In the context and the matrices of his awesome literary repertoire, satire and allegory came with a literary and linguistic challenge as the nature and tilt of his specific address, double-entendre, and advanced intertextuality render his plays to be inconveniently intelligible and comprehensible to the vast tract of readers and audiences, all across the Global polity and the Indian literary terrain too. While extremely worldly in orientation, they do not tend to circulate.” Thus, in a manner, the eclectic and myriad nature and immense range of his plays and theatre have not been understood and comprehended with clarity, impact and aplomb and a large reach as should have been the order of the day for his plays and contingent theatre. Thus, one may argue that the one of the truest flavours of the plays and the Theater of Bhartendu Harishchandra lies in the manner in which he has hewn his plays and the genre of narrative intertwined in the text, characterisation and the description of the societal, political, spiritual and cultural challenges of those repressively colonial times and years.

In his play, “ Bharat Durs Dasha”, the lament of the Mother India concerning the fall from grace of the motherland from a prestigious positioning of self, love, action and scientific progress, formed a richly repeated undercurrent. The play is a kind of a dirge upon the travelling down of the verve and vibrancy of a once great nation as in the contemporary deprecatory days of the country, intelligence, intellect, power, civilization, industry and kindness seem to be the remnants of a glorious and a classy past heritage and iconic legend. Another iconic play by the title of “ Andher Nagari” too happens to be a tragic comic lament premised upon the assiduous excesses of a foolish, foolhardy and a corrupt and incompetent ruler who finally reaches his own downfall by his own hanging from the State’s noose in the greed of reaching the heaven and not his masses of citizens who suffer immensely because of the callous incompetency of the unwise King.

Madan Gopal, a prominent Hindi literature critique pens that, “The year 1870, when Harsihchandra was devoting time to the writing of dramas, saw the founding of the Pestonjee Framjee’s Theatre company followed some seven years later by that of the Victoria Theatrical Company (which even staged plays in Britain ) of Khurshidiee Bahwala of Delhi, and of Cowasjee Khatau’s well known Alfred Theatrical Company.” The author further argues and sheds light on the Hindi playwright’s literary plays that, “Bhartendu felt that the drama form meets not only the audio- visual requirements, but also satisfies the five senses by presenting the conditionality that why Harishchandra adopted it as his principal medium of expression The dramas of ancient times, he felt, were bound by the rules laid down by the old masters and could not be successful in the changed context. Bhartendu was influenced by the character and the exigencies of the Parsi Theatre, and decided to incorporate all the desirable features of the Parsi drama, adequately amalgamating them with the good and affirmative attributes of the dramatic arts of old Hindi theatrical companies in their acutely fledgling forms, adhering to the cannon of the immensely popular Parsi theatre, which was also recognised as one of the core concerns and requirements of the one of the key requirements of the stage and thus placed more emphasis on canny, telling and astute characterisation, along with a constituent inclusion and enunciation upon a litany of purely moralistic themes of the age and the times.” Apart from the patriotic and nationalistic magic and influence of his plays and Dramas, he is also proudly and appreciatively referred to as the Rammohan Roy of Hindi Journalism and attendant Hindi literature of the times. What all Bhartendu Harishchandra could not achieve in his plays and Dramas, he kept them based on the premise of his writings in the Journals where he managed to vitriocally counter his critics in a very blatant, loud and vociferous manner. Also as an attendant fact, what makes Bhartendu’s literary contributions iconic and path breaking for the service of Hindi literary cannons and its socially transformative roles, lay in his efforts to augment the ambit of the plays and even the novels as Bhartendu himself argued that an increment in the number, nature, quality and the expanse of Hindi plays and novels happens to be a prerequisite of the manner in which the language of the Hindi heartland can be strengthened with steady societal reformation.

### **Conclusion**

In a succinct summation, it can be argued and held forth that Bhartendu Harishchandra served his role as a nation builder along with being a withholder, conserver and the preserver of the proud pantheon of the national upliftment under a suppressive, oppressive and repressive British Colonial rule. He did it through the deft instrumentality of the Hindi language as a Deus ex machina of the nation, that is, Bharat which emanates from the august name of the playwright, Bhartendu Harishchandra himself. The plays penned by him, namely the iconic nationalistic plays of the order of Bharat Durdasha and Andher Nagari rejuvenate the language in the Hindi heartland as well as perform the valuable task of social reform along with reinstating the myth, lore and the iconic heritage and proud historicity of the nations intact with its heroes, protagonists and its ancient ancestry.

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