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The Yakshagana of Karnataka

K. Shivram Karanth

The Kannada-speaking area of India, usually called Karnataka, has a rich theatre form known as 'Yakshagana'. In earlier times it used to be called 'Bhagavatara ata', 'Dashavatara ata', or simply 'Bayalata'. In Kannada 'ata' means a play. Originally this form of theatre used to deal with the tales of Bhagavan Krishna and hence the name 'Bhagavatara ata'. Later on, it began to depict tales of the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu; hence the name 'Dashavatara ata'. Being an open-air theatre, it came to be called 'Bayalata'. The nomenclature 'Yakshagana' came from a special style of music which accompanies these plays. It is a very ancient style, for there is mention of this style in Kannada literature of the tenth and twelfth

centuries. The *Chandraprabha Purana* (1189) makes mention of the form. Nagachandra's *Mallinatha Purana* (1105) refers to Yakshagana as "pleasing to Laksmi who stands in the lotus". In the sixteenth century Kavi Ratnakar Varni speaks of *Yakkalagana* in his *Bharateshavaibhava*. Since he belongs to the region of South Kanara, it may be surmised that the Yakshagana form was widespread by that time.

Yakshagana embraced in earlier times a form of music played before royal personages. Later on, owing to the advent of more evolved styles of music like Hindustani and Karnatic music, Yakshagana receded very much into the background. We would have totally lost this form, but for the fact that opera-like plays began to be written in this style and their stage success contributed to its survival right to this day. In the Kannada country we have over three hundred Yakshagana plays, written by a number of writers, from at least the period of the sixteenth century. The tradition of staging such plays has continued over the past few centuries, evolving its own peculiar stage techniques.

An essential feature of these plays is that the play is conceived as a fantasy dealing with heroes, gods and demons; the material chosen for depiction comes from our myths and legends. Such stories are moralistic in outlook and often portray the victory of good over evil. Most of our traditional drama leans heavily on such legendary lore. The special distinction of Yakshagana consists in its presentation of the story through the medium of music, dance and literature.

The very backbone of Yakshagana is its operatic nature; songs and verses are employed for the narration of its themes. This is done sometimes in the third person, and often in the first and second persons. The songs consist of many musical patterns, composed to express every type of emotion contained in the puranic stories. The language is simple and direct, and can easily be understood by lay audiences. The *Bhagavathar*, or conductor of the play, has to sing all those songs (in addition to many narrative verses) to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums.

The *purva ranga* of the performance is known as *Sabha-lakshana*. It begins with a prayer to Ganesha, Skanda and other deities. The *Bhagavathar* is, of course, the leader. Next to him in importance is the character who plays heroic or serious roles. Those who perform the parts of demons are known as *bannada vesha*. (Colour is *banna* (*varna*) in Kannada). The *stree-vesha* is lower down in the scale. The *Bhagavathar* is at the apex. The two accompanying instruments, the *chande* and the *maddale*, are an aid, but it is he who controls the rhythm and the pace. The *Bhagavathar* introduces each character; when a character is alone on the stage and seeks to express his feelings, it is the *Bhagavathar* who listens to his problems. The *shruti* determines the note of the *Bhagavathar* and the *shruti* box is by his side throughout the performance. Even when the music is silent, the dialogue continues to be based on this particular note and has its own mode of presentation. The din of the *chande* becomes more pronounced during a war sequence or in moments of elation or vigorous movement.

Another feature of the earlier part of the performance is the Balagopala (Krishna-Balarama) dance. Then there is always a comic interlude. Hanumanayaka comes with his band of urchins. These young monkeys are the *kodangi* and their *nayaka* (leader) is Hanuman. Even as the *Bhagavathar* sings the praises of Ganesha, Hanumanayaka and his followers forge ahead with their own brand of humour. They repeat the pattern during the moments when Skanda and Shiva-Parvati are praised. Then the *stree-vesha* enter; they dance and sing, concentrating on the *shringara rasa*.

The *Sabha-lakshana* terminates and the *Prasanga* proper begins. It is introduced by the *vaddolaga*. The character, who is about to enter, stands behind a curtain and he is presented to the spectators. If a Mahabharata story is to be enacted, the Pandavas are presented through the *vaddolaga*. For example, Hanumanayaka speaks the *birudavali* of Dharmaraja. He hails him thus: *Shrikrishnasuprita, Duritavamshavidhata, Trailokyavikhyata, Sakalavaninatha, Sharanasankuladhata, Kamakrodhavidhata, Ajatashatruavadata, Sarvashastradhita Saddharma Pariputa, Shrimadrajakulakulalimandita, Padpadmaradantha, Dharmaraja Maharaja.* There are traditional songs associated with a *vaddolaga*. For instance, Krishna's *vaddolaga* begins with a Sanskrit *shloka* and is followed by a song in *raga* Sankarabharana, *tala* Adi. The *vaddolaga* of the demons is a more spectacular affair; the dance is more slow and is punctuated by roars and cries. Popular *prasangas* like the Karna-Arjuna Yuddha are eagerly awaited by the audience.

Kannada works based on Sanskrit compositions form the source of these *prasangas*. These include Kumar Vyasa's *Bharata*, Torwe Narhari's *Ramayana* and Battaleshwara's *Kaushik Ramayana* and *Bhagvata Katha.* It is through them that village audiences make their earliest acquaintance with our epic forms. The neroic *prasangas* which feature battles have the word *kalga* incorporated into their titles. They include *Babhruvahana Kalga, Sudhanvana Kalga, Marimukha Kalga* and other *kalgas*. Those that end in marital bliss have the word *Kalyana* or *Parinaya* inserted in the title. For example, *Subhadra Parinaya* or *Kanakangi Parinaya*. Of course, the humorous element of a performance is wholly monopolised by Hanumanayaka. The *Sabha-lakshana* introduces us to the choreography of the Balagopala and *stree-vesha* sequences. The *vaddolaga* includes excellent group formations in its dance.

Various metres fulfil a particular function. For instance, the Kannada metre *Kanda*, based on the Sanskrit *Arya*, helps to speed up the pace of a narrative. *Vritta* is used when deities are praised. *Dvipadi* and *Bhamini Shatpadi* are employed for telling a story. Yakshagana is never too ornate and some of the songs like those in the *Shrikrishna Balalila* borrow heavily from folk songs. The famous *prasanga* of Chandravali composed by Kavi Nagappaya of Dhwajapura has elements of love and pathos, and a touching simplicity of mood. The *Bhagavathar* resorts to prose particularly when something exciting is expected to happen.

Yakshagana music at one time employed as many as one hundred and fifty *ragas* and about seven *talas* in its musical patterns (*Dhatis*). Today's *Bhagavathars* have forgotten most of these *ragas*; even so the musical patterns

that have survived are numerous enough to depict forcefully the many different moods of these plays. If all the earlier *ragas* could be revived now, we would experience again the operatic excellence of this form. There is a richness and potency in the *ragas* and *talas* used; they are able to convey various shades of thought and feeling. In classical music, both Hindustani and Karnatic, we have numerous *ragas*, but their thought content is generally devotional or sad in its nature. It embraces the wail of a devotee, self-castigation or praise of one's personal deity. Even in the aspect of love, it is the *viraha* element (the pangs of separation and the yearning for the presence of the lover who has vanished from sight) that predominates. A drama cannot restrict itself to these emotions alone. It has to deal with other human feelings like anger, jealousy, rage or joy. It cannot limit its emotional core to pathos, devotion or praise. The Yakshagana composer, therefore, found greater opportunities for composing expressive patterns which could also lend themselves to rhythmical dance expression.

In Yakshagana some of the *ragas* have Karnatic names (Gaula, for instance). Others have a wholly Kannada flavour—Koravi, Mechali or Gopanite. The Koravi is close to the Kurunji of Karnatic music. Dvijavanti is like the Hindustani Jaijaiwanti; Pahadi is like Pahadi. Assembling some of our traditional *Bhagavathars* and with the help of classical scholars (in both the Karnatic and Hindustani styles), I was able to discover more than sixty *ragas*, whose patterns our *Bhagavathars* can recollect still, but whose names they have forgotten. Not being sure of their scales, they often migrate from *raga* to *raga*; at times they tend to be monotonous. We realized that whenever an old composition (set in a particular *raga*) was wittingly or unwittingly changed, its expressive power seemed to wane. It is quite clear that in former times composers were experts in their musical style; whereas most of our present day *Bhagavathars* appear to have lost their moorings.

The importing of *gamaka* (style of modulation) from the Hindustani and Karnatic schools has also had an adverse effect on Yakshagana. This factor differentiated it from the other two schools. The tendency of the *Bhagavathar* to imitate Marathi stage music and the devotional songs of saints like Purandaradasa has also modified the original style and impaired its purity.

There is one element in Yakshagana which has suffered a good deal at the hands of the present-day *Bhagavathar* and his accompanists. The *Bhagavathar* tends to ignore the language-content of his song, and to concentrate for the main part on its style and *tala*. The accompanists are mainly absorbed in playing the *maddale* and *chande*. The sound of these drums drowns all the words of the song. The musicians pay little attention to thought content. The pitch of the voice and the accompanying cymbal and drum beats are shrill and piercing. The dancer necessarily follows them. Subtler feelings, the lines of demarcation between one emotion and another are wiped out in the process. Earnest attention to these aspects of music can help us to exploit the richness of Yakshagana. For a dancer it offers wonderful opportunities for expression; many of the songs portray a wide range of emotions, calling for quick changes in mood and utmost subtlety in projection.

Kamalabhupa and his daughter Rati

The characters speak out their words in dignified prose after each song; this art has to be cultivated over long years of experience. The prose passages cannot be learnt by rote. A speech is delivered extempore and often improvised on the spur of the moment after the *Bhagavathar* has sung one stanza after the other during the course of the play. Two opposing characters, or a courting couple, can thus develop a fascinating dialogue between themselves; this is often handled with dexterity by veterans of the Yakshagana stage.

Kathakali, with its strong accent on music and the language of gesture, allows for no dialogue spoken by actors. In Yakshagana the dance element is not predominant. The story unfolds itself through the words spoken by the actors. The dance is supported by the rhythm of the *chande* and *maddale* and the pace of the *Bhagavathar*. The simple metre of the *Bhamini*

Shatpadi provides the dancer with the right tempo. The *stree-vesha* concentrate on the *lasya* element of the dance. The male characters display valour and fury. Hanumanayaka's movements embrace humour and joy. The dances do not depict so much of delicate emotions as the predominant mood of a sequence. They offer the rhythmic background to its delineation. Thus dance (except for the few occasions when travel, battle and valour are depicted) serves as no more than an embellishment to an otherwise prose drama. The spoken word is the main ingredient and the audiences remain passive observers of the drama enacted in front of them.

The important problem in Yakshagana is that of liberating dance from the medium of prose. Dance with music can by itself suggest quite significantly many aspects of a drama. The thought-content is in the realm of language; but emotions can also find an intense and subtle expression through music and dance. To discover these possibilities, I eschewed spoken prose altogether in my ballets. The songs did have words; they set a sequence in motion. But the dancers were taught to express their emotions in terms of footwork, body flexions, gesture, facial expressions, and choreography. This did not mean substitution of gestures for every spoken word. The minimum of commonly understood gestures was used. The entire body was turned into a vehicle of expression. Footwork was subdued or tuned up depending on the nature and pitch of the emotion. Steps were not deemed to be exercises in technical skill. *Tala* rhythms had to be a part of the dancer's body-movements and poses. The rhythms of songs had to evoke corresponding reflections in

Headgear and Make-up in Yakshagana

a dancer's movements. Years of study and exercise led me to the conclusion that our Indian dance has a lot to gain by accepting the fact that one medium hardly enriches itself by imitating another. Skill alone is neither art nor *shastra;* acrobatics in *raga* and *tala* cannot serve the needs of dance or musical expression.

The potential in this form can be exploited to the full and its canvas enlarged. For example, tradition has given Hanumanayaka full liberty of speech and action. He assumes light roles like those of servant, courier or messenger. He provides the element of humour in the dance. Dance developed to suit such a mood can enrich the possibilities latent in his role. Yakshagana has a few basic dance patterns but they are restricted to the performances of the main characters during the battle and travel sequences. They can be employed to embrace other situations, too.

Yakshagana surpasses many Indian theatre forms in one particular field, that is in the matter of costumes and make-up. These plays were originally conceived as fantasies, and practioners of the form evolved a rich variety of costumes. Their design was not inspired by ancient paintings or sculpture: it is based on the essential nature of the characters. To the first category belong heroes like Karna and Arjuna or *Avatara purusha* like Rama or Krishna. The second type consists of characters of heroic mould who are a trifle too proud of their prowess and consequently slightly immature. To this class belongs Indra or Gaya (Gandharva). The third group includes those like Kirata who are fearless, yet somewhat uncultured and even stupid. Then there are demons like Ravana and Kumbhakarna who are brave in their own right but, on the whole, quite destructive in their ways. Another group includes those who are born among demons but have a code of right and wrong. Among these are Ravana's brother Vibhushana or Ravana's son Atikaya. A special kind of costume is designed for them. Then there are those deities like Veerabhadra and Narasimha who are entrusted with the difficult task of annihilating demons. Apart from the characters of this *deva-danava-manava* group, there are others like Hanuman, Bali and Jambava. Then there are straight characters, like rishis or gurus. The *stree-vesha* includes queens, princesses and attendants.

The Yakshagana performances used to take place at night. Torches were used to light the arena. The dim, yellowish flames flickered and the dazzling costumes imparted to the atmosphere a suggestion of fantasy. In the olden days *aradala* (yellow orpiment) was mixed with coconut oil and smeared over uncovered parts of the body. With the introduction of petromax lamps—a whiter shade, with a slight crimson colouring, was substituted. The area of the temples near the eyes is covered with white and outlined with streaks of red. A white *tilak* is painted on the forehead and a black line is drawn in the middle. The *stree-vesha* has a red *tilak* on the forehead. Balagopala, Lava-Kusha, Krishna have no moustaches.

The main colour for the *rakshasa* characters is red, green and black. The face is multi-coloured. Rice paste is used to outline the contours and after many such layers, the face begins to have a solid, three-dimensional effect. The face

looks even larger when it is framed by a strip of paper, cut into sharp, teeth-like shapes and tied behind the ears.

Those playing the roles of rishis or purohits are usually simply clad. The clothing for all the characters is effective; the ornaments are elaborate and dazzling. Special types of headgear correspond to the nature of the characters portrayed in the play. Every foreign student of the theatre, who has witnessed Yakshagana plays, has gone into raptures over its costume and make-up. It can stand comparison with the best in their Balinese, Javanese or Cambodian counter-parts. Unfortunately decadence slowly set in in the matter of costumes, particularly in the style of clothing worn by female characters. The desire to cater to popular taste resulted in their being presented like fashionable ladies of the times. Female figures looked like women on the street straying on to the stage from among the crowd. Re-designing appropriate costumes and ornaments for them has now become an urgent task and I have sought to introduce suitable patterns and colours for the sari and other apparel used by female characters. I have also tried to design a few ornaments to blend with those of the male characters. A number of early plays have stopped being performed and the costumes and make-up of characters like Vali, Hanuman, Jambava, Nandi and Garuda have been totally or partially forgotten. I am now making an attempt, with the help of veteran artists, to fill in this gap and introduce improvements in this sphere.

There is an enthusiasm for the 'new' and the 'latest' and many troupes have made it a point to stage novel and fanciful plays. But the writers seem to lack talent and shabby musical structures are produced as a result. They do not realize that new types of characters need intricate and well-designed costumes and make-up. Imitating the professional stage or the cinema will not help matters.

To get a clear picture of what Yakshagana is, all one has to do is to experience its artistic wealth. This rich variety cannot be expected of every troupe. Every play cannot fulfil a rigorous standard. Today the aesthetic elements of this theatre have been renounced by those votaries of the bizarre who have no sense of colour or harmony. Even so, there are a few temple troupes which still retain much of what is best in the old tradition.

The village audiences, who for centuries appreciated and patronised the traditional Yakshagana, now find it stale; their patronage has shifted to those cheap and garrulous productions that profess to be Yakshagana. Lack of aesthetic perception has contributed to this state of affairs. In earlier days, traditions were considered sacred and nobody dared to tamper with a given form. A more sensible government or the existence of discerning patrons could have helped in the task of preserving Yakshagana as a national asset. State troupes could have come into existence and this heritage (which is now in the hands of commercially-minded individuals and novelty-chasing audiences, who regard it as a form of escape) would have thus been conserved in its authentic state.

Iocaste

Sombhu Mitra

What kind of a person was Queen Iocaste and what was the nature of her relationship with Oedipus—these problems cropped up as soon as we embarked on the translation of Sophocles' play. And they were intensified during rehearsals.

One day during rehearsals we came to the part where Oedipus, plagued by doubt, asks the Queen how old Laius was and what he looked like. Iocaste answers him, "He was about your height and he looked a lot like you, too".

Now the problem was this: how were these lines to be said? Would the Queen speak these lines as though she was merely stating a fact? Or had this likeness struck her long ago? And if that was the case, why did she not say so before? Or perhaps it could be that she loved her first husband deeply and when she set her eyes on Oedipus and saw that he resembled him, she came to fall in love with him. But if that was the case, Iocaste must have mentioned the first king—Laius—from time to time. And that would imply that Oedipus already knew a great deal about King Laius. But that is not how it is in the play. On the contrary one gets the feeling that

even the name of Laius does not enter their conversation. When the circumstances surrounding Laius' death are conveyed to Oedipus, he hardly seems to register their import.

Can it be then that the Queen deliberately concealed the likeness? And if so, why? Because Oedipus might feel jealous? But then Oedipus himself makes a proclamation before an assembly of Thebans that he accepts his obligations to King Laius and will fulfil them,

> "just as though
> I were his son to press the fight for him".

In other words there is no hint of jealousy in Oedipus anywhere at all in the play. Moreover such marriages were not considered unusual in those days.

What then are we to make of this? That though Oedipus was not jealous, the Queen misread his nature and mistakenly kept from him all mention of Laius? But if this is so, then we also have to consider why it is that the Queen committed such a mistake. Did her experience of men teach her that all men tend to be jealous in this respect? That in the presence of one it is always best not to mention the other? But the only man she ever knew intimately was Laius. So?

What then was her understanding of Laius? And why today does she say that Laius was so like Oedipus? No woman who has had this doubt all along can ever make this mistake. On the contrary, to lull her present husband's jealousy will she not imply that there are no grounds for comparison between Oedipus and Laius? So where does that leave us?

During our rehearsals Tripti said these lines as though the resemblance between the two had suddenly struck Iocaste that very moment. And someone raised this pertinent query: how could she say her lines thus, almost as though Oedipus has not been in front of her eyes all this time?

Gradually as we discussed this problem, the contours of Iocaste's character began to take shape before us.

To begin with when the youthful Oedipus first entered the kingdom, Queen Iocaste was still young, certainly young enough for marriage. Otherwise the question of matrimony would not have arisen. In other words Oedipus must have been born when his mother was very young.

What was Laius' age then? Obviously, he was much older than Iocaste. For Oedipus speaks of him as one advanced in years which in turn implies a gap in years between Laius and Iocaste.

The events prior to the start of the play indicate that Laius was under a curse because he had harmed another. Learning from the oracle the nature of the curse, he gave his own infant son to a servant to be slain. But it was the young Iocaste's first experience of a mother's love. Certainly

it was not with a smiling face that Iocaste handed over her child to the killer. Nor could she have wept freely either—because the command to kill the infant came from her husband as an act of self-preservation.

Perhaps another experience of motherhood might have helped her to forget her sorrow. But fearing the threat to his own life, Laius would not consider such a possibility. As the days went by, the girl matured into a young woman; with the passage of time came the bloom of womanliness. But Laius, old in years, possibly refrained from even touching her for fear of fathering a son. Thus, avoiding her, he could never have satisfied the deep-rooted yearnings of young Iocaste nor tapped the springs of passion in her.

And, of course, Iocaste is hardly the sort of woman who will go to seek another man to satisfy her cravings.

In other words she is a woman who has suppressed all stirrings of youthful desire within herself; a woman, wan and withdrawn, who has fulfilled her duties towards her husband, her brother and all those who people the palace. Nor could this lonely, weary figure be aware of the degree of distaste which her husband roused in her. Accepting the moral laws governing the tenor of everyday life in those times, she took it for granted that men, fearing for their lives, would of necessity become selfish and cruel. But surely the woman and the mother within her could not bring herself to pardon her husband. Surely, disgusted by his selfishness and cruelty, she must have tried to avoid all contact with his person.

Such was this woman then—one who knew what it was to be a widow even while her husband lived. After all, what could she have possibly felt when they brought her news of his death? And when they talked of a re-marriage in the interests of the state, she must have consented out of a sense of duty. For by now the idea of marriage could have had no attraction for her.

But the man to whom she was now married turned out to be a totally different kind of husband. He was not at all selfish. He was a passionate and ardent lover. It was as though an unimaginable banquet of love was set before the famished Iocaste. Before she knew it, Iocaste had surrendered herself to the will of this brilliant, restless and impulsive husband. Impulsive, yes. Because this husband would both flare up in anger and calm down again with the same ease. His capacity to make love was as intense as his ability to harbour suspicion. He was so much like the petted child of adoring parents that despite all the love in the world he could still nurse a grievance and feel that he was being ignored. He always demanded "a little more". But once he was convinced that he was loved, he would trust in his wife completely like a child and grow to depend on her. Iocaste spent her days caring for such a husband, lavishing her affection on him. The past now seemed like an ugly dream. She did not even want to think of it.

So Iocaste, now middle-aged, has ripened into loveliness. And when Oedipus asks Iocaste about Laius, it is as if for the first time that

she summons up memories of this man from her past, a man she has almost wholly forgotten. The passage of time and her own present sense of fulfilment have obliterated all feelings of disgust or resentment towards the dead man. Perhaps it becomes natural for her to remember not the aged and selfish Laius but the Laius of long ago whom she first encountered on her wedding night. The resemblance between Laius and Oedipus suddenly dawns on her.

So Tripti had said her lines right. Everything fell into place.

But the train of our thought could not grind to a halt. We continued to feel that Iocaste was not merely an image of womanly fulfilment. Somewhere there was a touch of disquietude in her. Somehow one cannot visualise her as a serene person. Why should that be?

In the course of our discussion, it became clear that in the midst of all this happiness within Iocaste's heart lies a lurking fear which refuses to leave her. Ever since her first child was killed without reason, she lives in constant dread of what the future is likely to hold for her. That is why even now, surrounded by so much happiness, she feels the tremors of terror. She cannot believe that such happiness can ever be her lot. Fate had once snatched away from her lap her three-day old infant, as lovely as a doll. Fate would surely intervene once again and wrench this rare joy from her.

Unlike Oedipus, Iocaste cannot believe in her own good fortune. Fate has struck her once. She continues to live in fear of Fate.

Perhaps there have been nights when she has upbraided Fate: if you chose to give me this husband, why didn't you give him to me much earlier? When I was still young? Towards the end of the play, it is this feeling which is expressed when she speaks in agitation to Oedipus: "Fear? How much can a man fear? Our lives are but toys in the hands of unforeseeable circumstances. So what can a man do? He must survive as best he can, survive, whatever be the cost".

Perhaps Iocaste's mind has nothing to cling to, nothing to believe in. She feels a wild urge within her to live before becoming a victim in the hands of Fate. She wants to drink life to the lees as though it were wine or a concentrated potion and feel intoxicated at least for the time being. So it is today with so many whose desire to live is like an intoxication before they become victims of a Third World War.

When it slowly begins to dawn on Iocaste that Oedipus is her son, she tries desperately to hold him back. But she comes to a dead stop, even before she has touched him. Who is she about to touch? Her son? Her husband? In that instant the poetry of the drama of Iocaste's life reveals itself; its *abhinaya-vaibhava* surpasses ordinary comprehension. Afterwards when she holds Oedipus's face cupped in her two hands, she becomes ultimately the mother. With this gesture Iocaste inexorably pronounces a death sentence on herself.

This is, for us, the tragic tale of Iocaste.

From *Prasanga: Natya*
(Translated from the original Bengali by Ashok Shahane).

Duke Ellington (1899-1974)

The Anatomy of Jazz

John Wiggin

(This is the text of a talk recently given in Bombay. It has been reproduced verbatim, complete with the references to the discs and tapes used.)

We're here to talk about jazz—a subject which delights me and, I hope, delights you. It's an enormous subject, of course. We could meet everyday for three months and talk about nothing but Duke Ellington. The library of jazz that has built up since about the year 1910 is simply enormous, and all we can do today is hit the highlights—have sort of a pan-tasting, trying a little bit of this kind and a little bit of that.

I assume that all of us here like music, American and Indian music both. This includes me, for the first piece of music I ever learned was a lullaby my ayah sang to me many years ago in Bombay where I was born. I've never forgotten it. It goes like this:

Nini, Baba, Nini!
Roti, mukkan, chini!

Swings, doesn't it?

I am not an authority on jazz—I haven't published any books or monographs on the subject. I have simply lived the subject. I'm about the same age as jazz, and I have been a part of the jazz movement ever since I was about eleven years old, and I trust I will continue to be as long as Fate permits.

What is jazz? You may remember that an old lady is supposed to have asked that question of Louis Armstrong, or was it Fats Waller? Anyway, the answer was: "Lady, if you don't know what jazz is, you never will know". I really don't think either Satchmo or Fats ever said that; they were both too gentle. Furthermore, such an answer implies that jazz is too difficult or too esoteric for any but very special people to play or even appreciate.

That, of course, is not true, because very early in the game, jazz spread rapidly all over the world, reached and maintained great popularity. And many people outside the United States became fine jazz musicians.

But, jazz *is* hard to define—it is so subjective, so personal. I think it may be called a Music. Or even more correctly, a Way of Playing Music. There is *composed* jazz—Gershwin, Harold Arlen, Hoagy Carmichael, Duke Ellington and a host of great orchestrators-arrangers have proven that. But some of the most memorable jazz performances have developed from simple popular ballads.

It is a Way of Playing Music. But where did this way come from? What is the origin of jazz?

Well, I agree with many authorities that jazz has a number of ancestors. It developed in America, a land of immigrants. And the several cultural strains of the several kinds of immigrants all contributed. The North English balladry of the earliest colonists, the fervent hymns of the later Evangelical Protestants, nineteenth-century French light opera, Spanish folk-rhythms, turn-of-the-century brass bands. But above all, the rhythms, the vocal mannerisms, the emotional expression of the black Americans whose ancestors were brought from West Africa to live as slaves in the two American continents.

The musical anthropologists and folk-lorists have traced down some of these slave vocalizings, and they obviously are predictions of jazz.

Here are some brief excerpts of field shouts—"hollers", they were called—and play song and a work song:

MUSIC: 1. Hollers

a. Cornfield
b. Quittin Time
c. I'm Going Up North
d. Hammer, Ring

There were syncopation, a strong beat, the vocal slurring of certain notes in the diatonic scale that produced what people later on called the Blue Note. And the Blue Note is all-important to the musical form called the "Blues" which developed from those Field Hollers.

The classical Blues consists of two lines of verse that rhyme, with the first line repeated. "I hate to see that evening sun go down"—repeat "I hate to see that evening sun go down"—now, conclusion "cause my baby, *he done lef'* dis town". "He done lef'" are all sung on the Blue Note. Each line takes four measures of music, twelve measures in all.

That primitive vocalizing and the Blue Note took on a definite musical form, the classical twelve-measure blues when sung by the great Bessie Smith. It won't be the St. Louis Blues—I like her "Reckless Blues" better.

MUSIC: 2. Bessie Smith

During the nineteenth century, the transplanted Africans, before and after emancipation, embraced the Evangelical Protestantism of the pioneers, the mountaineers, the poor whites. The plantation-owners were Episcopalians with cool, dignified hymns. But the Baptists and Methodists of the Southern uplands had a fervent hymnology, emotional, turbulent. The Black Americans were right at home in this atmosphere. They added their strong beat, their syncopation, their Blue Note and produced the so-called Negro Spiritual.

Here is an excerpt sung by the late Mahalia Jackson.

MUSIC: 3. Mahalia Jackson.

Ancestors of jazz!

You're probably all familiar with the legend that jazz was invented in New Orleans, went up the river to Chicago and there became world-famous. This is not untrue, but it's not the whole story.

By 1885, Negro musicians were composing a syncopated, highly stylized music for the piano, which they called Ragtime. The greatest of these composers was Scott Joplin, born in Texas, lived in St. Louis, Missouri, moved to Sedalia, Missouri, where he played the piano at the Maple Leaf Club, and where he composed the world-famous "Maple Leaf Rag".
MUSIC: 4 "Maple Leaf Rag"

From that excerpt, I think it is obvious that Ragtime was an ancestor, and a close one, of jazz, but it was limited to written music, written exclusively for the piano. It did not have the freedom, the improvisation that distinguishes jazz. At all events, Ragtime was in full swing as late as 1914, when the young jazz movement began to crowd it out.

By now, all the various influences had come together—the old English ballads, the Protestant hymns, the field shouts, the work songs, the Spanish rhythms, from New Orleans and Cuba, the strong beat, the syncopation, the Blue Note. And the French influence was pointed out by that fantastic New Orleans creole, Jelly Roll Morton, when he traced the derivation of the famous "Tiger Rag" back to a French quadrille.

It's hard to get away from New Orleans, but I must emphasize that New Orleans was not the only place where it was all happening. There was a ferment going on in Texas, in Missouri, in Memphis, Tennessee, in San Francisco, California, in New York, in Boston. The whole country was a smoking volcano, ready to erupt at any moment. And when the action flared in New Orleans, it set off flares in the other cities, and we had jazz. My opinion is that New Orleans was the place where they "put it all together", so to speak. The legend has it that after the Civil War, the Union Army went home and left a quantity of band instruments behind. That the Blacks picked up these instruments and taught themselves to play them.

Without teachers to show them how to produce pure tones on, say, the trumpet, the Blacks produced unorthodox tones with unorthodox fingering and embouchures. They taught themselves to play the trumpet the way they sang—vibrato, Blue Note and all. New Orleans strutted to the sounds of the street bands.
MUSIC: 5 New Orleans Street Band

Certainly, New Orleans developed the first heroes. Buddy Bolden's trumpet could be heard for miles, they said, and Jelly Roll Morton played his pioneering jazz, and so did those other creoles, A. J. Piron, Alphonse Picou and Papa Celestin. And it is true that Fate Marable organized bands that played on the steam boats that puffed up the Mississippi to St. Louis, where Scott Joplin had played ragtime, and even up to Davenport, Iowa

where a skinny kid named Bix Beiderbecke went down to the river and listened with awe to the trumpets of King Oliver and the young Louis Armstrong. And it is true that King Oliver and Louis Armstrong went to Chicago and rattled the windows on the South Side.

But even before that, in 1915, Tom Brown, a white man, took a five-man group to Chicago, which was billed as "Brown's Band from Dixieland". They were a sensation and Chicago wanted them back. But Brown couldn't go, so an illiterate Italian trumpet-player named Nick La Rocca took up a rival group, which he called "The Original Dixieland Jass Band", and they were an even bigger sensation. By 1918, they were playing in New York, in 1919 in London. In 1922 I brought their records to Bombay. The Original Dixieland Jazz Band, now spelled with two zeds. They sound crude and monotonous, now, but in their time they were a revolution, the spearhead of a movement that was to conquer most of the world.
MUSIC: 6. O D J B

Crude and monotonous they were, but I can remember the exhilaration they inspired in me. I listened avidly to their records, and to the little Jazz bands that sprang up around Boston, where I was going to school at the time. But about now, New York began to wake up. The ground had been prepared there by a talented young Negro who bore the curious name of Europe—James Reese Europe. Jim Europe founded a group called the Clef Club, to encourage budding talent among Negroes. When the United States entered the First World War, Jim Europe enlisted in the 369th New York Infantry, and organized a regimental band which became famous, toured Europe, in fact, after the War. Europe toured Europe. Unfortunately, Jim Europe died quite young. However, Eubie Blake, who had played piano with him, carried on into the 1920s when New York became a jazz-piano town.

James P. Johnston played his wonderful splay-handed piano and taught the great Fats Waller, who in turn would influence the fabulous Art Tatum.
MUSIC: 7. Johnston
Waller
Tatum

I got a little ahead of my chronology, there. Tatum was in the 1930s, and we're still in the twenties. There was another pianist, in New York, who would soon be heard from as a band-leader, Fletcher Henderson. And in Washington, D.C., a youth named Edward Kennedy Ellington was already beginning to show the drive and originality that would carry him to fame and earn him the coronet of a Duke. We'll hear both these men soon, but in the meantime, an unhappy thing happened to our revolution. There was a counter-revolution.

The jazz of the early twenties was too violent, too vulgar—too vital—for the public taste. Some shrewd musicians compromised. They kept the beat of jazz, and some of the novel effects, but they toned down the noise and in so doing, they threw away the musical validity. These men—Art Hickman, Eddie Elkins, Vincent Lopez, Guy Lombardo, and Paul Whiteman—they called their

music sweet jazz, or even more preposterous, Symphonic Jazz. This pseudo-jazz got a great shot in the arm when Paul Whiteman in 1924 commissioned George Gershwin to write an extended piece of music for a proposed symphonic concert. It was strictly a publicity stunt from start to finish, but Gershwin's composition was the "Rhapsody in Blue", and the whole world took notice. The publicity stunt did its job. Unfortunately, the cause of real jazz was set back for about ten years.

Let's listen for a few seconds to the introduction to the Gershwin "Rhapsody", that wild clarinet glissando
MUSIC: 8. "Rhapsody in Blue" Whiteman

The "Rhapsody" had guts, and some true jazz, but the dance-band leaders led by Whiteman played their antiseptic pseudo-jazz. Like this:
MUSIC: 9. "Whispering" Whiteman

With pseudo-jazz riding high and commanding the popular music market, jazz went underground. The jazzmen found neither fame nor fortune, but they played for their own happiness, and kept a small, but devoted audience. I have to confess that I was taken in by the pseudo-jazz. I loved the Gershwin "Rhapsody" and I bought Paul Whiteman's records as fast as he could make them. But fate intervened. In my last year of college, I ran into money trouble, and had to get a job. I went to work in a music shop, selling sheet music and phonograph records. One day in a back room of the shop, I found some records by people I had never heard of, and that the customers of the shop had never heard of either.

I heard Bessie Smith for the first time and Clara Smith and Ethel Waters. I heard Louis Armstrong and Bix Beiderbecke, Jimmie Noone, Johnny Dodds and Baby Dodds. Here is Bix playing "Louisiana" with Min Leibrook on bass saxophone. Roy Bargy, the pianist, was engaged for the recording date, but young Lenny Hayton came along for fun and played the top end of the 2-piano chorus. At the end of the number, Lenny went over to a broken-down organ and played an unrehearsed coda.
MUSIC: 10. Louisiana Bix

So the revolution was still there, but underground. The market was small for Bix's records. Try as I could in that music shop. I couldn't find many buyers for Bix; as for Armstrong, he probably wouldn't have been recorded at all except for the Negro Market. Thank goodness for the Negro Market.

Now, what to select to show the early Armstrong? I think "West End Blues" is the best exposition of his trumpet virtuosity. Let's roll it.
MUSIC: 11. "West End Blues" Armstrong

By 1928 Henderson and Ellington had really developed well. Fletcher, who had Armstrong for a while, but replaced him with Red Allen, and had the young man on tenor saxophone named Coleman Hawkins, who became so great—Fletcher had Don Redman making arrangements, but Fletcher was his

own best arranger. He took some of the precision and discipline of the white bands, but he kept it honest, he kept it jazz. When I first heard "Henderson Stomp", I immediately imagined a modern sort of ballet: the clarinets were the pretty black girls, the brass represented the male dancers. The solo piano was the spangled prima ballerina, and the solo trumpet was the leading male dancer, strutting in a white evening suit.
MUSIC: 12. "Henderson Stomp"

Ellington was slightly looser, slightly more relaxed. He liked primitive effects, muted trumpets, mysterious low-register clarinets. "Black and Tan Fantasy".
MUSIC: 13. "Black and Tan Fantasy"

Other names on those records in the back room were the Dorsey Brothers, Miff Mole, Benny Goodman, Jack Teagarden, Joe Venuti, Zutty Singleton, Earl Hines, Ethel Waters.

In 1929, the year the Great Depression began, I went to New York and got a job with the National Broadcasting Company as a specialist in popular music. I, of course, looked up all the heros whose records I'd been listening to, and was shocked to find them without recognition and in some cases without jobs. I found out what it meant to be underground. The National Broadcasting Company had never heard of these great jazz men. The company, in fact, was still living in the world of Paul Whiteman and Vincent Lopez.

I was pretty young to have much influence on the programming policies of NBC, but I did what I could for jazz. I put the Original Memphis Five on the air, I got McKenzie and Condon a limited engagement. I got auditions for Fats Waller and a young singer named Bing Crosby. Unfortunately, nothing came of them, but it was a beginning. When a big orchestra—a really big one—was being put together for a program advertising Camel cigarettes, I was instrumental in getting Bix into it, as well as Tommy Dorsey, Joe Venuti, and Lenny Hayton. One week I featured a pure jazz spot on this Camel Show, with Bix, Tommy, Lenny and guest artists Benny Goodman and Gene Krupa. Camel cigarettes were made by Southerners in North Carolina, and the makers nearly took their program away from NBC because of the "Negro-Style" music played by my white group. I felt complimented.

I should note here something of the personality of Bix Beiderbecke. I knew him well during the last year of his life. A tall, round-faced young man, he was introspective, shy, and modest to a fault. As far as I knew, he never took drugs, but he drank desperately just to face a world he really didn't think he was able to. We all tried to help him, but his self-deprecation was a constant barrier. I told him once that one day people would write books about him, as indeed they did.

He looked at me in genuine amazement. "Why should they?" he said. "For so many reasons", I said. "For example, I would write about you that your improvisations were architectural". "You really think they are?" Bix said, "That's what I try to do, but I fail so often---". What can you do with such invincible

modesty? Bix wrecked his body, wrecked it, in fact. He died at the age of twenty-seven. The official cause of death was pneumonia. But Eddy Condon said, "Bix died of everything".

A couple of years later, I hand-picked a little band for a summer program, which included Artie Shaw, Bunny Berigan, Adrian Rollini and Claude Thornhill. This group improvised all their tunes except one each broadcast which was always arranged by Glenn Miller.

I did some missionary work, too, talking up Benny Goodman, Jack Teagarden, Red Norvo and Mildred Bailey, and the whole idea of jazz. A few kindred souls did likewise, and among us, we unquestionably influenced events.

At any rate . . . as the years went by, the United States began to recover economically, and in 1934, jazz began to lift its head above ground. By this time, jazz was attaining a maturity, a variety, a musicality, which, combined with its original drive propelled it outward and upward into public recognition. Records made by small studio groups began to sell. One of the solidest of these was "Beale St. Blues" as played and sung by Jack Teagarden. Joe Venuti and Benny Goodman were there too.
MUSIC: 14. "Beale St. Blues"

Many people have speculated on the origin of the word "jazz". I have never found an explanation that satisfied me, and I have no shrewd guess to make myself. I do think it is curious that the noun "jazz", and the adjective "jazz"—as in "jazz band" are descriptive and respectable. But even in today's free-and-easy society, with today's permissiveness, the verb "to jazz" is not quite acceptable in polite company.

Leaving New York and going back to Chicago, King Oliver and Louis Armstrong had exerted such a powerful influence that a number of young white men went into jazz with an enthusiasm that created a style, an urgent, headlong way of playing that was called "Chicago style" for a while and then gradually became known as Traditional or Dixieland jazz. Eddy Condon on rhythm guitar, Bud Freeman and Mezz Mezzrow on the tenor saxophone, Frank Teschmacher and Benny Goodman on clarinet, Earl Hines, Joe Sullivan and Jess Stacy on piano, Jimmy McPartland and Wild Bill Davison on trumpet, all figured prominently in the Chicago movement. I think a good illustration of the style is Eddy Condon's record of Gershwin's tune, "Lady Be Good".
MUSIC: 15. "Lady Be Good" Condon

The year 1935 saw the sudden emergence of jazz. Almost overnight, jazz won universal acceptance by Americans—for the first time since the Counter-Revolution of 1924. I say, acceptance by Americans, because jazz through those lean years in the United States, had enjoyed great popularity abroad. The first book ever written on jazz was by a Belgian, Robert Goffin, the second, by a Frenchman, Hugues Panassie. The first encyclopaedia of jazz was compiled by an Englishman, Leonard Feather, and he is still the standard reference. But in 1935, everything happened. Benny Goodman, a thrifty, cautious man plunged and organized a big band. The enterprise floundered

for some months, and was on the brink of disaster, until one night in Los Angeles, a chemical reaction took place, and a dignified dance crowd turned into a screaming mob.

Other musicians took heart, and the Dorseys, Glenn Miller and a host of others, many of whom had very little feeling for jazz, organized big bands, and jazz came back to its home. A publicity agent working on a catchy title for Benny Goodman, came up with "The King of Swing", and thereafter Big Band Jazz was called "Swing", and the next eleven years, 1935-1946, are known in jazz history as the Swing Era. In a way, it's a misleading term, because there was plenty of Little Jazz alongside the Swing Bands. One long city block on West 52nd Street in the heart of Manhattan spawned a dozen or more intimate night clubs, where small jazz groups flourished. The Onyx Club, Hickory House, The Famous Door, Jimmy Ryan's, and many others provided appropriate settings for Joe Marsala, Louis Prima, John Kirby, Stuff Smith, Jonah Jones, Bunny Berigan, Charlie Shavers.

It was a good time to live. I counted among my good friends, Benny Goodman, both Dorseys, Bunny Berigan, Glenn Miller, Fats Waller, and Chick Webb. When I wasn't at Hickory House listening to Joe Marsala's clarinet and his wife Adele Girard, and her jazz harp, I was at the Onyx Club listening to Art Tatum. Or I was up in Harlem at the Savoy Ballroom listening to Chick Webb and his buxom young singer, Ella Fitzgerald. I was there the night Count Basie arrived from Kansas City and the Middle West for his first engagement in the east. The Police Department had to call out the reserves to control the tremendous crowd. I danced with Ella to the music of this highly touted band. I said to her, "They're pretty good, aren't they?" But Ella was loyal to Chick. "Yeh", she said, "they're all right".

It was a good time to live.

I think we have time for only about three swing numbers—I don't like to excerpt them. So first, Benny Goodman playing Fletcher Henderson's arrangement of "King Porter Stomp".
MUSIC: 16. "King Porter Stomp" Goodman

Here I have to shoe-horn in that little Ellington masterpiece, "Concerto for Cootie" in which Cootie Williams and Rex Stewart contend for the honors.
MUSIC: 17. "Concerto for Cootie"

And now the second or third version of Bill Basie's "One O'Clock Jump".
MUSIC: 18. "One O'Clock Jump"

In the words of Ira Gershwin, who could ask for anything more?

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The Second World War came and went. It did not hurt jazz. If anything, it helped it. The normal hedonism of a time of war—the short life and a merry—

prevailed, and the big bands and the combos prospered. Some jazz figures went into uniform, and all of them participated in one way or another. Glenn Miller, of course, went to France and his plane went down in the English Channel. Many musicians came back from the War with wider horizons, and began to think of new directions to go in jazz. But actually, jazz had already started to travel in a new direction. In fact, as the Second World War ended, jazz was undergoing a revolution. A group of young musicians, mostly blacks, had been gathering for late-late jam-sessions at Minton's Night Club in Harlem, the black quarter of New York City, and they were evolving a revolutionary style which eventually became known as "re-bop", "be-bop", or just plain "bop". These were gifted musicians, with great technical virtuosity, and their new fashions were compelling, if not irresistible. Dizzie Gillespie on trumpet; Charlie-Yardbird-Parker on alto saxophone; Thelonious Monk on piano; Max Roach and Kenny Clarke on drums: they developed a nervous glittering style. Gillespie and Parker were full of invention and delighted in long, elaborate phrases. The drummers kept a steady beat only on the ride-cymbal, while they produced oddly-accented, eccentric beats on bass drum and side drums.

In selecting a performance to illustrate this revolution, I found one of the best ones was not made by Gillespie but by the late Clifford Brown, a man of magnificent talent, whose tragic death was a great loss to jazz. The drummer is Kenny Clarke.
MUSIC: 19. "Get Happy"

The Bop Revolution deserves much fuller treatment than we have time for here. For one thing, it was not purely a musical phenomenon. There were sociological implications. The Gillespies and Clifford Browns were bright, alert young men. They may not have been college graduates, but they were highly articulate, and they wanted to elevate their music above the level of providing casual amusement or rhythms for dancing. They wanted to be taken seriously, as professional musicians. More than that, they were in the vanguard of the civil rights movement, demanding respect for all Americans regardless of racial ancestry. In most ways, the Bop Movement was wholly admirable, but in one or two directions, it had drawbacks. For one thing, it over-intellectualized jazz. This is my personal view, and there are many people who would challenge me.

At all events, the Bop Movement left its indelible imprint on jazz. Thelonious Monk intellectualized the piano considerably as we can see as he plays his best known composition, "Around About Midnight".
MUSIC: 20. "Around About Midnight" Monk

Even before Bop, there was a tendency toward "cooling" jazz, making it less emotional, more detached. Lester Young, who came to town with Count Basie as one of his two tenor saxophonists, was one of the first to cool jazz off. To illustrate this, I'll play some "hot jazz" by the great Coleman Hawkins. His style was romantic, warm, enthusiastic, vibrant. Here is Coleman Hawkins.
MUSIC: 21. Coleman Hawkins

Lester Young was cool, detached, almost pessimistic. He cut away from Hawk's majestic, throbbing style, and, using very little vibrato, produced what came to be called "cool jazz". So let's listen to Lester Young, assisted by Ellis Larkin on the piano, Dicky Wells on trombone and the great Jo Jones on drums. They play Gershwin's "I Got Rhythm".
MUSIC: 22 Lester Young—"I Got Rhythm"

Cool jazz was, in one way, a logical consequence of bop, most particularly because of its understatement, its detachment, its intellectuality. Cool jazz took itself very seriously and expected everybody else to do so. Miles Davis, Gerry Mulligan, Shorty Rogers, Chet Baker were prime exponents. It made great headway in California, which, because of the movie and television industry, is always crawling with fine musicians. It was even called West Coast Jazz.

For an example, here is Gerry Mulligan, the great baritone saxophonist, with Bob Brookmeyer, trombone and Chet Baker, trumpet. It's called K4-Pacifica and Gerry has orchestrated it tightly for ten instruments.
MUSIC: 23 K4—Pacifica.

I said the War did not hurt Jazz—but the inevitable post-War economic depression hit Jazz badly, especially the big bands.

The Goodmans and the Dorseys had enormous payrolls to meet. They employed star instrumentalists at very high salaries. They carried star vocalists, and star vocal groups. A band leader could very well have eighteen musicians, plus four or five vocalists. There were usually two arrangers attached to the band, and to handle logistics, there was a road manager, at least two band-boys, and a bus driver and the leader had a dresser—show-business term for valet.

When things were humming, the gate receipts at the theatres and the big dance pavilions paid for everything. But by 1946, the dance pavilions began to lose their patrons, and theatre attendance began to fall off steeply. One by one the big bands disbanded until just four were left—Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Stan Kenton—and he, off and on—and Woody Herman. They were and are all great bands, but I have an especial affection for the Woody Herman Band of 1946, the so-called First Herd, because I was their radio producer, and knew most of them well. The group was famous for their wild "head arrangements" and I'd like to play one now—"Apple Honey".
MUSIC: 24 "Apple Honey"

If one of you were to say: thanks for all that ancient history but how about discussing jazz since 1946? I would have to admit that I have neglected the more recent music. I would have to admit that I haven't discussed great trumpet-players as such, or guitarists, or trombonists or modern pianists—or the great singers. I mentioned that I had known Ella Fitzgerald when she was young. She's another modest one. She is that rare phenomenon, an artist who never had any driving ambition, but who was propelled to stardom, in spite of herself, by her enormous talent. Listen to the way

she sings the "C-Jam Blues" with Ellington—she calls it "Take Me Down to Duke's Place".
MUSIC: 25 "Duke's Place" Ella

Let me bow briefly to some modern saxophonists who deserve a great deal more consideration than we have time for. I have left out Stan Getz, because he became so indelibly associated with Bossa Nova. I personally love Bossa Nova, because it's really the Samba, which I learned to love when I lived in Brazil. But Bossa Nova left no imprint on jazz, so I'm moving on to the tenor man who by 1958 had attained a reputation equal to Getz's, and who has had an equally profound influence on other tenor saxophonists. I am speaking of Sonny Rollins, the thinking man's tenor sax. You may remember his self-imposed retirement, or exile, from public performance, after which he came back stronger and more brilliant than ever before. He had been a hard bop man, then briefly an experimentalist, then finally settled on a rich style, very aware, cynical, crude when necessary, humorous, and sometimes even beautiful. We'll sample a little bit of his song called "Tuning Up".
MUSIC: 26 "Tuning Up" Rollins

The trouble with this attempt of mine to compress the world of jazz into one session, is that I keep running into extraordinary figures who each deserve whole evenings devoted to consideration of their lives and their music. Just think—Bessie, Mahalia, Bix, Satchmo, Fats, Fletcher, the Duke, Big Teagarden, Benny Goodman, Count Basie, Woody, Hawk,—Well, I've at least sampled them. So many others I have barely mentioned, or not mentioned at all, Ethel Waters, Red Nichols, Miff Mole, Adrian Rollini, Bunny Berigan, Gillespie, Parker, Tadd Dameron, Frank Newton, Mary Lou Williams—I could go on and on. I say all this because in John Coltrane I come to another complex, rich personality, a man who has become a cult-hero to many people. I was not among them, because "Trane's" avant-gardism hasn't always aroused my undivided enthusiasm. But John Coltrane is a much more important figure than John Higgin, and I regret that I can only spare the time for a two minute sample. Here is John playing not tenor, but the soprano saxophone.
MUSIC: 27 "My Favorite Things" Coltrane

We have still another cult-hero to go, in the person of Ornette Coleman. "Free Jazz" was his war cry, and like so many moderns, he tended to go on and on. Some listeners thought he was amazing, others thought he was a bore. But Charlie Mingus said, "I think Ornette is really an old-fashioned alto player". I like this little excerpt. Perhaps you will, too.
MUSIC: 28 Ornette Coleman

Dave Brubeck was the beloved of the American university students in the 1950s. Nowadays, he is criticized for being a bad pianist, pretentious and *un*jazzlike. I disagree. I think he has been an enormously influential figure in jazz—a beneficial one. I love him personally and artistically and I'm very proud that I was instrumental in bringing him to India in 1958. After the trip, he saluted India with a single-line composition called"Calcutta Blues". Maybe, you're familiar with it. Here's an excerpt.
MUSIC: 29 "Calcutta Blues"

When the Brubeck Quartet was in Madras, I arranged for them to spend an afternoon at All-India Radio with Indian Musicians. One of the great *mridangam*-players of the day, Shri Palani Subramania Pillai, found the jazz drumming of Joe Morello quite understandable. A lot of the afternoon was spent with the two percussionists. Here is a sample.
MUSIC: 30 Morello and Subramania Pillai

While we're on American jazz salutes to India, let's listen to a sombre little mood piece, which Duke Ellington wrote after his trip here. It's called "Agra".
MUSIC: 31 "Agra" Duke Ellington

Miles Dewey Davis, once in the front ranks of bop, later became averse to avant-gardists, is nowadays dabbling in some experimental music. This is an example. He has Wayne Shortes, Chick Corea and John McGlaughlin with him among others. The piece is entitled a Medley—Gemini and Double Image. The cover of the album is so experimental I can't make out what it's called.
MUSIC: 31 & 32 Medley—Gemini and Double Image—Miles Davis

Don Ellis has been called an extension of Stan Kenton, and, in a way, he may be but he is really much more. His experimentation has been soundly based in Western musical values, and at the same time he has used the Indian pedal-point bass intelligently. This could have resulted from his having founded the Hindustani Jazz Sextet in Los Angeles with Hari Har Rao (1964).

Let me play you a short version of Don Ellis's "Indian Lady".
MUSIC: 33 "Indian Lady" Don Ellis

To finish off our session I am going to play a tape by a college band—a big band.

There are at least seven hundred university and college bands in the United States, all of them as good as this band you're going to hear, from the University of Ilinois. In addition, there are somewhere between seventeen thousand and thirty thousand high-school jazz groups. As you will hear, these young musicians are very good. There is a lot of excellent experimentation going on in the college as you can imagine. However, I thought we would close out our session with a relaxed swing-era number. The University of Illinois Jazz Band plays "The Lunceford Touch".
MUSIC: 34 "The Lunceford Touch" Univ. of Illinois

Ladies and Gentlemen, that is the end of my presentation.

The Rasleela of Manipur

Guru Bipin Singh

Tradition has it that the people of Manipur are descended from the celestial *gandharvas* and that music and dance are interwoven in the very fabric of their lives. Dance and music form part of the entreaty for a child and essential components of the *Annaprashana*, *Karnavedha* and *Upanayana* ceremonies. On these occasions Sankirtana has to be performed. When the child is a ltle older, it plays Krishna, Radha or Gopi during the Rasleela. There is Sankirtana during a wedding ceremony or even for the Shraddha rites. The spirit of Vaishnavism pervades the life of the people and gives an enhanced meaning to their existence.

Rasleela is one of their most developed dance forms. It is a faithful expression of the religious and artistic sensibility of the people. The form incorporates all the four modes of histrionic representation (*abhinaya*): *Aharya*, *Vachika*, *Angika* and *Satvika*. It embraces both the *Nritya* and *Nritta* elements in *Nartana* and has in it *Lasya* as well as *Tandava*

In the ancient texts on dance Rasleela is referred to as *Rasaka*, one of the *Uparupakas* (minor forms of dance-drama). There is an elaborate account of the form in Vaishnava texts like the *Bhaktiratnakara*, *Govindaleela-mritam*, *Krishnabhavanamritam* and other works.

Gopis performing the Achouba Bhangi Pareng *in* Maharas

Six Rasleelas are usually performed in Manipur on different occasions *Maharas* is held on the full moon night of Kartik; the story is based on the *Raspanchadyaya* in the *Shrimad Bhagvata*. *Vasantras* celebrates spring and takes place on the full moon night of Chaitra. Krishna plays Holi with Radha and the Gopis; he pleads with the offended Radha and begs to be forgiven.

A sequence from Nityaras

Krishna and Balrama in Goparas.

An open-air sequence in Goparas

Nityaras is played at any time of the year and pure dance and music predominate in it. *Kunjaras* is usually performed in Ashvin and it describes Krishna's sports in a particular *Kunja*. *Goparas* concentrates on the exploits of Krishna and the Gopas. *Ulukhalras* has for its theme Krishna's childhood pranks like stealing the butter or breaking the pots of curd.

The performing arena is the *Rasmandala*. The spectators crowd round the artists on three sides, and a feeling of kinship and intimacy prevails. Krishna and Radha seem to them like real deities The spectators' eyes brim with tears of joy and devotion; they touch the feet of the main dancers in obeisance.

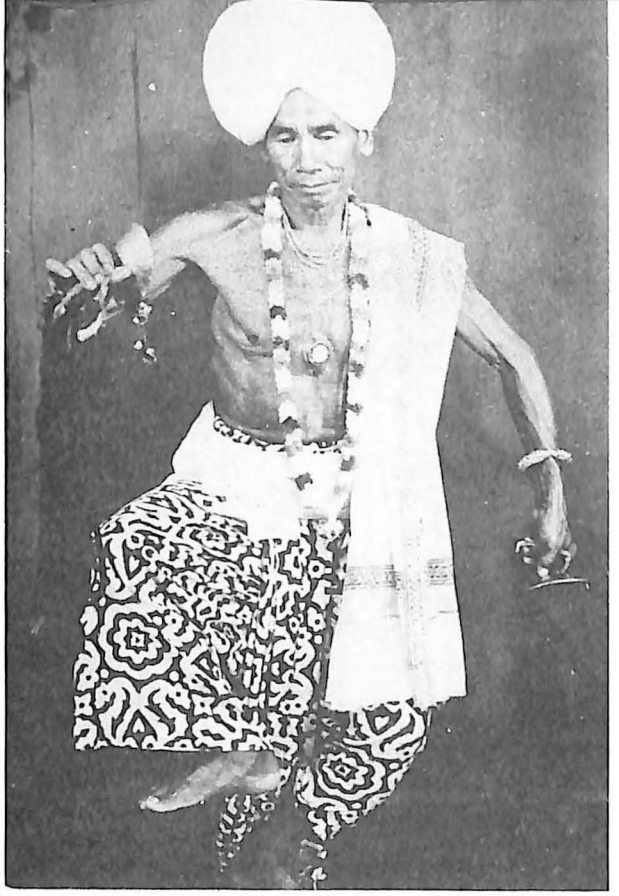
Rasleela has to be danced first in Govindji's temple and on fixed days. After this, it can be performed in the other temples of Manipur both in the towns and villages. Each lane has one or two temples. Rasleela is performed in the courtyard in front of the temple. It lasts for about eight to ten hours. It is often arranged by parents who have pledged before God to dress their children in the costume of Krishna or Radha or the main Gopi Krishna is expected to be very young, a mere child So in the actual performance the part of Krishna is played by a six or seven year old boy or girl. Radha is always played by a girl of the same age group. Rasleela

A sequence from Ulukhalras

begins at about nine at night and continues till the early hours of the morning. The onlookers sit through the performance, in a mood of religious fervour. The aesthetic sensibility of the spectators is so pronounced that if someone is impressed by the artistic talent of the performer, he immediately rushes to the *Rasmandala*, and bends down in obeisance before the artist and presents a piece of cloth as a mark of appreciation.

Rasdharis, that is the dance gurus, teach the young girls for about six months. The guru knows the music and texts of the songs; he can play the drum and, of course, he is an expert in dance. He has also to train the musicians. The sequences of the Rasleela are fixed. But the *Rasdharis* have the freedom to create music and dance compositions. Sometimes they select songs from Bengali Vaishnava Padavalis and sometimes they compose new songs. Songs are recited in old Bengali, Maithili, Brajbuli, Sanskrit and even in Meitei. They include the compositions of devotional poets like Narottamdasa, Gyandasa, Vidyapati, Govinddasa and Jaydeva.

Songs are sometimes sung by the Gopis or by the characters; but the linking or descriptive music is usually sung by two *Sutradharis*. They keep time with brass cymbals. There are two drummers; one is the *Rasdhari* and the other supports him. There is a flute player and a conch player. The conch is played at the beginning of the Rasleela to create a serene atmosphere and to draw the spectators' attention towards God.



Guru Th. Chouba Singh in Kartal Cholom

Guru S. Meitei Tomba Singh in Pung Cholom

Sutradhari *Kshetri Tombi Devi demonstrating a* mudra *in* Nityaras

Guru Bipin Singh demonstrating a pose from Khurumba Bhangi Pareng

The *Mridanga* (*Pung*) accompanies the dance and dance movements are composed to accord with the syllables of this instrument. The trunk of the drum is made out of the wood of jackfruit, the mango or the *vang* tree. The right side is a smaller round than the left. The *pung* tapers in the centre. On both its sides it is covered with the leather of the wild she-calf. The ends are tightly joined by stripes made from the leather of the wild cow. The syllables of the right side (मनाउ) are: तेन, तांग्, ताँ, तत्, त्र, त्रेन्

Those of the left (मरू) are: घीन , घीत् , खीत्

The syllables of both the hands together are:

धेन , धा , धत् , थेन , थत्, ग्रग्र ,
खरत्र , ग्रगांग्, थीत् , ग्रांग्

The syllables are composed and played to suit the mood of the dance. There are innumerable *talas* and rhythm patterns in both the Rasleelas and the Sankirtana. The Sankirtana is danced by males with a drum and huge cymbals. It forms the prologue to the Rasleela. It is an invocation. The *talas* range from four beats to sixty-eight beats. The commonly used *talas* are *Tanchep* (4 beats), *Menkup* (6 beats), *Chautala* (12 beats), *Tintala Macha* (7 beats), *Rupakkata* (10 beats), *Chartala* (14 beats), *Rajmel* (7 or 14 beats), *Brahma-tala* (28 beats), *Tintala Achouba* (8 beats), *Chali* (8 beats) The *Tevda* has 7 beats and 3 stresses:

परींग धेन तेन तांग् | ताँता खिता | घीन्ता घीन्ता
+ 2 3

अलंकार

(२) धेघीन ताता धेघीन ताता खीता ताघीन धेघीन
ताता खीता धेघीन ताता खीता घीन्ता घीन्ता

(२) धेघीनताता धेघीनताता खीताताघीन धेघीनताता
खीताधेघीन तातास्वीता घीन्ताघीन्ता

(२) धेघीन -ताता धेघीन -ताता खीता -ताघीन धेघीन
-ताता खीता -धेघीन ताता -खीता घीन्ता -घीन्ता

The *tala* system of Manipur has for it's basis the technical divisions enunciated in the *shastras*. A composition of *tala* with other elements of song is known as a *Prabandha*. A *tala* with a combination of more than one *tala* is known as *Tala Prabandha*. Such compositions are commonly used in the Sankirtana. *Dipani Jati Prabandha* has four elements:

पद, स्वर, पाट , ताल

पद = स्वर मंडल बाजत
पाट = थोधिक कतनक धमिनताक धमिनताक धा

पद = राधाकृष्ण दुहुमेली खेले
कोई कोई सरखीघन सारीगम गावे
प्यारी मोहिनी धरत ताल
ललित त्रिभंग मृदंग बाजाय

स्वर= रेरे रेसा सासा सासा नीनी नीध नीसारे
रेरे रेसा सासा सासा नीनी नीध नीसारे

पप गम सुललित ताल तनके तुम
पाट = तन नन ननन यललो यललुं

Tala Tanchep धीनतेन ऽतत् ऽधे गीनधे

The drum tries to reproduce the words of the song with *swaras:*

खीतताता घीनताता खीताताखीत् तांखीताता
घीनघीनताता घीनांगताता खीताताखीत् तांखीताता
खीताखीता घीनांगताता खीताताखीत् तांखीताता
खीत्तांग् घीन्तांग् खीताताखीत् तांखीताता
खीताखीत तांखीताता खीताताखीत् तांखीताता
खीत्ताता खीताघीनांग् तांताखीता घीनाघीना
घेन्ताघेन -ताघेन तांताखीता घीनाघीना (३)

The dances of Radha and the Gopis are in the *Lasya* style of Manipuri dance. They are delicate and graceful. The movements are rounded and continuous like the waves of the sea. The feet are kept as close together as possible; they are never lifted too high. A delicate balance is achieved between the movements of the different parts of body, rejecting any emphasis on a single part. Torso movement is a special feature of this dance.

In *Lasya* there are two divisions; the first one in which the movements are restrained and slow, with a great deal of poise and balance as is to be found in *Bhangi Pareng*; the other division where the movements are a little free and fast, and accord with the syllables of the drum—as is to be found in *Punglol Jagoi*.

Tandava is danced by Krishna and the Gopas It is the counterpart of *Lasya*. It has the same restrictions except that the movements are more free and involve certain jumping and sitting movements, more suited to the character of the young and mischievous Krishna. The *Tandava* danced in Sankirtana is called *cholom*. Its basic postures involve feet movements which are more vigorous and acrobatic in their character This is more evident in *Pung cholom* (the drum dance). *Kartal cholom* (the dance with the huge cymbals) includes softer and more graceful movements than those of the *Pung cholom*. But it has vigorous ones as well.

In Rasleela the sentiment and mood is conveyed through body movements, facial expressions and hand gestures. An expression is suggestive and symbolic in keeping with the dignity of the style. *Madhurarasa*, the sublimated sentiment of love, predominates and all the other *rasas* are integrated with it.

The costumes of Rasleela are very gorgeous and yet dignified. Nearly forty girls, the Gopis, appear. Each is dressed in a stiff, red skirt with silver sequins. The upper white half skirt with its *jari* stripes creates a rich effect. It also enhances the beauty of gliding movement of the *Lasya* style. The gauze veil covering the head accentuates the dream-like quality of the dance. About forty young boys are dressed as Krishna and the Gopas. They wear yellow dhotis and belts with mirrors and sequins.

The pose Marumanau Hanba *and the* Longhul *movement in* Pung Cholom *of Sankirtana*

The sets and decor are designed to create the atmosphere of Brindavan. The killing of the demons, Dhenukasur and Bakasur is carried out in the open maidan, the audience accompanying the artists.

The following sequences are strictly followed during the enactment of each of the first four Rasleelas.

I *Natpala* or *Sankirtana.* It includes two highly developed dance forms, *Pung cholom* and *Kartala cholom.* These follow a strict code of discipline in relation to the sequences.

1. *Mridangaraga* is a particular type of fixed composition always played as a prologue. Some of the *ragas* do not follow a particular *tala* but have a combination of different rhythms (*Jatis*).
2. *Sanchara* is a type of fixed composition, believed to infuse life into the *ragas.*
3. *Tala Tintalamacha* of 7 beats or *Tintala Achouba* of 8 beats.
4. *Tala Rajmel* of 7 beats or 14 beats.
5. *Tala Tanchep* of 4 beats.
6. *Tala Menkup* of 6 beats.

II *Raga Macha* is a short *raga* played on the drum.

III *Sutradhari Raga Alap.* These are fixed compositions in different *ragas* sung differently in each Rasleela. For example, in *Vasantras*, an *alap* in *raga* Lalita is sung.

IV *Brindavan Varnan* includes a description of Brindavan.

V *Vaishnava Vandana* is a salutation to the gurus and the audience.

VI *Krishna Abhisara* is where Krishna leaves for Brindavan to play *ras.*

नीरमलपूर्णचन्द्र श्रीवसन्त यामिनी
अभिसारे चले श्याम भावे राधाराणी

VII *Radha Gopi Abhisara.* Radha and the Gopis leave their homes for Brindavan to meet Krishna.

रायगमन निकुंज कानन कुंजरगामिनी मतिम दामिनी

VIII *Mandali Sajan* is the preparation for the commencement of Rasleela.

IX *Gopi Raga Alap.* The Gopis themselves sing at this point. For example, in *Vasantras*, they sing *raga* Vasant.

X *Mapop Jagoi*

1. A composition in *tala Tintalamacha* of 7 beats or *Tintala Achouba* of 8 beats.
2. *Rajmel Afeibi* in *tala Rajmel* of 7 beats.
3. *Tala Tanchep* of 4 beats.
4. *Chali.* A dance in *tala Tintala Mel* of 8 beats.

XI *Bhangi Pareng.* It is a traditional and long composition with a series of basic body movements. There are three *Lasya* and two *Tandava Bhangi Parengs.* Each lasts for about half an hour. A good dancer is required to imbibe the spirit and style of this composition. It is considered to be very auspicious and the audience cannot leave unless the *Bhangi Pareng* is completed.

XII *Krishna Nartan.*

XIII *Radha Nartan.*

XIV *Atmasamarpana.* The Gopis dedicate themselves to Radha and Krishna.

XV *Pushpanjali.* The offering of flowers.

XVI *Prarthana.* A devotional prayer.

XVII *Arati.* Invocation to Krishna and Radha.

XVIII *Grihagamana.* Krishna asks the Gopis to return to their homes. Between these sequences there are many dances in praise of Lord Krishna and Radha or pure technical dances in various *talas* like *Punglol Jagoi* can also be performed. Over and above these dances, each Rasleela has songs and dances to accord with its theme.

In *Vasantras* the main theme of the story begins after *Atmasamarpana.* Krishna and Radha play Holi-Phagukhel with the Gopis. Krishna gives as much attention to one of the Gopis (Chandrabali) as to Radha, who feels offended and leaves the *Rasmandala,* casting away her blue veil.

देख देख सखी ललिता विशाखा
चन्द्रावली संगे नाचे नटवर
सहते नारे आमार प्राण
आर ना हेरिब कालिया वरण
एइ उत्तरीय कृष्णवर्ण सम
ना राखिब देहे एथाय थोब
चल चल सखि एथा काज नाई
चल चल सखि विलम्ब नाकर

The language used here is Bengali. When he sees the blue veil, Krishna senses Radha's anger and pleads to be forgiven. The mood is like the one expressed in Sanskrit in *Geetagovindam.*

वदसि यदि किंचिदपि-दन्तरुचिकोमुदी
हरति दरतिमिरमतिघोरम्।
स्फुरदधरशीधवे तव वदनचन्द्रमा
रोचयतु लोचनचकोरम्॥१॥
प्रिये! चारुशीले। मुञ्च मयि मानमनिदानम्।

त्वमसि मम भूषणं त्वमसि मम जीवनं
त्वमसि मम भवजलधिरत्नम्।

स्मरगरलखण्डनं मम शिरसि मण्डनं
राधेदेहि पदपल्लवमुदारम् ॥

दशमःसर्गः
गीतगोविन्दम्॥

Then the Gopis join Radha and Krishna to perform the cosmic dance.

ऐसेन कृष्णेर वचन सुनी मानिनि मान भेल अवसान

The lyrical nuances of this dance form, its quiet dignity inform it with the restrained temper of classicism, and though almost all the inhabitants of a village participate in it, the dance still affords artists opportunities for self-expression within the framework of a general convention.

News and Notes

A Snapshot Glimpse of Calcutta's Theatre Cross-currents

Whatever personal reasons become the goad to visit Calcutta, it is difficult to leave without a taste of its theatre. Even a random nibbling, dependent on time and happenstance, affords something to savour.

This time, a brief spell in May, I saw five plays, not all of them good, not all of them of my choosing. But—without being pontifical—they did provide a snapshot glimpse, an etching-in of cross-currents.

First (and always, in Calcutta) two competent productions of adaptations. *Teen Poishar Pala* (adapted seems a feeble word for this transcreation of *The Threepenny Opera*) produced by Nandikar and a regular stand-by in their repertoire, I had seen several years earlier. This is no longer a fledgeling group, and the play a recognised success. Seeing it again, I was as taken by it as before—in particular the translation of mode, mannerisms, ethos, from late-twenties Berlin locale; the play was truer to the spirit of Brecht than more literally-faithful productions I have seen. In particular, I recall the National School of Drama's Hindi production several years ago, where the delineation of Berliner mores, dependent as in theatre on the nuances of gesture and stance as much as on words, sat uncomfortably on Indian bodies. It wasn't a question of acting ability—the National School of Drama has always a competent troupe—but here, they were drilled automatons pulled by the strings of a puppet-master in a ritualistic dance whose meaning seemed to have eluded them. In *Teen Poishar Pala*—the *Pala* form permitted as much stylisation as Brecht demands, but a stylisation within a range of common experience shared by both the actors and the audience. The one sour note in this production was the replacement of the original prostitute (who loves and betrays Mohin Dakat/Macheath) by another actress. The original, Manju, was a lovely girl, with fire and grace and talent. Her successor was a good actress, but unfortunately looked ungainly, more like Ajitesh's (Mohin Dakat/Macheath) mother than his paramour. Somehow, with the notable exception of Tripti Mitra, charisma in the contemporary Bengali theatre has become a male province.

As though to disprove my own point, the other competent adaptation, again of Brecht, *Bhalomanusher Pala* (*The Good Woman of Szechwan*) rested squarely on the more delicate shoulders of Nayantara, 'the good woman' and, of course, the singers. This play was part of a five-day drama festival organised by young 'not established' groups. The taste for adaptations and the ability to transform them into relevant theatre is one skein in the fabric of contemporary Bengali theatre. *Bhalomanusher Pala*, too, dispensed with the Chinese trappings of the original play, and became Bengal, where the Brechtian voice assumes, as it were, a natural resonance. And

the songs, though they are not divorced from their theatrical context, seemed almost a thing apart, a pleasure in their own right, judging from the reactions of the audience.

But the production which was memorable provided an altogether different pleasure. This was the first night performance of Utpal Dutt's most recent play *Duhsapner Nogori* (or *Nightmare City* or . . . . . .*Calcutta*). As always, a technically brilliant production. But much more than that, the play itself. It is written in verse, a verse which is compacted of the colloquial and the literary, cheek by jowl. It is also, most of the time, hilarious. At last, the usual Utpal ammunition, polemics, is masked by humour—scathing satire with frills of farce. The target, perhaps a natural guy for a Calcutta audience, but very adroitly mocked, is the Congress rule in West Bengal. The story line is thin—nor does it require the flesh of inventiveness. Its verisimilitude to life, and its larger-than-life wit proved more than a sufficient buoy. It is about an idealistic boy (with a pragmatic attuned-to-reality family) who gets involved in a strike during his first job at a factory. Instead of getting beaten to pulp by the police, he is beaten up but suddenly released at the behest of the D. C. of police, who does so at the behest of the biggest business-man-cum-blackmarketeer in the locality, who already has under his protection, the 'rising star' in the ruling party. The boy is promised freedom from intimidation, and want, and penury and . . . . . in return, his admirably athletic body is put to good use. He becomes the local 'dada', the official goonda-in-chief of the party in power. And so it goes on: his traumas, his eventual decision to break free, his predictable death. Not much of a plot. Perhaps, what gave the play its brilliance was its wit—both savage and pithy. And its relevance, its accuracy to the minutiae of daily life, now. Thus it avoided both the false resonance of melodrama, and the stridency of polemics. And it was also so funny. And so true. And so bitter.

The swing of the pendulum—and I was amazed by yet another 'popular' play. I could not believe that I was in Calcutta, watching a play in Bengali, surrounded by a Bengali audience, lapping up the dregs of Hindi film farce. The star attraction—as always in Bengal—the actor-director. In this case, Anoop Kumar. The Play *Hotath Nobab* (*Suddenly a Nawab*) was apparently based on Molière's *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*. In reality, it was a formula Hindi film comedy, with swooning lovers, dancing girls, glitter and vulgarity galore. In fact, Anoop Kumar in every gesture, moué, inflection was vulgarity personified. By the vulgar, I do not mean the obscene. That would have been a breath of fresh air. Cheep jibes, crude gestures, tedious farce: and most of the audience were rolling in their seats. This is what upset me. Aesthetic prudery, on my part. Perhaps. But so far theatre in Calcutta which includes, of course, meaty melodrama and skittish sentimentality has eschewed this type of tinsel meretriciousness. I checked, and was told that each performance of *Hotath Nobab* has been a success—houseful, all the way along. Such catholicity of taste dampens my spirits.

Finally, an average play, somewhat disappointing, but much less depressing than the Anoop Kumar spectacle. It was part of the five-day

drama festival by 'young' groups. It was called *Biboshona Brihandala*. The title is somewhat misleading, as it is no contemporary re-telling of Mahabharata myth. Unclothed or naked Brihandala is an allusive title based on that old Pirandellian mode—the break-down of illusion and reality in a theatrical production. But the play itself was pedestrian, dealing in social stereotypes (the plain elder sister who holds the family together, the pretty younger sister who turns to freedom and whorehood, the sensitive brother who becomes the local thug etcetera) who break free of their 'roles' and turn upon the writer-director, in search, inevitably, of their real selves. But it did not work. One set of stereotype characterisations exchanged for another set of stereotype rationalisations. With a solitary exception, the actors too were obviously striving—and that great fulcrum of Bengali theatre—the actor-director of the production was himself the weakest cog. But the play had some good moments. Far better *Brihandala* with its inexperienced cast than the gloss of *Hotath Nobab*. Those who enjoy casting stones at Bengali theatre (and there are some who relish this exercise) can happily aim at Brihandala. That is understandable. But Anoop Kumar and *Hotath Nobab* remains an inexplicable aberration.

(*N. B.* An explanation and a passing regret. If the omission of Bohurupee seems strange, that is because they produced no new plays during my brief stay. *Gondar* belongs to an earlier visit, two years ago. And the regret—that I missed a much talked-about play, whose name itself is intriguing—*Kolikatar Hamlet*, that is *Calcutta's Hamlet*.)

—NITA PILLAI

The Marathi Theatre Today

Nowadays when one feels the impact of a play, one does not regard its writing and its production as two different stages of an experience. Nor does one try to define their relationship in terms of an original idea and its elaboration. Today we tend to treat a production as an audio-visual performance. The visual image is equated with a poem enacted in space and an utterance (not just the written word) becomes a sound image. It is through these elements that the director projects his experience of the play.

An important landmark in this direction was Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal* and particularly so on account of the imaginative shaping given to the text by its director Jabbar Patel and the able support it received through Bhaskar Chandavarkar's meaningful music. Rhythm was the language of the total production and a traditional form was employed in a new context.

Two of our young directors, Amol Palekar and Dilip Kolhatkar, also seem to have devoted serious attention to the concept of the play as an audio-visual enactment. Thay have not just done some abstract thinking on the subject

and then injected it into a production. Their style has evolved in the actual process of their response to a text. Instead of employing the usual phrase 'directed by' for his production of Achyut Vaze's *Chalre Bhopalya Tunuk Tunuk*, Amol Palekar uses another rendering: 'Visualised and Designed by Amol Palekar'. The other plays in this category include: Sadanand Rege's *Gochee* directed again by Amol Palekar; Vrindavan Dandawate's *Bootpolish* directed by Dilip Kolhatkar; Satish Alekar's *Mickey and Memsahib* directed by the author himself.*

The inventiveness displayed in the directing of the play *Gochee* and the acting talents of the cast evoked general interest and acclaim. The word *Gochee* has now become part of the vocabulary of some of our urban youth; it has come to signify the hurt that people experience in modern times. This experience itself is such that it cannot be mirrored through an event, because it is not really affected by time. Man feels stifled in this tiny body, inhabiting a vacuum of time and space. This body-frame creates its own relationships and its daily routine; man feels trapped in it, in its trivial details, in the movements of the hands of a clock. He becomes a cog in a huge mechanism. He cannot find another being in this mighty roar to whom he can communicate what he wants to say. This is an abstract experience and demands a different sort of skill on the part of the director who seeks to project it. Amol Palekar, who edited the script, depended almost wholly on tableau effects. There were no props as such and their function was fulfilled by the varying shapes formed by the actors' bodies. The two figures of the boy and the girl, dressed in dark tights, glided and danced through that free space and structured not only different visual compositions through their bodies but also accomplished the role of a chorus. They uttered simple words and sentences like spells and this device turned out to be quite effective. There was no dependence on mikes for amplification; one heard only a blend of human voices in a wooden monotone. The cast managed an excellent balance of stylized and spontaneous gestures.

Vrindavan Dandavate's *Bootpolish* is a good example of 'group theatre'. The work is not just a reproduction of the life of street urchins. At one level it depicts this stratum with its *dada*, and those passers-by who try to enter this world. At another, it explores the ties of family, social status, the new face of woman, and the tensions between father and son. At a third level it pinpoints the image of the woman as female, a dream designed to entertain the well-to-do classes. Even the lives of these vagabonds on the footpath have their own kind of shape. This is what was suggested by the group movements designed by the director. The non-metallic sounds of the brush and the bootpolish box were the right kind

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*GOCHEE by Tadoz Ruziwich, translated into Marathi by Sadanand Rege, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1974, Rs. 5.00.

BOOTPOLISH, Yugavani, Diwali Number, 1973.

MICKEY AND MEMSAHIB by Satish Alekar, Neelkantha Prakashan, Pune, 1974, Rs. 4.00.

of accompaniment to the satirical note in the chorus song and this heightened the dramatic quality of the production.

Achyut Vaze's *Chalre Bhopalya Tunuk Tunuk* says that the man in search of nothingness is also tethered to the trivia of life. He thinks he has grasped something new only to discover that others have found it long before him. The songs conveyed the tempo of existence in an industrial

Dilip Kulkarni and Anuya Palekar in Gochee

whirl. The non-hero's humor had a Chaplinesque slant and the fluidity of the play's structure itself points to the new contours of Marathi drama.

Mickey and Memsahib explores the psychological problem underlying the domination of one human being over another (Achyut Vaze's *Shadja* had tackled a more or less similar theme). The bondage imposed by one partner on another as a result of the sexual tie; the relationship between the Professor and the mouse (Mickey), whom he is using as a guinea-pig for his experiments; between the Professor and his student; between the student and

Mickey—all these help to build the form of the play. But both the script and the production has far too much of a 'finished' feel, considering the terrifying quality of the subject.

Ek Asato Raja and *Ek Ande Phutle*, two plays by the young playwright, Dilip Jagtap, put both spectators and critics into somewhat of a quandary. His style betrayed the influence of C.T. Khanolkar and a marked tendency to overwrite. Even so the attempt to project the clash between authority and the common man in *Ek Asato Raja* shows germs of definite promise.

The work of these young playwrights reveals a sharp awareness of the possibilities and power of the dramatic form. Production techniques and decor seem now to be influenced by non-representational painting and sculpture. A new generation reared on the work of Vijay Tendulkar and C.T. Khanolkar, and non-Marathi dramatists like Mohan Rakesh, Girish Karnad and Badal Sircar is now growing up. These young theatre people prefer original plays to translations and adaptations. Both in writing and in direction, the trend is towards the group. A hero and a heroine are not as significant as the team. They are serious-minded lot, these young people. Though they are alive to trends from the West, they also realize that the folk drama and the folk dance offer rich potential. Sometimes these new experiments appear difficult or obscure, partly because spectators have not learnt to appreciate the medium's possibilities or because of the division in the minds of theatre practitioners. The new trend has to find its own feet yet. In their predilection for the visual they tend to neglect the spoken word. Even so, these theatre people are dedicated to the medium and their efforts will certainly enrich the Marathi stage and carry it beyond the realm of entertainment and narration.

—PUSHPA BHAVE

On the Tamasha

A dissertation entitled *Tamasha: People's Theatre of Maharashtra State, India* by Tevia Abrams, submitted to Michigan State University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is an attempt to acquaint Western readers with the *tamasha*, the most popular folk theatre form of Maharashtra. The writer traces, in brief, the history of this form, and its stylistic features. He discusses some of the script materials and performances and also the more refined version of this form, the *loknatya* of modern times. There is a detailed explanation of the structure of a *tamasha* group, and information about artists, impresarios and theatres. The challenges posed by the developing mass media and by the efforts of playwrights to employ the form for their own themes and aesthetic purposes are also touched. The Government's attempt to exercise some degree of control on the *tamasha* is also dealt with in detail. The second part of the thesis examines the use of the *tamasha* for

social and political propaganda. The Appendices contain a Glossary of *tamasha* terms, a sample of some of the *tamasha* scripts used for Government development programmes or election publicity, scenes from popular modern *tamashas* and a list of three hundred and twenty-eight people's poets. The photographs at the end of the dissertation try to project the visual appeal of *tamasha* performers and sequences.

Sankara Panikker (1874-1936)

Kavungal Sankara Panikker (whose birth centenary is being celebrated this year) was one of those Kathakali dancers of exceptional genius, who, by reason of their very individuality, defy classification and provoke diverse judgements. He came from the Kavungal House (near Trichur) which had enriched the Kathakali tradition for three generations. He received his training in Kathakali from his famous uncle, Kavungal Kunhikrishna Panikker, and became one of the greatest dancers to figure on the Kathakali stage.

Sankara Panikker was not particularly handsome, but he had wonderful large eyes, a fine nose, a delicate and sensitive mouth and a bold jaw to which the *chutti* make-up gave a striking contour. He seemed to create his parts; that is to say, he gave them the specific stamp of his individuality. This was particularly true of his Keechaka. One felt one was in the presence of the character.

It was impossible to watch Sankara Paniker as Bhima in *Baka Vadha*, as Arjuna in *Kalakeya Vadha*, as Nala in *Nala Charita* or as the Brahmana in *Santanagopala* without being powerfully shaken by the range of his technique and of his passion. His Hanuman in *Sougandhika* was memorable. He rendered Hanuman's lines *Manasi Mama Kimapi* with such incomparable sensibility that one can even now see his looks and gestures as if these were sensations of yesterday.

Sankara Panikker was certainly one of the greatest dancers within living memory. He impressed himself so vividly with his histrionic ability that some of his weaknesses—his awareness of the audience and his tendency to use *mudras* not accepted traditionally—pale into insignificance.

In stressing his powers of acting one should not ignore the remarkable grace of his dancing; Panikker's *kalasams* had an incomparable elegance. They were rendered with such deceptive ease and in so natural a manner that the effect was overwhelming.

YAKSHAGANA by K. Shivram Karanth, Radhakrishna Prakashan, Delhi, 1973, Rs. 50.00 (*In Hindi*).

A major contribution to the literature on dance, Dr. K. S. Karanth's *Yakshagana* is an exhaustive and lucid exposition of the traditional open-air (*Bayalata*) dance drama of Mysore-Karnataka. It is no exaggeration to say that the untiring efforts of Dr. Karanth have succeeded in focussing attention on the cultural heritage of Karnataka. His researches, the number of articles he has written in various languages and his lectures have helped to restore to Yakshagana its rightful place on the contemporary stage and won it acceptance as a major form of dance-drama.

Yakshagana, as a living tradition, was prevalent in some parts of Karnataka from the sixteenth century A.D. Districts like Ballari, Malanadi, Shimoga, Chikmagaloor, Bijapur and the old Mysore State have been the major centres of this tradition. With the passage of time the form has not remained exactly the same as before. The author avers that from among the several elements of Yakshagana, texts are available both in manuscript and published form. The mode of singing is in some cases now permanently lost but somehow the tradition has managed to survive.

It is Dr. Karanth's contention that Yakshagana is a folk dance-drama. There are a few classical elements in its exposition; but still he prefers to call it folk dance-drama, the reason being that Yakshagana did not flower under any royal patronage. It has always received support from the people. The artists have from the very beginning been villagers and the all-night audiences, too, have all been drawn from the rural areas. Dr. Karanth compares some of the elements of folk dance-drama that Yakshagana shares with the Jatra, Terukoothu and Tamasha. One can trace the influence of other forms like the Kuchipudi, Melatur Bhagawata Mela Nataka, Kathakali and the other forms prevalent in the surrounding areas. This is a result of the inter-exchange which took place when touring companies absorbed members of other areas. Yakshagana remains essentially a folk dance-drama.

The ten chapters of the book embrace various aspects of Yakshagana: its historical background; the Yakshagana Ata (the forerunner of the Yakshagana form); the Sabha-Lakshana conventions; the nature of the language; Yakshagana proper, the dance-techniques; the make-up and costumes; the antiquity of Yakshagana and of other related forms; the

texts and authors. Dr. Karanth deals exhaustively with all the problems concerning this tradition as it exists today. He gives us a vivid picture of the form as it is practised now. While doing so, he takes us back to the past, compares it with the present, draws certain important conclusions and sets them forth in a systematic and scientific manner.

Dr. Karanth makes no attempt to romanticise the subject. Even so, the work is no dryasdust study. It is easy to go into ecstasies while discussing certain aspects of the make-up, costumes and the dramatic impact of the dance. But Dr. Karanth's approach is balanced. What makes the whole study so interesting is the author's running commentary on Yakshagana's contemporary presentation. Before one can get carried away and start boasting of the great past, his gentle banter reminds us that Yakshagana , as it is today, has changed a lot and tall claims are, therefore, uncalled for.

The various conventions of Yakshagana are described graphically, particularly the opening sequences and the introduction of the characters. The *Poorva Rang* (*Sabha-Lakshana*) and the role of Hanumanayaka (Vidushaka—the jester) are explained in detail along with excerpts of dialogue and the liberty that is permitted by tradition to Hanumanayaka. Clearly the humour of the situation is likely to be lost on one who does not know Kannada. Similar is the case with *Vaddolaga* (*Patra-pravesh*—the introductions of the characters). After the exciting presentation, the small curtain held in front of the actors is removed and after a little while the dance is over. The dialogues need to be understood if one wants to enjoy the beauty of this convention. The main character asks Hanumanayaka to praise the other characters. For example, in the Pandava *Vaddolaga*, Yudhishthira asks Hanumanayaka to sing a panegyric to his other brothers. Hanumanayaka does so with a fascinating command over speech delivery; long-winded Sanskrit compounds are mixed with Kannada words and adjectives. Here the visual impact alone is not enough. The convention becomes interesting and enjoyable only if you know the language.

Parallels could be drawn with similar conventions in other dance-dramas, like Kathakali, Kuchipudi and Bhagawata Mela Nataka. However the resemblance to Kathakali strikes us more because of the colouring of the face, the large crowns and costumes; the comparison is true for the visual impact only when characters like demons are introduced. Both Kathakali and Yakshagana have this element of colouring of the faces and arresting costumes, almost dehumanising the characters and casting them in *types.* But as has been said earlier on, the comparison stops short on a visual plane. The characters in Yakshagana deliver their dialogues in a racy and dramatic fashion with an emphasis on *Vachikabhinaya* (the spoken word). In Kathakali (barring the demon characters who occasionally emit shrieks) the actors never speak.

The author unfolds before the readers a fascinating world. However, even when he is tracing the origin of the word Yakshagana or its genesis as a musical mode, the author never loses sight of the importance of relating the form to the needs of the contemporary stage and times. Of course, because of his own interest in music and grammar, the treatment of those

aspects is so thorough that it can be exhausting but it is never tiresome. The book has five appendices: a prose translation of the play *Bhishma-Vijaya* (it is wrongly spelt as *Bhima Vijaya* in the index); the dance aspect of Balagopal and Pandava *Vaddolaga*; the list of Yakshagana manuscripts with the names of the authors and the dates; the various *ragas* and *talas* and the *solfa* syllables with a glossary of the technical terms. This valuable information and all these explanations are a help to those who want to work on Yakshagana. The author's approach is analytical and informative and this adds to the value of this monograph.

An attractive feature of the work is the inclusion of four sketches by K. Hebbar and twenty-four colour photographs of various mythological characters in typical Yakshagana costumes and make-up. Though the reproduction is fairly satisfactory, photographs in black and white of a regular performance would have been more interesting.

In order to reach a wider readership it is imperative that this book be translated into English as early as possible. The Hindi translation by B. V. Karanth is extremely lucid and the reader can also enjoy the text of some excerpts from Yakshagana plays.

—S. K.

MERI FILMI ATMAKATHA by Balraj Sahni, Rajpal & Sons, Delhi, 1974, Rs. 10.00 (*In Hindi*).

CINEMA AUR STAGE by Balraj Sahni, Atmaram & Sons, Delhi, 1974, Rs. 9.00 (*In Hindi*).

KYA YEH SUCH HAI BAPU? by Balraj Sahni, National Publishing House, Delhi, 1974, Rs. 5.00 (*In Hindi*).

Balraj Sahni was one of those rare Hindi cinema personalities endowed with a wider social awareness. Our image of him is that of the intellectual on the Indian film scene. These three books by him have been published for the first time in Hindi exactly a year after his death.

The first of these books is, as the title itself suggests, an autobiography of Balraj Sahni, the film man: thus it leaves quite a lot of the human element in him out. He emerges in the book as a writer of eminently readable prose, but not as one who shares his intimate thoughts and feelings with the reader. Whatever he allows us to see of him seems to be the result of a discreet kind of frankness and self-imposed humility. He seems like a well-meaning, suave and self-conscious host whose hospitality might appear restrictive and, at times, even unrewarding to an enthusiastic, inquisitive and friendly guest. There are passages which tend to reveal elements of human frailty, but then the pen stops as if to say: only thus

far and no further: Balraj, the man, yields, most of the time, to Balraj, the self-image.

Most educated Hindu Punjabis of Balraj Sahni's generation, and particularly those from a rather rich background, were brought up under the strict discipline of the Arya Samaj. Balraj Sahni was no exception to this rule. This discipline, with its Victorian code of conduct, often gave birth to torn and rigid personalities. Balraj Sahni's first contact with cinema was when he was eight; in a village he saw some cheap European films in a make-shift, open-air cinema house. In such films, women would undress quite often during the love sequences. Balraj Sahni feels that his youthful dreams of sex were coloured by these film sequences which he says he saw much before he could understand anything about sex. Would he have been spared such dreams had he not been exposed to those films at the age of eight? Thus Balraj Sahni has a way of over-simplifying things. A new cinema house in his home town (Rawalpindi) advertised in its opening bill a film which happened to be based on a novel prescribed in the course books. Balraj Sahni quotes this as an example of the wiles of capitalists! He mentions (with understandable pride) those who migrated from Punjab (and particularly from Rawalpindi) to the world of films. He attributes this to the policies of the British who taught educated Punjabis to look down upon their own culture and folk forms. This again seems to be an over-simplification of the cultural situation obtaining during those days.

Balraj Sahni was swayed by the teachings of some of his professors in Lahore and drawn to literature and the stage. So after he had completed his M.A. degree, he went to Calcutta, hoping to make a career on the stage. He was dissuaded from taking such a step by Pandit Sudarshan.

He married his first wife Damyanti and became a teacher at Shantiniketan. Later he joined the Sewagram Ashram of Mahatma Gandhi. But soon he left for London to become an announcer on the B.B.C. In London, he came to be influenced by the Soviet Cinema, the ideas of Marxism, and the People's Theatre. Back home, a chance meeting in Bombay with his old friend Chetan Anand, and Balraj Sahni and Damyanti were offered leading roles in *Neecha Nagar*. The film project did not materialize and finally when *Neecha Nagar* came to be actually made, Damyanti played the female lead. The male lead was played not by Balraj but by someone else. Another chance meeting with a total stranger, V. P. Sathe, brought him to the IPTA fold. Here K. A. Abbas entrusted him with the direction of his own play. Balraj became an IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) activist and soon joined the Communist Party.

His first role in films was a minor one in Phani Majumdar's *Justice* (*Insaaf*). He found his first shot before a movie camera satisfying; but he thought of himself as inadequate for a close-up shot. In this particular shot the hero had to utter the word 'Lenin' and his friend (played by Balraj Sahni) had to ridicule Lenin. Balraj Sahni felt that Phani Majumdar had deliberately sought to use an IPTA activist to make fun of Lenin. Balraj Sahni says he should have walked out, but he did not. "On no condition

should I have agreed to utter a word which derided such a great man. It was an act of moral cowardice on my part".

Then came the IPTA film *Dharti Ke Lal*. But soon the hopes of IPTA members were belied; there were quarrels among the leaders; their inexperience showed. The film was a sort of collective effort. By the time it was released communal riots had broken out and it lost heavily at the box office. "Bimal Roy in *Do Bigha Zamin* and Satyajit Ray in *Pather Panchali* took the same path which was pioneered by *Dharti Ke Lal*. But, alas, Abbas himself renounced that path. Later on, Abbas made many films, but none could compare with it", is Balraj Sahni's comment on this film. Soon Damyanti became more popular than Balraj Sahni and this roused his jealousy. He says he behaved boorishly at times and Damyanti pined away,

"Dammo died on April 27, 1947. Punjab was partitioned on August 15, 1947. Our family was uprooted from Rawalpindi and scattered in many directions. My house of cards was demolished".

Some time later Balraj Sahni was scheduled to play a jailor in K. Asif's *Halchal* but before the shooting could start, he and his second wife Santosh were arrested for participating in a communist procession. Special permission was obtained for him to participate from jail in the shooting of the film.

After his release from jail, Balraj Sahni had to face enormous hardships. He did not have much work and he was forced to look for child roles for his son, Parikshit. Chetan Anand asked him to write the script of *Baazi*, Guru Dutt's maiden directorial venture. The film was a great success and Balraj Sahni wrote another script for Chetan Anand. During the writing of *Baazi*, Balraj Sahni met Zia Sarhadi, who gave him that famous role in *Ham Log* and that, too, against the wishes of Chandulal Shah, the producer of the film. Balraj Sahni was afraid of facing the camera and also his co-star Anwar Husain. He was a failure in his own eyes. He tells us that one day he reached home and broke down: "I cannot become an actor—never!" But Nagrath, a nineteen-year old assistant of Zia, exploded: "Coward! You call youself a communist? ... You cannot act? No, not as long as you watch their cars, or get cowed down by their fame and wealth ... Jealousy is corroding you from within, and you claim to be an artist! The fact is you only look at wealth and not at talent or art! ..." Nagrath's words had their effect. The next day he did not go to the studio with Zia, but alone. He did not allow the make-up man to beautify his face. On his way from the make-up room to the studio floor, he saw many shining cars. He spat on two. And—before the camera now stood a new Balraj. *Ham Log* was a success and it came to be called a communist film. But by then Balraj Sahni had drifted away from the Communist Party.

After *Ham Log*, Balraj Sahni again went into oblivion. Fortunately, Bimal Roy cast him in *Do Bigha Zamin* . . . a film of which Balraj remained proud to his last days. In comparison with *Do Bigha Zamin*, Raj Kapoor's *Awara* could reach much wider audiences both here and abroad, and especially in the Soviet Union. According to Balraj Sahni, *Do Bigha Zamin* was inspired and influenced

by foreign values of art (*Bicycle Thief*), while *Awara* was a reflection of robust Indianness. Bimal Roy won recognition and honours with *Do Bigha Zamin* and *Parineeta.* He tried to monopolise all the credit for himself and many of his real well-wishers and some of his talented associates started leaving him. After *Do Bigha Zamin,* Balraj was again left out in the cold. He had to grab any assignment that came his way and he never forgave Bimal Roy for making a sarcastic comment about his working in cheap films.

Balraj Sahni wanted to return to Punjab and start some exciting and purposeful cultural activity there, but success brought him only weaknesses and compromises. Producers came to him with currency notes which never gave him time to think . . .

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The title of the second book, *Cinema Aur Stage*, suggests that what we are being offered is a comparative study of the two media by an artist who was active in both. It turns out to be a collection of eleven stray articles which Balraj Sahni wrote from time to time and is, on the whole, extremely disappointing. None of the pieces deals rigorously with the stage or the cinema. One deals with the problems of radio artists and their grades: then there are memoirs about people, a setting down of certain experiences. The article entitled *Cinema Aur Stage* itself touches on the subject rather cursorily—as if the close-up were the only major difference between the two media! Most of the pieces are exactly what they were meant to be—magazine articles written for the casual reader; they did not deserve to be collected and reproduced in book form. The only article of some permanent value is the one on Prithviraj Kapoor.

Unfortunately the editors have also overlooked the problem of dates and the articles have not been arranged in any chronological order. The reader is not allowed a glimpse into the development of the political and social outlook of the man.

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Kya Yeh Sach Hai Bapu? is an insignificant and didactic play by Balraj Sahni; its subject is communal harmony. The souls of Mahatma Gandhi, Pandit Nehru, Subash Chandra and Bhagat Singh come down to earth to discuss the current situation with a dying social worker. The whole problem is presented in a very drab and boring manner. The play lacks depth and is full of platitudes. It was staged under the title of *Sukshma Roop* (with Balraj Sahni himself in the main role) and it flopped. Balraj Sahni thinks the title was perhaps too high sounding for audiences. It is hard to say if that was so . . .

One wonders why there is no mention of the name or names of the translators from the original Punjabi. Balraj Sahni, in his later years, wrote only in Punjabi. Why should an impression be created that these books were originally written in Hindi?

—ARVIND KUMAR

PREMKAHANI by Ratnakar Matkari, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1973 Rs. 5.00 (*In Marathi*).

Ratnakar Matkari is well-known in Maharashtra, particularly on account of his one-act plays and his plays for children. The contribution he has made since 1950 to the development of the one-act play is now generally recognised. His full-length plays have not been so much of a success. His themes are out-of-the-ordinary; he conducts experiments in technique; he has a flair for dialogue. But even so the image he projects is only that of a skilled playwright. This is so because in the final analysis his plays fail to suggest a total and unified experience. Besides, at an artistic level he is unable to communicate a modern sensibility.

Premkahani is an elaboration of one of his own one-act plays. A superficial reading suggests a pre-occupation similar to that of Pirandello's: actual experience, dramatic experience and real truth. But the story which is the starting-point of this search is so slight that the search is reduced to a game of technique. The play is important only as part of the general trend in Marathi writing to move away from plays with mere narrative interest.

—P. B.
