

My Past is my Future

For the last sixty years, I had but one aim. May the race that I was running all these years continue in the future too - that is my ardent wish. A full account of my life-long efforts at collection of folk arts will be available to the reader of this book. For this, I am indebted to Dr. Mulik Raj Anand and his associates.

It is not my nature to look back and review the past. In the opinion of most people, it is good to have glimpses of the past, so that one does not repeat one's mistakes. Perhaps there is a great truth in this. But my temperament does not allow this. I am running a race, which pulls me along by its very momentum. And it is due to this trait in my nature that I was able to assemble this big jumble.

There have been many unhappy incidents and difficulties in my life. But - in spite of the shortage of money and discouragements caused by "well-wishers," I did not stop my quest. I did not let difficulties stand in my way. Surmounting them every time, I have created the fantastic world of my Museum.

My personal life also has been complementary to the story of my Museum.

My wife Kamalabai always joined hands with me. Much credit for setting up the Museum goes to her. When the collection became larger,

my only daughter Prabha, alias Mrs. Rekha Ranade, gave me great support inspite of her own impecuniousness. She grew up with me and encouraged me with her youthful enthusiasm. My only son, Raja, passed away forty years ago. From that day on, I gave up everything except the search for art. I have given the name of my late son to the Museum. And his memory urged me on.

I have not narrated the story of the development of this Museum. Basically, I am a poet. I do not remember much about my childhood. In my school life I did not make much progress in studies.

But I remember my teacher of those days. I was very much impressed by him. And I feel that much that I have attained in this life is due to this teacher.

One other thing I remember. I could never do mathematics. I liked literary and historical subjects.

When I was in the English fourth standard, I had a teacher, Shri Ram Ganesh Gadkari who was a renowned Marathi poet, playwright and humorist.

I had a great affection and respect for him. In this very period, I started to compose poetry. In three or four years I realised that I had a bent towards historical poetry. In those days most poets were busy with romantic themes. I was a lone traveller on my own way.

In my free time I used to read historical books.

During the vacations I tried to establish contacts with historical families at several places. All this made a great impact on me. One day,

I began to feel that maybe from these old family-houses I will obtain some traditional things of art, which I wanted to arrange in my room and thus create a kind of historical atmosphere. As this thought got hold of me, objets d'Art began to be assembled in my room and the beginnings of a Museum was made. This is the simple story of this Museum.

When I was occupied with my search for art objects I often received financial assistance, in difficult times, from friends, among whom the most prominent are my brother, Dr. Bhaskarrao and my mother. Since they are from my own family, they may not wish to have their names mentioned, but I cannot forget the help they gave me. And on this occasion, I must not also forget to mention my friend from Bombay, Abdur Qadar Isaji, who gave me understanding of antiquities.

To my memory also comes the name of Dadasaheb and Smt. Sushitaben Maulankar, without whose moral and material help this Museum would not have come into existence.

I have already said that I do not like to look back. I do not want to stop the race that I am running.

Now I have entered 83rd year of my life. In a way, I am aware of this, in a way I ignore the fact. Actually, I have forgotten my age already earlier. The most powerful One is helping me in all that I do.

There is a big bundle of experiences on my back but I am putting the past behind. Now I hope that everything will go smoothly. Whatever money is required, will be available from generous friends. The Museum is no longer MY Museum. I have donated it to the Government of Maharashtra and it is the Government's responsibility. But while handing it over to the Government, I felt that it is essential to reorganise it. The display should be improved. And we have to collect more objects. If we will not assemble the art objects of our country, who will do it? Already we see to our shame that if one wants to study the art of our country, one has to go abroad because many artefacts have been smuggled out.

When I thought of reorganisation, I was not sure that the Government can solve this problem. To renovate this Museum I was in need of two and a half lakhs of rupees. One fine morning, I decided to go to Shri Shantanurao Kirloskar, the renowned industrialist of Pune. He treated me with respect. I requested him to donate fifty thousand rupees. And what a pleasant surprise!! On the afternoon of the same day I received a cheque for that amount. His wife, Smt. Yamunai.

must have also played a role in this. After this auspicious beginning, I have received two lakhs more. Other well-wishers are offering money. And before long this Museum will become a living monument of my dreams.

I have received help from many friends from among whom I may mention Shri Rahul Kumar Bajaj, Shri H. K. and A. N. Firodia, Shri Madhaurao Apte, Shri O. C. and A. C. Agashe, as well as Shri G. M. and Smt. Mangalabai Abhyankar, and Shri and Smt. Kantibhai Shroff. Smt. Abhyankar and Shri Shroff treat me as their family member. I want to finish the work of extending the Museum quickly. I cannot afford to waste a second. And I am sure the funds will come.

I have a desire to establish an unparalleled Museum pertaining to women of India, in which there should also be a Research Institute. In this, every article should concern women, and it should be created by women. I often feel that women do better work than men in India. The administration of this Museum should also be in the hands of women. In this Museum, I want to evoke the ethos of every part of our country. I shall spare no pains to achieve this.

Also, I want to make two more galleries. All this is not idle dreaming. This is a plan to be initiated immediately. I have thought over this. The first gallery will be of Tribal art. Artefacts from various tribal communities will be assembled here. I have already begun to collect these. The second gallery will be Folk Arts. In this I shall not be able to display everything from the whole of India, but I shall present at least the most important things.

I love Terracottas. So there will be a gallery entirely devoted to Terracottas.

Another favourite of mine is the puppets. In various parts of India there are leather puppets. Some of these I have already collected. I am looking for more.

I have also collected embroideries and I am aspiring to collect more from the various parts of the country.

Indoor games is another theme, especially playing cards, various brain-teasing games, and dolls from Karwar and Konkan areas.

I have various types of smoking pipes and I am daily adding to these.

To enlarge the Museum I need money and land, but I am sure it will come.

I hope my work will make a contribution to the recognition of the beauties and wonders of our culture by showing the art of everyday life of our land.

In many respects this work is for educating the people. The realisation of the importance of the Museum for education will come much later. Outside India, Museums are almost holy shrines. There, the wealthy people constantly help by donating art objects.

By devoting a special issue of MARG to this Museum, Dr. Mulk Raj Anand has assigned me a high status. He has honoured my efforts and achievements. The scholarly study of the objects of my Museum and the writing of the monograph on them has been undertaken by my dear young friends, Dr. Jyotindra Jain and his learned wife, Ms. Jutta Jain. They are both ardent young scholars of their subjects. I am indebted to them for their contribution and feel happy and proud to see our children inherit the only legacy I can leave behind for them.

Shantanurao Kirloskar is publishing a beautiful colour catalogue of the Museum, and I am very grateful to him for helping me in all my difficulties.

Everyone likes roses, but not the thorns. People like to have a garden of fruits and flowers, but few want to be gardeners who have to work hard. Keeping a single aim in life, I have been going ahead in life, and I have always avoided telling the story of my struggles. I am not interested in discussing the difficulties, miseries and insults that came my way. I have lit an everlasting incense stick. I want people to enjoy the perfume. That is my only wish.

Lately, the University of Bombay has honoured me by prescribing my poetry collection, "The Poetry of the Unknown" for the B. A. syllabus. The Museum Association of India has elected me as their honorary fellow. And now the Pune

University has conferred on me the degree of D. Litt.
(Honoris causa). I appreciate these honours, because
I know that, in the end, devoted labours are recognised.

When I sit in a relaxed mood, one thought comes to
my mind, that, in the last fifty or sixty years, I have gathered
many things and made a large collection. The collection
has grown slowly. And from my assemblage, a show-place
has come to be. But whatever things I have, and by seeing
which connoisseurs open their eyes wide, are all the
work of those many craftsmen who have been neglected and
forgotten. Having created these objects, they have merged with
the Unknown. If they had not created these things, how
could I have erected this wonder-house? But I know
their souls are dwelling in these very objects of art.
And I bow to them with reverence.

This whole effort at reminiscence, this jumble of
stray words has arisen like a poem from within me. I feel
I have always been writing a long narrative poem to
fill my life with the fragrances of the past.

Sankar Ganesh Kulkar