

"Ambrapali" By Hindustan Theatre

By Our Drama Critic

The Prime Minister was among a large audience that watched the Hindustani Theatre's production, "Ambrapali", at the vast open-air railway theatre at Delhi Kishanganj on Saturday.

After "Shakuntala" and "Mrichhakatika", the Hindustani Theatre gives us another period play, this time based on the Buddhist legend of a lovely court dancer of Vaishali who, upon disappointment in love, forsakes mere sensual passion for spiritual enlightenment. Niaz Haider's reconstruction of the legend may appear to lack substance, but it has ingredients of entertainment and it conveys a variety of moods—from the easy chatter of young girls to the profound preaching of the Buddha. Perhaps in the belief that the story is well known, the playwright narrates it in a staccato, stenographic style, leaving much to the imagination of the audience. This contributes to a sketchy treatment, devoid of the intensity of passion, the power of personal tragedy and the unity of structure.

The production may not suggest the authentic period but it appeals to popular tastes. It has several sweet, lilting tunes, contemporary in their composition but pleasant to the ear. One of the women singers has an attractive, silvery voice, crystal clear in enunciation and honeyed in its effect. The incidental music occasionally intrudes and drowns the dialogue, but this is a minor flaw compared to the dancing, which is a hotch-potch of hand gestures and body gymnastics. The title role especially calls for a trained dancer which Miss Veena Singh is not. However, Miss Singh has a handsome stage presence, though perhaps she is rather young for the famed courtesan and speaks in a flat monotone most of the time. If she can import variety in her speech and bring suitable expressions to her face, she should do well. The dialogue is simple and easy to understand and is mouthed with fluency and, occasionally, with power (as by Harjeet in the role of Ajatshatru, the tyrant and nitwit.)

The producer has devised one setting for the play that suggests the mango grove as well as the palace. This makes swift movement of scenes possible. The initial scenes do indeed move with facility. However, subsequently the play appears to mark time with only the comical interludes (misplaced during the second half of the play) to sustain our interest. The dresses are the least satisfactory both in their choice and combination of colours and their cut. It should be possible to give them—as in fact the entire production including the dialogue—a "period" touch.

The play is directed by M. S. Sathyu. Music is by Amar Nath. There will be one show on Sunday sponsored, as on Saturday, by the Northern Railway Welfare Fund Committee.

LECTURE ON 'EVOLUTION OF RAGAS'

By Our Music Critic

An absorbing illustrated discourse on the "Evolution of Ragas" was given by Mr Amar Nath at a meeting of Natya Forum held under the auspices of the Bharatiya Natya Sangh in New Delhi on Wednesday evening.

Starting from a single note "sa" (C), the speaker showed how a whole shloka could be intoned upon it. This was developed into a two-note (sa-re or C-D) and then into a three-note (sa-re-ni or C-D-B) combination.

Discussing the evolution of "shrutis", the speaker said that, since it was not possible to sing all of them with precision, only 12 were singled out to serve musical purposes. Particularly interesting were his observations on the origin of ragas which, he said, were derived either from folk music or from "moorchhanas". He was ably assisted by a young lady who gave a melodious rendering of different folk songs. The Rajasthani tune turned out to be a primitive form of Brindabani Sarang, while the Hariana song had a marked Kafi colouring. The Uttar Pradesh song was strongly reminiscent of Tilak Kamod. Sweet, sensuous and full of lyrical delight was the famous "Chanchalo Kunjua" Pahari song of Himachal which bore close resemblance to Bhupali.

As regards the "moorchhana", the speaker, with great address and accuracy, showed how by shifting the position of "sa" (C) new modes could be evolved. Turning "re" (D) into "sa", then "ga" (E) into "sa" he demonstrated the method of forming new ragas. He explained the symmetrical character of certain modes such as Bhairav (with "re" and "dha" as komal) and Bhimpalasi (with "ga" and "ni" as komal).

Lastly, the speaker emphasized the aesthetic and spiritual aspects of the musical art.

The discourse was followed by a discussion. Dr Fabri complimented Mr Amar Nath on his "marvellous" lecture but said that it lacked historical evidence, to which the latter replied that his was not a research scholar's but primarily an artiste's approach to the subject.

Mrs Khurana objected to a remark previously made by the speaker that a musical note in itself expressed nothing, that it was the singer who put meaning or feeling into it.

A thoroughly enjoyable programme bringing credit to Mrs Saroj Vasissth who organized it.