

## Book Review

**Hillol Kumar Pathak. 2022.**  
***Ji Kotha Nokole Shakespeare-e***  
**(What's left unsaid by Shakespeare)**  
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*“Let today’s dramatists contemplate and discern what’s left unsaid by Shakespeare and cry out loud these untold facets. Let plays like Gatha or Manuh Howar Bipod ring out the first letter of this shackled life, the letter that would help men to write about men. The words will remain the same, but the meanings will resonate with a fresh boom, with a new veneer.” (Pathak, 323)*

In an age where commercialism is gripping everything in its claw, Assamese theatre, not being any exception, is gradually sacrificing its excellence and speculative value to the famous market. This is a vicious cycle because you breed what you are fed. If the audience is fed on shoddy and inferior shows, their capacity to discern good from wrong will be unrestricted over the years. And this is bound to perturb any ardent follower of thoughtful drama gravely. Hillol Kumar Pathak’s book - *Ji Kotha Nokole Shakespeare-e* - comes as a clarion call to the playwrights to bring quality and permanency into their plays. His despair at the absence of brilliance and originality in the present professional theatres in Assam, despite its impressive increase in numbers, has led him to ponder the dangers of stagnation. The essays presented in this book come as loud beckoning to the artists and playwrights of contemporary times towards their moral duties and responsibilities.

The book is a collection of small articles split into three distinct parts. Many of the essays were previously published in the Assamese weekly- *Sadin* and the

magazine-Satxori. Although Pathak plunged into theatre professionally around 2004 (first as a theatre journalist and then as a full-time storyteller and presenter), his actual association with theatre is very old and deep-rooted. He was born into an ambiance of theater. His father was an eminent writer, director, and actor who led the ‘group’ theatre in Assam, and his mother was a leading actor of her time. Pathak, therefore, inherits theater in his blood. With his intense dramatic and thought-provoking themes, innovative presentation, and solid prose, Hillol Kumar Pathak has created a distinctive niche for himself in the world of Assamese theatre. He is keen on making a difference through his impactful plays and hopes to establish a receptive audience and refine their sensibilities. The articles in this collection also express the same vigor in forming a receptive audience. While paying his panegyric to eminent dramatist Sewabrata Barua in his article titled – ‘Xomoyor Xobhat Apuni Xobha,’ Pathak writes.

“It was forcibly tried to obliterate that you had marked your creativity in reforming drama. You were denied the chance to create and form the taste for the new generation. But, the assembly did not realize that your imprints were eternal.” (125)

Pathak upholds a moral stance that focuses on creating and filtering the taste buds of the new generation. Therefore, through his writings, he invites the artists to reflect in their plays a little room for philosophy and a little room for speculation. The articles selected in this book demonstrate his theatrical standpoint. In his last article, he expresses his concerns about the paucity of thoughts and expression in contemporary Assamese plays - “Why do the contemporary playwrights fail to reflect the same compelling rhetoric that timeless dramatists like Webster or Shakespeare employed to evoke and entice the souls of the audience into their plays?” (321)

But his lamentation and annoyance are always accompanied by hope and suggestions for improving the situation. For when he says - ‘Let mobile theatre walk away from the secret conspiracy of creating a class difference. Let Ratan Lahkar be the lodestar’ (143); he offers hope and a direction for whom to look up to.

The first group of articles in the book consists of eight quick but probing analyses of a few classic plays by some of the most influential dramatists of the country, like Bishuprasad, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Arun Sharma, Bhishma Sahani, Brata Basu. The inquiry into these texts is enriched by Pathak’s vast knowledge of dramatic and literary theories, his own experience, his staunch belief in the social responsibilities of an artist, and his sharp analytical abilities as a critic. His appraisal of a particular play or a playwright is marked by a clear-cut exposition of the most potent features. For example, while reviewing the plays of Bhaben Saikia, Pathak says - ‘Selection of the story, elegant presentation of that story in a logical way, the stylistic devices reflecting the social life and the creation of flawless, fluent dialogues are the primary qualities to be found in the plays of Bhabendra Nath Saikia’ (33).

The second group consists of some twenty-five articles, and they deal with personal

encounters with people who influenced and shaped his temperament as an artist. These articles offer glowing tributes and encomiums to some of the quintessential artists with whom the author had come across at some point in his life, touching and directing his life and career. Despite being personal to a great extent, these essays sincerely attempt to provide a broad discussion on dramatizing above the mere personal. The articles also deliver an excellent commentary on the socio-political scenario, including the controversies that disturbed the theatre world of the time in which a particular article was written. Each article in this group brings alive the inexorable contributions of some of the forerunners in Assam's theatrical world, like Ratan Lahkar, Robijita Gogoi, or Sewabrata Barua.

The articles in the third group present specific discussions on drama as a genre, its elements, and various theories of drama while simultaneously focusing on a playwright and his artistic tendencies. They are enriched with allusions to the world-famous playwrights and their meaningful sayings, excerpts of interviews, and his interpretations of those.

What binds all three sections is the reflection of Pathak's immense passion for drama, his sincere and vigorous moral and artistic stance with which he sees the world, and a strong, clear, and undaunted voice reflecting his opinion. His essays are characterized by insightful interpretations, compact but crystal clear messages, and an apparent denial to clothe his commentaries in jargon.

This very readable book provides, on the one hand, an exploration and incisive analysis of some works of the most exciting writers of Assamese theatre and, on the other, the deep-seated values of the author as a practicing dramatist.

The subject matter of this collection is varied but displays his stance as a practicing dramatist and an advocate of sincere drama aimed at bringing social change or touching the nuances of human life. All the articles are presented with a personal evaluation and a passionate appeal. The articles, with their admiration of the renowned playwrights of Assam, are quite Arnoldian. The selected texts and excerpts from their exemplary plays attempt to uphold the benchmarks for future dramatists in similar lines as Mathew Arnold had done in 'The Study of Poetry.'

The title of the collection reveals Pathak's belief in the need for a revision, for a reinvestigation of the iconic texts of the past with new vigor as the words might remain the same, but the meaning changes with each passing generation. The words get new connotations and reveal themselves with a new brilliance. While commenting on the plays of Arun Sharma, Pathak says – 'The consciousness of time will carry the responsibility of refining his plays. Refinement of literature fulfills all the conditions of literature. Otherwise, literature will remain erected at a definite spot like an ancient pyramid.'" (71) To keep the drama alive as literature, Pathak deems it essential to bring an amount of readability to a play. Therefore, he doesn't appreciate the popular idea

of sudden improvisation on stage or too much importance on stage décor. The plays may have temporary and commercial value, but they will lose the permanency of a time-tested classic. He says - “Readability of a play is a matter of broad dimension. It is not inevitable for stage accomplishments.....The more effort to stage a play, the lesser would be the focus on the readability of a play.....The people who follow an intense, stable desire to look for literary values in a play would hardly feel a smooth emotional flow in the sudden improvisations on the stage, which is gaining momentum as a favored medium. (113-114)

Pathak’s energetic and vigorous prose remains a smooth vehicle throughout the book to courier his urge and make his message be heard distinctly. The pertinent evaluation of the selected plays after minute observation, judicial commentary on the selected playwrights and producers, and his prudent criticism of the ills of contemporary socio-economic and political reality, combined with his strong morals, situate him as a stimulating theatre critic. The book is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the storehouse of Assamese theatre literature.