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Poetics, Plays, and Performances: The Politics of Modern Indian Theatre

Vasudha Dalmia

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This book addresses the political and aesthetic concerns of modern Indian theatre, propelled by the urban interest in folk theatre and the popularity of Brecht. Just as Brecht's theatre held out the promise of widening the scope of middle-class concerns, of questioning the politics of theatre, and of overcoming the bounds of the proscenium stage, Indian theatre turned to Hindi as the national language of production. What theatrical practice could this newly realized "national" theatre invoke? Was there dramatic composition in modern Hindi, did it have any theatrical tradition? The book delves into the past, to the plays of Bharatendu Harischandra in 1870s Banaras, and forward from there to Jayshankar Prasad and Mohan Rakesh, landmark figures in the history of modern Hindi drama. Also, the use and misuse of "folk" theatre was of significance because it helped in the analysis of Indian theatre makers' understanding of Brecht. The overall focus of the volume is on the politics of modern Indian theatre, particularly the action and reaction inspired by official policy-making in the capital of the country, and its international representation. The last chapter maps some of the routes taken by the avant-garde women directors of the last decade of the 20th century.

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