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EXPLORATIONS IN NEW FILM TECHNIQUES.

Mani Kaul

The newness of a work refers to the subjective originality of the film maker and tradition to a more collective acceptance of certain norms. Their relationship embraces a legitimate contradiction which all valid attempts in art forms must seek to resolve. An engagement which is strictly modern/new will become not only sterile, but also corrupt its usage of the traditional if it remains enamoured with the more superficial aspects of folk culture. An inversion of the stated position can also reach an absurd point when the strictly traditional begins to use half-scientific truths to induce a modern sensibility in the orthodox area, when, in actual fact, it is in need of no such justification.

Folk material for me, therefore, is not just a distortion of classical culture; its function (rather than its origin) is well-entrenched in the environment from where it springs. Folk literature is unlike presentday urban literature, which is in keeping with or in revolt against classical culture; and it is difficult to reduce folk literature to any 'humanistic' generalities. In fact, since it is devoid of such 'serious human realism' in its treatment of problems, folk-lore sometimes appears childish to educated minds.

The thematic (or the ideological) aspect of folk-lore undergoes varying stresses of sociological change and yet its formal structure not only manages to remain constant but relevant to the changing ideas it contains. Concepts and events, which would be one personal mass of expression in an urban poem, can suffer and even lose their entity within its three translations; the notion of *scheme* in such a poem is not distinct from its *chronological* order. Whereas in folk material the horizontal axis is impermanent, the axis of events being placed in a chronological order; while the events by themselves, being reducible to a more undebatable dialectic (such as *man: woman; east: west; up: down; inside: outside*), are placed in the vertical schematic axis. Each is superimposed exactly upon the other (*Claude Levi-Strauss*.) The need to comprehend and use schematic designs will be discussed elsewhere.

After working on two films, (*Uski Roti* and *Ashad Ka Ek Din*), which were based on middle-class urban literature, I was introduced to folk material through the writings of Vijaydan Detha (who works in the village of Borunda, near Jodhpur in Rajasthan). Before I proceed to explain my own cinematic pre-occupation, it must be immediately admitted that half of the possibilities I have explored in connection with the film (*Duvidha*), would have remained latent had I encountered folk material in its original form. The writings of Vijaydan Detha intuitively integrate (rather articulate) both the earthly authenticity of the narration (in the sense of performance) and the original structural relations between the events. What perhaps baffles and upsets an urban reader is the basic impossibility, the incredibility of the physical reality which Vijaydan uses so as to arrive at a commonplace, actual experience. A careful study of his works will reveal that this extra-physical phenomena (of ghosts,

etc.) is resolved neither by belief nor by disbelief; but it is resolved by a third answer such as would make belief/disbelief redundant. This leads him to treat that incredible physical situation in the most natural way possible and, fortunately for him, it enables his writings to escape the burden of two stilted extremes: the one, where a particular natural image, in its attempt to be realistic, has no 'inner dimension'; and the other, where a general unreal image overloads itself with symbolic meanings and fails to 'live'. In essence: an impossible question that does not contain an answer would be resolved by neither accepting the statement nor rejecting it, but by providing an answer that no longer contains the question.

This may lead us to presuppose that in such a situation the relationship between the question and the answer ceases to exist. In a sense, this is true. But whenever a question is answered, it implies that the answer has *satisfied* the question and the experience of the subject who faces such an answered question would also be of one of satisfaction, emotional or intellectual. This satisfaction acquires the nature of play, where infinite questions are resolved by infinite answers and the progress made, in the realm of *understanding*, confines itself to the known. It is not my intention to underestimate the widening experiences of the known as much as it is to propose that the realm of the unknown must be taken into account in a direct way, rather than just through intuition. I, of course, assume that the contradiction between the known and the unknown will persist for all time to come, mainly because each exists to the negation of the other.

Therefore, whenever the question has not been seemingly answered or satisfied by the answer, it is possible that the answer might actually *displace* the question. Here the activity no longer remains a play; in fact, it amounts to a transformation. The subject in whom the question had raised the doubt is not left satisfied on that level but raised a step up to view the level at which it appears curious, so that it no longer applies to him. The cessation of the question is an answer not to the question but to the subject who experiences such a question-answer situation and who will, therefore, either be transformed or cease to accept the basic equation. The trend in urban art forms *not* to answer questions and merely to state the problem perhaps arises from this need to transform the subject, rather than satisfy the subject's increasing pool of inertia. We notice that the urban mind begins by arranging the particularities of physical experience and further attempts to arrive at its abstracted (subtler, non-physical, intellectual) forms; whereas the folk mind constructs from an already abstract material and reaches, mainly through performance, the anguish of particularity. For Vijaydan Detha the material becomes complex: his folk background provides him with an unreal structure, and his contemporary sensibility cannot but help wanting to reveal realistic meanings. The contradiction between the unreal and the real stretches itself into his methods, to arrive finally at one experience: where the cessation of all contradictory movements is the *proof* of understanding. In fact, the non-availability of a proof presupposes the existence of contradictory things.

Oppression is the unresolved state of tension that gives rise to major expression in man. The authenticity of expression seems to emerge in propor-



Om Shivpuri as Vilom in *Ashad Ka Ek Din*

tion to the degree in which oppression is imperative to the subject. Perhaps one of the first examples found of this oppressor—oppressed relationship is the bison and the cave man. The cave man painted the oppressor (bison) in its might and power, crouching and attacking, in order to bring it ritually under his control. The *act* of painting itself was the measure of his control. It did not matter to him if his fellow-hunter had superimposed another painting on his own. The subject of his ritual was the bison: it meant life or death to him! It may be noticed in passing that quite a few 'committed' artists in India either depict the oppressor in a totally 'non-imperative' manner or otherwise in a manner of ridicule which ironically enough betrays their fear of the oppressor.

However it is oppression that forms the major body of Vijaydan Detha's work. It is quite a coincidence that I should discover in one of his stories a theme that has gone into the making of a right third film by me, for it seems logically to follow the other two which have already dealt with the subject of 'oppression' in relation to women in India. In my films the problem becomes two-fold. Firstly, there is, of course, the social environment of the city and the village (*Uski Roti*) or the court and the valley (*Ashad Ka Ek Din*), plus the male dominance that extensively oppresses women in India; the other and more complex element is the subjective problem of the woman herself, who is being laid waste by her own idealism and who will not accept the relationship with her male as being oppressive. This element, her own choice, or rather her obstinacy (which even stems from ignorance, as some of us would like to believe) creates a visible column of strength in her person. In a sense, idealism begins with self-abnegation and achieves its mark only by effacing the personality

of its subject. It is in the face of such horrible exploitation of this innocence, leading up to an end which embraces a series of tragic fragments, that the need for transformation emerges on our sensibility. Some of my colleagues would have me believe that the end of this tragic life (which is not even death) is incomplete and a transformation of the woman must be shown in the film: she must revolt. I myself fail to see the connection—it is not the character on celluloid that needs a transformation; it is the audience that must be transformed, even in a little measure.

It is possible that the suggested transformation of the character might completely sentimentalize (or falsify) the end and so even out all the guilt stored up in the hearts of my audience; it is also possible that the absence of such a transformation might inhibit the growth and change of stimulating factors. Neither of these positions can by itself have any absolute significance; most likely its relative significance would depend on the time and place it is related to, (for example, the transformation of the sailors in *The Battleship Potemkin* in early communist Russia or *Bicycle Thief* after the defeat of the Fascists in Italy). Of course, in times when an external circumstance of no "overwhelming consciousness" exists, it is difficult for the film maker to determine the nature of the contradictions that are prevalent.

Similarly in the choice of a theme it is possible that the film maker himself is a parasite living on the theme of his film—that is, his treatment of the theme is not further reducible to fundamental contradictions; and, instead of providing an exposition, the film may end up in just some form of entertaining or sentimental rubbish which, though engaging in itself, is actually a barrier in the path of understanding the significance of the theme. Major themes based on prostitution, poverty, epidemics and repression are, in fact, the most difficult to handle because they can be easily exploited.

Before proceeding to explain the present film (*Duvidha*) with which I am pre-occupied, I would like to revert to two of my other films. Both the films (*Uski Roti* and *Ashad Ka Ek Din*), the one based on Mohan Rakesh's short story and the other on his play, are contemporary in their mode of thinking. The discipline in these films emerged mainly from cinematic means. In taking up certain limited aspects of cinema and bringing them in relation to the theme, all other factors (like acting, decor, mise-en-scene) were neutralized to realize the possibilities of the limited experiment.

To demonstrate: confining the film to two lenses (28 mm and 135 mm) and making them represent the actual and the mental life of the waiting wife in the beginning of the film—I mean, the wide angle provided a universal focus or the extra actuality of the cinematographic image and the long focus a critical range of sharpness or a certain dream quality. Having faithfully established this as a norm, the lenses were gradually freed of the strict representation—they were crossing each other in the middle of the film where the distinctions were blurred—until in the end the representation was reversed, with the result that the actual return of the husband almost appears as a hallucination (without my resorting to any gimmicks or theatrical devices). This slight edge of disbelief in the reality of an actual return of her husband

gives rise to an ambiguity, almost necessary for a scene to redeem itself of the physical covering and reveal the conceptual meaning.

The orthodox mind may discover nothing new in the technique; it might be for him just another case of *employing* the technique to demonstrate a theme. Whereas for me, it is not just a question of finding technical means, but of discovering such a technical arrangement as would sustain itself without the factors of conventional (natural) acting, decor or *mise-en-scene*. In that, the technique is not subservient to the meaning, nor is it independent of it (the meaning); it is neither the cause of the meaning nor its effect. So that the moment itself is its own meaning. Without it, the cessation of the contradiction between the meaning and the form, which is the proof or actuality of experience cannot be obtained. Anyhow this particular example is one of the many things attempted in the film.

Arriving at fixed seven distances (from the camera to the object) in respect of the particular lens being used was for example another experiment. 'Distance' of course has its history in cinema. When Griffith used the close-up most effectively for the first time, he changed the distance and created the use of another volume; all earlier works were confined to medium or long shots. The unconscious growth of the tradition of long shot, mid shot, close-up is of utmost significance for the cinema. Every film maker must necessarily attach emotional/intellectual significance to these vague divisions in order to shoot a film. What we have done is only an extension of this system by choosing first one lens, (it was 28 mm) and beginning from its closest range to arrive at seven fixed variations. Each volume growing into another, changing, making an interval in between, (like 1.4 feet to 2.8 feet to 4 feet to 7 feet to 10 feet to 15 feet and so on.) All the characters stood at one or other of these distances, moved from one distance to another and so with the camera. Of course the important thing was to discover a *group* of distances and repeat a similar group under a different improvisation at various points in the film. This also facilitated the allusions to past sequences.

Other experiments in terms of location, faces, objects, etc. were conducted in the same film (*Uski Roti*). I must admit that this first film was mainly a visual pre-occupation in my mind.

In *Ashad Ka Ek Din* the experiment was confined to the inter-relationship of theatre and cinema; naturally to the dominance of the *word*. The whole play was pre-recorded after its division into sound cycles (of measured rhythm) and played back at the location. Other variations of acoustic change were also used from areas that would reproduce dead-flat sound to the echo quality, finding a state in between. Here the main thing with which we were preoccupied was the significance that an element acquires in the total structure. The techniques are not gimmicks inasmuch as they do not involve any disrespect for historical development: all that we used was an extension of what had been used for naturalistic purposes—and all naturalistic methods employ varying techniques as an accompaniment to create an *ensemble*. This has to be distinguished from that 'undifferentiated' vision of reality where every element is understood as contribution—and (even) independently of the meaning it may



be required to state. If a meaning *contains* a method, its inversion is also true: a method contains a meaning — a quality demonstrated in the paintings of children where objects invariably remain in a state of non-differentiation (Eisenstien: *Film Form*). Only, in the case of children, the intention cannot be specific, since it is involuntary. In the case of Paul Klee and Picasso (who were once accused of painting like children), the expression is fully controlled, and, therefore, directed to subtler forms and meanings.

The third film, *Duvidha* (unlike the first two, which were financed by the Film Finance Corporation) has been made with the help of my friends. It was because of Akbar Padamsee's Workshop (which was part of the Jawaharlal Nehru Fellowship Scheme) and Rupayan Sansthan of Borunda that the plan of making the film could be realized. Akbar, apart from being an exceptional painter, is perhaps the only genuine artist—theoretician we have and naturally the fertile environment of the workshop (which springs both from his work and thinking) means a great deal to all of us. The discipline in this film acquired a much more comprehensive meaning. Folk material, as stated above or elsewhere, provides a schematic design, apart from the chronological order of events that it follows. In the schematic design, the representation of an event is reducible by graphic or oral means to such a generalised degree that a common denominator is finally discovered as the basic norm from where all particularities spring. The combination of such as interior/exterior not only remains at a graphic level which is quantitative, but extends itself to the qualitative aspect of the film. Rather it is a denominator which converts itself into graphics as also into a meaning, pertinent to the thematic movement of the film. To demonstrate: a ghost enters *into* the room of the girl, a child is conceived

A scene from *Uski Roti*



(is *in* the womb), the actual husband returns and questions the ghost's impersonation of the husband. The child is born (comes *out* of the womb). The villagers take the ghost and the husband *outside* the village where a shepherd, through a kind of fundamental genius, puts the ghost *into* or *inside* the drinking leather bag. The bag is dumped *into* a well. The husband and the villagers re-enter the village. The husband re-enters the bride's room. And here the tragic quality of the bride, who was in love with a ghost, or with the impersonation of her own husband, emerges. This feeling is due mainly to the cessation of the exterior/interior relationship with the actual husband.

The use of colour in the film has been, therefore, subjected to light and dark areas, not only within the frame but also in the order of sequences. Following the shots determined by IN and OUT situations, the sequences appear against black or white (night or day, so arranged). Unlike the usual practice where two colours put together naturally create a separation, without the need for white, grey, black tonalities separating them, in this film the colours have not been moulded extensively (evened up by lighting) from the way they presented themselves under a certain lighting condition. In a sense, it makes us notice the colour in a sharp way, and without creating either an atmosphere conducive to the film maker's thinking or a psychological state, wherein the colour represents the inner life of the character. In short, the colour is made to belong to its fact of physical condition. (This should not be confused with the idea of the setting being realistic in the contemporary sense. In fact, the film belongs to a period). It is necessary to add here that intellectual or emotional meanings ascribed to colours, cannot have any rigid/absolute interpretation. (Red, for example, may not suggest violence all the time; it may often mean joy). It is a context that gives rise to a meaning. This would suggest that a colour may represent an emotional bias, but this bias cannot become the reason for using that colour. This would amount to a superimposition of non-existent meanings upon the quality of colour.

The arrangement of the colour that was attempted in *Duvidha*, was brought about by what really belongs to inter-relationships of colours, rather than by personal logic. Since we know of contrary and complementary colours, imbalance and balance can be controlled—in other words, a structure can be built. Even the proportions have been already worked out by great masters. If green is suddenly introduced after an excessive use of red and in twice the quantity of red, a kind of 'settling' would be effected. But if the film abstains from using green and goes to part of the green (which is yellow + blue; as red is posited against the other two primary colours combined into green), let us say a yellow inclined towards orange rather than green, the shift would cause a whiter tonality and a mildly warm feeling. In much more complex relationships than the example can speak of, *the colours would be meanings*; they would neither *become* meanings nor *represent* meanings, for in both these cases the use is figurative rather than actual. While on the other hand, whenever the subject matter of the film rises to be the meaning, it will also be total and complete: the colour, in such a situation is 'absent'; its assertive quality is absent. When the form and the object behind it, which are actually one, appear separated in expression they should in that separation acquire total and independent existences. For only then the true experience which



neither belongs to the *sensuous* nature of the form nor to the *intellectual* quality of the meaning, (but to both) and is yet intangible and beyond analysis—which the materialists mistake for 'mystical' or the 'metaphysical'—but which is actual and real is born.

I will end here by drawing a strange parallel between the discovery of Eisenstein of some major elements of montage and the division of consciousness of the universe perceived in the *Bhagavad Gita*. In Chapter XIII, *shloka* 15, it speaks of three categories which are permeated by the *purusha*. They are away and near, immobile and mobile, interior and exterior. In Eisenstein they have been almost replaced by his vision of montage or the cinematic totality as close shots and long shots, pieces of graphically varied directions; pieces resolved in *volume* with pieces resolved in *area*, pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness. (Cf. *Cinematographic principle and the ideogram: Film Form*)



It is Eisenstein again who credits the oriental mind with 'monism' of ensemble, where the elements do not accompany each other but are brought into function as elements of equal significance whose balanced juxtaposition must lead us into that precious experience of the undifferentiated mass of consciousness.

Natyacharya Khadilkar

N. R. Phatak



The 23rd of November 1972 saw the centenary of the birth of Krishnaji Prabhakar Khadilkar, generally referred to in his native Marathi as *Natyacharya*, Teacher of Drama. Next only to this, he is known as one of the impressive editors who in his time counted in the foremost ranks of social and political mentors of the nation. Remarkably for a man of his almost Roman *gravitas* in social and political life and his almost puritanical self-discipline in many aspects of personal life, he declared unambiguously that he was an artist-dramatist first, and a journalist afterwards.

This mature self-evaluation, as it happens, is fore-shadowed in the chronology of his development. The posthumous son of an administrative official of the princely state of Sangli, he spent his boyhood, though not perhaps in

actual hardship yet in a straitened condition of the family finances, which was relieved a little when an elder brother matriculated and obtained work as a teacher. He was a wayward and rather unmanageable boy, who grew simply enough into a very masculine, athletic, and adventure-loving youth. He learnt early to handle a gun and at the age of thirty learned to ride a horse. He was still at school when he acquired a taste for the plays that travelling companies put up at Sangli, an important centre of the development of the Marathi theatre. Several times he won prizes (usually not much more than a sugar-cane or a lump of jaggery) for imitating the performance of some actor he had seen.

At home in the same period he was absorbing the classic stories of the Puranas and the epics. His mother had a way of re-telling such stories after she had heard them at discourses at a temple; and she had a knack of supplying the gaps where the traditional story left a character or a motivation or the course of events obscure. He wrote in his Memoirs later that he often seemed to see in a *Mahabharata* tale links and lucid consistencies which were not clearly expressed in the texts, and ascribed this to what he had absorbed from his mother.

He matriculated in 1889 and took his B. A. in Philosophy in 1892. For two years he taught English, Mathematics, and Sanskrit to the upper classes in a high school. In these years he wrote out his *Sawai Madhavaravancho Mrityu* (The Death of Sawai Madhavarao). He had been constructing the play in his head while he studied at college; he now put it down; ten years later he revised it extensively for the final version. In his college days he found himself attracted to the Sanskrit playwright, Bhavabhuti. In his Memoirs he notes that he was struck by Bhavabhuti's method of bringing out the qualities of his characters through a few suggestive lines. Among English writers he loved Shakespeare, read Tennyson's *The Princess* and *Idylls of the King* with attention; and knew enough Scott to take a hint from *The Talisman* for one of his minor plays later on.

After his two years as a schoolteacher, he went to Bombay to study law, and in this period found publication in the distinguished journal *Vividhajnana-vistara*. His play *Sawai Madhavaravancho Mrityu*, some articles on the life and work of the Buddha, and four review-articles on a book titled *Brahmana ani Tyanchi Vidya* (Brahmins and Their Learning) were published in this journal. The motive of the articles on the Buddha was plainly stated to lie in the need to give a generation of Indians, discouraged about their own culture and lost in adulation of things Western, a due sense of the achievements of Indian civilization on the metaphysical and religious side and to rouse in them a willingness to undertake world leadership in this regard. The review-articles were a responsible assignment; for the book in question was the focus of a controversy in social thinking. Young Khadilkar brought to his review much reading in Maharashtrian history and a keen observation of current social conditions. The crucial point was the author's contention that Brahmins should keep out of political movements so as to avoid the disadvantages of the British rulers' displeasure. Khadilkar refuted this with force, sincerity, and a burning sense of duty to the country. Tilak was writing article after article at this time urging the view that the Brahmins must come out of their arrogant isolation and consider in

all seriousness the duty they owed to all classes of society. He made a mental note of young Khadilkar's review-articles and in effect sent for him. On September 1, 1896 appeared Khadilkar's first article for Tilak's *Kesari*, on the significance of national festivals. During 1908-9, while a sedition charge hung over Tilak, Khadilkar's name appeared as Editor of the *Kesari*. In 1919-20 he worked again as Editor. He shared Tilak's patriotic views and pressed them in a thoughtful and yet dramatic style.

After Tilak's death he assumed the editorship of the new *Lokmanya*, founded largely by admirers of Tilak, in 1921. This continued till early 1923, when he resigned because, in the division of opinion that had arisen among the nationalists, he favoured and consistently supported the position of Mahatma Gandhi, which many of the promoters of *Lokmanya* rejected. Never to be placed in such crises of editorial conscience again, Khadilkar launched in March 1923 his own *Navakal*. He announced in his first editorial that he would follow faithfully the line of thought of Tilak and Gandhi.

From 1920 on the British rulers' attitude had hardened and no nationalist journal, however cautious, was likely to have a smooth career. Deposits were demanded at the discretion of the Government and sometimes confiscated on slight pretexts; money then had to be raised for fresh deposits. Khadilkar managed for several years, but found himself in prison for an year and fined two thousand rupees. When the sentence was announced, Khadilkar remarked to a colleague who was by him in court: "I won't let the fine fall on *Navakal*. I must write a play or two in jail to recover the money".

Khadilkar was released after nine months. In prison he studied the *Vana Parva* of the *Mahabharata* in preparation for his play *Savitri* and managed to complete the writing of it. He also studied Tulsidas' *Ramayana*. Besides, it is remembered that he projected a play on Devaki, and it may be surmised that his experience of prison suggested it. The play, however, was never written.

His first play, *Sawai Madhavaravanacha Mrityu*, published in *Vividhajnana* in 1895, lay by him ten years, till he revised it in 1905. When it was produced in 1906 by the Maharashtra Natak Mandali at Indore, a princess of the ruling family there lent costumes and jewellery for the performance that the splendour of the Peshwa's court might be fitly represented. In a drama conference at Nasik in the same year it won the gold medal for the best play. Nevertheless, the performance gradually improved later as Khadilkar was able to rehearse each actor individually. In the Mandali's later successes, too, Khadilkar was as important as master of rehearsals as in the capacity of the original author.

Khadilkar has himself described the conception of this play :

'My attention was strongly drawn to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and *Othello* as presented on the Marathi stage. I was taken with the idea that if characters corresponding to Hamlet and Iago could be introduced into the same play, that would make a novel and good play. While brooding on this, I came across the biography of Nana Phadnavis by (the Miraj historian

Vasudevashastri) Khare. I felt that I had found the kind of thoughtful but emotion-haunted "Hamlet" I was seeking.'

The 'Hamlet' he had found was the young Peshwa Sawai Madhavarao, whose historically known suicide is represented here as caused by a distraction which is induced by the methodical poisoning of his mind with regard to Nana Phadnavis, to whom on the other hand he had owed his preservation from birth onwards and his enthronement as Peshwa. Compared to Hamlet, Sawai Madhavrao appears pitifully weak. But there is merit in the depiction of the stages by which his reliance on his minister Nana sours into a sense of being his prisoner and later into horrible suspicions of Nana's relations with the women of the Peshwa family.

The poisoner of Madhavarao's mind is Khadilkar's lāgo, an agent of the rival branch of the family which sought the Peshwaship. This agent, Keshava-shastri, uses every possible device, without scruple or remorse, that it was possible to use to unsettle the Peshwa's mind. In spite of the conscious inspiration from *Othello*, these devices are all such as fit without discrepancy into the social and political atmosphere and customs of the period of the Peshwas' rule.

While the emotional impact of the play is very real, the Marathi mind has always been troubled by the historical inconsistency that Nana Phadnavis, who has the reputation of having been another Walsingham, should be so outwitted and even kept in ignorance of the deadly intrigue. One critic lost his temper so completely as to say it would have been better if Khadilkar had never been born to traduce Nana in this fashion! For the only time in his career Khadilkar hit back in a reply exposing the critic's ignorance both of the text and of the performance.

Second in the order of writing among Khadilkar's plays was *Kanchan-gadchi Mohana* (Mohana of Fort Kanchangad). In his early years with the *Kesari* he made many tours in the Sholapur-Bijapur area in connection with drought-relief work that Tilak had started under the auspices of the Sarvajanic Sabha. A ruinous fort he saw in one of these tours became the scene of this play, which was written and published in book form in 1898.

The Maharashtra Natak Mandali produced it first in September 1904. This was a group of idealistic and patriotic young men in Mahad. In the face of a growing trend towards musicals, they chose this play as expressive of their aspirations. The successful stage-craft they displayed in this and later productions owed much to Khadilkar's skill as a playwright and even more to his painstaking direction of rehearsals.

Kanchangadchi Mohana turns on the heroic struggles and final sacrifice of an imaginary commander of the Vijayanagar empire after the conquest and dismemberment of the empire itself by the Muslim armies. With Fort Kanchangad, which is under his command, as his base and with the hope of support from like-minded patriotic Hindu noblemen, Prataprao prepares for a stern resistance to the conquering Muslims. Intrigues and betrayals, chiefly by his

own master of ordnance and by another commander who nurses a reckless passion for Prataprao's wife, Mohana of Kanchangad, bring about the fall of the Fort and the death of both Mohana and her husband. Patriotism and valour brought to nothing by the self-seeking ways, the sensuality, and the treachery of one's own people must have struck a chord in the young group. It reminded them of the last days of the Peshwas and their defeat by the British. The play has intrigues, a love interest, and eloquent patriotism; but it never became popular as did Khadilkar's next play, *Keechakavadha* (The Killing of Keechaka).

Keechakavadha was written while *Sawai Madhavaravancha Mrityu* and *Kanchangadchi Mohana* were still in their successful runs on the stage. He handed it over to the Maharashtra Natak Mandali in 1906, and it was first staged in Poona in 1907. From the first night it became famous all over Maharashtra and outside. Sayajirao Gaekwar of Baroda sent for the company to Baroda; but the prince never saw the play; for while the company was actually in Baroda preparing for the performance, the Government proscribed the play. In the period 1907 to 1910 any individual who had not seen it before it was banned was generally regarded as unfortunate.

The theme of *Keechakavadha* is an episode from the *Mahabharata*. While the Pandavas were living out their year of *ajnatavasa* (exile incognito) at the court of old King Virata, his commander-in-chief and brother-in-law, Keechaka, saw Draupadi, the Pandava queen, in her assumed guise of maid-of-the-chamber to Virata's queen. Inflamed with passion and accustomed to imposing his lawless will, Keechaka openly persecuted her to make her bow to his dictates. King Virata was too weak to control Keechaka. Bhima finally obtained Dharmaraja's consent and killed Keechaka in a secret single combat.

Khadilkar put forward in his preface to the play a special view of Keechaka's character. He thought him dominated not simply by a lawless sensuality but rather more by an arrogant insistence that his will ought to be obeyed whatever it might be. He thought he had derived this character-pattern from that of Ravana in Tulsidas' *Ramayana* story. He has certainly put into his Keechaka's mouth speeches suggesting an autocrat's contemptuous disregard for the feelings of those he rules. His Draupadi, bitterly reproaching Dharmaraja for letting this humiliating state of things drag on by his refusal to sanction at once the death of Keechaka, certainly speaks of how slavery enervates the mind and heart till the slave becomes 'sleek in body and an impotent neuter in mind'.

His Maharashtrian audiences of 1907 certainly thought of enslaved and humiliated India when they heard all this. Keechaka was even identified with Lord Curzon; Dharmaraj with the group, led by Gokhale, which wished to adhere to constitutional means in obtaining self-rule; and Bhima with the more forthright and aggressive nationalists. A British Civil Servant wrote in the London *Times*:

... since the play first appeared in 1907 the whole Deccan has been blazoning forth the identity of the characters. Once they have been recognized, the inner meaning of the play becomes clear. A weak Government at home,

represented by King Virata, has given the Viceroy a free hand. He has made use of it to insult and humiliate India. Of her two champions, the Moderates advocate gentle—that is—constitutional measures. The Extremists, out of deference to the older party, agree, although satisfied of the ineffectiveness of this course. Waiting until this has been demonstrated, they adopt violent methods, and everything becomes easy. The Oppressor is disposed of without difficulty. His followers—namely, the Anglo-Indians—are, as it is prophesied in the play and as narrated in the *Mahabharata*, massacred with equal ease.'

Accepting this view of the play, the Governor in Council prohibited its performance by an order dated 27 January 1910. He may also have connected it with such incidents as the assassination of collector Jackson in 1910 'in a native theatre which has seen "Kichakavadh" acted', as the *Times of India* said on 5 February 1910.

The ban was lifted in 1926, but the play never found again the same excited popularity. This may have been because some of the original actors had left the company; it is likely that the popular mood had changed as Mahatma Gandhi made his impress on the nation's mind.

Certain critics have accepted Khadilkar's account of Keechaka's character, with no reference at all to the political-allegorical interpretation. Others insist that he was primarily a man maddened by lust, and that anything he says about rulers and slaves is beside the point. One critic even thinks that Dharmaraja in the play is rather a forerunner of Gandhian thought than a type of the Moderates led by Gokhale. In any case, the dialogue gains much of its force from the long arguments about the rights and wrongs of the use of force even in putting down evil. The *Mahabharata* is not involved in ethical doubts on this point; but it is clear that Khadilkar conceives himself as not simply repainting the impressive characters of the story but bringing out their philosophical significance. He would certainly have rejected the notion that his drama of ideas is alien to the spirit of the story.

The next major play of Khadilkar's is *Bhaubandaki* (Fratricidal Strife), based on the assassination of the young Peshwa Narayanrao by the contrivance of his uncle Raghoba Dada and the subsequent events. Khadilkar used scrupulously such historical information as was available to him, including Grant Duff's brief but firm appreciation of the integrity and moral courage of the judge Ramshastri. The relations between Raghoba Dada and his grimly ambitious wife, it has been suggested, owe something to *Macbeth*, though the actual characters of these two are notably different.

The play first came to the stage when the memory of Tilak's trial and bold defence was fresh, and many identified Ramshastri, defying the ruler and pronouncing the sentence of strict justice on him, with Tilak. Indeed the actor playing Ramshastri was at first dressed in a manner to remind the audience of Tilak; but this had to be changed a little under police pressure. Nevertheless the play survived the Press Act, as its predecessor *Keechakavadha* had not.



Ranade and Balgandharva, two famous actors, in female roles.

With *Manapaman* (Honours and Insults) we come to Khadilkar's major successful musical. Its rather contrived romantic plot rests on an attempt to contrast the unworthy insolence of the rich and the established with the valour and merit of one risen by his own character and qualities. The heroine belongs to the first class but gradually comes to appreciate and love the hero, who is supposed to belong to the other.

The music of the songs inserted into this play is still popular, but in its day it was all the rage. The great Balgandharva played the heroine, and some of the others have since become important names in the history of the Marathi theatre. It was also one of the early triumphs of the famous musician and music director, Govindrao Tembe.

Two more plays followed which had a base in the old literature of India. *Vidyaharana* is based on the story of Kacha and Devayani. Kacha, son of Brihaspati, preceptor of the gods, comes to Shukracharya, preceptor of the *Asuras*, to study the art of *Sanjeevani* (raising the dead). This art had helped the *Asuras* to gain the advantage in the protracted war of the gods and the titans. Kacha is killed, burned, and the ashes of his body given to Shukracharya in wine. When Devayani, who has fallen deeply in love with him, begs for his life, Shukracharya, at the cost of his own, restores him; the process involves Kacha's absorbing the art of *Sanjeevani*. Kacha then restores Shukracharya to life, and returns to the gods but without Devayani. In the *Mahabharata* this is the point when she lays a curse up on him. In Khadilkar's play she consents to regard him as a brother. Kacha is a character convincingly drawn, though full of a most remarkably consistent virtue. He is manly, courageous, courteous, and full of a sense of duty to his own people. He loves Devayani truly, but refuses to let his love become an obstacle to the accomplishment of his mission. It was suggested that he is an example to Indians who go abroad and are lost to their country for ever because they are enslaved to the charms of European girls. But the play has too much depth and force and psychological vividness, as far as these two are concerned, to have been intended as a homily of that kind. It also has very effective speeches against drunkenness, but is not at all a prohibitionist tract on that account.

The other play is *Sattvapareeksha* (Trial of Purity), which tells the famous story of Harishchandra, who underwent dreadful sufferings when Vishvamitra put his truthfulness to the severest tests that he could devise. Tilak has said when he was sentenced in 1908: 'It seems God's will that the cause I serve should succeed by my tribulations.' The ultimate triumph of Harishchandra is to Khadilkar's mind the traditional symbol of this. The hero's speeches show a lofty and unforced sense of the uttermost obligations of a king or ruler or political leader: They are not conceived as administrative or political declarations but as moral and spiritual commitments.

Khadilkar's *Svayamwar* is both a mythological and a musical. The title refers to the ceremony by which a *kshatriya* princess might choose her husband from among the princes and warriors invited. This famous tale refers to the *svayamwar* of Rukmini, who became Krishna's queen. This play

has become part of the lasting culture of Maharashtra. Khadilkar's delineation of Rukmini fuses the noble princess, the good daughter and wife, and the true devotee; for the general public she was a heroine after their own hearts.

The music of the songs in this play is equally a part of the general culture of Maharashtra, and has been immortalized in the voice of Balgandharva. Among Balgandharva's recollections of Khadilkar is an unreserved tribute to the fashion in which he guided the understanding of his actors in bringing out his conception of his characters.

One need not, perhaps, dwell separately on each of the succeeding plays. There were *Draupadi*, *Menaka*, *Savati-Matsara*, and *Tridandi Sannyasa*. They all had roots in the tales of the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, but none of them shows the dramatic intensity of his major plays.

Much might be said about Khadilkar's sense of devotion to the theatre as such. As a playwright he never insisted on receiving his dues from a performing company unless the company itself could afford it. As an editor he did not press for payment of advertisement charges from a theatre company unless the company could manage to pay it. He threw himself into the guidance of rehearsals for another playwright's work as he did for his own plays. He wrote promissary notes over his own signatures for such companies' debts, and did not hesitate to help them, though his own resources were never very large. A less successful playwright was afraid that his unproduced play on the Draupadi theme would never be produced once Khadilkar's *Draupadi* came on the stage: Khadilkar made a promise to hold back his own play till the other's had been produced.

All this was of a piece with the man. His strengths and his limitations as a dramatist both remained sincere expressions of the lofty and severe cast of his mind.

[An abridged version of the original Marathi, rendered into English by Ramesh Sircar.]



Guru Kunju Kurup

K. P. S. Menon

(author of *Kathakali Rangam*)

With the recent death of Guru Kunju Kurup, the sole link with the great Kathakali maestros of the last generation has snapped. By 1955 he had ceased to appear on the stage. But he left behind him a glorious record and in the heart of audiences an indelible memory of his artistry. He was one of the most universally appreciated and admired of the actors of his time.

There are two groups among artistes: the stars and the rest, that is those who reach the very top and those who don't. This kind of classification is as old as art itself, which again is "as old as the sun, moon and stars".

It is also true that quite a few good artistes, though well-trained and technically competent, are not a hit with the public. This leads people

to conclude that it is popularity that makes the star. Granted that the public's response is, in a sense, uncontrolled, and not born of conscious effort; yet it is not quite without a reason of its own. People may not be able to say with any degree of precision why they like an artiste, but there is something in the star that inspires goodwill. Guru Kunju Kurup, certainly had that "extra something" which marked him out from other artistes.

Kuttanad, in South Kerala, is the rice bowl of the State. It was also an area where Kathakali flourished. Many of the giants who trod the Kathakali stage were sons of this fertile soil—Velu Pillai (1810-1866), Nilakanta Pillai (1855-1929), Kesava Panicker (1867-1939) and Sankaran Nambudiri (1880-1943) were among them.

The summer of 1881 saw the birth of Sri Kunju Kurup in the town Thakazhi, in this fertile region of Kuttanad. Even as a child, Kunju Kurup was fascinated by Kathakali. His family noticed how interested he was in this dance form and placed him under the tutelage of the famous brothers, Kochayyappa Panicker (1864-1948) and Rama Panicker (1866-1931), popularly called "The Kochappiramans".

In 1893, Kunju Kurup made his debut. He continued his training under Champakulam Sanku Pillai, and till 1902 he was a member of the troupe led by Sanku Pillai's trusted lieutenant, Mathoor Kunju Pilla Panicker. He played minor or female roles in this troupe and soon graduated to middle roles. This rigorous training laid the foundations of a great career.

In 1902, a troupe led by Vechoor Ayyappa Kurup toured Malabar (the northern part of Kerala). Kunju Kurup was in this troupe, performing the female and middle roles. This troupe toured Malabar, performed in many centres and finally went to Mangalam at the invitation of the head of the Manthredath House of the Nambudiris. They gave a number of performances there. The head of this house was so impressed by Kunju Kurup's performance that he invited him "to come and stay" with him. This was the patronage they usually extended to artistes of promise. After the tour, Kunju Kurup accepted this invitation. This step marked the start of the next phase of his career.

Thus, in 1903 Kunju Kurup moved to the north of Kerala, settled down there, and joined the artistes of the northern school of Kathakali.

In that year itself, at the behest of his patron, Kunju Kurup joined the Chethalloor Edamana Troupe. With the training he received there from Kodenkurissi Sankunni Menon and the close association with Ramunni Menon, Kunju Kurup became an adept in the "Kalluvazhi School" of the Dance. By then, Kunju Kurup had graduated to minor lead roles, those which held the stage through the play—the mark of a complete artiste. Till 1905, he continued to stay with his patron Nambudiri whose scholarship in Sanskrit, whose knowledge of the dramatic mode and love of music influenced Kunju Kurup and helped him to round off his training.

In 1906, Palayakot Govinda Menon, a manager of the Zamorin of Calicut, organized a Kathakali troupe led by Koottil Kunjan Menon. This artist was, on the whole, contemptuous of other dancers and jealous of Kunju Kurup. But he had to yield before Kunju Kurup's self-confidence, youth and skill. Gradually the two became friends.

In those days many of the rich and noble families of Kerala maintained Kathakali troupes. A few of them invited Kunju Kurup to perform as a freelancer. He was a member of the troupe formed by Parakkadavu Meykat Nambudiri in North Travancore, and later of the Manjeri troupe. In 1908 he led the troupe owned by Vayyavanat Kizhakkepat Krishnanunni and the next year, the troupe of Kumbalath Empranthiri. By then he had become a close friend of Palayil Karunakara Menon, a leading artiste, and in 1910, Kunju Kurup married Karunakara Menon's niece, Sridevi Amma. At that time, Kunju Kurup was with the troupe formed by the Chief of Eleyangad. In 1911, he moved to the troupe of Naduvilidom Bhimanachan. The following year he was with a troupe formed by his uncle-in-law, Karunakara Menon. In that year, that is in 1912, Kunju Kurup lived in the Nambudiri house of Kanjoor Mana at Chunangad (near Ottapalam) and trained younger artistes at the instance of the Nambudiri.

1913 saw Kunju Kurup in Trichur with Nedumballi Nambudiri's troupe. They were to perform for four days in a house there. On the first day when Kunju Kurup visited the arena for the dance, he found it swept and heavily rubbed over with cow-dung paste. "There was no need for so much dung on such a good floor", commented Kunju Kurup. "No, no", remonstrated the host, "many drama troupes have performed here. So all impurities must be removed. After all, we are lighting the sacred lamp for the Dance. It must be pure."

Though Kunju Kurup had performed in Trichur around the year 1910, it was only three years later that he became well-known in the Cochin area of Kerala.

In 1915, Kunju Kurup's tour with the troupe of Kavungal Narayana Panicker was a resounding success. For the next year or two, he was with the troupe of the Punnathur noble family. In 1918 he moved to the troupe formed by Cheruvattat Kunjiraman Nambyar at Meppayyur. Then in 1919 and 1921-22 he shifted to the Manakkulam Troupe of the Head of the Kakkat family who himself was the author of the *Vamanavatara* story for Kathakali. After these two years at Kunnamkulam he went to his native town. He had been separated from his family for too long. He was with them for about a year; he felt rested and refreshed.

By then, the Paliyam family had set up an organization called 'Kalabhayudayam'. From 1924 to 1926, Kunju Kurup was the major attraction of the Kathakali performances presented by this organization. He was also the draw at the recitals arranged by Mahakavi Vallathol and Mukunda Raja. This was perhaps the first time that tickets were actually sold for a Kathakali performance. Till 1929, Kunju Kurup performed for the troupe of

C.C. Appukutty Nambyar at Meppayyur. He went home and rested again for a few months before resuming his work.

In 1930 he performed with the Manakkulam troupe and that of Kuthiravattath Sankaran Thampan. That year, he was also the star attraction of the performances at Guruvayur, arranged by the Kalamandalam.

In 1931, with the setting up of the Kerala Kalamandalam he became the teacher for Kathakali there, and performed the main roles in the performances arranged by that body not just in Kerala itself but in other parts of the country. In 1936 he left the Kalamandalam. But he was usually invited to star in all their important performances.

In 1943, Kunju Kurup stayed in Bangalore for some time, teaching Kathakali to the famous dancer, Ramgopal. The next year, he moved to Madras to coach Shrimati Mrinalini Sarabhai. From 1948 to 1952 he taught at the 'Natanakalamandalam' at Ambalapuzha, and then returned to Malabar.

In 1940, he bought a house at Kottayi and settled down. Though he was a star attraction by then, like Kuchela, the character whom he depicted best, he never made any money.

In 1919 when Kunju Kurup took part in a four-day performance at Trichur, he was presented a gold medal by Kochunni Thampuran. In 1932, he starred in the Kathakali performance arranged at Ernakulam in connection with the visit of the Viceroy. The Maharaja of Cochin presented him the *Veerasinkhala*, the bracelet for the hero, a great honour conferred only on those who had rendered signal service to the State. In 1933, he received a gold medal for his performance at Tripoonithura, and in 1953, a gold ring for his performance in the Kathakali staged for the annual day celebrations of Kalamandalam. He also received similar gifts for his performances at the house of Koodalloor Nambudiri and at the royal house of Manjeri.

To crown all this achievement, the President of India conferred on him in March 1956 the National Award for outstanding service to art. When he returned to Kerala from Delhi, receptions were held in his honour and a generous public came forward with donations to express its admiration of his art.

Kunju Kurup's greatest roles are called 'Paccha' (signifying the good and the godly) and 'Katthi' (portraying the sinful and the ungodly). He usually played the Hunter and the Swan in *The Story of King Nala*, the hero Kuchela in *The Story of Kuchela*, the Brahmin in *Santhanagopalam*, and the Brahmin messenger in *Sundara Brahmin*.

Kunju Kurup's face and his expression were exactly right for an actor. The costumes he wore suited him, and especially when he was made up as 'Paccha', he appeared really handsome. His finesse and his correct conduct only added to the spell he cast on audiences.

Though Kunju Kurup had moved over to the 'Malabar School' of Kathakali, he did show vestiges of the early training he had received in the south, such as not using his body as much as he should have, or turning away his face while depicting the *mudras*. But since the costumes he wore sat well on him, since he was an adept in dance and a great actor, these defects did not mar the quality of the performance. Kunju Kurup was most suited for the leading roles in the Stories of Nala and of Rugmangada of the southern school. His portrayal of King Nala and Bahuka in the story of Nala is said to be unsurpassed. He was very good as Ravana in the stories *Victory of Ravana*, *Victory of Bali* and *Victory of Karthaveeryajuna*.

Kunju Kurup was a master, when it came to expressing emotions on the stage. Pathos, sarcasm, surprise, valour, anger, love were all suggested with the right kind of nuance, and with a skill matched by very few performers. Kunju Kurup never over-acted. He never prolonged a piece without cause; yet each movement of eye or limb conveyed its message clearly but succinctly. Where other actors had to thump their chest ten times to ask, "Now what shall I do?", Kunju Kurup had only to do it once. A simple gesture to indicate the turn of fate, merely placing his index finger on his nose—it was a master stroke and it used to move audiences. Koranath and Sankara Panicker also portrayed Keechaka with great ability. But there were occasions when Kunju Kurup surpassed them. Yet on some days he could be quite ordinary; but even so he was always correct in his technique.

The technique of the Pattikkanthodi School of dancing without "contact" with the audience helped him to act the 'Kamaladala' scene in *The Story of Karthaveeryajuna*. Perhaps he was the only one who realised that the scene was taking place in the Queen's apartments in Ravana's palace (*Anthapura*). Whether there, or in the story of Rambha or in the killing of Keechaka, he never deteriorated into the vulgar or the obscene. In the fourth day's play in *The Story of Nala*, Bahuka, as he utters the words, "Here I come, a pile of happiness", is very difficult to depict. The problem is not just one of co-ordinating the *mudras* in tune with the speed of the music. The problem is one of expressing transient feelings like annoyance in love or jealousy. To portray the rage of a character and to portray that the character was just pretending to be angry are two very different things and only an accomplished actor can convey this distinction. This is where Kunju Kurup scored. He towered above the others because of his ability to express transient phases of emotion in various forms: he could move from humour and valour to love, from love to rage and back to love again.

The part of the charming Brahmin, the 'go-between' in the *Swayamvara of Rukmini* was another of Kunju Kurup's great roles. In the story, the Brahmin is charming both as a person and an actor. He has to suggest not just the vocation of priesthood but also that the position is not achieved by merely wearing the sacred thread. Chandu Panikkar used to act this role well but both he and Sankaran Nambudiri overdid the part. But Kunju Kurup did better, bringing in nuances, like the boast of the messenger and the foolish traits of Brahmins. He had observed such people very closely in real life. He used this experience to the full to make his audiences laugh. He would

portray the hunter depicting the act: *Watch him take up his bow and arrow and sword*. It used to be superb. Or while depicting the love-lorn figure in the jungle, crying out, "O! my love, how can I leave you?" or later, saying "I beg your pardon. Be kind to me" and following Damayanti, bowing his head as one belonging to a lower caste. Kunju Kurup was really a master when it came to communicating such feelings. It was not as though Kunju Kurup did not shine when he acted in the stories staged by the Kottayam School of Kathakali. In 1940, when Kunju Kurup performed at the Dhanwantari Temple of P.S. Warier, he excelled as Arjuna in *The Killing of Kala-keya*. The master's touch was evident when this portrayal could be compared with the same role played by another great actor.

I would say that after Sankara Panicker it was Kunju Kurup who impressed me most. Kunju Kurup did not blend with his costume as much as Panicker did. But, with each role, Kunju Kurup's sense of the story and his rectitude stood out in sharp relief for the audience to behold. Perhaps his *mudras* and his hands occasionally failed to correspond with the music but the *mudras* were always very expressive. He also used *mudras* which



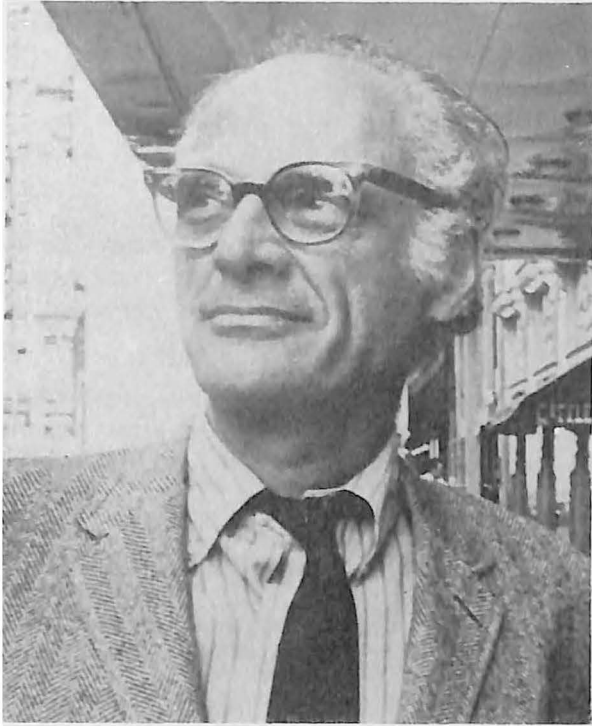
others did not employ. When he described the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the impression he created was that he had mastered even the tantric sciences.

It was Kunju Kurup who popularised *The Story of Kuchela*, the first and fourth day's play of *The Story of Nala* and *The Tale of Rugmangada* in North Malabar. From 1900 to 1909, Ayyappa Kurup used to bring his troupe to Malabar every year. They were perhaps the first to act *The Story of Kuchela* there. At that time, the narrative had yet to be printed. In 1904, when Kunju Kurup was with the Edamana Troupe, he brought a copy of the script and made Venkitakrishna Bhagavatar teach it. Even Karunakara Menon learnt this drama from Kunju Kurup. Similarly, it was only after Kunju Kurup produced *The Tale of Rugmangada* in 1932 at the Kalamandalam that others of the northern school assimilated it.

The second day's play in *The Story of Nala* had become popular in North Malabar in the days of Kunju Kartha, a half century earlier. In 1915, Mathoor Kunjupilla Panicker and Sankaran Panicker introduced the third day's play of the same drama to the area. The first day's play was popularised in 1925, and the fourth day's in 1941 by Kunju Kurup and Venkitakrishna Bhagavatar. In the rarer plays, Kunju Kurup's portrayals of Shukracharya, the Guru of the Asuras, in *The Story of Devayani* and of Mahabali in *Vamanavatara* were unmatched.

Kunju Kurup did not make a mark as a teacher. He did not have the gift of training pupils. His teaching helped accomplished dancers to imbibe a certain flair for this dance form and grasp its essence. Ramgopal and Menaka, Gopinathan, Kelu, Sivaraman, Madhavan, Krishnan Nair were among his pupils at the Kalamandalam. But they were all dancers who had already had their preliminary training with other teachers. Of these, Krishnan Nair is the only one who still performs on the Kathakali stage. In his dance, one catches a glimpse of Kunju Kurup's art. But just as Ramunni Menon's students could not capture the dignity in costume that he had, Kurup's pupils did not imbibe his sense of correctness.

If I have mentioned a flaw in Kunju Kurup's style it was only meant to indicate how competent he was otherwise. Other great dancers have also had their limitations. But, in a great artiste, such errors are ignored by his ardent fans. Just as variations are a fact of nature, so are ups and downs in a great career. There would be no beauty as such if all mountain peaks were identical.



Salesmen and Sinners: The World of Arthur Miller

Michael J. Bandler

"The point is: does any of this speak to the human condition finally? Does it illuminate it? Does it say anything to it? If it doesn't, it's going to be discarded and sloughed off."

That's playwright Arthur Miller speaking—Arthur Miller: advocate for the little guy, surveyor and chronicler of the human condition, gadfly, social critic, political animal.

The past quarter century has witnessed wars, racial and social tension, space travel, shifts in sexual mores, women's consciousness, and a host of alternately ephemeral and permanent "revolutions."

Through it all, Arthur Miller remains what he always was, a humanist, and virtually unchanged—not unaffected, but nevertheless, unchanged. And his faith in man in the moment of history—expounded in his writings—is substantiated by his unflinching popularity and promise.

His life has been woven from the fibers of middle - and lower-class America—the ordinary people of the small towns and large urban centers—rather than from more exotic strands. This explains, perhaps, why he has been much more sympathetic to the frailties and the dashed dreams of the common man—and one's impotence at the hands of society—than any other major U.S. playwright, living or dead.

In taking up the cudgels for the little man—be he longshoreman, farmer, salesman, small time entrepreneur or cop, Miller has penetrated Everyman's psyche and evaluates life from his perspective. In the process, he has gained defenders and adversaries.

But pro or con, patrons in New York and San Francisco, in Tokyo and Mexico City flock expectantly to his plays, knowing they'll be jolted and provoked. There's rarely a week in which a drama by Miller isn't on the boards somewhere in the world.

Miller slices away all layers of artifice. His plays largely continue to succeed in competition with whatever's in vogue, from modish or splashy musical to sensationally arch drama. Why? Because, he feels, "there are enough people who say, 'Well, I'm going to die one day, and I want to think about it a little bit.' "

The great Irish writer, Frank O' Connor, once offered another clue to Miller:

"He is unique among American dramatists in having a public all his own who will fill a theater to see his work, no matter what anyone else may think about it. And perhaps the chief reason he has such an earnest following is that his plays are so intensely American."

Twenty-five years ago, in *All My Sons*—his first successful play—he confronted questions of truth, morality, survival and expiation of guilt. Now, in his newest drama, *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, these identical themes reappear.

As for the period in between, punctuated by his tales of unsung heroes and scoundrels, these ties and others have bound audiences to Miller and Miller to theatrical viability. It's understandable, for looming dilemmas of guilt, mutual responsibility, truth, morality, the elusive nature of success and survival afflict and hound all people, from presidents to paupers. If it is trite to say that he speaks for mankind, it is nonetheless true.

Success, the survival struggle, the everyday rat race of life may seem commonplace and trivial for dramatic exposition, but not to Miller. "That's what kills you," he says, "so it isn't ordinary. We've been taught that it's ordinary by a culture that has much of what is trivial, and has despised exactly those things which make the difference between going mad or not, or dying after an empty life or not."

Yet in dealing with the commonplace, he has kept a watchful eye on the course of mankind. That's why his works are set against backdrops such as the U. S. Depression, World War II, the Mitteleuropa holocaust of the early 1940's and the American political scene of the early 1950's. In the past decade, he has used these settings several times and now, in his newest work, has reached all the way back to the Creation for an environment in which the age-old questions might run free.

The Miller portfolio contains ten major dramas, a novel, a flawed but respectable screenplay, numerous short stories and nonfiction articles, a children's book and two volumes of reportage dealing with men in war and with the Soviet Union.

Most recently, he covered the Democratic National Convention in Miami Beach in July 1972 for *Esquire* magazine, having attended the 1968 affair in Chicago as a delegate from Connecticut. Yet, he sees little effect from writers' and authors' involvement in politics. The experience, he suggests, is relatively superficial, and furthermore, most writers are not involved. He is, "because I'm fascinated by society and the way it works."

Whether he is working on a play or on a piece of reportage, Miller is controversial within that society. Perhaps it stems from his literary reputation; it may also arise out of the drama in his own life.

It has been nearly two decades since he was summoned to testify before the Committee on Un-American Activities of the U.S. House of Representatives, but the public hasn't forgotten the newspaper photographs of the owlish, intense, bespectacled playwright, and his refusal to name persons he saw at communist-organized meetings in the 1940's, his conviction of contempt of the Congress, and his subsequent exoneration.

Similarly, people remember pictures of a sheepish, grinning, lanky Miller standing arm-in-arm with the glamorous American film star, Marilyn Monroe, on the day of their storybook marriage that was to end in divorce.

Within and without the framework of drama, Miller has stood four-square in defense of man's inherent freedom to stand unmolested for virtually any cause, despite its unpopularity. In a foreword to his comparatively unsuccessful adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, he suggested that the play centered on

"... the question of whether the democratic guarantees protecting political minorities ought to be set aside in time of crisis. More personally, it is the question of whether one's vision of the truth ought to be a source of guilt at a time when the mass of men condemn it as a dangerous and devilish lie."

This is an enduring question for Miller, "because there never was, nor will there ever be an organized society able to countenance calmly the

individual who insists that he is right while the vast majority is absolutely wrong."

Frequently, his outspokenness has been prejudicial to his dramatic purpose. In 1953, he completed *The Crucible*—a play set in Salem, Massachusetts, at the time of the witchcraft trials of the late 17th century, and dealing with the intrusions of man's social obligations into his private life. Coming right in the midst of the investigations by Senator Joseph McCarthy aimed at ferreting out communist sympathizers in the federal government, the play was considered a highly partisan thrust. "I thought then, and I think even more now," Miller says, "that it really is an investigation of a social process which we have by no means outlived." *The Crucible*, by the way, is the most frequently-produced Miller play.

A new Miller drama sets the gossip mills churning, sparking audiences and critics alike. Always, though, it's assumed he will never stray far from the thematic path he has marked out.

There was a period, in the middle to late '60's, when the obsessions with fashionable writing surrounded him. He rejected them, and now believes they've been dissipated:

"It is now clear to at least some of the serious people in the field that they haven't been making any points by having people come onstage acting peculiarly—sitting in garbage pails, standing on their heads, walking around naked or using dirty language. We've had all this, and the question is, what else is new?

"There is an enormous amount of naturalism that has been disguised as poetic work. By naturalism I mean a direct report of how bizarre and insane life can be. The premium now, it seems to me, is to find a form for all of this which elicits a coherent—if not meaning, then a symbol of meaning. This was always the job of dramatic art. It got disguised for a long time with people dealing with the superficial formulations of it. We've been in the throes of a fashionableness, so to speak. And maybe, if I gauge the temper correctly, enough people have caught on that this is all a kind of dressmaking, a couturier operation."

Theater is undergoing constant change, though, whether Miller approves of it or not. So are its audiences. Shifting populations in urban centers have blurred playwrights' thinking as to whom they are addressing.

In earlier days, when Miller was sharpening his skills, a playwright had to address people in all the various grades of society—teachers, intellectuals, businessmen, doctors and skilled workers. It was, he recalls, "an unspoken condition of working" that the message had to be fundamental enough for a variety of people to react to it.

This foundation may be the reason why Miller—his thought processes inexorably linked to America's *raison d'être*—has addressed himself to a

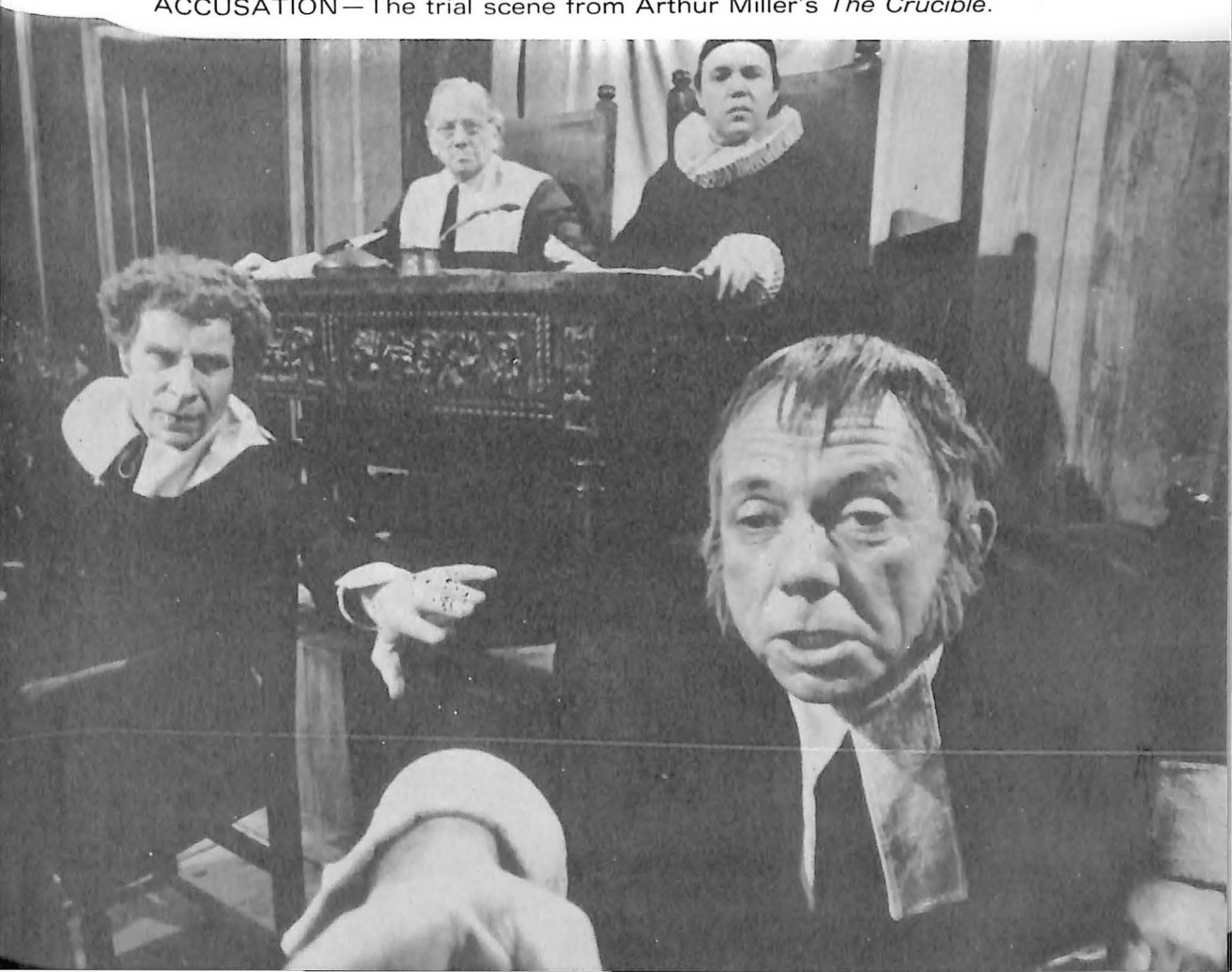
broad audience, whether or not they as individuals attend theater. It's true of his new play, a comedy which he describes as being "about creation, about youth, about the youngness of the world," through which he hopes to broaden his constituency by relating to youth.

The play, set in heaven, in the Garden of Eden, and in the land east of Eden to which Adam and Eve wander after their banishment, examines what Miller describes as "the biology of morals." Its ironically comic element is seen in the fact that man keeps seeking a moral scheme, despite his basic immorality.

The Creation of the World and Other Business traversed the rockiest road to Broadway of any major play in Miller's career, as three actors, a director and nearly 40 percent of the script itself were replaced, even though it had taken two years and three months casting the four leading players.

Nonetheless, the portentous, foreboding public image of Miller the man has vanished. At 57, he is trim, yet slightly grayer and infinitely sunnier than one would imagine. "I love to laugh," he told me as he catalogued his comic favourites from Moliere to the Marx Brothers, underscoring the fact that his moods are directly related to his work in progress.

ACCUSATION—The trial scene from Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*.



Miller, who is now married to a freelance photographer, Inge Morath, hasn't varied his work habits in 25 years. He's up each morning at seven, and by 8:30, he's at work in a utilitarian frame cabin on his 35-acre dairy farm in western Connecticut, only 100 miles (160 kilometers) from New York City but light years from the Brooklyn home in which he grew up, the son of a manufacturer of ladies' coats.

As a student he was mediocre, and his erratic performance barred him from college. Late in 1932, in the throes of the Depression, he went to work one day as a shipping clerk in an automobile parts warehouse on the west side of Manhattan. For more than a year he punched the time clock twice daily, collected his paycheck weekly and followed the same routine by the minute.

One day, he encountered Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, and came to realize how frustratingly complex life is, and how fascinating it would be to dissect its inner thoughts and meanings.

At the same time, he began to discover the relationship between one's own experiences and the art of writing, and to comprehend how personal moods and occurrences might have their counterparts in others.

Saving an average of 13 dollars from each week's salary of 15 dollars, he reapplied to one of the schools that had rejected him, the University of Michigan. He pleaded for a chance—despite his dubious high (secondary) school academic record—to prove his sincerity about wanting to seek a college degree, adding he intended to become a journalist.

He was accepted conditionally. If his grades fell short of required standards, he would be dropped.

Miller entered college with an unforgettable employment experience behind him. His year in the warehouse was to be the seed, decades later, of a one-act drama, *A Memory of Two Mondays*, a brief nostalgic vignette acknowledging life's inevitable flow towards death. Set in a warehouse, it focuses on a young man who comes to work there temporarily, knowing—as do his colleagues—that he'll be leaving for greener pastures as they remain behind in their predetermined rut.

As the young man, Bert, bids farewell to his co-workers near the drama's end, he promises to return for a visit. Steeled against optimism, hope and change, one of the men says, "Oh, not likely; it'll be out of mind as soon as you turn the corner."

Of course, Miller himself did return, figuratively, by writing the play. And although he declines to specify preferences, *A Memory of Two Mondays*—his paean to youth—holds a special place.

It was written hastily for a group of actors who were in another play that was failing. "It evokes a lot of memories for me directly," he said

recently. "All those guys in the play were real people, There was practically no distortion at all, for dramatic purposes, of what they were doing and the way it was."

That wasn't the first play to originate in Miller's memories, nor was it the last. There's part of the playwright tucked into *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Price* and *After the Fall* (he has steadfastly denied the latter is autobiographical, despite the fact that five characters strongly resemble him, his three wives and a close friend). And if his personal encounters aren't directly reflected in *An Enemy of the People*, *The Crucible*, *A View From the Bridge*, *Incident at Vichy* and his new comedy, there is an emotional and intellectual kinship evident in each. Throughout his career, Miller has addressed himself to two inherent characteristics of mankind—utter fallibility and a relentless will to survive. He has battled the mystique of the American dream—that elusive ideal encompassing family, home, job, friends and, above all, success. Ideally, morality and honesty and truth should go hand in hand with that dream; yet, too often, man's fundamental immorality evinces his equally basic mortality. Miller said this in *All My Sons* 25 years ago, and he's echoing it still.

Read his plays, and you will find certain words appearing and reappearing, words such as truth, guilt, dream, survival, honor, ideal. But in order to survive, the dramas postulate that man will do anything—lie, cheat, even shatter confidences and friendships.

That's what Miller was saying in *All My Sons*, which focused on a family unit awash in lies, a self-perpetuated unreality replete with false shields, chief of which is the father's claim of innocence in the production of defective airplane parts. When the truth emerges, it is stunning, painful and shatteringly tragic. Yet the father, owner of the factory, begs his shocked son to understand that his deception was unavoidable:

"You're a boy, what could I do! I'm in business, a man is in business; a hundred and twenty cracked, you're out of business; you got a process, the process don't work you're out of business; you don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take away forty years, let them take my life away?"

In *Death of a Salesman*, the play which captured the Pulitzer Prize and became an international success, Miller created Willy Loman, the salesman of the title, who also lives a life haunted by lies. Loman urges his sons to be careful with the girls, to be honest and to be friendly; yet he tolerates dishonesty. But the false front remains, even when his son flings the truth at him mercilessly:

"I am not a leader of men, Willy, and neither are you. You were never anything but a hardworking drummer who landed in the ash

can like all the rest of them. I'm one dollar an hour, Willy! I tried seven states and couldn't raise it. A buck an hour! Do you gather my meaning? I'm not bringing home any prizes any more, and you're going to stop waiting for me to bring them home!"

Over the years, Miller has pressed this notion. Nowhere, perhaps, was it more soberly expressed than in his 1968 drama; *The Price*, in which he established a dramatic conflict between two brothers on an unlikely battlefield—the ramshackle attic of a building slated for demolition, in which their late father's decrepit possessions are stored. One brother had supported his Depression-wracked father by working as a policeman and surrendering any hopes of going to college; the other forsook the family burdens to pursue an ultimately lucrative medical career. As they debate the price of their father's belongings with a seedy, but crafty old junk-dealer—one of Miller's most memorable characters—the doctor tells the policeman that their father actually had 4,000 dollars hidden away and that he should have known about it.

Victor, the policeman, is stunned and mute. But his wife, equally dazed, cries:

"No wonder you're paralyzed. You haven't believed a word you've said all these years. We've been lying away our existence all these years; down the sewer, day after day after day... to protect a miserable cheap manipulator. No wonder it all seemed like a dream to me—it was; a goddamned nightmare. I knew it was all unreal, I knew it and I let it go by. Well, I can't any more, kid. I can't watch it another day. I'm not ready to die."

False shields, illusions, deception, guilt. Walter, the doctor, asks:

"Is it really that something fell apart? Were we really brought up to believe in one another? We were brought up to succeed, weren't we? Why else would he respect me so and not you? What fell apart? What was here to fall apart? Was there ever any love here? When he needed her, she vomited. And when you needed him, he laughed. What was unbearable is not that it all fell apart, it was that there was never anything here."

Yet to Victor, as to Miller, self-deceit is the sacrifice that occasionally must be offered for a higher good—loyalty and responsibility for the family unit. "I just didn't want him to end up on the grass," he says, recalling a mental picture of the nation's unemployed men sitting pointlessly on the green swath of a municipal park. "And he didn't."

In his 1961 screenplay *The Misfits*, the lies also have been lived, and continue to be felt. The title refers to the prey in a climactic mustang (wild horse) hunt, but also to each of the protagonists, who are all out of step with reality. Four have experienced the smashup of their individual family units, in which the comeuppance is betrayal.



(Left to right) Eli Wallach, Thelma Ritter, Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe
in *The Misfits*.

Even during a seemingly noble venture, the hunt itself—a classic clash between man and nature in which each struggles to survive—rationalization, illusion and self-deceit are evident. Where once the hunt was a grand experience, because the mustangs were essential in westward expansion, it now was a degrading hunt for dog food. Only after triumphing in a bitter struggle with a stallion is one of the cowboys able to acknowledge the deception, and the fact that the enterprise is no longer heroic, but merely the search for "money just like everything else. You know that. I know that. It's just ropin' a dream now. Find some other way to know you're alive. . . if they got another way, any more."

Each play in Miller's career is related to its predecessor, and to its successor. He himself has said that "any body of work is a voyage with ports of call. Each of my plays has carried through some element of an earlier play." And so questions of survival and feelings of remorse and guilt, dominant in *After the Fall*, resurface in modified form in *Incident at Vichy*, a one-act drama set in 1942 in a place of detention in Vichy, France. Similarly, the looming dilemma of society's collective responsibility—an

integral element of the playwright's Jewish heritage that is at the heart of "Vichy"—is the essential question, in narrower scope, in *The Price*.

Despite the fact that Miller's new play, *The Creation of the World and Other Business*, is a comedy—a seemingly striking departure for him—there is a link with *The Price*. Nearly every Miller drama has elements of comedy—mostly one-line throwaway jokes and retorts—that are indicative of the man's comic sense. *The Price* is filled with them.

Besides that, though, there is a moment at the play's end when the junk dealer—alone on stage in a sea of undesirable items—plays a phonograph record consisting solely of the sounds of laughter. Artificial mirth reverberates. Soon, struck by the pointlessness of it all, the junk dealer joins in, roaring to the point of tears as the curtain falls.

"There's got to be a link," Miller maintains. "I'm the writer. And if the situation is totally different, the two are related in the sense that there is an absurdity in both kinds of humor. *The Creation of the World and Other Business* begins where *The Price* ended, in a way."

The new play is awash with absurd humor, as the actor portraying God shifts back and forth from Biblical language to colloquial, slangy street talk, as Adam names the animals, and as Adam and Eve—in their innocence—spend their first moonlight moments playing volleyball while the angels impatiently await the appearance of the first physical desires.

The individual plays are links in a full chain, representing the elusiveness of the dream. The end of the dream, for Miller's characters, is death.

So it is with factory owner Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Willy Loman in *The Death of a Salesman*, John Proctor in *The Crucible* and Eddie Carbone, the longshoreman scorned by society at the denouement of *A View From the Bridge*. Yet as long as there is a flicker of hope, as there is for policeman Victor Franz, the dream and the struggle for survival continue.

The dream continues for Miller, too, although there was a period in the late 1950's and early 1960's during which the public wondered. He once attributed the gap between produced plays—from *A View From the Bridge* (1955) to *After the Fall* (1964)—to a temporary disillusionment with the theater.

Interviewed in *The New York Times* in 1964, he said he had increasingly felt that the work he was doing was regarded as unimportant. "I felt I was a kind of entertainer, succeeding in drawing a tear or a laugh, but it seemed to me that what was behind my plays remained a secret. I think every artist gets to this stage."

Unable to discern whether he or the audience was out of step, he decided to write more for himself. He completed five plays, none of which was produced, in which, he recalled, he attempted "to develop a viewpoint

toward the world and myself. The plays were searching, but came to no dramatic conclusions that satisfied me. They cast no shadow. Then in 1959 I had the idea of doing *After the Fall*—a play that presented the search itself."

After the Fall seems to have broken the spell. Since its premiere, which inaugurated the Lincoln Center's Vivian Beaumont Theater in New York in 1964, Miller has produced three plays, a volume of reportage and numerous articles. In addition, he has served as president of P.E.N.—the international society of writers—and has immersed himself in Democratic Party politics.

The pace of his work varies considerably. Using a notebook to organize and develop scenes of a play, he revises constantly, throwing away hundreds of pages of dialogue in the process. He is a painstaking writer. *After the Fall* was written over the course of a year and a half. On the other hand, the final draft of *Incident at Vichy* was turned out in three weeks, and only 20 lines were revised from completion to opening night. It was a far different situation recently, when he scrapped the entire third act of *The Creation of the World and Other Business* in the midst of its harrowing pre-Broadway tryout in Washington, D.C.

Miller admits to having discarded some 25 plays during the past quarter century that were completed or two-thirds finished. Recently, there were rumors in theatrical circles that he had completed a play based on a book of interviews with people who had survived the Depression. In other words, it seemed he was returning to a familiar theme—this time, using it as the focal point of his drama, rather than merely as the backdrop. But in our conversation he disclosed he had given it up after a year-and-a-half's work.

We met late in August 1972 in his New York hotel room, in the midst of rehearsals of his Biblical comedy. Predictably, he was reticent about the production, and simply generalized about it. Puffing on his ubiquitous pipe, he paused, sighed, then admitted, smiling, "All that doesn't tell you very much, but there's no way to tell it other than for you to see it."

"There's no point in trying to tell it anyway," he continued, "because it always arms people with the wrong kind of impression. I'm too close to it to even begin to hope to describe it. I mean, I'll be amazed, probably, when people come and start writing about it. I'm always surprised as to what they've seen."

We talked about Miller the traditionalist—who described himself as disturbed by the "kind of debased, so-called absurd dramaturgy" in the theater today—"unfinished sketches, snatches and fragments of disconnected dialogue which in other times and places would have been discarded as being simply undigestive material."

Four years ago, in an interview, the playwright said that in many ways, that was the best of times for an artist to be alive. Today he stands

by that statement. There are no conventions to adhere to or to attempt to buck, he explained. Rather, he said, "the pure expressiveness of the artist is now there." Yet he sees limits to expressiveness, specifically when the question of what a man is saying is obfuscated by gimmickry and sensational behavior on the part of the actors.

As the Miller version of "Genesis" wended its way to Broadway, it was obvious, late in 1972, that the author remains a playwright for our times. But is he a once and future dramatist?

It was nearly midnight in the smoke-filled suite. With his shoes off, his feet outstretched on an ottoman, Miller slouched lower in his lounging chair, momentarily pensive. Finally, he bolted upright and tackled the question of his own immortality:

"God knows, ten years from now a play of mine might be simply unknown. I'm not by any means the most popular writer in the theater. It happens every generation. It could happen to Beckett. It could happen to Ionesco. It could happen to anybody, that suddenly a generation looks at a work and says, 'What the hell were we so excited about?'"

He had voiced a similar thought in a newspaper interview several months before, in discussing the resurgence of O'Neill and the decline—at least temporarily—of Hemingway as exemplifying the unpredictability of literary fortunes.

"You can't hang any value on a current estimate," he said. "You can only pick up a thing and relate yourself to it and say, 'I believe in this. It meets some quality of reality that I recognize. It moves me this way. It moves me that way.' And to hell with everything else."

Fatalistic? Yes, but relentlessly productive. Vague phrases scattered through our dialogue hinted at a new play in progress, a couple of important revivals, perhaps a few short stories and an evening of one-actors. With Miller, you never know what's coming until it's before you, onstage or on the printed page.

In 1969, he said, "I often feel I have not started to say what I want to. I've just been preparing to say it."

Does that still hold today?

"Yes, I still feel that way. I guess you feel that way until you're finished."

(Courtesy—USIS)

Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan and the Kirana *gharana* of Hindustani Music

K. D. Dixit

Abdul Karim Khan was born on November 11, 1872 at Kirana, a village near Panipat, about 50 miles away from Delhi. His father Kale Khan was also a musician and Abdul Karim Khan and his two other brothers, Abdul-Magid and Abdulhug, imbibed their earliest lessons in music from him. It is said that Abdul Karim Khan and one of his brothers left Kirana when they were still in their teens and came to Baroda where Abdul Karim Khan soon earned a name for himself as a young and talented musician. He left Baroda and travelled down to Poona and Bombay. He imparted his knowledge of music to a few earnest students and soon established himself as an outstanding musician of the Kirana School of music. He left Bombay and settled in Miraj, which was then a princely state. It was about one hundred and seventy-five miles south of Poona and from there he travelled all over the country. He was invited to perform at a number of music conferences. Among the well-known musicians of his time he was the first who studied the complex problem of *Shruti*. He was the principal and perhaps the only demonstrator of the *Shruti* scale of the chromatic scale of Hindustani Music. He worked with Rao Bahadur K. B. Deval and Justice C. Clements, both of whom delved deep into the ancient critical treatises of music, especially the *Natya-shastra* of Bharat and the *Sangeeta Ratnakara* of Sarngadeva. Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan demonstrated that the sub-division of the seven notes of the usual gamut into twenty-two parts was a fact to be reckoned with and not just a fancy or fantasy in the minds of the ancient musicologists.

Among Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan's pupils, who perpetuated his style and his name, are Rambhau Kundgolkar (Sawai Gandharva), Sureshbabu Mane. G.R. Beherebuwa, Balkrishnabuwa Kapileshwari, Dashrathbuwa Mule, Roshanara Begum, and Hirabai Barodekar (who learnt from Ustad Wahid Khan of the Kirana school and from Sureshbabu Mane, her brother). Shri Rambhau Kundgolkar's disciples are Gangubai Hangal, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi and Firoj Dastur. They are all popular and brilliant artists.

Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan was a man of simple and frugal habits, non-ostentatious and kind-hearted. He did not bully or ill-treat his pupils and those who lived with him enjoyed parental care and attention. At Miraj, he developed an interest in the *tanpura* as an instrument and brought his own musical knowledge to bear in the construction. It is an established fact that the vibrant and harmonious sound of his *tanpura* was unparalleled.

He travelled from Bombay to Uttar Pradesh, Calcutta, Hyderabad and to Madras. He was on his way to Pondichery when he experienced a

severe pain in the chest at Chingalpeth. On October 27, 1937 he died peacefully on the platform at Singapuram Koilam, reciting Kalma in the *Raga Darbari*.

We find it a little difficult to understand how it is that geo-physical regionalism has become synonymous with the history of *gharanas* or schools of music rather than the names of those maestros who have devoted their lives to propagating and teaching the mode of music perfected by them in their own way and after their own heart. Is it the typical oriental philosophy of the impermanance of man that is responsible for the transference of credit and merit from man to place? Tansen's disciples made his music the music of the Gwalior *gharana*, Ustad Alladiya Khan's complex music came to be linked with Jaipur or Atrauli, Ustad Faiyyaz Khan and Ustad Vilayat Khan belonged to the Agra *gharana*, Ustad Bade Gulam Ali was associated with the Patiala *gharana* and Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan's cultivated pattern of music came to be known as the Kirana *gharana*. Our inquiry into this aspect may not lead us on to any definite results. But it is important to explore how a school of music or a *gharana* is born. Let us consider the Kirana *gharana* and its distinguishing points. First, nothing very much is known about Abdul Karim Khan's teacher, his father, Kale Khan. Kale Khan's musical achievement, his performances are not recorded. Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan, another exponent of the Kirana *gayaki*, learnt his music from his father Hyder Khan. Nothing much is known about him either. Bande Ali Khan, the *been* maestro, is said to have belonged to this *gharana* and except for his celestial music and the romance which culminated in his marriage to his disciple, Chunna, there is little or very little said about the Kirana *gayaki*. Most accounts of musicians, both living and dead, are anecdotal. They do not give us even a glimmer of the manner in which these great masters imbibed their music, the methods, the routine they followed and the influences which worked on them. We have some definite and reliable source material about the Gwalior or the Jaipur *gharana* and its lineage can be positively traced. Not so with the Kirana *gharana*. The ethos of this *gayaki* or manner and the method of singing has to be traced from musicians and the conclusions which follow are necessarily empirical. It is not possible to convey accurately the idea of a *gharana* through words because our musical aesthetic or critical vocabulary has yet to arrive at a stage of absolute precision. It is still in a state of evolution. A listener feels the stamp of a *gharana* and there it rests; the musician, guided by his fancy and immersed in his own interpretation, has already left familiar ground and is in his own world where the *gharana* is as far removed from him as an airman from terra firma.

A common observation (mind you, this is not to be interpreted as a definition) about the Kirana school is that the musician develops his song or *cheeja* merely on the strength of *alapi* or elongated notes, so dovetailed that in his exposition of the melody, his only aim is to fix and cajole or caress a note, the only limitation being that of *tala* (the time measure) which beckons him to the point of return. The sweetness of melody, *raga* is primarily due to the tonal quality, which imbibes a gradual, subtle use of semi-tones in the main note, whose placement in the scheme of the melodic weave



*Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan
(1872-1937)*

is the main objective. For him the *cheeja* or words in the song are only a help in articulation. The Kirana musician seems to have all the time in the world once he has started and closed his eyes to mundane things like the audience. He weaves his net of *alapi* around a note and ascends the melodic structure as delicately as a gossamer spread over a leaf. He is in love with his own note or the *swara* he has captured that very moment. He plays with it, is engrossed in its nodal and sub-nodal musicality, like a child completely lost in untwining a knotted thread. This has provoked derisive, and wholly unjustified remarks from listeners. They say if one Kirana *gharana* musician takes half an hour to reach *gandhar*, another musician of the same *gharana* will take one hour to do so. Allowing for the sneer in these comments, there is no doubt that the musician of this school begins with a very slow unravelling of the melody, a quiet and sensitive approach to the task of fixing notes in the firmament of the melodic whole. He is aware of *tala* only as a factor limiting and guiding the melody. How he places his notes against or on the beats in the *tala* is not of primary importance for him. He goes through a variety of graceful combinations and returns to the *sama*. At that point his trance or concentration on a note comes to an end.

All this is true of his *khayal* singing and, therefore, some musicologists are of the opinion that this *gayaki* or mode of presentation lacks "form". Now this criticism can be held to be valid only if we are able to postulate without contradiction what can be or what exactly is "form" in the presen-

tation of classical music. As we know, apart from (a) the composition in two parts of a *khayal* (b) the melodic structure (that is the *raga*) as accepted in its general structure and (c) the *tala*, governing or accommodating the melody, there are no norms, no invariables, which can be enumerated about the singing of a *khayal*. Perhaps a lover of Indian music would not tolerate any more bounds or restrictive elements on the musician. The appearance and existence of so many *gharanas* is proof enough that what is termed 'form' is an elastic, accommodative arrangement and not a fixed principle of scientific rigidity. In our music, the artist sets out and sings a *cheeja* or a song perhaps once; he enunciates it properly and then begins to establish the melody of *raga* in a multi-pronged manner. The chosen melody is set to a particular *tala*, and his beginning in slow tempo necessitates a slow and leisurely progress. Each school of music has decided over a long period of deliberation and practice its own mode of such measured progress. Again, one musician may employ all his technicalities in this process right at the start and opt for a faster tempo and another may reserve a fast *tan* pattern for a faster tempo and use certain selected phrases only in the first or slower part of his song. There is no fixed or unalterable rule on how a musician should proceed. If we compare two music lovers' assessments of the *gharana*, both of them may agree on the overall effect of the music but often disagree on individual movements or methods of elaboration. All theoreticians will agree and admit that finally what we term "form" in music is postulated for aesthetic satisfaction. In our music there is really nothing inherent which dictates to us that only one arrangement is possible in the recital of a song. Witness, for example, the different ways of enunciating the word *kaku* in Sanskrit musical treatises. Witness, also, the musician's improvisations in changing the stress for the *sama* or point of return. One can pile up a whole list of such individual gimmicks employed by a musician. All these, undoubtedly, are trivial in themselves, but formidable enough in the context of a discussion on 'form'.

In our music, the basic material is the melody or abstract series of sounds related in an artificial manner. These sounds are subject to some arrangements: for example, five-note *ragas*, six-note *ragas* and so on. It is easy to understand that once this arrangement is stretched over a composition, i.e. on the musical theme, the musician is permitted a great amount of freedom in his handling of it. Music, whether Indian or Western, when performed has an added dimension of time. We do not hear a *cheeja*, even when we listen to it on a gramophone disc in one instant or at one moment. Some period of time has to elapse before we learn to understand the full import of music, for it is constantly flowing along ahead of us and we try to retain one impression and even as that lasts, another is added to it, making it relevant to the overall structure which the musician erects before us. The ingredients of music thus have a plan, a basic arrangement for a musician. He makes use of abstract sound and concrete words to make an intelligible, comprehensible and pleasing pattern—what we call a performance.

When we think of "form" in our music, we have to think of the sound content and not of a rigid structure superimposed on a *cheeja* and its movement. This dimension of 'time, is one of the chief components in

any assessment of the musical performance. Our music, Hindustani music, is not written and, therefore, the duration of a performance differs from musician to musician. If a musician compresses all his art in a short period of time and another stretches his recital over a longer span, we do not consider it amiss. The total impression is what we finally have in mind. When a Kirana musician creates an agreeable atmosphere of a melody by a succession of notes woven carefully and gradually and when he expounds the *cheeja* with finesse and keeps you rooted to your seat, you cannot merely dismiss his art, and his effort as charming yet "formless". Basing ourselves on impartial considerations, we will have to grant then that the Kirana musician has evolved his own 'form' and this is no mean achievement. The distinguishing characteristic of this school is its complete submission to *alapchari* or rhapsodical embellishment as the main ingredient in the exposition of a *raga* and a *cheeja*. *Swara*-orientation in all its beauty is the most significant factor in classical music and other graces like *Bol-Upaj* or *Bol-Tan*, that is playing and placing the words in the texture of *tala*, and the swift and relentless battle with *tala* circles does not play such an essential part in the exposition of melody as most people tend to believe.

A distinctive feature of this school of music, can be briefly summarised thus: a Kirana musician places greater stress on the presentation of melody or *raga* by employing *alap* or lengthened flights of *swara* continuation, running through the full time-measure. He does not play with the inherent rhythm or *laya* in the manner of a musician of the Agra *gharana*. In fact, his obsession with the note or *swara* overshadows every other facet of the presentation of music. He does not unfold the melody through playful hide-and-seek either with the time-measure or with intricate and complex variations of the rhythmic pace. His main concentration is on the note or *swara* and with this as his base, he proceeds to create an atmosphere of deep reverence. He abhors mechanical or forced combinations of notes which to him seem irrelevant and which do not establish any relationships in his scheme of melody. A listener who concentrates on the performance notices that the Kirana musician does not deal with scattered or separate musical ideas, individual movements within the time-circle but builds up his melody, note by note like a weaver.

Another distinctive feature of the Kirana musician is his voice culture. His gestures seem to indicate that he is really at great pains to produce a sound and that he has some difficulty in sustaining it; but actually the artist is not greatly constricted in his articulation. The Kirana musician's sense of control of the subtle inflexions in voice production is remarkable and he has had to strive hard to attain it. He seeks to achieve the desired tunefulness. But his mannerisms appear somewhat odd; even so, they are natural to him. The Kirana musician's *tan* or swift note presentation is simpler than that of the musicians of other *gharanas*. In his *tans*, there is more of facial or jaw-bone control. This is noticeable when we compare it with the *tan* pattern of the Jaipur school of music. If we borrow a literary expression to describe his style, we can say that his style is lucid and delightful but not florid. He seems to give us a sentimental rendition of classical music. The Kirana musician elaborates the *sargam* or notation of phrases deftly and in an ingratiating manner. In fact, this has become one of the notable and accepted ingredients

of this *gharana*. His vocal line has a wide range—wider than that of most of the musicians of other schools of music.

One significant aspect of the Kirana musician is his presentation of the *thumri* in his own cultivated way. The Kirana musician's voice culture is suited to singing the *thumri* because there is equal stress on both the composition and its meaningful presentation. His style differs from the Purab pattern which is considered as the authentic style of *thumri* singing. The Kirana musician's delineation of a *thumri* is again *swara* - dominated and tends towards a *khayal* pattern; even so the *thumri* is a special attainment of the Kirana musician.

The Kirana school presents the established *ragas* and the repertoire of these musicians is limited compared to that of the Agra or Jaipur school. "Jod" or a combination of two or three *ragas* is not the forte of the Kirana musician. It is not that he cannot accept the challenge of such a mixed *raga* but his style is likely to be considerably cramped if he takes on such combinations as a matter of his regular selection of *ragas*. The variation concept is important in such mixed *ragas* and the emotional or aesthetic implication of original melody which is preponderant in the Kirana style of singing tends to be hampered by such a form of presentation. This may be responsible for the Kirana musician's desire to avoid such mixed *ragas*.

Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan evolved and perfected the style entirely on the basis of his own genius. There is a gramophone disc of Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan, rare, yet still available in the possession of connoisseurs. It reveals an entirely different kind of musician. One can hardly place the musician as Abdul Karim Khan even after ten guesses.

It is clear that Abdul Karim Khan pondered over the problems of musical expression. He created a pattern that harmonised with his own genius. He was gifted with a sweet, and extremely pliant voice which he cultivated in his own rigorous manner and it is on record that he enjoined his disciples to conform to the voice culture he taught them and to perfect it through persistent practice. Abdul Karim Khan gained a remarkable control over his voice and he could reproduce all the twenty-two *shrutis* of our chromatic scale. He demonstrated his mastery in this field before learned audiences. His style was his own creation. He preached what he practised. We glean from imperfect accounts that out of the four *Banis* of Dhrupad singers, he belonged to the *Goharan Bani*, whatever it might have come to signify in present times. Apparently, what we call "form" came to the musicians through the Dhrupad style which was rigid in its structural presentation. Our musical progress, however, is traceable to rebels who boldly deviated from the rigid and uncompromising elements in the attitude of the Dhrupadiyas. Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan ought to be applauded for the leadership he took in this battle. In the *cheejas* or songs presented by Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan or by his disciples this lineage or throwback to Dhrupads does not seem a deliberate change. The oft-repeated change of 'formlessness' is due to this break from the tradition.

Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan's style is now so well established that it has come to stay. He, who creates, lives. He has established his own norms, his own code of conduct. Khansaheb lived at a time when great, very great and even outstanding musicians lived and performed in their own way. If he rejected some of the ideas of other music styles, he must be applauded rather than accused of departing from them. New and upcoming musicians (like Kumar Gandharva or Vasanttrao Deshpande) have also boldly created, established and consolidated their own style and our music is the richer for their contribution.

Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan's performances delighted his listeners. In addition to *khayal* gayaki, he raised *thumri* presentation to a new and beautiful state. It is on record that his concerts were highly successful and during his performances, the listener experienced a mental repose, when he put, to quote Milton, "his soul in tune". He sang *khayals*, *thumris*, Marathi stage-songs, Marathi *pads*. He was not a purist or a dogmatic upholder of a particular tradition. He remained in his own sound of *swara*—dominated trance the whole day and those who were close to him say that he would pick up a *tanpura* and tune it to the basic note of a *tanpura* tuned the previous day, without reference to or without striking the note of the harmonium for support. This meant that he was in constant harmony with that note both during his sleep and during his waking moments. This insatiable, inexhaustible, constant pursuit of and for a *swara* was the chief factor in the evolution of his style of music. All his pupils have continued the tradition of their guru. They assimilate what is new and fuse it in their master's technique.

Sawai Gandharva studied music with other Ustads like G. R. Beherebuwa or Rajab Ali Khan. In style and temperament they differed from Abdul Karim Khan. Hirabai learnt her music from Ustad Wahid Khan and Sureshbabu Mane. They absorbed influences from other types of *gayaki*; they set out on a search for better styles and yearned for beauty in their music; and yet all of them remained true to the maestro, Khansaheb Abdul Karim Khan and to the Kirana *gharana*.



Shanmugam (1912-1973)

Memories of Shanmugam and the Tamil Theatre

T. Janakiraman

The era of Boys' Theatre Companies in Tamil Nadu ended with T. K. Shanmugam, who passed away on February 15 of this year. Generous obituaries claim for every major death the end of an era, but Shanmugam's demise is one of the rarest exceptions to the cliché. He made his debut as an actor in 1918 when he was only six years old and stuck to the boards to the end of his life. There were enough things to unnerve him and scare him out of the theatre: Poverty, politics, unpredictable audiences, betrayals, losses, swindlers, desertions and the competition of cheap claptrap. There were innumerable instances of talented men who entered with hope and left in panic or disgust. But Shanmugam persevered because he had a sense of dedication to the theatre.

The group presided over by Shanmugam and his three brothers, Sankaran, Muthuswamy and Bhagavathi afforded a training ground for young talent. Most of the leading artists of the stage or the screen received their early training in this theatre group. N. S. Krishnan, the humorist and S. V. Sahsrnaman spent years of apprenticeship in this theatre and were associated with it for a number of years.

It is said that the Boys' Theatre Movement of Tamil Nadu was founded by one Jagannatha Iyer. But another figure gave it the strength and solidarity of a movement. He was Shankardas Swamy (1867-1922) of Tuticorin. A religious recluse, he was brought up in a strictly puritanical tradition. He was a scholar and a composer. He relinquished the post of an accountant in a salt factory and joined the fold of the theatre in his twenty-fourth year. After serving as an actor and director in a few professional theatres, he eventually started his own organisation in 1918. It was entirely composed of children and teenagers. Shanmugam and his three brothers were apprenticed by their father to this troupe. The troupe and its founder inspired the emergence of the 'Juvenile' theatre movement in Tamil Nadu.

Shankardas' personality itself is of great interest in the evolution of the Tamil theatre. A bachelor and puritan, he chose the theatre as a career and freed it of some of the social taboos with which it had been associated in Tamil Nadu as well as in other parts of India. Perhaps this reformist zeal prompted him to recruit children and teenagers whose characters he could mould. He instilled in them a rigid code of personal discipline and behaviour. To quote Shanmugam, "The master forbade even *pan* and tobacco in any form. Those who violated were beaten black and blue. They either stayed, or they fled the company for good. The enterprise was a theatre version of the *Gurukula*." The Swamy gave the children a fair grounding in Tamil poetry and the classics. He taught them music, speech and acting. He was himself the author of about forty plays, most of them based on mythology, the classics and folklore. He produced a Tamil version of *Cymbeline* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Shanmugam says his guru was a giant of energy. He himself was an eye-witness to, at least, one of his incredible feats of writing. Shankardas wrote a full-length play (*Abhimanyu Sundari* of four hours' duration) in a single night. He locked himself in a room at about eight o'clock at night with a sheaf of papers and early in the morning they found him asleep beside the 'clerk's desk' with the hurricane lamp off. The four-hour play was there—with the dialogues, songs, poems and stage directions, all complete and without a single erasure or over-writing.

Sheer need prompted Shankardas to do a great deal of writing for the professional stage. The theatre of those days was in need of disciplined scripting. It was then infested with what in the jargon of those days was called the 'Special Drama'—a kind of speculative venture. The contractor announced a play or a series of plays. He then booked actors who were to play the various roles. They arrived mostly in the morning or in the afternoon, from different directions. Perhaps they had never met before. There was no rehearsal and no regular script. There was just a story. And everything else was extempore. In most cases it was the music which mattered and each actor rolled out his stock of songs. If the actor was a competent singer, the audience often clamoured for songs totally unconnected with the play. It was ready to tolerate him even if he brought in anything which was extraneous; the only condition being that the musical fare he offered had to be interesting enough. The play ended after a night-long debate of music, mostly unfinished.

Shankardas was impatient to end this anarchy. He introduced the order of regular finished scripts. He handled the episodes in the classics with imagination, and interpreted them in a new way so as to heighten the drama of situation and character. But he could not make a bold bid for prose plays. The urban theatre of the time was an extension of the rural one; urban folk were, really speaking, absentee farmers and their culture was no different from rural culture. The only difference lay in the physical environment created by the larger number of streets and people. If Shankardas did not attempt a model prose play, he, at least, provided theatre men with a wide range of scripts from which even the artists of the 'Special Drama' could draw liberally. He instilled in them a kind of discipline. They were groomed to spare themselves and their audiences gross violations of a sound theatre aesthetic.

There were also a few other dramatists who earned a name for themselves in the theatre of the time. They were Sarabam Muthuswamy Kavirayar, Ekattoor Sivashanmugam, Sundaram Pillai and Sooryanarayana Sastri. But these names were stray examples. They only serve to pinpoint the baffling absence of literary plays in a culture which had for ages revelled in theatrical activity. Tamil scholars are fond of quoting the names of ancient villages which were donated to *koothars* (actors) and minstrels. They like to recite long passages from the epic *Silappadikaram* and words and phrases from the devotional poems. They consider this as internal evidence proving the antiquity of the theatre in the Tamil country. But not a single Tamil play of the past has survived. Some scholars try to attribute this to the dominance of the austere Jain tradition; others to the unsettled conditions that followed in the wake of events like Malik Kafur's invasion. But then how did that great one-acter by Mahendravarman Pallava, *Mathavilasa Prahāsana* survive? And how again did the Sanskrit plays of Bhasa (who is surmised to belong to the south) endure? And how did the other branches of Tamil literature manage to exist?

Shanmugam and his brothers formed their own theatre-group in 1925. This was the Balashanmugananda Sabha; it was renamed T. K. S. Nataka Sabha later. The organization remained a hive of intense activity for about forty-five years. The troupe toured almost all the cities, the larger, and the smaller towns and most of the villages of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. They also visited some of the northern cities, boasting a sizeable Tamil population. They went to Malaysia and Singapore. This ceaseless activity gave Shanmugam an insight into the taste and the particular likes and dislikes of the various Tamil districts. He was the only theatre man who had this kind of experience. Perhaps that is why he cast his net wide when he scouted for talent, both in the field of acting and writing. His troupe staged about seventy-five plays in all and covered a wide ground, ranging from plays from the classics, from mythology and Indian history to those with a reformist and nationalist bias. His repertoire included folk versions of the epics and Puranas. From 1931 the shift was in the direction of nationalism and social reform. It must be said to the credit of Shanmugam that he made his theatre reflect the problems of contemporary life and its aspirations far more faithfully than any other organisation of his time. His theatre served

as a plank in support of the struggle for freedom. His organization also ranged itself against a past that permitted casteism, the dowry system, and accorded an inferior status to women and to one's own language and culture. Two of his plays were banned on account of their anti-British sentiments. He was a close friend of leaders of different political parties—E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker of the Dravida Kazhagam, C. N. Annadurai of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, Jivanandan of the Communist Party, and Sivagnana Gramani of the Tamil Arasu Party. He was also very friendly with many well-known Congress leaders. But he had the necessary detachment and could steer clear of all the possible pressures that such ties imply. He was a devout believer. His first passion was the theatre. He made a significant contribution to the movements in favour of social reform. But he was not prepared to wound the feelings of a society that had been nurtured on religion for ages and in which atheism or agnosticism was more of a public gesture than an actual conviction.

Shanmugam used to be immersed in extremely strenuous and many-sided activities. All of them were connected with the theatre. For three years he brought out a weekly magazine for the education of his theatre-group; he wrote out entire pages in his own hand. He participated in political and literary conferences. It was he who initiated the idea of a theatre conference in 1944. The conference was presided over by Sir R. K. Shanmugam, the Finance Minister of the Union Government and the participants included the playwright, P. Sambanda Mudaliar, the doyen of the Tamil amateur theatre and many leading figures in the professional theatre and the world of letters. The conference sought to establish a society of theatre men to promote theatre activity. It decided to institute prizes for new plays; it proposed that theatre-halls be erected by municipal bodies and suggested improvements in the living conditions of theatre personnel. This was followed by two conferences. Except for Shanmugam, nobody took any serious interest in the task of making such conferences the starting point of a permanent body. Perhaps this was because conditions changed and the work was taken over by the State Sangeet Natak Sangam which is now trying in its own way to promote theatre activity through grants and other forms of assistance to artists. In fact, it was Shanmugam and his colleagues who were responsible for activating this body. Shanmugam himself instituted in 1944 a prize scheme for new plays, perhaps the first of its kind for Tamil Nadu. He made it a point to produce the prize-winning plays in his own theatre. With characteristic energy he found time to write a few books in Tamil. These included a biography of his master Shankardas Swamy, a book on the drama which has now been prescribed as a textbook for under-graduates and an autobiographical account of his long career in the theatre. The autobiography was released last year on April 26. The occasion was the celebration of his sixty-first birthday. The book covers the period till 1948 and it appears that he had been working on the second part of the book when he suddenly took ill and died on February, 15. This book is a valuable addition to the literature on Tamil theatre history. Except for the reminiscences of P. Sambanda Mudaliar, (which mostly deal with the amateur movement) there have been very few books which have helped the general reader to form a cogent picture of theatre activity in Tamil Nadu.

Shanmugam was a member of the Central and Madras State Sangeet Natak Academies and received the State Award in 1960 and the Central Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1962 for acting. Again and again he was honoured by a public whom he himself had served for more than half a century. Lastly, it must be recognized that it was Shanmugam's theatre which trained people not only in the art of acting but also in organising their own theatre groups.

One of the leading men so trained is S. V. Sahasranamam, a veteran, who has specialised in 'character' roles. He, too, started his career in the theatre at the age of twelve. He shared the life of hardship of a touring company for over two decades. In 1946 he took over the management of the N. S. K. Nataka Sabha, a troupe sponsored by the great humorist and comedian, N. S. Krishnan.

Sahasranamam is a great actor in his own right. He introduced the concept of realism in his acting style. Many other actors began to emulate him. This helped to free the theatre from out-dated habits of rigidity and stylization. These mannerisms were a ludicrous hangover from the past and the theatre world's obsession with mythological and historical themes. It was he who introduced modern writers (like B. S. Ramaiah, Alagiri Swamy, Rajamani and the present writer) to Tamil audiences. His productions communicated a new experience to the theatre-goer. There was a general finesse and a conscious attempt at subtlety in acting; the stage decor was also altogether new. The modern painter and sculptor Kalasagaram Rajagopal introduced new techniques of lighting and stage decor; they supplanted existing practices. There was a sudden feel of modernisation in the air. The writing, the spoken word, the acting styles, the new stage effects—all these combined to provide a fresh and more satisfying aesthetic experience. Sahasranamam will be remembered for at least two great productions—*Panchali Sapatham* (Draupadi's Vow) and *Kuyil* (Cuckoo). Both these are outstanding poems of Subramania Bharati. The first is a long poem tracing the events leading to the humiliation of Draupadi at the hands of the Kauravas and the fierce vow she and her husbands take to destroy them. It was Bharati who gave a new glow to Tamil poetic diction, a new currency to words that had been blunted by usage and habit. His poetry had a cauterizing effect on Tamil poetry. It is this fire that also burns throughout in the small epic he wrote, using Draupadi as a symbol of India, exploited and humiliated by foreign rule. Sahasranamam adapted this poem for the stage, preserving the verse form. He invited poets to meet his troupe. They instilled in the boys and girls "a sense of Bharati". The present writer saw the production six times and does not recall ever being moved to such depths again.

The other production was a long poem of Bharati entitled *Kuyil*. The characters are the poet as a dreamer, a monkey, a bull, a cuckoo and a woman. It is a song on love and treachery—a romance in sylvan surroundings, alternating with an eerie sense of despair and a refusal to face realities. I do not know how a poem of this kind could lend itself to adaptation for the stage. The writer N. V. Rajamani performed the task well and Kalasa-

garam Rajagopal did the trick. It was one of those rare explorations into the realm of fancy visualised on the stage. In other words, it had the effect of a direct and breath-taking visual translation of the poem. I have yet to see a similar adventure on the Tamil stage.

Sahasranamam was always an experimenter. That is why he felt dissatisfied with the *ad hoc* training received by actors. He wanted a school of drama where he could forge talented young men afresh without going through the agony of making them unlearn what they had imbibed earlier on. I remember he ran three such courses with the help of Rajamani, Kala-sagaram and other experts. I think Sahasranamam's was the first effort in Tamil Nadu to codify a comprehensive theatre curriculum and run a workshop for theatre men.

All these efforts have not been rewarding for as far as Sahasranamam is concerned. His life has been one of continuous struggle. He had to make a living as a film star, and to pump these earnings into the theatre to keep it alive and all this in a situation of unpredictable responses, where all the input seemed to disappear into a bottomless pit. Between 1952 and 1970, Sahasranamam produced thirty-six plays and his only reward was the usual official and unofficial recognition and the satisfaction of doing some pioneering work in an atmosphere of increasing self-denial.

In Tamil Nadu the professional theatre has generally been cruel as far as the returns for producers are concerned. Theatre activity has never been self-supporting. Let us cite some more instances: those of Shivaji Ganesan, Manohar and a few more who run their own professional troupes. All these theatre men persist in continuing with their work because of their total dedication to the theatre. Most other troupes have folded up. Those who survive have to fend for themselves by raising funds from other resources. The prosperity of a troupe depends on their leading artists enjoying successful careers as film artists.

Manohar has tried to minimise his dependence on his film career by resorting to two devices. He has attempted a series of plays wherein the traditional pattern of characters of the classics and mythology has been re-interpreted. For instance, Ravana's abduction of Sita has been exonerated by a kind of para-Freudian reference to events that happened in a past birth. The traditional archetypes of villainy appear once again in a new garb. The other device he employs is that of spectacular display of costumes and sets. The late Kannaiya and after him Nawab Rajmanickam also believed in spectacle and glitter. For two generations they dazzled audiences in the style of the Parsi theatre in Western India but their cast was generally very mediocre. A fine actor himself, Manohar has tried to blend both these elements: grand spectacle and talent. He has produced about fifteen plays; the themes are mostly drawn from Indian history and the epics. His is perhaps the only troupe that is active in a large way at the present moment.

The professional theatre in Tamil Nadu has always been somewhat puzzling in terms of its life span. No troupe has survived more than twenty-

five years. Shanmugam's was the sole exception. One explanation for this state of affairs is the absence of plays. Hundreds of plays have been written for professional and amateur groups. But it is difficult to mention even five plays which have any serious literary merit and are, at the same time, stage-worthy. Secondly, I am not sure whether serious and critical theatre-going has ever been the concern of Tamil audiences. It will not be true to say that the cinema is responsible for the decline in audiences. The enormous number of amateur troupes—about two hundred for the whole of Tamil Nadu—is proof enough that the cinema is no serious threat to the theatre. Theatre-going has generally been for the urban population a pastime in which they indulged for lack of better things. It was just one of the many diversions they sought when they were in a mood for cultural approbation on a gregarious scale or craved for a sort of upmanship. In the *sabhas* of Madras city (societies formed in a locality for recreation). I have seen the same audience getting equally thrilled watching an assorted fare: a musician singing today, a slapstick comedy tomorrow, a dance recital of a *Bharatanatyam* novice (usually a child or a teenager), a garish dance-drama depicting a mediaeval theme. This eclecticism has always been a puzzle to me. One cannot describe it as escapism, since the audience does not want to escape from anything. These *sabhas* in Madras and in few major cities and towns of Tamil Nadu have (to translate a Tamil adage) 'simultaneously pinched the baby and rocked the cradle'. It is they who encouraged the bold efforts of professionals like Sahasranamam and the T. K. S. brothers and also turned their backs on them when amateur entertainers began to knock at their doors. Most of the amateur theatre groups charge one-tenth of what a professional troupe expects and the *sabhas* have (with an eye on saving in expenditure) lapped them up avidly. Most of the amateur troupes fall back on topical, political and social satire. Their inspiration is the morning newspaper and pulp jokes. These troupes have also had a major share in elbowing out and starving the professional theatre.

The non-professional theatre which can, in fact, afford a leap in the dark has been a failure in Tamil Nadu. It has never adopted an avant-garde or experimental approach. Most of these troupes tended to imitate the commercial theatre or the movie stars. This is indeed a harsh judgment which is one compelled to make upon the amateur movement which itself did so much for the theatre and invested in with social dignity half a century ago under the leadership of Sambanda Mudaliar.

The situation has also been complicated by the absence of theatre-halls. Tamil Nadu has yet to think in terms of halls, exclusively designed for plays. One such was erected in 1947 in Madras by the T.K.S. brothers and their friends. This example has never been emulated by other towns or cities. Even today there are hardly five well-equipped theatre halls in the whole of Tamil Nadu. Prestigious *bhavans* still stand uncompleted.

The growth of the theatre-going habit has to be a joint effort. What is needed is not just theatre-halls but a daily performance. At present, you can never hope to witness a play in Madras or the districts except during the week-end. What we require is inexpensively built halls—well-designed

community centres, as Sahasranamam suggests—which will make it possible for plays to compete favourably with movies in terms of ticket rates. At present, to go to the cinema is far cheaper than a visit to the local theatre to watch an amateur dramatic performance.

This anachronistic situation is responsible for the absence of any urge among serious writers to try their hand at play-writing. After all, the physical goal of a play is the theatre-hall. No writer can rest content with the mere publication of a play which can never compete with a novel in point of sales. He cannot entrust his play to non-professionals since most of whom can neither guide him nor produce it on a mature plane. All these arguments sound banal, but this is the harsh reality that has to be faced. The predicament is more absurd in view of the fact that the Tamil country has been and continues to be a busy centre of the performing arts.

Very recently a new trend has made its appearance in the field of playwriting. I refer to Indira Parthasarthy and N. Muthuswamy whose work holds promise of an avant-garde touch. Indira Parthasarthy has written two plays—*Mazhai* and *Porvai Portha Udalgai*, both dealing with the dilemma of the educated woman and her relationship with a world which lies in wait (with cudgels), expecting a lot of fun from her, after having given her the tools of freedom and loneliness. Both the plays were produced in Delhi by an amateur group and won awards in a competition for plays in the regional languages. Both of them are departures in the realm of play-writing, as far as Tamil is concerned. There is no chronological movement, as it were, but all the drama is packed in a few moments like a panorama telescoped into one point. As far as impact on audiences goes, I can only recollect two plays of comparable quality. One is *Kuyil* (adapted from Bharathi) and the other is *Kali*, a play written by N. Pichamurthy and acted by a group of students almost twenty-five years ago.

N. Muthuswamy has written two experimental plays which have yet to be staged. I am not at all sure whether all these plays will be produced in Tamil Nadu since professionals have understandably their own reservations about Tamil audiences and their receptivity. Twenty years ago M. R. Radha wrote plays which had significant themes but their target was social injustice. But the plays of Parthasarthy and Muthuswamy are against the sham and the concealed schizophrenia which is lodged in every human being. I have my own doubts whether the professional or amateur troupes in Tamil Nadu will risk presenting plays with such challenging themes.

— T. JANAKIRAMAN.

Book Reviews

SAHASA RASA. Transliterated and edited by Dr. Premalata Sharma, Sangita Natak Akademi, New Delhi, 1972, Rs. 25.00 (*In Hindi*)

Nayaka Bakhshoo was one of the court musicians of Raja Mana Singh of Gwalior (1486-1516). The word *Nayaka* was used for one who was a musicologist, a composer and a performer. Bakhshoo was a reputed musicologist, an excellent composer and a charming performer. Hence he was universally acknowledged as *Nayaka*.

Nothing is known about Bakhshoo's parents or his teacher. A slight reference is made to him by Hakima Mohammada Karama Imama in his *Madan-ul-Moosiqi*, written in Urdu in the nineteenth century. Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore also refers to him in his *Sangita-sara* and Pandit V. N. Bhatkhande in his *Hindusthani-Sangita-Paddhati*, Part Four. An earlier reference is found in Faqirullah's *Raga-darpana* in which he says that Bakhshoo had come for a purificatory bath to Kurukshetra, that he had invented the three ragas: *Bahaduri Todi*, *Nayaki Kalyana* and *Nayaki Kannada*. According to him, Bakhshoo was a much better musicologist than Tansen and his descendants. Faqirullah, the writer of *Raga-darpana*, was one of the generals of Aurangzeb. He lived in the eighteenth century. Much confusion is caused by similar statements made by certain writers about both Nayaka Baijoo and Nayaka Bakhshoo. For instance, some say that it was Nayaka Baijoo who by his wonderful performance persuaded Humayun to release the prisoners captured in the Malwa war against Baza Bahadur. Others credit Nayaka Bakhshoo with this achievement. Some maintain that it was Nayaka Baijoo who created the *Bahaduri Todi*; others believe that it was Nayaka Bakhshoo who created it.

It is difficult to say whether Bakhshoo was a Muslim or a Hindu. According to Hakima Mohammada Karama Imama, he belonged to the Dharhi community which was a community of professional musicians. The entire Dharhi community in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh became converted to Islam during the Muslim rule. There are some members of the Dharhi community in Rajasthan and Punjab who are still Hindus. According to Hakima Mohammada Karama Imama, Bakhshoo was a Muslim. If Faqirullah's statement that he had come for a purificatory bath to Kurukshetra is to be believed, he must have been a Hindu. It is difficult to arrive at any decision on the basis of his name. Bakhshoo or Bakhsh was a name which was adopted by many Hindus in the Muslim period. Even if he was a Muslim, his forefathers must have been converted to Islam only a few decades before him, for in his compositions he reveals a very accurate and detailed knowledge of Hindu gods and goddesses, Hindu beliefs and customs. His references to certain important concepts of sangita shastra also lead one to believe that he must have studied major works like *Brihaddeshi* and *Sangita Ratnakara* in the original Sanskrit.

Bakhshoo's compositions had not been systematically recorded anywhere, but even so, many musicians remembered them and very often presented them in their recitals. Emperor Shah Jahan was exceedingly fond of his compositions and ordered a selection of one thousand Dhruvapadas of Bakhshoo to be recorded. Musicians who knew his compositions were invited by officials of the royal court. About two thousand Dhruvapadas were collected in two years. Out of these, one thousand Dhruvapadas were selected and recorded. Some Dhruvapadas

which were not the compositions of Bakhshoo but of Tansen have also been included in the selection, but they are very few in number. Bakhshoo had used the names of his patrons in the last line of his Dhruvapadas, but Shah Jahan's name appears in place of these patrons, evidently by the order of his courtiers who were anxious to flatter him and give him credit for being a great connoisseur. The selection was titled *Sahasa rasa*. *Sahasa* is the Hindi equivalent of the Sanskrit *sahasra*, meaning a thousand, and *rasa* means flavour. It contains the flavour of a thousand Dhruvapadas.

Originally the selection was recorded in the Persian script. Two photostat copies of the selection were obtained from the India Office Library by the Sangita Nataka Akademi, Delhi. The Akademi entrusted Dr. Premlata Sharma with the task of transliterating it into the Devanagari script. She has done her job exceedingly well. She had the benefit of the guidance of her father, Shri Lal Chand Sharma, himself a good Persian scholar. With his help, she has prepared a perfectly flawless transliteration of the Dhruvapadas into the Devanagari script. She has not only transliterated the book, but also added an introduction of about thirty-two pages in which she has thrown light on the *pada* and its importance in vocal music. She has made use of a number of quotations from the *Natyashastra* and Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *ragas* and *talas* used in *Sahasa rasa*, on the language used by Nayaka Bakhshoo and on the thought content of the Dhruvapadas selected. She has provided a Hindi translation of the Persian Preface to the selection. She has also prepared a detailed list of the *padas*, giving page-wise the first line of each Dhruvapada appearing in the selection, together with its *raga* and *tala* and thought-content.

According to the Persian Preface, the book contains four *ragas* and forty-six *raginis*, but the compiler of the selection has used the terms *ragas* and *raginis* indiscriminately for some of his *raginis* are traditional *ragas*. There are about one hundred and two songs in the *Kannada raga* and only five in *Malakosa*. Ten *talas* have been mentioned in the book: *Ekatala*, *Athatala*, *Samatata*, *Jhumara*, *Kamalakantha*, *Jatalagana*, *Chaturthatala*, *Jhapatala*, *Tritiyatala*, *Paratatala*. With the exception of the *Jhumara tala*, practically all the other *talas* are found in Sanskrit *granthas*.

Unfortunately the notation of the songs is not given. So it is impossible to assess their musical value. The collection is, however, useful for the study of the language used in the Dhruvapada compositions. It seems to be an earlier form of Brajabhasha. It also contains many technical terms of music used by Bharata, Matanga and Sarngadeva which goes to show that Nayaka Bakhshoo was well-versed in the musical literature of the country and that those terms were commonly in use till the fifteenth century. Most of them have gone out of vogue now.

The book has been ably edited; the printing and format are excellent. It deserves a place in the library of every music lover.

—JAIDEVA SINGH.

MY MUSIC, MY LIFE by Ravi Shankar, Vikas Publishing House Private Limited. (Second reprint), 1972, Rs. 30.00 (*In English*).

Few masters have enriched the domain of Indian music as much as the sitar-wizard Pandit Ravi Shankar. Panditji is just fifty-two, but the global stature he has attained among the musicians of his age is something unique, even incredible. One may or may not agree with his interpretation of Indian music in relation to a western context. The hard fact must, however, be conceded that it is Pandit Ravi Shankar who has done more than most to reveal the immensity and wealth of our musical heritage to the West.

Pandit Ravi Shankar enjoyed the advantage of receiving a formal education abroad. He was associated with his illustrious brother, Uday Shankar during the latter's international tours and had his schooling in Paris. He was exposed to the medium of western music right from early boyhood. This explains his enthusiasm for the western masters and his catholic taste which embraces a deep understanding of western classical systems. Who does not know of his pioneering experimentations in duet-play (*jugalbandi*), in orchestration and in screen music, as also his achievements in the field of ballet and opera? These are all typical of his modern outlook.

Pandit Ravi Shankar's proclaimed belief in the happy co-existence of classicism and catholicism has engendered much animated and even acrimonious controversy in this country. The long period of his stay in the States and his association with the Beatles, the Rolling Stones and the Byrds has provoked the most severe criticism from several quarters. He has been blamed for departing from tradition, and adapting Indian classical music for western audiences. He has even been accused of having migrated to America to forge a synthesis of the East and the West in music!

All this and more forms the subject matter of the book under review. *My Music, My Life* is essentially the author's assessment of his own achievements and some of the problems and misunderstandings which they have raised in the field. It cannot be called an "autobiography" in the conventional sense of the term. This volume consists of four parts. The first three parts, covering a mere eighty-six pages, contain a rather sketchy and rambling account of certain significant aspects of his life. That is because the author has, within this limited compass, tried to concentrate more on personalities than on periods, explaining in the process what Indian music signifies, how it is enshrined in our Vedic scriptures, what frame of mind has to be nurtured if it is to be correctly appreciated and how important the guru-shishya relationship is. He also describes the rich contribution that great musicians, innovators and gurus (including his own master, the great Allauddin Khan), have made to promote its growth. Part Four, on the other hand, covering no less than fifty-five pages, embodies an exhaustive manual for the sitar.

All this, however, does not in the least detract from the value of the book. Far from it. In point of style, treatment and approach, the author has obviously a foreign readership in mind in writing the book. Nevertheless it unfolds before the reader—whether he is an Indian or a foreigner—one more facet of Pandit Ravi Shankar's immense gifts. Pandit Ravi Shankar emerges here as a sensitive writer with a style that should be the envy of many a contemporary Indo-Anglian litterateur. The lucidity of his presentation is matched by a felicity of expression. There is hardly a page which does not bear the imprint of his charismatic personality, his unique blend of rare musical talent, uncanny showmanship and his firm rootedness in our classical traditions. The reader may be a confirmed dilettante, or a perceptive connoisseur, an

ardent votary of Indian classical music, a passionate bibliophile or an obsessed bookworm. But the book will hold his interest from start to finish.

Apart from the lucid and almost conversational style of the whole narration, what lends added charm to the book is that it is intensely readable. There is the disarming candour with which he tells his story. To cite only a few instances: his encounter with the Hippies; or his firm belief that Tat Baba once appeared before him in the form of a parrot and sipped tea; or his portraiture of Baba's irascible temperament; or his account of the self-invited trepidation of Ali Akbar Khan when he played truant during his *riyaz* routine.

The book also abounds in incidents which could provide material for a first-class thriller. Equally moving is the account of the arduous years of apprenticeship spent with the Ustad before he could achieve any proficiency on his sitar. We learn to appreciate the background which helped him to attain that degree of perfection which has today made him one of our most creative and sensitive artistes.

The manual for the sitar is highly instructive. A young and talented sitarist will find it indispensable. The inclusion of half-tone photographs and an extensive glossary add to the utility of the book. No less significant is the introduction by Yehudi Menuhin to whom Pandit Ravi Shankar says he is indebted "for some of the most inspiring moments. I have even lived in music."

— MOHAN NADKARNI
