

Departmental Colloquium: New Interventions in the History of Partition

# Stages of Partition: The Early Years of Prithvi Theatre

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The Indian films of the post-partition period continued to avoid sensitive contemporary themes partly out of censorship concerns and partly for commercial reasons. And yet to a large extent this vacuum was filled in by theatre. Prithvi Theatre, a group closely associated with the Bombay chapter of IPTA (Indian Peoples' Theatre Association) as well as with the Bombay film industry, played partition right through the

mid-forties into the 1950s. Despite remaining close to IPTA, Prithvi Theatre retained its distinctiveness and ideological distance through the assertions of its outspoken and politicised founder-actor Prithviraj Kapoor.

In the histories of Indian theatre, Prithvi Theatre's plays are summarily mentioned as 'enormously popular secular narratives'<sup>1</sup> and among the anti-imperialist, anti-fascist radical 'people's theatre' of this decade.<sup>2</sup> A closer engagement with the group's partition performances reveals the ambiguities of their theatre practice. Bringing together newly identified historical sources on Prithvi Theatre such as memoirs, biographies, contemporary commentary and extant play-scripts, I critically revisit some of the received ideas around Prithvi Theatre and the representation of partition right at the time it unfolded.

1. Anuradha Kapur, 'Reassembling the Modern: An Indian Theatre Map since Independence', in *Modern Indian Theatre* ed. Nandi Bhatia, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2009), 45.

2. Apama Bhargava Dhanwadkar, *Theatres of Independence: Drama, Theory and Urban Performance in India since 1947* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2005), 31.



Registration and  
Information

Thursday 12.01.2023  
16:15 CET (Zoom)

Image: Courtesy Prithvi Theatre, Mumbai