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The History and the Origin of the *Thumri* with Special Reference to *Gharanas* and Styles

Premlata Sharma

The *thumri* is the most popular form of Indian music cultivated by individuals, as distinguished from that spontaneous form of music cultivated by communities or social groups. It is, therefore, designated as classical music, as distinguished from folk music. It is comparatively more free of those restrictions of strict discipline which form part of orthodox classical music. For this reason it is called 'light' classical music.

As denoted by its feminine name the *thumri* is characterised by a striking note of tenderness and the theme of its songs is invariably related to some or the other phase of human love in a stage of separation or union. The *thumri* lacks that virility of musical expression associated with the *dhrupad* and *khayal* styles; we must remember that both these are masculine names. The songs in these manly styles do not always have love for their theme.

The Origin of the *Thumri*

The most widely current theory attributes the origin of the *thumri* to the royal court of Oudh, especially that of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. This causal theory of the origin of a musical style, like all causal theories of interpretation of historical problems, is at best rather partial in its compass, if not wholly superficial. Causal theories do not take cognizance of the inner, homogeneous continuity of human affairs, to which causal factors have to be related to have any real significance. In order to understand and interpret the basic trend which made possible the evolution of the *thumri,* attention has to be paid to the continuity of fundamental trends in the Indian tradition of classical music which comes in an unbroken current from very ancient times and reflects India as an organic and vital cultural entity with a spiritual foundation too strong for any secular influence which does not owe loyalty to it.

Historically speaking, the true significance of the development of a new art form can only be grasped when its understanding is related to preceding cultural trends. Intrinsically any classical musical form has to be judged with reference to the fundamental concepts of musical theory. Indian society has nourished such a strong spiritual base for the cultivation of the arts that incompatible influences of a political or exotic kind have made only a slight, superficial and evanescent impact on the fundamental concepts of art which are rooted in the very soul of the people.

As is well-known, the theory of classical Indian music is enshrined in our traditional *Sangitashastra.* In studying any musical style and its charac-

teristics an attempt has, therefore, to be made to relate them to the concept of musical forms as given in that *Shastra.*

The Characteristic Features of the *Thumri*

The characteristic features of the *thumri,* as a musical style, can be enumerated thus:

(i) The musical effect of the *thumri* is far more dependent on its poetic content than is the case in the orthodox style of the *khayal;*

(ii) The poetic theme of songs sung in this style deals most often with *Shringara Rasa,* and has sometimes a dual significance, spiritual and mundane;

(iii) Its lyric form is due to the restricted range of *ragas* suitable for its rendering and to its latitude of elaboration. It is, at present, the most lyrical of all forms of Indian light classical music;

(iv) Judged by the familiar principle of art design, 'Unity in Diversity', this form dwells more in its melodic pattern on the element of diversity than on that of unity;

(v) It requires a special quality of voice, natural or cultivated, for its proper rendering;

(vi) Its association with the *Kathak* style of dance, looked upon as an inferior dance style, led to the exponents of this musical style being assigned a low social status until quite recently;

(vii) The *talas* identified with this form of music constitute one of its features;

(viii) The embellishments are tonal-verbal for the most part and not purely the tonal ones which preponderate in orthodox classical music.

The *thumri* is an ephemeral evolute or a variant out of a long series of forms, beginning with the *Dhruvas* mentioned in Bharata's *Natya Shastra.*

Bharata deals with verbal-tonal rhythmic compositional patterns in the Thirty-Second Chapter of *Natya Shastra,* entitled *Dhruva-Vidhana.* He speaks of five types of *Dhruva* in the context of drama (*Natya*): *Praveshiki, Akshepiki, Naishkramiki, Santara,* and *Prasadiki* or *Prasadini. Prasadini* is described as that which gives rise to colourful delight (*Rangaraga*) and self-engrossing happiness (*Prasada*). As is to be expected, this type is specially allocated to the delineation of the *Shringara Rasa.* The following lines are significant in this context:

प्रसादने संभ्रमे च तथानुस्मरणेऽपि च ।
तथातिशयवाक्येषु तथा च नवसङ्गमे ॥

गर्वे च प्रार्थने चैव शृंङ्गाराद्भुतदर्शने ।
ध्रुवा प्रसादिनी कार्या तज्ज्ञैर्मध्यलयाश्रया ॥

It may incidentally be noted here that Bharata has aptly enjoined the use of *Madhya Laya* (medium tempo) in this type of *Dhruva* which is specially suited to the *Shringara Rasa*, whereas he has enjoined the *Vilambita Laya* for the *Dhruvas* suited to the *Karuna Rasa* and *Druta Laya* for those suitable for *Vira, Raudra* and *Adhbhuta.*

Matanga, the next important extant author after Bharata, has dealt with compositional patterns under *Prabandhadhyaya.* He speaks of *Nadavati*, a type of *Gana-Ela Prabandha*, specially suited for the *Shringara Rasa:*

नन्दावती तृतीया च तुर्या भद्रावती स्मृता।
ऋग्वेदादिसमुद्भूता विचित्रध्वनिरञ्जिता ॥
इत्येला गणमार्गेण बुधैरुक्ता चतुर्विधा ।
एला नादावती रम्या वर्णालङ्कारशोभिता ॥
गीयते मट्टतालेन नादयुक्ता पदे पदे ।
टक्करागो भवेत् तत्र सर्वेषामनुरञ्जकः ॥
श्वेतो वर्णश्च विज्ञेयः शृङ्गारः कथितो रसः ।
कैशिकीवृत्तिराख्याता पाञ्चाली रीतिरिष्यते ॥

The following characteristic features of this type of *Prabandha* can be noted from the above quotation:

(i) A remarkable beauty and variegated graceful embellishments;

(ii) Deployment of special rhythmic patterns (*talas*);

(iii) The universal appeal of the *raga* or melodic pattern of this form. (I shall shortly review this feature in some detail);

(iv) The presence of the *Kaishiki Vritti* and *Panchali Riti;* the former of these, the *Kaishiki Vritti*, represents the graceful, sportive tendencies of love in drama and the latter, *Panchali Riti*, represents a special style of diction which is marked by the absence of compounds on the analogy of which it can be construed that this form makes use of short and sweet embellishments and avoids elaborate and intricate ones.

It will be interesting and useful to review the special features of the *raga* chosen for this compositional form. It may be noted that *Takka* is an important *Grama Raga* known as *Bhasajanaka.* It gives rise to a large number of *Bhasas* and *Vibhasas. Bhasa* is described as *Alapavishesha* or a particular variety of improvised elaboration of a *raga.* It is well-known that only a few *ragas* permit of unrestrained variety in elaboration. *Bhasas* and *Vibhasas* imply a licence for such variety as is evident from the following words of Matanga regarding these two *Gitis* or style-forms of rendering *ragas:*

प्रयोगैर्गात्रजैः श्लक्ष्णैः काकुरक्तैः सुयोजितैः।
कम्पितैः कोमलैर्दीप्तैर्मालवी काकुनान्वितैः॥
ललितैः सुकुमारैश्च प्रयोगैश्च सुसंयतैः।
भाषागीतिः समाख्याता एषा गीतिविचक्षणैः॥
यथा वै रज्यते लोकस्तथा वै संप्रयुज्यते।

The last line deserves special notice as it speaks of the ascendancy of *Loka-ranjakata* over all rules and regulations. Similarly he says for *Vibhasa Giti:*

ललितैर्बहुभिर्दीप्तैः कम्पितै रौरसैः समैः॥
तारातितारैर्मसृणैर्मध्ये मध्यमदीपितैः।
गमकैः श्रोतृसुखदैर्ललितैस्तु यदृच्छया॥
विभाषागीतिस्तु संयोज्या यथा लोकोऽनुरज्यते।

It is clear that *Rakti* or *Ranjakata* and not rule or regulation is the main consideration in *Vibhasa Giti.* Thus such *ragas,* as have been described by ancient authors as *Bhasajanaka* may be understood to permit of somewhat loosely restrained elaboration.

Sarngadeva gives a similar treatment of *Nadavati,* the type of *Prabandha* which we have just spoken of on the authority of Matanga. He also says that novelty is to be preferred to conventional rules in certain varieties of *Prabandha* forms. For example, he says:

नूतनै रूपकं नूत्नं रागः स्यायान्तरैर्नवः।
धातू रागांशभेदेन मातोस्तु नवता भवेत॥

That means to say, in certain *rupakas* (compositional forms) the melodic structure (*dhatu*) is endowed with novelty through new *sthayas* which may be somewhat extraneous to the intrinsic structure of the *raga* concerned.

This element of novelty is supplied by either the latent potentialities of the *raga* itself (*Mulaja Bhasa*) or by the regional melodies known to the performer (*Desaja Bhasa*) or by the shadow of a different *raga* (*Chaya Bhasa*) or by the mixture of a number of *ragas* (*Sankirna Bhasa*).

Sarngadeva's discussion of the varieties of *Alapti,* or improvised tonal elaboration, is also interesting in this context. He divides *Alapti* into *Ragalapti* and *Rupakalapti,* the former being concerned with *Ragaprakatikarana,* that is with an unfolding of the tonal potentialities of the *raga* without any reference to the *Rupaka,* or the verbal-tonal-rhythmic pattern, and the latter being devoted to the *Rupaka* itself. Naturally, the verbal content of the *Rupaka* gets an important place in *Rupakalapti* which expresses the finer shades of significance of words through appropriate tonal variations. Viewed in terms of Sarngadeva's definitions of *Ragalapti* and *Rupakalapti,* the *thumri* has to be treated as a musical pattern of the latter form of *Alapti,* and not of the former.

A rough similarity of the *Bol-banavas* of *thumri* can be traced to the varieties of *Rupakalapti,* mentioned by Sarngadeva namely *Pratigrahanika,*

Sthayabhanjani, and *Rupakabhanjani*. When the artist's attention is concentrated more on the tonal-verbal variations with the purposes of expressing musically the suggestions implicit in the words of the songs than in the effective exposition of the *raga* concerned, there is bound to be some deviation from the conventional pattern of the *raga*. Kallinatha has beautifully explained this idea by saying that in *Rupakalapti* the *raga* concerned is just like a pearl which is set in the midst of multi-coloured gems.

Reverting to the topic of *Prabhandha*, it may be remarked that subsequent writers after Sarngadeva either avoided a treatment of *Prabhandha* or were generally content with reproducing Sarngadeva's text on the subject almost verbatim. It is, therefore, not possible to connect the link of parallel trends with the *thumri* in our musical tradition relative to the period between the fourteenth and the seventeenth century.

It will not be out of place to give now a short account of the trends in folk music which may be taken to have supplied the raw material for a refined and classicised light musical form like the *thumri*. The *Chaiti*, the *Biraha* and the *Kajari* forms of folk music of the eastern Uttar Pradesha, as also the *Padas* and *Ramainis* of the Kabir Panthis (who have exercised a marked influence on the folk music of eastern U.P. and Bihar) may be mentioned in this connection. These must have contributed to and inspired the evolution of the *thumri* in Banaras. The theme of songs of the *Chaiti*, *Biraha* and *Kajari* is mundane love and that of the music inspired by Kabir and his followers has a double significance of spiritual and mundane love. These have considerably influenced the songs of the *thumri*, especially of the Poorbi *anga*. Some popular *thumri* songs with the following opening lines, inspired by the Kabir cult, have a double meaning of spiritual love clothed in the garb of the mundane and may be cited as an example:

बाबुल मोरा नैहर छूटोई जाय।
मैं न लरी थी श्याम निकल गये आज।
रे दिन कैसे कटि हैं जतन बताय जैहो।

Songs of somewhat similar content of erotic mysticism are known as *Padams* in Karnatak music, and those having mundane love as their theme are called *Javalis* in the South. The *Lavanis* of Maharashtra are also a variety of erotic folk music. All these forms of folk music on the one hand and classical forms on the other must have made possible the evolution of light classical forms in all parts of the country as a manifestation of a spontaneous cultural movement.

The *thumri* will thus be seen as one of the varieties of light classical music emerging in its time as a result of the impact of classical music on the one hand and folk music on the other in Northern India in line with similar developments in other parts of the country and as an incident in the normal course of musical history.

As regards the special quality of voice possessed by women for rendering of light classical forms such as the *thumri*, reference may be made to Sarngadeva's remarks on the subject. He mentions *Madhura*, *Sehala*, *Komala*,

Karuna, Snigdha, Raktimana as qualities of the natural female voice which have generally speaking to be cultivated in the male. When Bharata wrote the following *shlokas*, he had probably in mind the qualities naturally to be found in males and females.

प्रायेण तु स्वभावात् स्त्रीणां गानं नृणां च वादनविधिः।
स्त्रीणां स्वभावमधुरः कण्ठो नृणां बलत्वज्व ॥
यः स्त्रीणां वाद्यगुणे भवति नृणांच गानमधुरत्वम्।
ज्ञेयः सोऽलंकारो न हि स्वभावो भवति तेषाम् ॥

Bharata says that it is only natural that women should sing and that men should play on instruments, because women are endowed with a sweet voice by nature, and men with a forceful voice. If, however, men are found who are adept in singing and women who are adept in playing on instruments that should be deemed a kind of ornament to their respective natures.

The qualities of *Komalata, Karunatva,* are not compatible with those required for singing the manly style of the *Dhrupad.* Hence the popular belief that the voice of *Dhrupad* singers is unfit for the *thumri*. This is true as a rule, though there are exceptions to be found in actual experience. For example, the late Chandan Chowbey of Mathura was a great singer of *Dhrupad* as well as of the *thumri.* Moreover, in the *Dhrupad* style itself there are the *Dhamar-Hori* forms which have an erotic content and call for *madhurya* of voice.

Similarly Kathak dances with whom the origin of the *thumri* of Lucknow is associated do not as a rule perform the *thumri,* since the voice of dancers is said to become unfit for graceful singing. However, those dancers who do *ada* while sitting on the stage have been known to be excellent performers of the *thumri.* (This tradition of Kathak dancers is now dying out.)

Literary trends contemporary with the development of the *Thumri*

The fundamental theory of Indian classical music, as indeed of all Indian art and poetry, is grounded in the theory of *Nada Brahman* or *Shabda Brahman* and is thus linked with the Vedic religion. Bharata's *Natya Shastra,* based on Vedic concepts, is the Bible of all branches of Indian art and poetics. Bharata applies the same sets of rules to the triple arts of song, dance and drama. As a consequence of this basic factor, historical developments in the field of poetry, music and other arts exhibit a clearly identifiable common trend. Parallels can easily be discerned, for instance, in the fields of music and dance and poetry and may be cited to explain and elucidate developments in other fields.

The very strong upsurge of spiritual poetry centred round the divine eroticism of the Vaishnava cult (beginning with the poems of Jaideva, Vidyapati, Chandidasa, Gyanadasain and others in the eastern parts of the country and of Suradasa, Nandadasa, Kumbhanadasa and Haridasa Swami in the western) released literary torrents which inundated Northern India with works depicting amorous sentiments. The period is known as the *Riti-kala* of literature. Kesava, Bihari, Matirama, Deva, Padmakara and Ghananada were the representative poets of this period.

This poetic literature gradually came to be appreciated by middle-class society. Soon the need must have been felt for a form of music which would be fit for cultivation by this social stratum and which could be used for expressing the popular poetry of the period.

Parallel developments are clearly evident in the fields of the three arts of poetry, music, and dance. All these three have an erotic bias. This is a fact which militates against any theory ascribing to the Nawabs of Oudh the origin of the *thumri.*

Thus the *thumri* was a form of music that evolved during the course of the development of the three arts of music, poetry and dance. It cannot be studied in isolation from allied currents. The poetry of this class of people was neither pedantic nor commonplace; it represented a compromise between two extremes. A similar development took place in the musical field blending the two extremes of orthodox classical music and folk music. Thus a social need was supplied by the *thumri.*

The *thumri* was thus expressive in music of the prevailing trend in poetry. A similar development took place in the field of dance. The Kathak variety is a compromise between orthodox forms and the folk dance.

Aesthetic Value

In its aesthetic content the *thumri* abounds in the *Madhuryaguna* and *Prasadaguna,* but lacks *Ojas.* There should be no objection to the use of literary concepts in musical analysis since our *Sangitashastra* has bodily borrowed its aesthetic terminology from the field of literature and has no independent aesthetic terminology of its own. *Madhurya* brings about melting of the heart. *Chittadruti* and *Prasada* instantaneously permeate the whole consciousness. *Ojas,* on the other hand, is known for brightening or exciting the heart, (*Chitta-diptikarakah*), leading to *atma-vistriti* or *self-exceeding.* Mammata speaks of these three aesthetic qualities or *gunas* in the following verses:

आह्लादकत्वं माधुर्यं शृङ्गारे द्रुतिकारणम्।
करुणे विप्रलम्भे तच्छान्ते चातिशयान्वितम्॥
दीप्त्यात्मविस्तृतेर्हेतुरोजो वीररसस्थिति।
बीभत्सरौद्ररसयोस्तस्याधिक्यं क्रमेण च॥
शुष्केन्धनाग्निवत् स्वच्छजलवत् सहसैव यः।
व्याप्नोत्यन्यत् प्रसादोऽसौ सर्वत्र विहितस्थिति॥

According to Mammata, *Samyoga Shringara, Karuna, Viyoga Shringara* and *Shanta* are graded in the ascending order of this enumeration for excellence and abundance of *Madhurya. Karuna* (as distinct from *Vipralambha Shringara* and *Shanta rasas*) rarely constitutes the theme of *thumri* songs. According to Mammata's aesthetics, therefore, the *thumri* of *Viyoga Shringara* has to be rated higher than that of *Samyoga Shringara* and the *bhajan* which delineates *Shanta rasa* has to be ranked higher than the *thumri.* Before passing on to a discussion of the *gharanas* and styles of the *thumri,* it will be more convenient to conclude the foregoing discussions in the following summary.

Concluding Remarks on the History and Origin of the *Thumri*

From the account of the origin and history of the *thumri* given in the foregoing paragraphs, it can be concluded that the main characteristics of the *thumri* are: latitude in elaboration of the *ragas;* a predominance of the amorous sentiment in songs; greater emphasis on verbal-tonal embellishments rather than on purely tonal ones; a preference for the feminine voice. These are all features of light musical patterns recognised by the traditional *Sangitashastra.* This means that styles resembling the *thumri* must have been in vogue from times immemorial and the *thumri* must have had a parent style and owing to the absence of notated records no definite information is available about them. It has, therefore, to be deemed as one of the ephemeral popular upsurges in the domain of classical music. The fact of royal patronage of the popular varieties of music is not to be treated as indicative of the genesis of those varieties. Royal patronage is to be viewed as an incident in the development of this style, and should not be exaggerated as a genetic element independent of the current of a spontaneous art movement of musical expression of the people.

The *thumri* marks one of the occasional manifestations of the indigenous trends in forms and modes of musical expression. The desire for freedom from the rigid restraint of the rules of orthodox classical music, or the urge to prefer *Rakti* or *Ranjakta* to the sobriety or solemnity of orthodox styles, asserts itself normally in society and cannot be attributed to any single causal historical factor. The *thumri* is an example of this perpetual musical urge in human nature. The rigorous disciplines of classical music appeal to a smaller group in any civilised society, and larger groups desire to cultivate less exacting disciplines.

Style forms which orginate from this kind of urge of that musical strata which constitute the dividing line between the aristocracy of orthodox classical music on the one hand and the ordinary folk music of the masses on the other, appear and re-appear in history. They appear with variations from the preceding forms, in line with the styles of orthodox classical music and of folk music. The *thumri* may be rated lower in the scale of standards of orthodox classical music, but it has an important place in our social life. It is significant that the *thumri* or its religious counterpart, the *bhajan,* is an almost essential part of a musical concert these days. And without it no musical treat is deemed completely satisfactory.

The *Gharanas* and Styles of the *Thumri*

As regards the *gharanas* of the *thumri,* it must be stated at the outset that there appear to be no special *gharanas* of this style-form of Indian music resembling the *gharanas* of *Dhrupad* or *khayal* or those which can be associated with the names of their founders or orginators. This is the view of all the living musicians whom I have met. Before writing this paper, I specially interviewed Shrimati Vidyadhari Bai, the great exponent of this style. She is now over eighty years of age. What she told me confirmed the fact that there never have been any exclusively *thumri gharanas.*

No performing musician is known to have attained eminence in the Indian musical world solely on the strength of his rendering of the *thumri*. All the musicians celebrated for their merit in the excellent rendering of *thumri* have primarily been exponents of the *khayal* style. The finer shades of rendering the *thumri* as practised by eminent musicians have never been individualised as distinct *gharanas* of *thumri* singers; they have always been identified with the *gharanas* of the *khayal* style to which particular musicians owed allegiance.

For example, the late Khan Sahib Abdul Karim Khan, and Khan Sabib Faiyaz Khan, the best known exponents of the *thumri* in recent times owed allegiance to the Kirana and Agra *gharanas* respectively. They are not known as the founders of any *gharanas* of *thumri* singing as separate from their *khayal gharanas*, notwithstanding the fact that their rendering of the *thumri* had a much greater appeal for average listeners than their singing of the *khayal*.

Although *gharanas* are absent in the *thumri* forms, two regional styles are quite well-known: the Poorbi and Pachahin *angas*, identified broadly with the eastern and western parts of Uttar Pradesh respectively. Banaras has been the centre of the former and Lucknow of the latter. The Poorbi *anga* is in vogue in the whole of eastern U.P., some regions of western U.P., for example the Vrajapradesha and in Bihar. It has all along been favoured by the musicians of Bengal, Madhyapradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra. The Pachahin *anga* has been confined more or less to the districts of Lucknow, Moradabad, Saharanpur, Meerut and Delhi.

The differentiating element of these two styles has been that whereas the Poorbi *anga* is characterised by a certain grace, tenderness, sweetness and elegance of rendering and flexibility of tonal embellishments, the Pachahin *anga* is comparatively less tender and somewhat less elastic. This distinction is prominent equally in the dialectical peculiarities of the regions with which the two styles are identified. The tonal tenderness of *Vrajabhasha* or the *Bhojpuri* dialect which are the media or expression of the *thumri* in the Poorbi *anga* is in marked contrast with the toughness of *Khariboli* which is the medium of the Pachahin *anga*. Apart from the distinction of tonal quality there is a further distinction in the thought content of songs of the two *angas*.

In addition to the Poorbi and Pachahin *angas* of the *thumri* there is a third style known as the Punjabi *anga* which has become quite popular nowadays. Khan Sahib Bade Ghulam Ali Khan is known as the most outstanding exponent of this style. The style is of quite recent development, if not origin. The ancestors or predecessors of contemporary singers of this style of the *thumri* were all musicians belonging to the *gharanas* of the *khayal*. The most notable characteristic of this style is the influence which it bears of the *tappa* style form which originated in the Punjab. This is probably the reason why the style has been given its name.

A profuse deployment of successive tonal embellishments, that is elaborate turns and trials (*murkis*, woven into *tana* patterns) in quick tempo, which is a characteristic feature of the *tappa* has been adopted as its feature in the Punjabi *anga* of the *thumri*. Although the Poorbi *anga* singers also use *murkis* of the

tappa anga, they do it with better grace and less elaboration. Another peculiarity of the Punjabi *anga* is its most frequent rendering of the Pahari pattern of melody.

This brief account of the styles of the *thumri* may be concluded with the remark that the Poorbi, Punjabi, and Pachahin *angas* deserve to be graded in a descending order when we apply the criterion of sweetness, grace and popular appeal.

UTPAL DUTT

Interviewed on behalf of the Quarterly Journal of the NCPA

by

Vijay Tendulkar and Kumud Mehta

Utpal Dutt, the celebrated theatre personality of West Bengal, expresses in vivid and forceful words his own commitment to the revolutionary theatre and also paints a live picture of theatre events in the State in the more recent past.

Q.J. : *Can you tell us about the Bengali theatre as it is today? What's the situation like?*

U.D.: That's a sad question.

Q.J. : *One reason why we asked it!*

U.D.: You see when I speak of the theatre, I put the political theatre first. And that has been broken up by force, by gangsterism, by those who resorted to shooting and bombs. For instance, there was the case of the play *Amar Vietnam.*

Q.J. : *The play on Vietnam which you wrote?*

U.D.: No, this is another play on Vietnam, produced by the *Rupantari* group. When they staged it in Uttarpara, six people lost their lives.

Q.J. : *What happened?*

U.D.: This was just one month after the elections. A reign of terror was unleashed on the people. Theatre groups were told not to stage certain kinds of plays. Anything which smacked even remotely of left politics was sought to be suppressed.

Q.J. : What exactly took place at Uttarpara ?

U.D.: A group attacked the stage with bombs. Nobody from the cast was injured. But some of the spectators in the front rows were badly hurt and six of them died. Naturally the show broke up.

Q.J. : Were other troupes subjected to such kind of violence ?

U.D.: Yes, the offices of the Indian People's Theatre Organization in Calcutta, Midnapore and Jalpaiguri were attacked. All their papers were burnt. Of course, this doesn't mean that the IPTA has been wiped out.

Q.J. : Didn't the police intervene ?

U.D.: No, they just watched.

Q.J. : Didn't your intellectuals protest ?

U.D.: Strangely enough most of our intellectuals think that all this is for the best. The Red Flag and the Congress Flag fly together ! And yet I can tell you of cases where publishers are warned not to display certain books.

Q.J. : How do you manage to survive ?

U.D.: We are prepared for the worst. When we began to do *Barricade*, we were quite nervous. We got ready for the onslaught, weapon for weapon. Finally they arrived. They were twelve of them, heavily armed. They wanted to enter the hall without tickets. When the ushers stopped them, they said, "We'll wait". Then the police arrived. We left the theatre pretending that we were more heavily armed than we actually were. That is what's happening to us.

Q.J. : Suppose a group had staged an anti-Communist play during the United Front's regime ? Would it have been allowed ?

U.D.: The Theatre Centre did stage a play of this kind. Outrageously anti-China, anti-Soviet Union, anti-Indian Communists. Nobody touched them. They labour under one great disadvantage. They can't find a single really good artist to work for them. Not one. They were quite displeased with Badal Sircar because he did *Spartacus*. They thought they had him in their grip. But he kept slipping out. The latest scandal was their Youth Festival.

Q.J. : Who organized it ?

U.D.: Not the Congress, but the CPI. Their leaders came to us and invited us to do *Tiner Talwar.* Then just three days before the Festival they said they wanted us to stage *Barricade.* We knew this was because it would fetch good money. We warned them that other parties were associated with the Festival, and *Barricade* was hardly the right kind of play for the occasion. But they said, "It's about Berlin. Why should anyone mind ?" Then on the day of the performance they came and said, "No, not *Barricade*". Our answer was, "We *will* stage *Barricade*. That's what was scheduled".

Q.J. : What did they say to that?

U.D.: They said, "You can't". So we went there in the afternoon. People could see that we were there. When we entered, we were encircled by one hundred and fifty volunteers and thrown out. But we made speeches and shouted slogans and registered our opposition. *Nandikar* and Badal Sircar walked out of the Festival as a protest against this action on the part of the organizers. So ultimately the whole show was reduced to a farce. An utter farce!

Q.J. : What is Nandikar *doing now?*

U.D.: They are doing good work. *Nati Binodini*, for instance.

Q.J. : *It's about the actress Binodini, isn't it? Tripti once spoke to us about Binodini's diaries. The same work?*

U.D. : Yes, but *Nandikar* has produced it. I liked it very much.

Q.J. : *Some other actress must be doing the role then—not Tripti?*

U.D. : Yes. Keya Chakravati produced the play. The whole drama is a fascinating discussion. The actors sit in a semi-circle and two or three of them rise and enact sequences.

Q.J. : *What's the discussion about?*

U.D. : About the problems that actors faced in the nineteenth century. But it's all very relevant even today. The production was very interesting. It's a daring kind of play.

Q.J. : *Is it a success?*

U.D. : Unfortunately, no.

Q.J. : *Why?*

U.D. : People say it's dull.

Q.J. : *Because it hasn't much narrative interest?*

U.D. : They say nothing happens. But I find the whole thing very alive. It's wonderfully done—the mannerisms, the gestures of every actor.

Q.J. : *Any other group doing this kind of work?*

U.D. : There's a group called *Silhouette.* They did a play which can be translated as *The Recurring Decimal.*

Q.J. : *What's it about?*

U.D. : It's just scenes from life in Calcutta. Unconnected.

Q.J. : *Without a plot? Or a story? Without characters, one might say?*

U.D. : The same set of actors enact a playlet. Each playlet has its own plot. But the treatment is quite unique. There are about twenty members in the cast and a tremendous amount of physical action. Very robust. A lot of mime and even ballet. It's written by a young man, Vir Sen. He is only twenty-two. Very promising.

Q.J. : *Any other group?*

U.D. : *Chetana* has done a play *The Story of Maricha,* the golden deer which tempted Seeta.

Q.J. : *Is it a mythological?*

U.D. : No, no. It satirizes our myths. It even brings in the Americans. It castigates those agents of the government who lure revolutioneries away from their chosen path. It's all very skilfully handled.

Q.J. : *Wouldn't you call it a political play then?*

U.D. : It's not my idea of what a political play should be. This play doesn't say anything that's bold. It's full of innuendo.

Q.J. : *Anything else you've seen recently?*

U.D. : A full-length opera *Lamba Karna (Long Ears)* based on a short story by Parshuram. It's a biography of a donkey who comes into the 'civilized' world and demands his rights. Everything is sung. Not a line is spoken.

Q.J. : *It's not directly political. But it's good theatre?*

U.D. : Yes, Maybe people got fed up of the prosiness of our plays.

Q.J. : *But how could they collect a cast where every member sang!*

U.D. : That's the fantastic part of it! They collected actors and actresses who could sing. Some sang really well. Others gave just about adequate support. They are nowhere near the troupe in Jaipur, a troupe

called *Sanket*, which was doing *Jasma Odan*. And they were planning to do *Maina Gurjari* again. Those Jaipur people had gorgeous voices. Our Calcutta group is nothing as good.

Q.J. : What play are you doing now?

U.D.: We opened with *Tota* in Calcutta. There's the new play I am trying to write. We show a *Jatra* troupe trying to rehearse a play about Abhimanyu. I'm going to call it *Saptarathi.*

Q.J. : Why?

U.D.: There were seven charioteers who joined to kill Abhimanyu.

Q.J. : You haven't completed it then?

U.D.: No.

Q.J. : What are Badal Sircar's recent productions like?

U.D.: His *Spartacus* was just superb. I also enjoyed his *Abu Husain*. Of course he has every right to satirize Girish Ghosh. But he needn't use tunes from Bombay films to parody his work. That sounds a little cheap. One's attention tends to slacken then. But *Spartacus* is really superb. They stage it in a room about four times the size of this hotel room. The arena is in the centre and the spectators squat on the floor—right round the actors.

Q.J. : How many characters?

U.D.: About thirty or more, I should think!

Q.J. : Is it linked with the traditional folk theatre in any way?

U.D.: No, no. I see it as a direct descendant of the European intimate theatre. It has nothing in common with any Indian form as such.

Q.J. : It's written and directed by him?

U.D.: Yes, adapted from Howard Fast.

Q.J. : Can you tell us more about the work of smaller groups?

U.D.: You mean work worth mentioning. I told you about *Rupantari*. They have a play which could be translated as *Prose, Poetry,* and *Essay.*

Q.J. : What's it about?

U.D.: It's about three stages in the life of a gangster. The first part is the prosaic stage when he is just a criminal. In the second part he falls in love and even his crimes appear beautiful. In the third part he becomes a tool in the hands of a political party. He becomes a big man—not exactly very rich. They constantly hold the sword over his head. But they look after his material comforts.

Q.J. : Who wrote the play?

U.D.: Jochhan Dastidar, the writer of this play *Amar Vietnam* which was bombed out.

Q.J. : What about Ajitesh Banerji?

U.D.: I told you about his production—*Nati Binodini*. He has directed the play and is also acting in it.

Q.J. : Which is Bahurupi's most recent production?

U.D.: *Rhinoceros.*

Q.J. : Who directed it?

U.D.: Tripti.

Q.J. : Successful?

U.D.: Unfortunately some of their recent productions haven't been too successful. But one of their recent efforts was really magnificent. It's Badal Sircar's play, *The Thirtieth Century,* that's what it means.

Science fiction, perhaps. No, no. How stupid of me! It can't be called that. The period is the thirtieth century and people are discussing how barbaric we were in the twentieth. But the play has been withdrawn. I don't know why.

Q.J. : What will be the future lines of development? Will the content of your drama become more politicalized?

U.D.: Yes, in West Bengal it will have to be more or less political. But sheer politics without any accomplishment in form will not be acceptable to the audiences—except perhaps street-corner plays.

Q.J. : Do you have a lot of such plays now?

U.D.: No, not one. It's too dangerous to produce them. They will be bombed out. Calcutta is just recovering from a spate of terror. So many people have arms!

Q.J. : But the old type of play is dated, in a sense, isn't it? If you do—say Ibsen or Chekhov, will people find it dull or stereotyped?

U.D.: No. Calcutta hasn't had enough of Ibsen or Chekhov. Ajitesh has tried hard. And Shambhu Mitra did the Bengali version of *The Doll's House.* Really, we haven't had enough of serious social drama. What now goes in the name of social drama is sheer melodrama. Instead of Elizabethan costumes or the costumes of the *Mahabharata* they wear a *dhoti* and *kurta.* You know Ajitesh's adaptation of *The Cherry Orchard* is still running. It has been performed from time to time for seven years.

Q.J. : Doing well?

U.D.: Yes.

Q.J. : Is it a very free adaptation?

U.D.: I think it is.

Q.J. : And Rhinoceros? *Does it make sense as a play?*

U.D.: No. Not to me, at least.

Q.J. : Do audiences flock to see it?

U.D.: No, they don't.

Q.J. : Then do they go in great numbers to watch those melodramas—the commercial kind of play?

U.D.: No. They're throwing that out, too. But there is one play which is quite a hit. A play called *Chowrangi.* Not a social melodrama. It's based on a novel by Shankar. It's about the scandals in a hotel. There are two cabaret numbers, nudes, a rape. Not quite in the social pattern which people were used to. It's ... well ... "slices of life".

Q.J. : Raw?

U.D.: Yes. But with its own kind of slick commercialism. That the audiences seemed to have enjoyed very much.

Q.J. : And your censors? They allowed it?

U.D.: We don't have a Censor Board. Anyway it didn't run for 1,000 nights. It was taken off after 300 performances. All the other professional plays are flops. Every one of them.

Q.J. : Then how do those companies manage to pull on?

U.D.: The owner rents out his theatre to amateurs and collects his money.

Q.J. : He becomes a contractor?

U.D.: Yes. The crisis in the professional stage is quite pronounced. And that's a very good thing.

Q.J. : How will the professional stage survive?

U.D.: It'll be taken over by more intelligent men. For instance, the *Star* owner contacted Shambhu Mitra. He even came to us. We refused to have anything to do with him. He wanted to be the boss. We were to be his employees.

Q.J. : But how did you manage at the Minerva?

U.D.: We took it on lease. We did what we liked.

Q.J. : You prefer to perform in one theatre all the time?

U.D.: No, we would like to move out occasionally. But one permanent theatre is essential. Four shows a week. A double bill on Sundays and holidays. About twenty shows in a month.

Q.J. : How many such theatres are there in Calcutta?

U.D.: Let me count ... eight.

Q.J. : So in all the professionals do about one hundred and sixty shows in a month. But do the amateurs find audiences for their performances?

U.D.: Yes. The amateurs command more prestige than the professionals. I forgot to tell you about *The Theatre Workshop*. They're doing a play called *Fresh Honey Taken from the Hive*. My God! the audiences they get! They go from one theatre to another—thirty performances in one month!

Q.J. : Who is the playwright?

U.D.: Manoj Mitra. Once upon a time I violently disagreed with him. He's a young playwright. I couldn't even understand the titles of his plays. *The Sun in the Vocal Chord* was one such title. There's the sun's heat, its light. But the vocal chord? Now he's come out with this tremendous play—about the people in the Sunderbans forest who collect honey. It's a hamlet deep in the forest. And these men are snake-charmers, too. Then there'a a *jotedar*, a rich peasant who exploits these people. This *jotedar* is dying of a snake-bite and comes to be cured. The snake-charmer has a grudge against him. But he has also his professional pride. He can't ever confess that he can't cure him. The moment the *jotedar* gets up from his deathbed, the first thing he wants to do is to collect the rent. The conflict begins. The snake-charmer's daughter pretends to give the *jotedar* some honey and actually gets the snake to kill him. The play is in verse—modern verse. Very beautiful. The group is even busier than *Nandikar*. They print the month's programme in the newspapers. They're playing every day, somewhere or the other.

Q.J. : The cast?

U.D.: Five; the theme is based on some legend in the Sunderbans.

Q.J. : You were complaining about the titles of his play...

U.D.: Yes. Not to speak about the plays themselves, I couldn't even understand the titles.

Q.J. : Obscure?

U.D : Yes. I didn't have to do anything. The people taught him how to write better.

Q.J. : His previous plays, were they more complex than Badal Sircar's former plays?

U.D.: Yes, if that's possible!

Q.J. : Do you think that over the years Badal Sircar has simplified his style?

U.D.: Let us hope so. His *Spartacus* is already more simplified than his previous plays.

Q.J. : But there he has a ready-made outline.

U.D.: Howard Fast has already done the work for him.

Q.J. : Do you think this intimate theatre movement can really compete with the professional theatre?

U.D.: No.

Q.J. : It will always remain on the fringe—this intimate theatre?

U.D.: Yes, like Tagore's. A coterie.

Q.J. : But does it contribute to the professional theatre, influence it in any way?

U.D.: You know the professional stage is dominated by people who are dead ... vegetable ...

Q.J. : But finding themselves in a crisis, won't they try to bring in the amateurs?

U.D.: I dare say you're right there. But when they did do this, their shows turned out to be major flops. Then they shied away from that too. People laugh at them.

Q.J. : But if they are commercially-oriented, they'll try out anything. They are not committed to any style.

U.D.: The owners you mean? Yes. They will drive out the old actors and get in the younger groups. For example, *Nandikar* is occupying *Rangana.* We went to the *Minerva,* under similar circumstances. The owner thought, "These people have a following. We might make some money". This is what happened when the *Star* was offered to us. But then there are the old actors. They will have to go. That's cruel. Just now they are playing rubbish. But still they are getting salaries. Let them do it! Somehow one feels diffident about it when one knows they will be out of job and won't find work so easily.

Q.J. : But this is the commercial theatre! There's another non-commercial theatre? A non-professional theatre? But at a professional level-like Shambhuda's or yours.

U.D.: Actually most of the important non-professional groups have a professional core. Otherwise they wouldn't be able to last out.

Q.J. : What do you mean by a professional core?

U.D.: We have at least twelve to fifteen members who are good actors, who are paid. We learnt that another group—a good group—pays its members not less than Rs.350 a month by way of conveyance allowance and so on. That's quite something!

Q.J. : Does the commercial theatre have audiences outside Calcutta?

U.D.: Oh yes.

Q.J. : You mean these professional companies do a lot of touring? In Maharashtra our companies seem to be touring all the time.

U.D.: There it's the reverse. They sit tight. People come from all parts of the State to watch them.

Q.J. : Our groups are always on the move-in Poona, Sangli, all over the State.

U.D.: That's such a good thing. When they are on tour, they have far more contact with the people. In Calcutta, they come to the theatre, sit down for their make-up, come on to the stage and go off.

Q.J. : *But if you have hectic touring, it is difficult to maintain high artistic standards all the time. The actors are worn out. You look tired—what with your shooting schedule!*

U.D. : Yes, two shifts a day. Two films. One for Subhodh Mukerji Productions. I don't know what it's going to be called. The other is *My Friend.* Naushad, the music director, is producing it. His son Rehman is the director.

Q.J. : *Do you act in Bengali films?*

U.D. : Oh, yes. In many of them. They've suddenly realized that I *can* act. It's not that I can't act at all. That's what they've realized.

Q.J. : *You act in commercial films? Not art films.*

U.D. : People want to make art films but many of us don't find anything artistic in most of them. Except a new film—a very fine one by Purnendu Patri. *Wife's Letter*—based on a short story by Tagore. It's his second film. The first didn't click. This one is a beautiful film.

Q.J. : *Does it have any commercial prospects?*

U.D. : It's a hit in Calcutta. But has flopped in the villages.

Q.J. : *Do the regional films compete in any way with the professional theatre?*

U.D. : No. That's what a lot of people had been bothered about. But the two don't overlap. I've seen great film stars come on the stage. The owners booked them hoping to have full houses. The reverse has happened.

Q.J. : *You were telling us when we came in about the Jatra play you were busy with. What's it about?*

U.D. : The *Jatra* play I was talking about is called *The Sanyasi's Sword* and deals with the Sanyasi Rebellion in 1776—at the time of Warren Hastings.

Q.J. : *You're attracted to the form because of its vitality?*

U.D. : Yes. It took me seven years to get used to the form. Then it came naturally to me.

Q.J. : *But do you change it in the context of the theme which you're tackling? Add something to it? Mould it?*

U.D. : What I've tried to do is to restore some of the elements that had been wiped out by the commercial tycoons. Some wonderful elements like the character Vivek (Conscience). He comes in at unusual, dramatic moments and sings.

Q.J. : *Like a chorus?*

U.D. : Yes. You know he has a special kind of dress, a yellow robe. And previously when the show lasted a whole night, there used to be sixteen or seventeen songs.

Q.J. : *And now?*

U.D. : The *Jatra* troupe does two or sometimes three shows every night. That's what the commercial tycoons demand of them. And the principal audiences are the coal-miners in the coal belt or the workers in tea-plantations. After a hard day's work you can't expect them to sit through an all-night performance. So the *Jatra* play is reduced to a duration of three or four hours. And the first element that is thrown out is the Vivek and his songs. Then they threw out another exciting feature—the *Juri.* The men in the *Juri,* dressed like old-style lawyers with turbans and long, black coats, sat right in the midst of the audience. They suddenly

got up and gave their verdict in song on what was happening on the stage.

Q.J. : But surely the Juri *can't be something from an ancient folk form, can it?*

U.D.: It came in the middle of the nineteenth century. It was first conceived by the villagers themselves. Not thrown in from outside.

Q.J.: So before the nineteenth century, the Jatra *had no* Juri *?*

U.D.: But it had other elements which are now lost. Like Shiva and his *ganas.* They were also used for comedy; they did a lot of somersaulting and acrobatics. The audience enjoyed a good laugh. Now that's out. But we can introduce the *Juri.* All of a sudden it sits on trial; starts discussing the villain and his misdeeds and pronouncing its verdict. In the great *Jatra* classic *Agnipariksha* the *Juri* intervenes when Sita has to undergo an ordeal by fire. They start a discussion. Has Rama been unjust in condemning her?

Q.J. : Have you introduced the Juri *in your play?*

U.D.: Not yet. But I hope to introduce it in my future *Jatra* plays. But the Vivek has already come in. Two or three songs and not more. The duration of the play is four hours. And it's a hit. A dialogue is on and suddenly it moves into a song.

Q.J. : What kind of music?

U.D.: Absolutely based on classical *ragas.* Like *Desh, Bihag, Bageshri...* Fantastic!

Q.J. : And the accompaniment?

U.D.: The usual *Jatra* concert party. All kinds of big drums. Two big harmoniums.

Q.J. : Like the organs they use in our Marathi musicals?

U.D.: No. Harmoniums. Huge ones, specially made for *Jatra* plays...

Q.J. : And the spoken word is heard in spite of such accompaniment?

U.D.: Oh, yes. The music is loud, the voice is even louder. You've no idea—how loud...

Q.J. : And carried without a mike?

U.D.: Always.

Q.J. : And their themes are usually mythological?

U.D.: No, they're all kinds. Last season there was a *Jatra* on Vietnam.

Q.J. : Yours?

U.D.: No, someone else wrote it. And in the coming season a *Jatra* group is doing a new one on Karl Marx. Shambhu Bag who has always been a *Jatra* writer has written the script. I've read it. He's still working on it. It's a very creditable achievement. He's trying to capture a chapter of Karl Marx's life in London.

Q.J. : When the child died?

U.D.: Naturally. That's the part. The news of the setting up of the Paris Commune sustains Marx in the midst of this terrible personal tragedy.

Q.J. : Any other kind of theme?

U.D.: *Samajik.* The ordinary middle-class family and all its trial and tribulations with a lot of melodrama.

Q.J. : Will the Karl Marx Jatra *play also be a commercial?*

U.D.: In the sphere of the *Jatra* there's no such a thing as 'amateur'.

Q.J. : What does the audience demand?

U.D.: The *Jatra* play always starts with a lot of noise and passion. And the violence and passion is expected to be sustained from scene to scene. But there are instances where the most violent, fiery plays have turned out to be flops. And someone goes and revives an old early nineteenth century classic like *Vidya Sundari* which has a lot of song and dance and it turns out to be a tremendous hit.

Q.J. : Because of what? They wanted something new?

U.D.: Yes. The oldest thing became very new.

Q.J. : When does the season begin?

U.D.: After the rains.

Q.J. : And goes on right till the end of summer?

U.D.: Yes. Till the outbreak of the rains.

Q.J. : How is a troupe organized? They are paid for each performance?

U.D.: No, on a monthly basis.

Q.J. : Who controls the troupe?

U.D.: It's all controlled by what they call a company. But actually it's just one man who owns the troupe. Previously he always used to be an actor himself—an actor-manager. Now that system is gone. There's what's called the *adhikari.* He sits in his office in Calcutta, and he employs actors.

Q.J. : Like an impressario, in fact?

U.D.: Yes. Most of the actors live in the villages. They have to come to Calcutta now to be employed and registered as actors with a troupe. At the end of a season the troupe is broken up. The *adhikari* usually has his eyes open; he is always scouting for new talent. Sometimes when an actor is in demand, he goes and agrees to two or three contracts surreptitiously. Then the trouble begins. There's quite a tussle. And we have the minor actors who have to beg of the *adhikari* to accommodate them in his troupe. Then the troupes are again re-organized. They rehearse right through the rains. In Calcutta the *adhikari* rents a house. The actors stay there day and night.

Q.J. : He looks after their comforts?

U.D.: Yes.

Q.J. : Are the actors protected—adequately?

U.D.: Yes. One seldom hears of an actor being cheated. There is the story of a wicked *adhikari* who left his troupe stranded in Assam. But the way they keep repeating the story, it appears as though this is the exception rather than the rule.

Q.J. : But the adhikari *may not* want *to cheat! A particular* Jatra *might turn out to be a flop. He may get into financial difficulties and not be able to pay his actors. Then what happens?*

U.D.: He will borrow money and pay them.

Q.J. : But in the commercial theatre this kind of attitude seems quite exceptional, doesn't it?

U.D.: Yes.

Q.J. : Do the actors come from families that have traditionally been associated with the theatre? Is it a hereditary profession?

U.D.: Yes. From father to son. But now new actors are coming in who haven't been trained by their ancestors. And the actresses, for example, are all new. There weren't any actresses formerly.

Q.J. : But can they make a living out of this ? Can they make it a career ?

U.D.: Oh, yes. They are paid much more than artists in films or the theatre. A leading *Jatra* actor gets eight thousand a month and a car.

Q.J. : What?

U.D.: Yes. Someone like Swapan Kumar, say. His father, his grandfather, were all *Jatra* actors. His elder brother was a craze in the thirties. Swapan's terrific when he comes on to the stage.

Q.J. : How big is the arena ? Its dimensions ?

U.D.: Not fixed. The *Jatra* troupe doesn t carry its equipment.

Q.J. : At a performance I saw in Shivaji Park there was a long kind of corridor at the back leading on to the stage.

U.D.: That's from the dressing rooms.

Q.J. : But the acting area seems quite small... like the average stage.

U.D.: Sometimes even smaller. The local people who organize it build the stage.

Q.J. : But the actors, can they adapt their moves to fit into this acting arena ?

U.D.: Yes. They're tremendously adaptable.

Q.J. : And the musicians ? Where do they sit ?

U.D.: Sometimes on a lower platform. Sometimes on the stage, if a platform hasn't been provided for them. There are times when they have to go into the audience. That's another problem. The audience is increasing. In the old days they used to act in a zamindar's courtyard with an audience of three hundred. Nowadays the audiences go up to twenty thousand sometimes. How can the voice reach all of them ? It's physically, humanly impossible. But they have to do it.

Q.J. : What do they do ?

U.D.: You watch an experiment with a new kind of significance. They yell and shout and yet pretend to be very real. I'm afraid to believe it—but it's true. They have arrived at a certain kind of balance.

Q.J. : They manage without a mike ?

U.D.: Yes. They're speaking at a huge volume, yet you feel a drawing-room play is on—father, son, wife...

Q.J. : It's difficult to believe.

U.D.: I'm afraid to believe it myself. An actor who died recently, Punju Sen —he was on the stage for sixty-two years. When he died he was eighty. His last performance was at the age of sixty-nine. Firstly, the voice was naturally massive. And he had mastered a technique, a physical technique where he didn't have to exert, where he managed to look relaxed. It's incredible! But nowadays the *Jatra* actors have to face another kind of exploitation They have to do two or three performances one after another. After all-night shows, the same morning they pack and travel one hundred and fifty miles to another town. And perform again. Then travel again. Their health is ruined, the voice is damaged. These are the demands of the system.

Q.J. : But even so they manage to live up to eighty?

U.D.: Yes, but he belonged to the older generation. The new generation can't do it. This hectic life. And there's another vice that's creeping in. Drink. They perform three or four nights at a stretch and then they might have a break. Quite accidentally, just because the manager couldn't arrange a show.

Q.J. : *Then?*

U.D.: They want to sleep... sleep soundly for the few hours they get. So they drink.

Q.J. : *And the actresses, which strata of society do they come from? I suppose middle-class people wouldn't like their girls to act in* Jatra *plays.*

U.D.: Not a single actress from the middle-class. But there are some who are drawn from the villages—daughters of rich peasants, who are themselves fond of the *Jatra*. They have no prejudice against it. They believe it's an honourable form. Then there are the theatre actresses from Calcutta, daughters of retired actresses, their younger sisters. Professional acting is in the family. There are instances when a girl from the middle-class is fascinated by the *Jatra* and enters the profession. But she can't stand the strain of rehearsals, not to speak of actual performance.

Q.J. : *And the actresses speak their lines using the same volume as the actors?*

U.D.: Girls find it easier. The voice is more high-pitched.

Q.J. : *But is every word audible? Is there the element of clarity?*

U.D.: If a girl doesn't have it, she'll lose her job. The audiences are very critical. They'll shout. The worst thing they can ever say is "Pal chapa de". *Pal* means the tarpaulin over the stage. They'll say, "Take it out and put it on the actors!" And this means the play's flopped.

Q.J. : *Is the audience so involved?*

U.D.: Oh, yes. Their involvement is supreme.

Q.J. : *What do you do with your* Jatra *plays? Rehearse them the same way with your own troupe?*

U.D.: Oh, no. I wouldn't dare to do a *Jatra* play with my own troupe. I write *Jatra* plays and direct a professional troupe.

Q.J. : *You write and direct? You don't even act in them?*

U.D.: Never. Impossible. I wouldn't be able to do it.

Q.J. : *How many* Jatra *plays have you written?*

U.D.: Five, four of which I wish to forget. They were consciously done. Politically motivated. Propaganda plays.

Q.J. : *Their names?*

U.D.: *Rifle, Jallianwala Bagh,* and then I wrote a very bad play called *Delhi Chalo*, centering round Subhas Chandra Bose and *Nil Rakta*, which wasn't so bad as a play. Somebody else directed it. It had for its background the Indigo Rebellion.

Q.J. : *Your latest play?*

U.D.: I spoke to you about it. ***The Sanyasi's Sword.*** It's on now.

Q.J. : *And it had a good response?*

U.D.: What the audiences seemed to have liked very much was the parallel. Although its background is the eighteenth century rebellion against Warren Hastings' rule, actually I tried to draw a parallel and relate it to the destruction of the Naxalite movement in Calcutta. The death—no, the murder of Charu Muzumdar in custody. The parallel was quite obvious to the audiences. They appreciated it. But it wasn't mere propaganda. Both levels were present.

Q.J. : *But in the villages could they see the parallel?*

U.D.: So they say. I've not been with the play all over. Only to a few places.

You see when a play's a real hit, it doesn't have to go deep into the interior. Word spreads somehow. The villagers come to the district towns. The actors don't have to go to the interior. But then the strain becomes unbearable. Two or three performances every night because there are so many people waiting to see it. And in the district towns the political undertones would be clearly intelligible.

Q.J.: *When you write on a historical theme, how far are you authentic?*

U.D.: As far authentic as it is possible to be. Take this specific example—*The Sanyasi's Sword*. I've been collecting material on the subject for the last eleven years. Hoping to do a play one day. I put it in *Jatra* form instead. I referred to certain rare books. For example, *Rennel's Journal* which I had the good fortune to consult in the British Museum Library. Rennel was the captain entrusted with putting down the revolt. He was Warren Hastings' personal officer. Then I consulted the usual history books, the authorities on the subject.

Q.J.: *But when you want to project a theme which is contemporary, say the Naxalite movement, and use a historical incident, do you mould it to an extent?*

U.D.: Yes. To an extent. But if the moulding affects the real incidents of history, somebody or other is bound to catch me by the neck and wring it. Take the case of my play *Barricade*. It's about Berlin, 1933. But it is also about Calcutta, 1971. I daresay nobody has been able to challenge a single incident in the play. All I did was to point out how the Nazis rigged the elections. Somehow the Congressmen in Calcutta think it is a terrible insult to them. They even tried to break up a show of ours. I asked them, "Do you admit then that you rigged the elections?" They said, "Certainly not". I said, "Why are you so furious then? We are only showing how the Nazis rigged the elections." In Berlin the old Judge, Judge Zauritz was killed. In Calcutta the Judge who was investigating the Baraset murders was also killed. In Berlin that old man was assassinated. The next day the Nazis began to scream that the Communists had killed him. He was seventy years old. Not a politician but a philanthropist. Somehow people seemed to be reminded of the murder of Hemanta Bose. Someone killed him and they began to scream that the CPM and the Naxalites had done it, giving the police and the political gangsters more opportunity to burn, kill, and shoot. And, of course, the Reichstag fire, we didn't invent it. It took place.

Q.J.: *Here. What was the parallel? Any incident comparable to the Reichstag fire?*

U.D.: No. We just showed it. No exact parallel as such. Two nights before the elections the Communist Party is banned. Yet the Communist Party has to fight the elections. All democratic and civil rights are suspended by Hitler. But the elections will take place. That brings a big laugh. The Communist Party is banned. Here the Communist Party, as such, is not under a ban. But the people see how they have to hide. The elections take place... We have to be very careful about historical things. Our greatest disappointment was when we took *Tota* to Delhi. The play is about the Delhi Uprising of 1857. Various historical episodes were introduced but we interpreted them in our own way.

Q.J. : *When you interpreted them, maybe you changed something or added a detail?*

U.D.: Certainly. But not a single critic in Delhi ever discussed what we were doing. They only talked of *how* we were doing it.

Q.J. : *That was not a* Jatra *play?*

U.D.: No. Firstly they should have asked why Hira Singh has not been shown as a traitor. We show him as a hero. Where did we find this? Well, we did find it. In 1957 the India Office Library, Leadenhall Street, London, opened its secret archives for people to come and read. A man called Albert Marker has written a huge book in which he quotes documents which conclusively prove that Hira Singh was not a traitor. Hodson's Intelligence Service had sown the rumour in such a beautiful manner that the sepoys and the amirs were taken in by it. In this way the English removed their enemy. In Delhi they should have raised such questions. Everyone knows the man to be a traitor; there's the usual legend that he sold his country for thirty pieces of silver. In Himachal Pradesh they sing songs saying how wicked he was. And nobody asked us why we show him as a hero. Not one question is asked. Fantastic!

Q.J. : *Why?*

U.D.: Because they themselves don't know it. They haven't read their own history. All that they speak about is whether Mirza Ghalib's verse was sung correctly or ask why this particular song of Bahadur Zafar was chosen and not some other. How stupid! How every stupid!

Q.J. : *You mean the critics, the intellectuals?*

U.D.: Yes. Anyway in Calcutta somebody is sure to raise a question. Not the critics. They're just as asinine there as anywhere else. Others. Students of history. They'll definitely raise some questions if I transgress limits.

Q.J. : *But if you are true to the spirit of history?*

U.D.: And I take certain liberties?

Q.J. : *Yes, And if somebody challenges that, what happens?*

U.D.: I'll say, "Lump it. Take it or leave it" What else is there to say?

The Seraikella Chhau Dance

Text and Photographs
by
Mohan Khokar

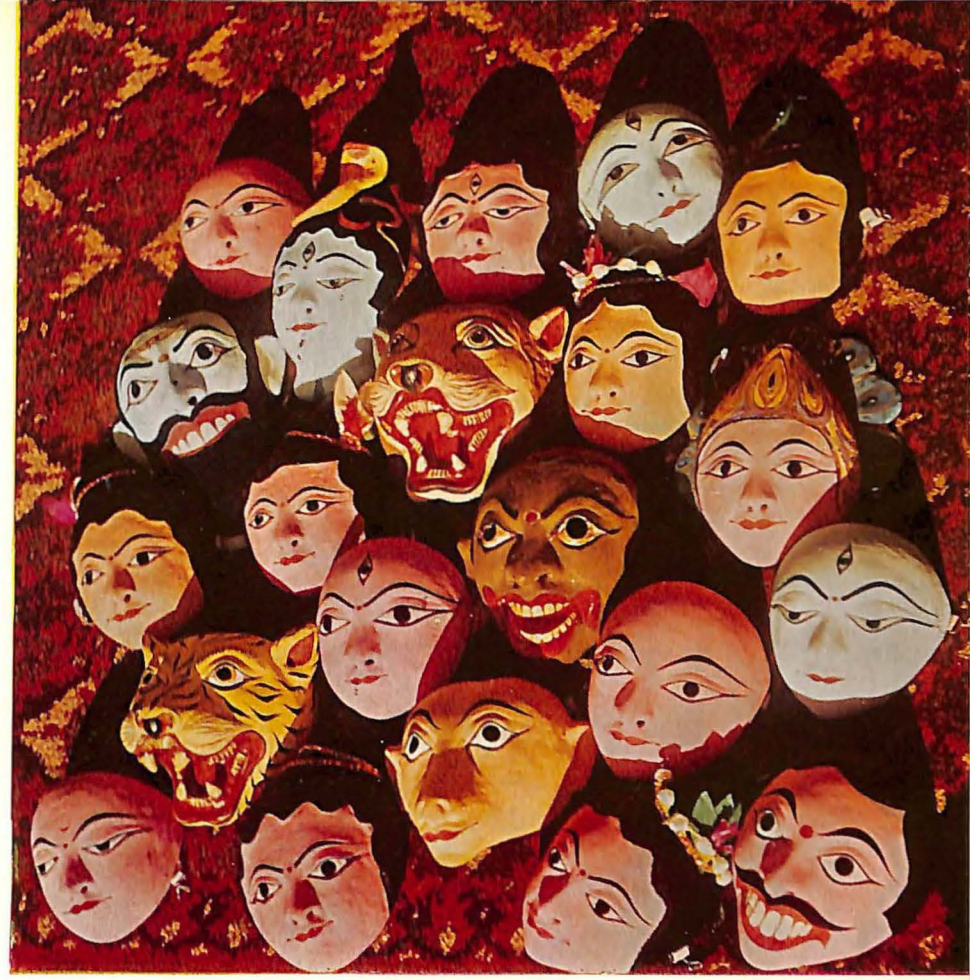
If the one-time princely state of Seraikella is known to the outside world, it is mainly because of the Chhau dance. For centuries the people here—rulers and commoners alike—have cherished and preserved this extraordinarily stylised and aesthetically rich form of art. Dance traditions bearing the same name, Chhau, also obtain in nearby Mayurbhanj, in Orissa, and Purulia, in West Bengal, and certain parallel characteristics suggest a common origin for the three. Broadly, however, the Chhau of Seraikella can be said to be poetic and evocative, that of Mayurbhanj earthy and vibrant, and of Purulia robust and virile.

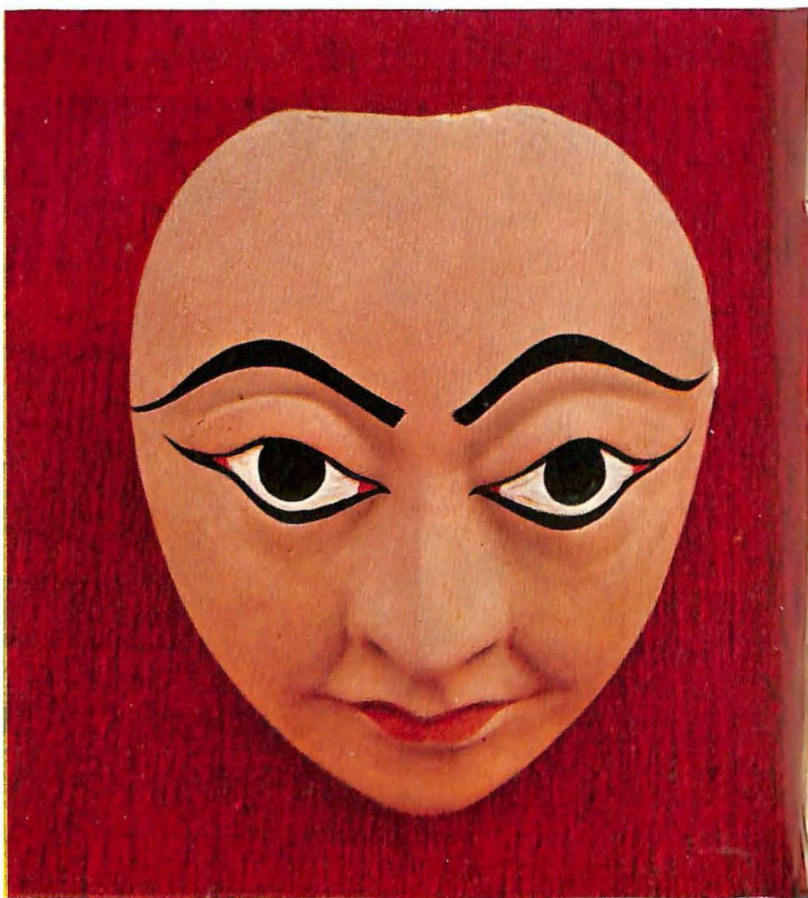
Hara-Parvati.

Seraikella lies in the heart of the Singhbhum district, formerly of Orissa and now of Bihar. Girdled as it is by the rolling Saranda and Bangriposi hills, it has for centuries maintained its own peculiar religious and cultural traditions, immune to influence from without. And these traditions find their fullest flowering once every year, at the time of *Chaitra Parva,* the Spring Festival. Preceded by elaborate ceremonies and rituals, the Chhau is performed for four or five nights and witnessed by thousands from the city and around.

The technique of the Chhau dance stems from the *parikhanda* system of exercise, an important part of the training of the *sipahis,* or warriors, of Seraikella. *Pari* means shield and *khanda* sword, and in the *parikhanda* the performers all hold swords and shields in their hands when doing the exercises. The *parikhanda* is generally performed in the early hours of the morning and, traditionally, only at one place—a stretch of raised land on the bank of the Kharkai river, known as Bhairavsal. The place is consecrated to Lord Shiva and it has seven stone *lingas* before each of which the *parikhanda* performers prostrate themselves before commencing their routine every morning. The exercise generally lasts about three hours, after which the performers take a dip in the Kharkai and then proceed with the day's work.

Parikhanda exercises





The *parikhanda* is always performed in the presence of a guru. The participants wear white dhotis and keep the upper body bare and stand in a row, facing the guru. The exercises have a set order which is strictly adhered to, and at the time of performance the guru as well as the participants keep reciting mnemonic syllables which guide the rhythm of the various steps and movements. The routine commences with a set of *chalis,* or stylised gaits, which are performed to the front, to the back and to the sides, in single, double and quadruple tempi. Most of the *chalis* are named after the manner in which the steps are taken; thus, *arhichali,* crosswise steps, and *teenparhichali,* three steps at a time. But there are also *chalis* which are based on actual gaits, such as *bugchali,* crane walk, and *gaumutrachali,* the walk of a cow after she has passed urine. The *chalis* are followed by *upalayas* or combined steps and movements which are suggestive of various actions. Example of *upalayas* are *gutti-koorha,* lifting a pebble with the toes, *gobar-goola,* mixing cow-dung with water, *kula-pachra,* husking paddy, and *bota-cheera,* splitting a bamboo. It is said that formerly there were over 100 *upalayas* but at present not even half of them are performed or remembered.

The Seraikella Chhau is so called because the *chhau,* or mask, is an essential feature of this art. The etymology of the word *chhau* is generally traced

Prasanna Kumar, a veteran mask maker of Seraikella

to the Sanskrit root *chhaya,* shade, but some ver that the word is derived from *chhauni,* or cantonment, which is where the *parikhanda sipahis* mostly stayed. The Chhau is performed only by men and boys and the items are never more than seven to ten minutes each, for it is difficult to dance longer wearing a mask. The musical accompaniment is provided mainly by the *nagra,* a huge kettle-drum, *dhol,* a cylindrical drum, and *shehnais,* or reed-pipes. The same instruments, incidentally, are used in the various processions connected with the *Chaitra Parva* rituals. Besides, whenever there is a performance of Chhau, it is absolutely binding to begin it with a rendering of the music used for *Jatra Ghat,* an important ritual of the Festival.

Ardhanarishwara, *the composite form of Shiva and Parvati.*

The tunes used in Chhau are in many cases based on the *ragas* of Hindustani music; in some cases they are borrowed from the compositions of outstanding Oriya poets of the past, such as Upendra Bhanja, Kabi Surya and Uddita Narayana, while there are also items which use folk melodies. Usually at least two distinct airs are used in a dance item, and when the melody changes so does the rhythm of the dance. The steps of the dance are governed by patterns of rhythmic syllables played on the drums, and any change of tempo is prefaced with a *katan*, a rhythmic flourish played three times in succession. The items of Chhau have a set choreographic framework, but the number of times particular sequences are to be rendered in a presentation is governed by the exigencies of time and space; for this reason, it is a part of the Chhau technique that whenever the dancer desires to change from one sequence to the next, he indicates this to the musicians through a subtle nod or some similar discreet cue.

The themes of the Chhau dance are taken from mythology, everyday life, aspects of nature, and, at times, the dance is simply the delineation of a mood, state or condition. In Chhau the mask is the focal point of the dance, for in it is concentrated the quintessence of the particular mood or theme. When the mask is worn the dancer loses the most sensitive and potent instrument of expression, the face, and so the onus of creating and projecting moods and emotions is transferred to the body. The mask mirrors the basic, dominant *rasa* of a dance; the body qualifies it. The totality of feeling or emotion pertinent to a theme is crystallised in the mask; the body gives it animation. The mask wears a static expression, but in the magic of the Chhau every flexion and every thrust of the head, coupled with total body dynamics, contributes to create a form of mime that adds a new dimension to the concept of *abhinaya* as it is generally understood.

The making of Chhau masks involves much more than mere workmanship. Each mask is first visualised by studying the character it is to represent, and then given shape and substance. Almost all masks are painted a flat pastel shade, and in some cases the colour is chosen to augment the overall effect of the disguise. The stylised contours of the eyebrows, eyes and mouth are painstakingly painted, for they bring into vivid relief the distinctive character with which a particular mask is associated. Thus, in *Ratri*, (Night) the mask has half-closed eyes, heavy with sleep, and in *Banaviddha* (The Injured Deer) the eyebrows are knotted in anguish. To really appreciate the mimetic potentiality of the Chhau mask one has to enter the world of this dance, for it is a world in which the human face is capable of absorbing and mirroring the innate urges and passions of all living beings. In Chhau the mask has a human face, but it can, when necessary, take on the salient characteristics of any living being, as visualised in the theme of a particular dance. For this reason in dances like *Mayura* (Peacock) and *Hansa* (Swan), though the masks have human features, the modelling is stylised to suggest the visage; at times even the emotional make-up of the creatures is represented.

The repertoire of the Chhau dance, broadly speaking, falls into three categories. Firstly, there are the simplest dances, like *Hare-Vishnu, Madana Gopala* and *Krishna-Balarama*, generally performed by children in which the

Banabiddha, *the wounded deer*

choreography has little, if anything, to do with the themes of these dances. The steps and movements, at best, touch upon the rudiments of the Chhau technique, and the dances are invariably performed without masks. To the second category belong dances such as *Arati* (Offering of Light), *Dheebar* (Fisherman), *Astradanda* (Sword-Play), and *Sabara* (Hunter). In these, the theme is literally followed through in the choreography: there is very little extraneous movement or mime to detract from the actual narrative. In the third category are what one may call the sophisticated and intriguing compositions of the Chhau repertory.

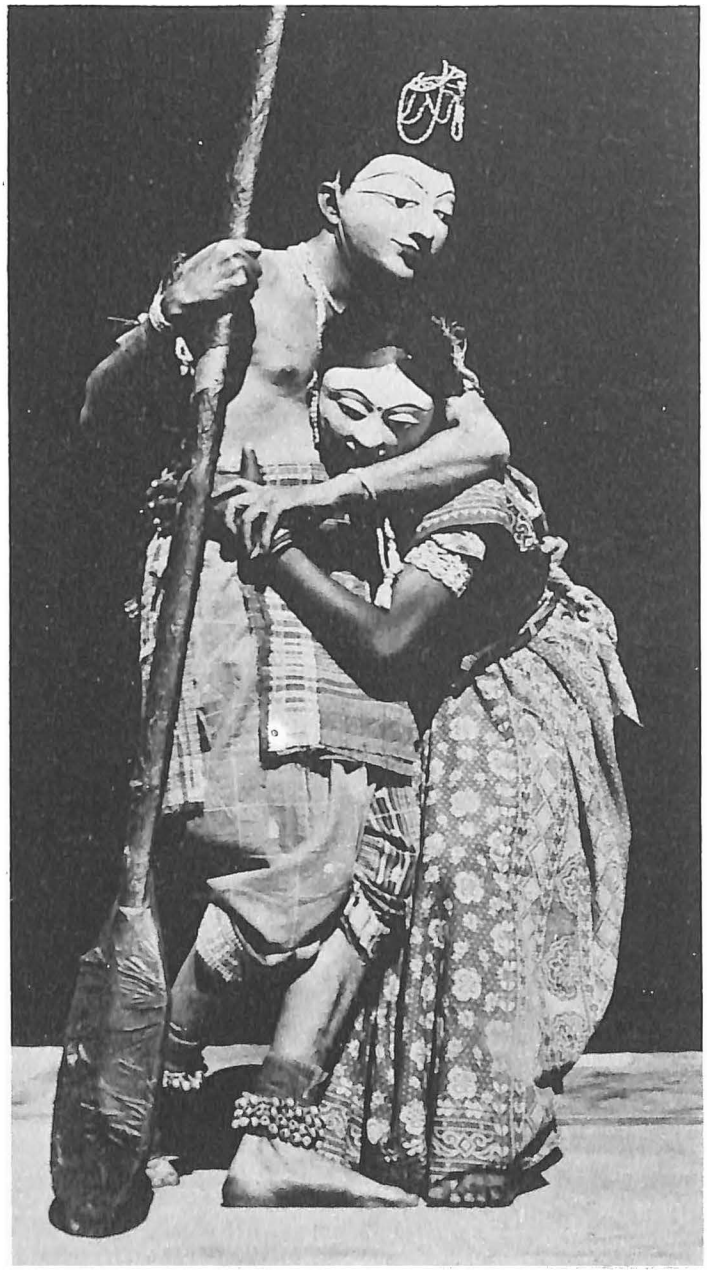
Here, in every dance, there are two specific aspects: the outward, and apparent kinaesthetic expression; and the inner, esoteric, allegorical, even philosophic, interpretation. *Mayura, Banaviddha, Nabik* and *Chandrabhaga* are perfect examples of this.

Mayura is the dance of the peacock, but it is so highly stylised that it bears very little resemblance to the natural traits and mannerisms associated with the bird. It can be called a choreographic fantasy, for, apart from etching a few movements characteristic of the peacock, the dancer exploits to the fullest the qualities of vainglory and self-adultation and uses these as a spring-board to project his own personality. By employing, for example, a startling contraction and release of the lower torso, an almost primitive pelvic impulse, a very primeval element is brought into focus: *Mayura* might be a bird or man in his most exuberant, sensuous mood. *Banaviddha* tells the simple story of a deer shot through the heart by an arrow. The movements of the dance project the sprightliness of the animal, but a palpable undertone of pain permeates the whole composition. Allegorically, one can read into it the remorse of a being unwilling to give up life, or the tragedy of unrequited love, or even a bitter commentary on the hunt and a subtle plea for *ahimsa.*

Nabik has the simple theme of a man and woman setting out in a boat, getting caught in a storm, and surviving it. For one who can perceive deeper, the philosophical implications in this dance are many. The boat, for example, stands for security, and when they are caught in the storm, it is as if they are dragged into the very vortex of life, and this brings out woman's innate desire to yield and submit to man, and her dependence on man whose duty and privilege it is to protect her. *Chandrabhaga* is the story of a maiden pursued by the Sun God. It has the quality of an epic tragedy, and is considered the *piece de resistance* of the Chhau repertoire. Chandrabhaga is bathing in the ocean and is caught unawares by the Sun God; he makes odious advances to her which seem so repugnant that Chandrabhaga is left with no other alternative but to plunge into the ocean and commit suicide. The sacrifice of Chandrabhaga glorifies the virtue of chastity which cannot be violated even by the gods.

Though the Chhau is a dance that has been in existence for centuries, it owes its present form and repertory almost entirely to one man: Bijoy Pratap Singh Deo. A younger brother of Aditya Pratap Singh Deo, who, till his death in 1969, was the Maharaja of Seraikella, Bijoy can be ranked as one of the truly great choreographers in Indian classical dance. He was not a performing artiste, but practically all the compositions used in Chhau today are his creations. Next to Bijoy, the most substantial contribution to the Chhau art has been by Maharaja Aditya Pratap Singh Deo and his three sons, Suvendra, Brijendra and Suddhendra. As long as he was alive, the Maharaja was the arbiter of taste in all matters connected with the Chhau dance and many of the masks which are in existence today were designed and given finishing touches by him. Suvendra and Brijendra were virtuoso dancers and among the finest in the Chhau tradition. Both of them, unfortunately, died very young.

Bijoy, Suvendra, Brijendra and Maharaja Aditya are now names of the past, but they have left the legacy of their pooled talent and genius to Rajkumar



Nabik, *the boatman and his wife caught in a storm.*

Suddhendra. Not only is he a brilliant dancer but also a choreographer and teacher of considerable merit and the only one so far to have been given the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award for Seraikella Chhau. The best of the past in the Chhau tradition is in Rajkumar Suddhendra's blood; the burden of the future, too, is on his shoulders. Will he live up to it?

Aram Ilyich Khatchaturian

T. Khrennikov

June 6, 1973 marked the seventieth birthday of Aram Ilyich Khatchaturian, the renowned Soviet composer. The event was celebrated the world over. In this article T. Khrennikov, the distinguished Soviet composer and President of the Composers' Union, USSR, pays a warm tribute to Khatchaturian, the man and artist.

The name of Aram Ilyich Khatchaturian is known all over the world. Professional musicians, as well as art lovers, are acquainted with his work. It is difficult to name a country (even one with a minimum development of the concert-going and performing tradition) where his music has not been heard at least once. His contribution to the field of modern art and culture is enormous. A number of books, sketches, research articles and commentaries have been written on him. His pupils occupy pride of place in many National Schools of Music in the Soviet Union and in other countries

The generation of Soviet musicians which had the good fortune to be the first to savour the creations of Khatchaturian still retain their creative and emotional force. They recall their days with him at the conservatory of Nikolai Ekovlevich Myaskovsky, where for the first time the genius of the inimitable art of Aram Ilyich began to glow. This light will never die out; it has been burning with great power and brightness during the last half century.

I recall Khatchaturian as he was then. An awkward youth with a florid 'eastern' appearance, who spoke little and always seemed to be following his own train of thought and his own kind of logic in conversation. This trait has stayed with him till now. In his life, in everyday affairs, in his habits as well as in his art, he thinks in images and not in logically defined verbal and understandable categories. Capturing the peculiar characterstic of each detail, the tendency towards aphorism, those fleeting, picturesque remarks—behind all these is the keen insight of the artist and a colossal experience of life and art.

It might seem that everyone knows everything about Khatchaturian but still it is impossible to get accustomed to him. Yes, he is an artist from the east. So were Avetik Isakyan, Komitas, Egishe Charents, Martiros Saryan. I am always struck by the concreteness, the bold relief of their images. Is it perhaps possible that this is the special feature of the theatrical quality of the artistic mode of thinking? Whatever it may be, as you watch or listen to their productions, you see and hear Armenia. If one has not visited Armenia, it is difficult to understand in full measure the creativity of Aram Ilyich, the flowering valleys and high mountainous air of his music.

Maybe, this is all a matter of inborn talent. In actual fact, not many of the masters of the twentieth century can stand comparison with Khatchaturian in

the spontaneous and volcanic quality of his natural inborn talent. But still when we assess the historical role played by an artist, we do not go by just this particular criterion, however great the artist might be. Strictly speaking, talent in itself is not a special virtue but that natural condition which gives birth to art. In which direction is that talent projected? How is it developed? What tasks does it set itself? What does it accept and what does it reject in life? These are the factors which ultimately determine the significance and place of talent in society.

And here I should like to emphasize one important point. Aram Ilyich Khatchaturian has from the very beginning of his art developed as an international artist. I would like to explain this concept in detail. It is not that Khatchaturian was the first artist in Armenia who employed the sonata form in a bright and artistic manner or "cultivated" harmonious hybrids, preserving the spicy quality of the East, having acquired the rigour of European functionalism or adopted the classical symphony orchestra. All this is in itself important but the main thing is that Khatchaturian generously opened his heart and lent his ears to the great artistic traditions of Europe and in the first instance to the artistic tradition of Russia with its ethical and moral heights. There is no doubt that it was the real environment, governing his creative life which has been the decisive factor—his childhood and adolescence spent in Tbilisi, which from times immemorial has been famous for the international tradition in its musical life; his student life in Moscow, and his meeting and building ties of friendship with such outstanding musicians of the modern age, and in the first place with Russian composers like Prokofiev, Myaskovsky, Shebalin, Shostakovich and Kabalevsky. In later life, when Aram Ilyich won worldwide acclaim as an artist, the circle of his personal creative contacts widened. Enesku amd Kodai, Pipkof and Vladigerov, Obradovich and A. Mendelson Nikolovsky and Tsikker, Dobiash and Sukhon, Vancha and Dumitresky, Dessau and Lesser, Orik, Barber, Menon, Orf-yes, it is possible to count all these whom Khatchaturian encountered during the joyful path of his creative life. I have not mentioned performers, artists, writers and poets and yet it would not be inappropriate here to recall such names as Leonid Kogan, Oistrakh, Saryan, Stokovsky, Picasso, Guttuso, Neruda, Amadu, Gilyen and Sikeiros....

All his life Khatchaturian has been generous (as I said before, openhearted) to creative men and they, in turn, have been generous to him. But all this does not explain completely the phenomenon of his creative work or reveal in any way the 'secret' of his uniqueness. There were and there are other talented artists who grew and were brought up in international music centres, to whom fate gifted great creative minds, and who did, in the end, compose not a few original masterpieces. But still Aram Khatchaturian is in a class by himself.

...Forty years have gone by since the performance of his radiant and mature piano concerto. Then the listeners were struck by his totally original, refined, and perfect form; the organic quality of his national expression and the influence of classical European traditions of which I have made an earlier mention. But in this 'concerto' there was also that 'something' which is often left out in our description of music. I have in mind the characteristic features of his subject in the ideological-aesthetic, or, if you can call it so, the philosophical sense of the word. It is difficult to understand completely the subject of this remarkable creation, unless we bear in mind the conditions of world culture in those difficult

years preceding the war. In the background of the irreparable crisis in bourgeois artistic trends and the avant-garde schools and systems feverishly trying to disprove each other, there rang out in our young Soviet state the fiery voice of the singer of socialist reality.

In other words, Aram Ilyich, from the very beginning of his fruitful career, performed as a Soviet artist, and envisaged as his lofty task the affirmation of the progressive political and moral ideal of the epoch. This is exactly what made Khatchaturian what he is. To those who are always ready to say that there is no freedom of expression in the U.S.S.R., we would like to say: Look, here is Aram Khatchaturian before you. Can you hear in his music a single sound that suggests falsehood, or any coercion on the compositions of his imagination? You do not hear such a note in his music. Perhaps one composition may be liked more than another. But in all these the master remains wholly sincere. But what force this zest for life and this radiance of positive ethical values has! Only an artist who has close and friendly ties with reality and who draws inspiration from being one with the widest strata of listeners is capable of such convincing expression. That is why I consider this piano concerto a unique creation not merely in the art of Aram Ilyich himself but in some measure in the entire sphere of Soviet music.

With the passage of time his own style developed and enriched itself. His brilliant violin concerto, the heights and the dramatic quality of his symphonies, the lovely melody of his incomparably bright ballet music; the live and theatrical note in the Lermontov 'Masquerade'— all these works have already become Soviet classics. And they have become classics because Khatchaturian never deviated from the goal which he set for himself.

Recently when we celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the U.S.S.R., we undertook a basic and theoretical study of the fundamentals and the specific features of Soviet multi-national culture, including our music. I believe that special attention ought to be focussed on the thesis of the common Soviet features and aspects of this culture, on the main and distinguishing feature which went into the mental and moral mould of an outstanding artist or of the entire national school engaged in the construction of communism. We realize that this complex process did not begin yesterday and will not terminate tomorrow. It is an entire historical epoch in the spiritual life of a socialist nation, a bright epoch full of dialectical contradictions. A major part of the study is still the subject of research but there is a great deal that we already know. We know, in particular, that our culture would never have developed its common Soviet features and aspects if it did not have as its fountain-head outstanding artist-internationalists who dedicated the total force of their talent to serving the worthy cause of communism. Khatchaturian has been throughout his life and still remains this kind of artist. So the fact of his real and immeasurable popularity cannot merely be attributed to his being gifted with a great talent but is the result of the position adopted in real life by his remarkable music.

I have had the privilege of accompanying him during his various concert tours—in the Soviet Union and abroad. I do not recall a single instance where the audience, the public remained indifferent to his music. This is confirmed by entire legends that are related about him. But, I swear, that reality is even more radiant than these legends. I do not wish to cite concrete examples to prove this and that is because they are too numerous to be related here.

Where professional circles are concerned, one need not be a special prophet to foresee a long and even happier life to the Khatchaturian traditions of music. And in this connection I must mention the fact that the personality and the work of Khatchaturian attracted the special attention of those who participated in the Moscow Music Congress. And this is absolutely understandable: this interest in the creative experience of our foremost composer, who was one of the pioneers in the task of leaving an imprint of the common Soviet features and aspects of our culture on the most beautiful of national forms and who is an intense internationalist both in spirit and character. For musicians from those countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, which have achieved their political independence just recently, this experience is bound to be extremely valuable and instructive.

We all know that the best pupil is not one who attends his classes regularly and comes to consult you about his work. There exists another mode of study, which embraces direct access to the scores of the master. In this sense (and this is undoubtedly so) there are pupils and followers of Khatchaturian scattered in all corners of the world. Their number is constantly on the increase. The ideas embodied in his music will gather in strength; their active influence on millions of people willl multiply and be reinforced. Aram Ilyich derived these ideas, this force from the period in which he lives, from actual reality, from our Soviet power. He, in turn, gives to it "all the resonant power of a poet."

Aram Ilyich has completed seventy years. He is the most outstanding artist-communist of modern times. He has won the Lenin Award, and the government has recognized his contribution by conferring on him various State decorations. He is the Secretary of the Union of Composers of the U.S.S.R., a member of many important international bodies. He is a remarkable teacher, an educator of the young. He celebrated his seventieth birthday with the aura of fame surrounding him and with perfect mastery over his art. This is an important landmark in his life and a significant event for all Soviet musicians. May I be allowed on behalf of all of them the privilege of offering our most heartfelt greetings to our beloved Aram Ilyich and wishing him a long and happy creative life, and expressing our hopes for new and brilliant compositions which I am sure will bring joy to all lovers of the beautiful?

[*Translated through the courtesy of the Bombay Branch of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society by R. S. Jalan.*]

REPORTS

Poona Theatre Workshop: May 1973

Today the theatre is easily the most talked-about subject in urban Maharashtra—that is if we rule out rising prices and politics. Interestingly enough, the common theme in all these discussions is despair. People suddenly seem to have reached a point where they find everything either hopeless or absurd. Clearly this is a critical moment. The Marathi theatre has always needed a long, hard look at itself. "Successful theatre" can create a very suffocating atmosphere in which everything that is even remotely off the beaten track appears perilously subversive. Part of the reason why these groans of despair are so often heard in Bombay and Poona is the rather sudden realisation that the theatre can become a subversive force in our life. Everything takes on an insurgent quality. Rebels, clearly, carry more weight today than the number of performances of their plays would indicate.

It would be an exaggeration to say that this is a turning point in the Marathi theatre, Probably such turning points never come or, maybe, they are always there. Nevertheless, it is a critical moment. The theatre, like trade unions, has become a part of the urban psyche. It is time, therefore, for people interested in the theatre to sit together and talk about the problems facing them.

The Theatre Workshop which was organized by Satyadev Dubey at the Poona Film Institute from May 14 to May 23 was the first serious attempt in this direction. It might appear that theatre people treat their business either very lightly (the Marathi translation of the word 'amateur' as *haushi* would imply that) or as if it were a sacrosanct affair. The result has been that most successful plays are quite often farces or melodramas. A time has come when the theatre ought to become what it should be—a serious business. Obviously the young are the most qualified to achieve this aim. This is what the Workshop attempted to do. It got together about twenty young playwrights, directors and actors to talk to each other over a cup of tea (mostly a bad cup of tea!) about each other's explorations. The idea was to find out what is and should be the preoccupation of the modern theatre in the true sense of the term.

Young, they certainly were. But for Dubey, Shankar Shesh, Mahesh Elkunchwar and G.P. Deshpande, everyone was on the right side of thirty, Dr. Shesh is a well-known playwright from Bhopal. Elkunchwar has already earned a reputation for himself on account of his one-act plays. The others read their second or third plays. Suhas Tambe and Satish Alekar of Poona had tried their hand at one-act plays earlier on. Both of them read out their first full-length plays. Deshpande read his very first exercise in drama writing. Achyut Vaze and Dilip

Khandekar read their second plays. Dilip Jagtap's was also the first attempt at writing a full-length paly. This gives us some idea of the young people who had gathered in Poona. Among those present were directors Amol Palekar, Madhav Vaze and Achyut Deshingkar. They had discussions with veterans like Rajabhau Natu and Satyadev Dubey. More interesting was the fact that most of these people were connected with the theatre in more than one capacities. Amol Palekar, Madhav Vaze, Satish Alekar and G.P. Deshpande were also actors. Alekar had directed his own one-act plays. The point is that the young folk who had got together in Poona knew the theatre in all its various aspects.

The day began with a play-reading, followed by a discussion of the play. The afternoons were usually spent in watching some films selected from the Archives of the Film Institute. The schedule, as organized by Dubey, was rather crowded-beginning at 9.30 a.m. and lasting till about 7 p.m. The camp feeling was thus complete.

Among other notable participants one must mention Prof. Bhaskar Chandavarkar of the Film Institute and Prof. R . M . Bapat of the University of Poona. Dr. Shreeram Lagu joined the discussions on the 18th and the 19th. Prof. Vidyadhur Pundalik was present at the last three sessions.

A striking feature of the discussion was the cordiality that prevailed all throughout. However this was not because of the vague and polite character of the discussions. On the contrary, the participants tended to be very frank and ruthless. This was easily the first time that Marathi playwrights had exposed themselves to such merciless grilling. A playwright, otherwise, is, more often than not, treated by others as a counter-point to God. Traditionally, the Marathi playwright has thought of himself in terms of the divine—as one above reproach. Others usually watched him with awe-stricken eyes, creating a universe all his own. Some myths die hard. The myth of the playwright's omniscience is one of them. The Workshop began with the premise that these myths had not taken us very far and a time had come when we ought to think of a play as the collective activity of the director, actor, musician, the man in charge of lighting and the critic. Everyone was in search of a play, as it were.

It is rarely useful to speak in terms of a great or an outstanding play. What was important was the remarkable freshness that most of the plays read in the Workshop betrayed. The language was fresh. The images were new. The experiences were authentic. I must make a special mention of Achyut Vaze's play *Chal Re Bhoplya Tunuk Tunuk* and Satish Alekar's *Mickey-Mouse.* Achyut Vaze's explorations into the meaninglessness and the absurdity of life were altogether exhilarating. He demonstrated that Marathi has still not lost the capacity of being wielded as a very flexible and subtle medium. Alekar's preoccupation with the dominant—dominated relationship showed once again that the man-woman relationship can be seen from such diverse angles that it can become a kaleidoscope of life. Elkunchwar's two plays *Garbo* (written four and a half years ago) and *Vasanakanda* showed a very sensitive and creative mind at work.

The discussions, as I have already stated, were very frank. An interesting debate developed around Achyut Vaze's play. While the play sought to ex-

plore the meaninglessness or the absurdity of our existence, the playwright seemed to demonstrate in several of the scenes between the audience and the producer an almost passionate commitment to his kind of theatre. Strangely in the midst of nothingness and endless waiting for the meaning of life, one heard a strong indictment of the traditional theatre-goer. It was reflected in the simple fact that for this young man from Bombay not everything was yet meaningless. I remember having described it as an example of Hindu existentialism! It would appear that there is something in Hindu culture that makes it impossible for anybody to look at life as an existential phenomenon. As a consequence, there always is a point or two to which the playwright sticks hard and with passion. There is something in life which makes it worth living. Our modern sensibility has been caught in this dilemma. It would indeed be difficult to have a Hindu "outsider" ; for the Hindu can rarely become one. Whether in paradise or in hell the Hindu is a participant!

However the freshness of Vaze's play (as was pointed out during the discussions notably by Chandavarkar, Anuya and Amol Palekar, Dubey and others) lay in his language. It had succeeded in creating its own rhythm and a very charming elasticity. The author of *Shadja* (Vaze's earlier play) had definitely taken two steps forward.

Tambe's play *Beej* had a Naxalite named Manmath as its hero. To begin with, the Naxalite was really a very non-ideological and impulsive young man. Manmath's counter-point in the play, Deeptiman, seemed to be, on the other hand, a very real and authentic personality. Manmath could be anybody; or for that matter nobody. The basis of the conflict, which professes to be ideological, collapsed.

An interesting suggestion came up during the discussion. It was thought that Deeptiman who has been shown as a composed and, in his own way, a definitely political individual was more likely to join a terrorist and conspiratorial group. How would the play read if the roles were reversed? Whether or not Tambe works on this suggestion, one thing emerged quite clearly. His Manmath was not what Manmath claimed he was. The conflict, thus, became a very unreal one and thereby forfeited some of its intensity.

Mickey-Mouse by Satish Alekar was generally well-received. Alekar's brand of humour was new and refreshing. The play kept alternating between what one observer described as a 'slapstick comedy on sex' and a very mature study of how people come to be dominated and how slaves are made. The discussion, naturally, took all this into account. Quite a few suggestions on the play's methodology emerged and those may turn out to be very useful.

Mahesh Elkunchwar's play had two great advantages. Most people present at the Workshop had either read or heard *Garbo*. It was a pleasure to hear Elkunchwar. The four characters of *Garbo:* Garbo, Intellectual (Intuk), Pansy and Shreemant, and their intricate inter-relationship became the subject of a prolonged discussion. In any case the impact the play had made was unmistakable. *Vasanakanda*, his other play, started off with explorations of an incestuous relationship. As it proceeded it left that problem far behind. Creativity, man's re-

lationship with his environment, the concept of sin (the Christian concept of 'cardinal sin' slightly Hinduised?) and how sheer existence can weigh upon oneself — all these elements became the central theme as the play advanced. The participants evidently did not see *Vasanakanda* in as clear a perspective as they did *Garbo.* Yet between the two it appeared that the *Vasanakanda* had gripped them more.

I would rather keep Dr. Shesh's *Ek Aur Dronacharya*,.the only Hindi play read at the Workshop, out of this coverage. Being a Hindi play, it falls outside the general context in which I am discussing the Workshop. Dr. Shesh, however, was one of the most active participants in the Workshop. Since he knew Marathi very well, he had little difficulty in following and responding to the discussion.

As regards my play, I will only mention two points that were raised in the discussion. Since *Uddhwast Dharmashala* claimed to be a play about the tragedy of a left-wing liberal, a rather naive (are all liberals naive in the last analysis?) and sentimental professor, there was a lot of discussion in it. The question of its stage-worthiness or 'theatrical quality' came up for discussion. When does a play become really stage-worthy? What is the difference between a play and a radio play? A section of the participants thought that *Dharmashala* did not meet the basic requisites of a stage-worthy play.

The other point was raised when the discussion was taken up on the following day. Dr. Lagu had used the term 'intellectual play' in his analysis. I changed it to 'play of ideas'. Dubey introduced his concept of 'felt thought'. There was naturally no conclusive debate on the issue. Maybe *Dharmashala's* performance, if and when it takes place, will decide the issue.

Dilip Jagtap's *Ek Ande Phutle* was the last play to be read. The reactions varied. The last play is always likely to be at a disadvantage in a Workshop like this. Everybody was perceptibly exhausted after so much talk. The play was rather obscure and the participants came to the quick conclusion that if its verbosity were reduced, something could be made of the play. An extraordinary experiment was tried. Following Jagtap, two other participants read the same parts of the play. All the three readings were recorded and played. It appeared then that at long last a pattern of meanings was emerging. I wish we had more time for Jagtap.

What does the Workshop look like now? A whole bunch of ideas relating to themes, actors, lighting, juxtaposition of characters and of scenes, a chopping of wordy jungles emerged out of these nine days of discussion. One day, that is on the 22nd, the generai discussion did go a little astray. Far too many cliches were repeated; platitudinous statements were made; and yet behind all this there was a genuine desire to understand the creative process. More than that the general discussion sought to place "us" in relation to the "establishment". The feeling of togetherness was caused by the search that these writers were making. No authorities needed to be cited. Somebody did refer to Shakespeare and promptly came the reply: Do not quote Shakespeare. Shakespeare is like *Bharatiya Sanskriti.* All discussion ends there. The point is not that these were angry young men. The point is that these young people want to grope towards the right way. They are going to write very different plays. But the quest is important.

No such attempt had previously been made in Marathi. Maharashtrians certainly love the theatre. It is doubtful if they think about it. Part of the blame for this lies with the activists themselves. It was time somebody got hold of younger activists and made them exchange views. Satydev Dubey is the first person to have done this for the Marathi theatre. This was *not* a training camp. This was a Workshop intended for action and inter-action of young people on the basis of absolute equality. Mystique of any sort had no place there.

A pioneering effort would be an inadequate and even unfair description of the Workshop. There are ideas and there are activists. They are only waiting to be got together. Satyadev Dubey picked up such people and made them talk. It would have been better had the plays been cyclostyled in advance. It is always easier to formulate reactions to a play one already knows. But then all this, I imagine, would need money which is not very easy to come by. The Marathi Natya Parishad would do well to take note of such activities. In any case Dubey has set into motion a debate to which our writers, actors, directors, and critics had hitherto been unresponsive. In fact, they have held it in contempt. For them each creative individual is an island unto himself. The Poona Workshop has exploded this myth. A breath of fresh air has entered the Marathi theatre. One only hopes there will be much more to come.

G.P. Deshpande.

The National Seminar on Theatre at Bangalore: May 1973

Those who participated in the National Seminar on Theatre held at Bangalore on the 15th and 16th of May went back home with mixed feelings. They had gone to Bangalore expecting lively discussions and impressive productions. But their expectations remained unfulfilled. The Seminar proved a disappointment. Of course, they did appreciate the difficulties faced by the organizers; and they realized that a lot of effort and energy had gone into the preparations for the Seminar. But somewhere something went wrong. The result was that most of the participants felt that there was a lack of direction and purpose in the proceedings.

Sixty-five theatre personalities had been invited but less than half the number actually turned up. An audience which was looking forward to watching the productions of Shambhu Mitra and Utpal Dutt had to remain satisfied with Tarun Roy's *Rajani Gandhara.* Habib Tanveer's troupe which was to have staged *Nacha,* a Chattisgadi folk form, could not come. Gujarat's theatre people were hoping to stage Kavi Dalpatram's *Mithyabhimana.* But Gujarat was represented by a performance of C.C. Mehta's *Hoholika.* The production could hardly have said to represent the average standards maintained by Gujarati productions. The *tamasha* that Maharashtra sent was appreciated for its vigour but it was certainly not the best of its kind. The two *Krishna Parijatak* shows were equally popular

but the Telugu production attracted special attention because of the exceptional talent of Raghuramiah. The Kannada play, *Kakana Kote* by the veteran playwright Masti Venkatesh Iyengar was appreciated by everyone because here was a case of younger people working out new forms and presenting an older playwright's work with a modern feel and excellent team-work.

What impressed the audiences most was the Kathakali performance presented by the Kerala Udyog Mandal. The sequences from the *Mahabharata*: *Dyuta*, *Keechaka*, *Krishna Shishtai* were beautifully rendered and the musicians' chaste and refined accompaniment proved beyond doubt how closely their music was integrated with the movements and gestures of the dance. It was an example of perfect mastery over stage-craft.

The Telugu *vitthi natakam* presented another variety of Keechaka. Though all the characters, including that of Sairandri, were played by males, the effective handling of a role established the identity of each person almost immedately after the performance commenced. Such potential in the hands of a more imaginative director (like the one who presented the Kerala Udyog Mandal's show) would have really helped to streamline the performance. Then the impact on the audience would have become even more telling.

The saddest part of the Seminar was that these productions were not related in any way with the themes which were discussed by the participants.

On the 14th the participants discussed the professional stage and the reasons for its decline. Shri Hirannayya attributed the decline to the growing popularity of the cinema. He felt that a playwright could only succeed in writing serious plays, touching on the problems of the people, if he himself toured a region with a professional company and came to grips with the living conditions of the common people and the real problems of actors. He described the feelings of insecurity experienced by even the most promising artists; he regretted the fall in professional ethics (since artists roved from one group to another); and he expressed the hope that the government would take immediate steps to assist artists. Such measures would help the artists to survive through the monsoon months when there was very little touring and practically no shows.

The papers read at the Seminar were not related to one another. Those who read out their contributions sat on the stage with a few distinguished guests. A small group of listeners sat in the hall. The kind of informal and round-a-table atmosphere which makes for lively discussions was absent.

In the discussions on the traditional theatre forms, there was a general feeling that amateurs could profit from the more flexible approach of our folk forms. Once the idea of a proscenium separating the audience from the actors was discarded, one could hope to evolve a new style, more vigorous and elastic. One could even think in terms of a kind of street drama, with new content injected into it every week, and with a closer association with the common people. Utpal Dutt's name was mentioned in this context. Here was an inspiring example of older form like the *Jatra* being employed to project more contemporary themes.

There was some controversy about the English language theatre and its relevance to Indian society. Pearl Padamsee raised the question and the general trend of the discussion was that the English stage need not restrict itself to lifting themes from Broadway. If the English language theatre wanted to survive, it ought to use the language only as a means of communication. But the themes it chose would have to retain an indigenous quality.

One of the highlights of the Festival was the Theatre Exhibition of ancient stage artifacts. K. T. Deshmukh's collection was almost wholly pictorial and included photographs of the Indian theatre since early times. Another section was devoted to the Kannada stage. The section sponsored by the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi displayed photographs of the traditional theatre of the country.

The Seminar was both a lesson and warning. Quite clearly there was a need for such meetings of theatre people because they had a lot to learn from one another. The folk forms they witnessed were in the nature of a revelation to many young participants and contributed to their theatre education. At the same time the Seminar proved that with the best intentions in the world such an effort is wasted without adequate planning, a sound organizational apparatus and, most important of all, without at least a trace of vision.

D. P.

Book Reviews

THE MIRACLE PLAYS OF MATHURA by Norvin Hein, published by Delhi Oxford University Press, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, 1972, Rs. 30.00 (*In English*).

In spite of the captivating title of the book, it sparks off a chain of associations with the miracle plays of Europe. A comparison, a parallel is implied by the use of a highly contextually charged words for a totally different cultural situation.

Fortunately for us, the sensitive author neither by implication nor statement takes the analogy further. The book is a forthright and direct study of the many forms of theatre, dance and drama prevalent in Mathura, Brindaban. It is divided into the regional dramas in the Mathura setting and the *Raslilas,* peculiar to Mathura. An epilogue on *The Dramas in Retrospect* and an Appendix on *Mathura's Ramlila Calendar for 1949* completes the study.

A neatly divided, rigorously structured, copiously footnoted and abundantly documented study of a subject, seemingly remote from dry philosophic conceptualization, conld have resulted in an impressive but unreadable dissertation. The author escapes this pitfall through a sympathetic and responsive feeling which permeates every chapter of the book. Few critical studies have been written on the Indian arts and particularly the performing arts—studies, which combine an austere academic approach with a sensitivity of feeling for the subject. Dr. Hein achieves this in a large measure, while using all the implements and tools of analysis and objective scrutiny.

Appropriately, the study begins with an analysis of the social structure in which the drama of Mathura has flourished; comparisons are made with the situation in Bengal, Punjab and Kerala. The author's chief preoccupation shifts quickly to a consideration of Vaishnavism as practised in Braj in the forties of this century and particularly in 1949. The sects and the *sampradayas* are described with lucidity. This section will prove to be very useful to those readers who do not have access to Hindi or Braj literature. The author then goes on to describe the different dramatic forms which were prevalent in 1949-50 in Mathura (such as the *Jhanki, Kathak, Ramlila, Raslila,* etc.). Quoting literacy figures from Census reports and other documents, the author comes to the conclusion that all these dramatic forms are meant for audiences of low literacy. This and some other statements alas reveal that, in spite of the author's sensitive response to the forms, there is at the same time an incapacity to understand from the inside the actual realities of the Indian cultural pattern. Oral communication and its efficacy is proved beyond doubt in the context of Sanskrit learning: judged by percentage and counts of literacy, many scholars of the great tradition were illiterate. What is true of the Sanskrit scholarship is even more true of the artistic tradition of performers of the most rigorous *sampradayas* of the North and South; they may or may not be literate. 'Literacy' thus is not an infallible indicator of the depth and degree of achievement in the Indian tradition. The dramas of Mathura share this characteristic feature: they range from a highly sophisticated literary language to simple, popular dialects.

The section of *Jhanki* is descriptive and informative. The section on *Kathak* in the Mathura setting is based mainly on information collected by the author from a certain Nand Kishore of Mathura. The chapter appropriately begins with a quotation from Sri A. K. Coomarswamy on Bindadin's dancing. One would have liked a more penetrating study of the relationship

between Bindadin's *Kathak* and the several types of *Brajlila, Raslila, Ramlila,* prevalent in Mathura. Alas, the author restricts himself to a descriptive account of Nand Kishore's dancing in Mathura both within and outside the precincts of the temple. Although there is detailed account, complete with the text of Bindadin's famous composition *Pragate Braj Nandlal,* followed by a word to word rendering of mime (pages 34 to 36), there is no fresh light thrown on the inter-connections between the dance-style in Mathura and the *Kathak* of Lucknow and the Jaipur *gharana.* This reviewer would tend to agree with the author when he says "no one has ever written a critical history of the kathaks or even complied the information from which a history might be refined", (page 47) and also with his remark that "the fame of Lucknow as a center of kathak dancing has caused many writers to speak of Lucknow as its birthplace, as if this were a self-evident fact" (page 47). But at the same time one expects a reference to source material, relating to the region. This might help in the reconstruction of precise recent history, even if it is too stupendous a task to establish a continuity over centuries. Nevertheless it is this continuity which the author has tried to establish through literary source material. His chief evidence revolves round the word *Kathak* or *Kathakar* in Sanskrit and regional literature. He comes to the conclusion that what we have in *Kathak* is "not a mere survival of a name, but the living continuity of a professional class... The contemporary kathak's line of teachers extends backward beyond the Muslim period into ancient times." (page 52). While no discerning student would disagree with this general remark, the exact routes and movements of development of this particular style in time and space have yet to be delineated: *Kathak* does depart in some significant fundamentals from other classical styles. How and why and where it does so has yet to be scrutinized from the point of view of both theory and technique.

The other chapters of both sections follow the same pattern. An introduction, a detailed description, excerpts and background material on the actors taking part in the particular types of performances. The sections on *Ramlila* and the *Brajlila* (particularly the section on *The Troupes of Braj and their Art*) are vivid descriptions of the atmosphere and the organisation pattern of the troupes. The detailed description of the sequential order of the various types of *Rasa* is welcome specially since this is the first precisely articulated account of the happening. This section should stimulate further research and study on the *Braj Rasa* which has attracted the attention of Indian critics and scholars during the last decade. The author has anticipated Indian scholars by nearly fifteen years and the delay in the publication makes for excellent timing. While the author has devoted considerable attention to the repertoire of *Rasdharis,* there is much more material for documentation and analysis. It is hoped that other scholars will continue to work in the new direction set forth by Dr. Hein. A fund of data is available.

The analytical portion of the book is contained in the chapter on *The History of Krishna Drama in Mathura.* Painstakingly done, closely argued, this section seeks to establish connections between the contemporary *Raslila* and the *Raslila* mentioned in ancient and medieval literatures. Even if it is somewhat unconvincing at times, this is a sincere attempt at piecing together fragments of a "jig-saw puzzle of artistic history". In the course of his arguments, the author quotes many authorities, mostly Western, (including Levi, Luders, Winternitz, Keith, and others), on Sanskrit theatre. At times this appears rather irrelevant because the theories of these authors are clearly dated and inapplicable to the Indian situation.

On the whole, the book opens up many fields of further exploration, areas of research which have so far received inadequate attention.

KAPILA VATSYAYAN

Dr. Sweeney's contribution is a very interesting study of the Malaya shadow-play. In his article, we find an account of puppet-plays as a mode of their performance. We encounter the influences of the *Ramayana* in all these plays as well as those elements which make for the stylization of oriental drama.

Dr. Seltmann studies the shadow-play of Andhra and Indonesia. Fittingly enough the volume concludes with Professor Scott's article on Noh theatre dealing with the theatre of Japan. It concludes with the hope, that Asia might yet find a satisfactory language for her total cultural expression in a new age.

This brief survey will indicate the variety of themes dealt with in this work. Since the volume contains such a fund of material dealing with the performance of Sanskrit plays in India, the shadow play in South East Asia and in India and new and minor forms of Sanskrit drama, it is an indispensable asset to the library of any serious student of the Indian drama and the art of the theatre. The Samskrita Ranga is, therefore, to be congratulated for having brought out such a valuable work in honour of Dr. Raghavan and for having devoted it to themes after his heart.

T. G. MAINKAR

ANARKALI (a new Sanskrit Play in ten acts) by Dr. V. Raghavan, published by Samskrita Ranga, Madras, 1972, Rs. 3.50 (*In Sanskrit*).

Dr. Raghavan is one of our foremost Indologists and enjoys an international reputation. He has a versatility that is truly amazing. In this indefatigable research worker we also have a poet and a playwright of a superior order. In this play, Dr. Raghavan deals with an interesting theme from the court of Akbar, the great Moghul emperor.

In writing this play Dr. Raghavan has an aim in view: to preach to his contemporaries the invaluable doctrine of integration (*samarasya*) of views and classes. This is a lesson that we badly need to learn. In Akbar, with his sympathy for all religions and his tolerant attitude, Dr. Raghavan found an ideal individual who could be made to speak to present times. In the romance of Prince Salim, the crown prince and Anarkali, the servant maid, Dr. Raghavan discovered the right kind of story to illustrate the principle of class-integration. Dr. Raghavan has succeeded in handling his material in a suitable manner and has also remained true to the facts of history in a remarkable degree. What is perhaps of greater importance is that Dr. Raghavan has had the boldness to change the tragic story of this love of the prince for the maid, into a story of fulfilment and happiness, and a union finally blessed by the emperor. This runs counter to the facts of history but it was perhaps necessary for two reasons. Firstly, Sanskrit dramaturgy does not admit a tragic conclusion. And the second reason is probably even more significant: Dr. Raghavan sought to make his Akbar more consistent in his outlook and convictions. One wants to believe that a great and tolerant emperor like Akbar could not have been so cruel as to order the death of Anarkali by having her crushed into a wall and in this way to end the romance of his beloved son. One likes to believe this though it is definitely in conflict with the facts of history. The drama, therefore, is a significant story, boldly handled and it is made to teach a lesson that is a sheer necessity for our own times.

Dr. Raghavan is a great poet and his verse and prose amply reveal his classicism. Everywhere one hears an echo of Kalidasa or Bhavabhuti or Visakhadatta, of Vyasa or Valmiki. It was only natural that the first act should be longer than the other acts since it seeks to create the atmosphere of the court of Akbar, to delineate the great personalities of his court and finally to reveal the integration of views which Akbar attempted. Then the story moves forward rapidly in short and moving acts with the intrigues of the rivals, adding an element of suspense and interest to the action. The dance scene of Anarkali is superbly managed. The play has about it the classical aroma of Sanskrit drama; but it has an ideology and a perfectly modern theme. Sanskrit playwrights rarely stray beyond the traditional and worn-out grooves. They seldom reveal any social awareness. We needed Dr. Raghavan to attempt that. So one has nothing but high praise for this splendid play. The play has been produced on different occasions and appreciated by audiences. Dr. Raghavan has every right to derive satisfaction from his *prayogavijnana* because it created a deep impression on all the scholars who had assembled for the International Conference in Delhi on 30th March, 1972.

T. G. MAINKAR