

The Blind Alley: A Post-mortem of the 'New Drama' in Orissa

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When Manoranjan Das's *Āgāmi* (The Coming Day) was staged in 1950 by United Artistes, it was the hope of many enlightened Oriyas that the 'new drama' that it inaugurated would produce a meaningful change in the tastes of theatregoers in Orissa. The basic tenets of the theories of Freud, Marx and Gandhi found congenial expression in that play. Eighteen years later, in April 1968, was staged Bijoy Mishra's *Shababāhakamāney* (The Pall-bearers), opening up new vistas of promise. Manoranjan staged his *Banahansee* (The Wild Swan) in June that year. Even by that time the initial apathy of the viewers towards the new theatre had not been overcome. His *Aranya Fasal* (The Wild Harvest) performed the next year made the playwright's point of view clearer, but it did not bring in the expected change. The other notable plays which were written expressly with the aims of the New Drama (Nabanātya) movement in view were *Mrugaya* (The Royal Hunt) by Biswajit Das (1970), *Punascha Pruthivee* (Once Again the World) by Ratnakar Chaini (1971), and *Janey Mahāpurushanka Janma o Mrutyu Samparkarey* (On the Birth and Death of a Great Man) by Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi (1972).

In spite of all the tall talk, the fact remains that the Oriya social milieu couldn't assimilate and foster the New Drama, sometimes erroneously labelled absurd drama. The history of ideas testifies to the fact that the desire for freedom from the fetters of tradition suffers from the misfortune of becoming a tradition in itself. In their desire to get away from the trodden path, the new dramatists succeeded only in establishing (or so they thought) an iconoclastic attitude in the mind of the audience. But the absurd, in the sense in which the term is used to describe the plays of Western dramatists from Albert Camus to Samuel Beckett to John Osborne to Harold Pinter and even *Evam Indrajit* by Badal Sircar, is surely not coming to Orissa before the first few decades of the next millennium. The reason is not hard to find: The Oriya mind has not prepared itself to accept the absurd; the idea of importing the absurd and transplanting it on our own soil is itself absurd.

A retrospective view would make this clearer. When the Western world was all agog for new experiments in playwriting and stagecraft during the last two decades of the 19th century, Orissa produced its first play, *Bābāji* (The Hermit), in 1877 which, according to Blumhardt, P.R. Sen and G.S. Ray, was really not a play but a sketch with the purpose of sermonizing against the use of intoxicating drugs. The centenary of Oriya drama was celebrated all over the State in 1977 with much pomp and gusto, proclaiming the author Jagan Mohan Lala (1838-1913) as the first Oriya playwright. Some critics maintain that

Kanchi Kaberi (1891) by Ram Shankar Ray (1857-1931) was the first Oriya drama in the modern sense. Though the overriding influence was Shakespeare's, the immediate influence on Ram Shankar was a Bengali play of the same name by Ranga Lal Banerjee. Vir Vikram Dev and Kamapala Mishra, contemporaries of Lala and Ray, wrote plays more for the sake of exploring the charm of the Oriya language than for nursing the infant Oriya drama. Kamapala's *Sitā Bibāha*, (The Wedding of Sita) was later adapted as the first Oriya film.

Ashvini Kumar Ghosh (1892-1962), Kali Charan Pattanayak (1898-1977) and Gopal Chhotray (b. 1918), believers in a radiant Oriya tradition, refined and perfected the social drama of Orissa. In his time Ashvini Kumar was regarded as the monarch of Oriya dramatic literature. He wrote a number of plays, each exhibiting a brilliant use of language and an irrespressible curiosity about the nature of dramaturgy. But artificiality and staginess he could never get rid of. Kavichandra Kali Charan Pattanayak, a stalwart in the history of Oriya literature, founded the Orissa Theatres in 1939 and "brought about a great revolution in the history of the stage plays" (*Hindustan Standard*, 17 August 1958). His plays, especially *Girls' School* (1942), which "presented a lively picture of life of our new-fangled youths and school-going girls" (*New Orissa*, 16 February 1942), *Bhāta* (Food, 1944) on the 1943 famine in Orissa, and *Chākri* (1944), said to have been influenced by the Bengali drama *Partha Sarathi*, ran for hundreds of nights to houses packed with dumbfounded audiences. Kali Babu was honoured with the Sahitya Akademi Award for his autobiography in 1976, a belated recognition to a litterateur extraordinary.

And then came Gopal Chhotray with *Feria* (Comeback, 1946), his first full-fledged stage drama for the professional theatre. Chhotray, still the most popular of Oriya dramatists, reaches the human heart in a way not surpassed by any other dramatist in Orissa. A versatile playwright, adapter and dramatizer, Chhotray is a potent influence on all those who care to create plays. He has dramatized many novels and short stories of great literary value, but his special talent is in providing a new orientation to the poetic plays of Vaishnava Pani (1882-1956) and Balakrushna Mohanty (1900-1958), creators of what is called the 'mass play'. His popularity as a radio playwright is so great that even in these days of cable television one finds passers-by gathering around radio-sets listening to a Chhotray play replete with lyrical poetry and lucid prose dialogues imbued with deep pathos and genial humour. He is peerless in enthraling the old and young alike because, as he says, "I have thankfully accepted anything new that has come my way, but never failed to have a nostalgic look at our rich past" (quoted from his speech at the Sahitya Akademi Award distribution function, 1982).

Before we pass on to discuss the new dramatists a passing glance at Byomakesh Tripathy (b. 1926) and Jadunath Dash Mohapatra (b. 1929) seems to be in order. Tripathy's *Ek, Dui, Tin* (One, Two Three, 1963) is described as a powerful experiment in Oriya drama of the 1960s. Much later, in 1974, Dash Mohapatra created in his best play *Athabā Andhāra* (Otherwise the Dark) an atmosphere of haunting mystery. The locale is Konarak, the epic in stone, where the characters, representatives of the modern decadent system, search for light in an ambience created by myth and legend; but when light ultimately comes, they are not able to open their eyes. Almost Elizabethan in their helplessness

ness against a system, almost a providential preordainment, the characters seem to be caught in a whirlblast of ironies.

Oriya drama up to Chhotray was tradition-bound. Well-knit conventional plots with mythical profundity, impressive action, lilting music, an overdose of pathos, and abundant, often farcically crude, humour delighted the people though such plays failed to generate an awareness of social problems. The playwrights who oriented the audience towards patriotism often sounded hollow because their plays betrayed a total lack of first-hand experience, the type of experience we find in the poems of the British war poets.

Drama is one of the most potent media for social revolution. But Oriya drama at that time was simply a matter of construction of a non-controversial palatable plot, peopled by flat characters and full of insipid sequences. Monotony was the hallmark of this drama, variety and experimentation were out of question. The great human predicament experienced in the aftermath of the last World War, the agonizing cries of sufferers, the unbelieving and questioning temperament, and above all, the desire to voyage into the uncharted recesses of the human mind were simply overlooked or left unattended. Drama meant unalloyed entertainment tailor-made to be enjoyed after dinner. Manoranjan Das (b. 1923), in protesting against the prevalent norms and practices, shouldered the responsibility of compelling people to visit the theatre before they retired for the day. And once they saw Das's plays, they were compelled to think. He tried to establish in the minds of the viewers a recognition of the pure but offensive reality represented by his characters, characters who are what they are.

Manoranjan's *Banahansae* pioneered the movement later named the New Drama (*Nabanātya*) movement. It heralded a new era and opened up a whole new vista of ideas for theatregoers. Unlike Ibsen's symbolist play of a similar name, Manoranjan's is a bold study in expressionism. Time has been conceived of, not for the first time of course, as a continuous stream and the division into the past, the present and the future is one of human convenience. O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* (1920), T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' in 'Four Quarters' (1943) and the dicta of countless philosophers and dramatists from Herodotus to Anouilh have exerted tremendous influence on Manoranjan. The time-as-flux hypothesis, the stream-of-consciousness technique in delineating past memories by the use of psychological, not chronological, time, the concept of eternity as in Eliot—

Time present and time past
 Are both perhaps present in time future,
 And time future contained in time past.
 If all time is eternally present
 All time is unredeemable.
 What might have been is an abstraction
 Remaining a perpetual possibility
 Only in a world of speculation.

—and the characters taking part in a present to which they do not belong (because they are dead) as if in a ritual of 'taking of roles' stand testimony to Manoranjan's indebtedness. His characters, tangibly alive at present, establish commerce with the dead and the

unborn. Dr Pravir Choudhury is in communion with the dead Santosh Sharma (the late husband of his beloved Usha) and the yet-to-be-born Geeta (daughter of Santosh and Usha) and visualizes all that will happen in future. Rajiv, his son, does exactly what Dr Chaudhury had visualized, and in falling in love with Geeta, recycles all that had happened to his father and Geeta's mother. Geeta deserts Rajiv and marries Ashoka à la Usha and Dr Chaudhury. Life is the wild duck trying to fly away into oblivion from the cycles of human existence. In terms of the resurfacing of the gene, Manoranjan comes closer to the Ibsen of *Ghosts* than to the Ibsen of *The Wild Duck*.

When "the weariness, the fever, and the fret" of existence threaten our personality, we, like Keats, turn to the "forest dim". The forest has been a constant companion to the bereaved and the bewildered. The closeness to nature helps us revive, and shed the dull monotony of modern life. But what about the primeval sensuality that all of us share in varying proportions? What about the desire for gratification of the instincts that civilization has warped? Does the forest alleviate or intensify the burden of sex? Manoranjan seeks an answer to such questions in *Aranya Fasal* (1969) which brought him the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1971. He finds that domesticated animals like human beings are more ferocious than the wild animals of the jungle. An undercurrent of eroticism permeates the play. Four persons—Baby and Subrat, and Lily and Verma—arrive at a dak bungalow presumably to get a respite from the fatigue of urban life. The action begins with a series of questions:

Subrat: Do I have to ask you to open the suitcase?

Baby: Would you like me to take out your clothes?

Subrat: Only mine?

Baby: Are you asking about mine?

Subrat: Aren't you going to change?

Baby: Do I look dirty?

[Act One, page 2]*

They are joined by Sangram, actor and lover of both Baby and Lily, now a bohemian gold-mine prospector. The Chowkidar of the dak bungalow has a domesticated goat which symbolizes sexuality in Freudian terminology. "It's that goat, Sir, you know, is very greedy; the more you give, the more it wants. It laps up all that you give" *, the Chowkidar informs them. The entire dak bungalow appears to metamorphose into an arena of sex-starved monomaniacs. Only Verma and the Chowkidar are not tormented by the incessant bleating of the goat; they seem to be out of the beckoning of sex. To represent the apparently coherent but intrinsically meaningless utterances of our day-to-day conversation, Manoranjan develops, through permutations, a seven-word sentence into many sentences:

Sangram: The goat is a domesticated wild animal. Do you know this statement can be made in a number of ways?

Baby: How do you mean?

Sangram: The wild goat is a domesticated animal. The goat is a domesticated animal of

* Translated by P.N. Das and J.M. Mohanty (*The Wild Harvest*, Oxford University Press, 1979).

the wild. A domesticated animal the wild goat is. The goat of wild is a domesticated animal. The domestic goat is a wild animal. The animal of the wild is a domestic goat. The goat is an animal of the domestic jungle. The animal is a jungle of the domestic goat, etc.etc.etc . . .

[Act Two, page 39]*

Manoranjan, however, does not succeed in his attempt to make Lucky of *Waiting for Godot* (see page 42; Faber, 1975) speak in a hostile milieu. In trying to be absurd, he becomes melodramatic. Drama means more than mere cerebral gymnastics, and in trying to awaken stuporous theatregoers Manoranjan draws a blank because of such obscurities. The tethered goat is finally set free by Sangram and killed by Verma. The search of Sangram ends and he stabs himself. Does the fact that all of us are actors and hypocrites make Sangram's suicide an acceptance of truth? Prof. B.B. Das in his foreword to the OUP edition of the play says, "'The Wild Harvest' is not an absurd play, like the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov. What Das is primarily concerned with here is the shallow, insincere, fleeting, sensational and escapist trends in the character of modern man." In spite of lack of spontaneity, and an untenable point of view, *Aranya Fasal* set the trend of the new drama in Orissa.

Later works of Manoranjan—*Kāṭha Ghodā* (The Wooden Horse), *Shabdaliipi* (The Wordscript) and *Amrutasya Putrah* (The Immortal) are an extension of his fond beliefs expounded in his post-*Āgāmi* plays. Manoranjan is a revolutionary, a votary of the new; but in retrospect, he appears to have felt dazed somewhere along his path and then apostatized and gone back to the golden 1950s and '60 of Oriya drama. The plays written after 1976, perhaps, are witness to his going back in terms of theme and structure. It is interesting to note that the first Lok Natak Mahotsava (an annual festival of what may be called back-to-roots plays organized by the Cultural Academy, Rourkela) held in 1976 gave a clarion call to revive and contemporize the traditional theatre through the folk play. Since then, plays dealing with more immediate problems, shunning philosophical investigations, have become the craze among theatregoers. This, of course, is now a national phenomenon. As has been rightly said, Manoranjan has ended where he had began.

A crowd-puller for the professional theatre, Bijoy Mishra (b. 1936) staged his *Shababāhakamāney* in April 1968; the production was an unprecedented achievement and it made Mishra an instant celebrity among the practitioners of the new drama. *Shaba* has no thematic novelty. The theme is as old as the hills and the message was then 16 years old (*Waiting for Godot* was staged in 1952). But what endeared Mishra to his audience was the new mood of the play and the immaculate craftsmanship:

Six persons, including a young woman, lose their way in a forest and take refuge in a dilapidated house in order to escape an imminent storm. The only thing they see is the deep darkness in and around the house. By managing to strike three damp matchsticks, they discover three rooms in the house. Surendra chances upon a corpse in a room. A map lying nearby indicates the precise location of a coffer buried in another room. Ajanta, the woman betrothed to Navendu, also comes to know of this. The secret no longer remains a secret, each person hoping that the others are ignorant of the buried treasure.

* Translated by P.N. Das and J.M. Mohanty (*The Wild Harvest*, Oxford University Press, 1979).

Consequently, each one tries to sneak into the room and dig up the ground with the pickaxe the dead man has left behind. Ajanta offers herself in marriage to whoever owns the wealth. Wealth is power, wealth is the light of life. They struggle for light—the hidden wealth—in the dark. Darkness is the essence in the life of these pall-bearers. When the *coffer is finally unearthed* and opened, they find it empty except for a letter requesting the discoverers to do a favour to the dead man and bury him at a certain place. Taken for a ride, they look at one another, suspend their disbelief and put their real identities to test. Thus the search for light, in fact, enlightens them, for along with the dead body they bury their greed, contempt, hawkishness and belligerence, their past deeds in short, and re-realize themselves. The action in the three rooms is shown simultaneously. The 'freeze' technique, common to almost all subsequent plays, was used adventurously in *Shaba*. If Manoranjan showed psychological time by mingling the past, the present and the future, Mishra spoke of the real, actual time and in his play the time of the action corresponded with the time of the performance. Though one of the many plays written around a corpse, *Shaba* presents life as a cavalcade of incoherences and contradictions, tempting some to call it the first absurd play in Oriya. But it is far from that; the traditionally structured plot carried forward by functional dialogue keeps it from being absurdist.

Of the other plays of Mishra, *Duiti Suryadagdha Phulaku Nei* (Concerning Two Sun-scorched Flowers, 1972) deserves mention. If *Shaba* is a bold experiment, *Duiti* is an existentialistic anti-drama or no-drama. The responsibility for blooming buds into blossoms lies on the sun, i.e. society. But if society revels in crushing and burning the petals, one wonders if there is any need for it. There are only two characters in the play—Raja and Rani—who build a sequestered world of their own, live there as they wish, not guided by the dictates of society. But are they out of reach of the tentacles of society? They enter into various phases of a human's growth (again, a taking of roles), from the innocence of Alice to the ignorance of Adam and Eve to the oldness of the two protagonists of *The Chairs*. But liberation is nowhere in sight. Hemmed in by perpetual loneliness and loss of communication, they wriggle out and venture into newer paths to shake off the estrangement. All in vain. Not a success on the stage, *Duiti* offers vital academic and theoretical brainstorming to students of drama. The key aspect of the play is the hide-and-seek that fancy and reality play on each other.

Except for *Mrugayā* (The Royal Hunt, 1970), Biswajit Das (b. 1936) acknowledges his indebtedness to dramatists in other languages and other countries for the plays that have made him a force to reckon with in the new drama. Contemporary society and the living reality are the building blocks of his plays. There is no wishful thinking and no chewing of the cud. *Mrugayā* presents life and society as they are, or at least as they appear to the playwright. It has a *minimal plot*, and no message. Darkness is the essence of the play. We grope in the dark, catch hold of things we do not want, and we sigh, which none around us notices. The gap between what we want and what we get (a pet theme of Manoranjan's too) increases. We are confused, we pant, we cry for light; but light does not come. The royal hunt of darkness begins. This happens to all of us in much the same way as it happens to the victims of *mrugayā*, the royal hunt, and to the characters of *Mrugayā*. The delineation of the eternal conflict between what should be and what is, a

masterly use of language, accuracy of observation and superb craftsmanship make this play a significant work in contemporary Oriya drama. The graceful choreography, the use of a single screen to serve various dramatic purposes, and the imaginative lighting in the first production of the play were something new in the Oriya theatre in 1970.

Ramesh Prasad Panigrahi (b. 1943) enjoys a versatility unmatched by his contemporaries. He has been writing not only for the stage, but also for the radio, television, and street theatre. A late entrant in Jatra, Panigrahi has brought about a revolution in all departments of Jatra production. But stage success in the new drama was not abundantly available to him. The two plays on which his fame as a new dramatist rests are *Mu*, *Āmbhe*, *Āmbhemāney* (I, We Two, We All, 1970) and *Janey Mahāpurushanka Janma o Mrutyu Samparkarey*. In *Mu*, he says that all of us are escapists and the vocations we pursue are only the media through which escapism is made acceptable. But he does not give vent to pessimistic attitudes and wants us to stay in the system in order to set the system in order. *Janey* circumscribes the extravagances and uncanniness of *Mu* but clothes itself in such otherworldliness as to border on the absurd:

Krushna Mohan, a scientist, harbours with uncommon eccentricity the belief that pearls are formed in the heads of frogs by the first raindrops of Ashadha (April-May). Unable and unwilling to drive the idea away from his mind, he has been diligently collecting frogs for the last eleven years. He has already dissected the heads of five thousands frogs to prove his hypothesis but has not wavered in his belief. Like Sangram's search for the unknown gold-mine in *Aranya Fasal*, Krushna Mohan's fond belief makes him spend sleepless nights in his laboratory in search of the pearls of his dreams. He fails to fulfil his duty as a husband and his neglected wife Madhavi longs for motherhood. This is where Panigrahi's deeper insight into human nature differs from Manoranjan's observation. While Manoranjan gives one the feeling of being a sedentary armchair thinker, Panigrahi appears to be the sort to venture out. Panigrahi does not obfuscate the spectators by making Madhavi go wild. Like her husband, she waits. Her victory is in the waiting itself. Waiting to Madhavi and the search for pearls to Krushna Mohan are not a means to an end; they seem to be the end itself. In spite of amorous overtures from another man (not a villain in the traditional sense) called Birabhadra (who is neither *bira* nor *bhadra*), Madhavi stands as an ancient rock, irremovable and unbreakable. But she is not a *mahāpurush*, nor is Krushna Mohan. As a family drama *Janey* is different from *Mrugayā* where things happen to the characters. Here nothing really happens. The happenings (or non-happenings) and the characters are one and the same.

Beckett's famous play set the trend for many dramatists all over the world. But would it not be weird to suggest that whatever that does not come is Godot? In the context of Oriya drama we can say with conviction that Krushna Mohan's waiting for the fruition of his belief in *Janey* is far from waiting for Godot. It is very different and very refreshing. The play appears absurdist because there does not seem to be any apparent relation between the cause and the effect (if there is any) or between sequence and consequence. The protagonists appear to be two interlocutors with a glass wall separating them. The wall is not a made-in-society object but a system, or lack of it, made by them.

Ratnakar Chaini (b. 1945), dramatist, poet, novelist, short-story writer and critic, is a

popular name in contemporary Oriya literature. Among the new dramatists, he is the only one whose works have their roots in tradition. He is not able to dissociate himself from the older dramatic tradition of Orissa. So when he tried to jump on the Nabanāya bandwagon in the 1970s with his magnum opus *Punascha Pruthivee*, his foray in the new drama seemed to be languid and listless. We can at best call this play a transition play as it could not rid itself of the hangover of the past and accept the new trend. Its strength lies exactly in that status. *Punascha Pruthivee* contains many philosophical ideas and doctrines handed down to us by our sages and savants. Making an appropriate use of myth and trying to contemporize it, Chaini brings onto the stage the Pandavas of the Mahabharata and sets them against the backdrop of modern society to drive home the truth that the battle of Kurukshetra is never-ending in the human heart. Bharatee is the mother of Yudhisthir (a magistrate), Bhimasen (an I.P.S. Officer), Nakula (a doctor) and Sahadev (an educated unemployed revolutionary), and the grandmother of Abhi (a student leader under the aegis of Sahadev), the son of Arjun who remains in the background. It is a bit absurd to keep Arjun out of Kurukshetra and let the drama develop. But Krishna is there in the character of a tout, one of the many who act as go-betweens in a metropolis. Satiā (literally meaning truthful) is the trustworthy dumb servant of the house. The play begins with a conversation between the playwright and his Paris-returned friend Manas, who partly serves the function of the chorus of the Greek tragedy. The ball is set rolling as the characters, in mythological gear, file in and out in front of them. Bhimasen dashes into the room with a warrant empowering him to arrest his brother Sahadev who is allegedly involved in insurgency. Through many ups and downs, twists and turns, weal and woe, the play ends, or, as Chaini says, begins, with Abhi dying in police firing and attaining unasked-for martyrdom. *Punascha Pruthivee* was greeted with whole-hearted audience response wherever it was staged in the decade following its first production in 1971. What matters to the audience even today is not the development of the plot but the development of the thought process of Chaini and the all-embracing philosophies. The dialogues are poetic, at times lyrical, but highly functional nonetheless. The language in *Punascha Pruthivee* is as important as the choreography in *Mrugayā*. And it is the language that helps the play stay in the twilight zone and not slip into the realm of the absurd. It is an experimental play that attains near perfection in the mature hand of Chaini.

The fact that Edward Albee has influenced Chaini is now not a matter of controversy. But to say that Chaini's *Shunyatāra Sidi* and *Āme* are the Oriya editions of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and *The Zoo Story* respectively is to stretch the case too far. In the first-named play Chaini attempts a psycho-analytical exploration of marital maladjustments and other related issues emanating from the inaction of the husband. The wife Aseemā (meaning boundless) asks for motherhood from the husband Anādi (meaning without a beginning). The playwright uses conventional symbols to express her longing:

Aseema: Have you seen famine?

Anadi: No, but I have felt it.

And again,

Anadi: I admit—the cow lives on grass . . .

Aseema: But I had said—the cow lives on rags, scraps of paper, even tea and biscuits.

If Aseema's husband does not fulfil his role, there is no harm in turning to her servant Naren or to Mānas who invades her subconscious as an unruly horse. She shows Mānas her rusty bedroom, the tin roof which gets unbearably hot in summer, etc. But she is not a sheet of tin to cool herself with any water regardless of the source from which it comes. She asks Mānas to leave 'their' home. It is a brilliant study in man-woman relationship in a collapsing family.

Āme deals with the by now hackneyed theme of alienation. In this mad world human relationships are breaking down at an alarming rate. When we believe we grow up we grow away, in fact. But the tragedy is that we are not able to develop the imaginative sympathy or negative capability required to perceive reality. The result is utter helplessness in a fast-changing world. The sense of alienation has not found a place in the psyche of the average Indian. It is still an exotic concept. Chaini differs from Manoranjan in this respect: his characters are sons of the soil and are not afflicted with the outlandishness of Manoranjan's characters like Verma. Chaini, like Panigrahi, has seen life while Manoranjan has learnt about it. That's why perhaps the latter's portrayal of life seems vicarious.

The name of Kartick Chandra Rath (b. 1949) comes up in any discussion on the new drama in Orissa partly because of the large number of plays he has written and partly because of the awards he has received at various State and national-level competitions. He started his theatrical career like the other playwrights and jumped on to the Nabanātya bandwagon also like the others. But unfortunately he got the idea of driving the bandwagon himself and in a short span of time wrote prolifically to dazzle his contemporaries. In the theatre, anything written in haste, staged in haste, and published in haste gives scope for repentance at leisure. One wishes one had not written so much to say so little. Barren of original ideas, Rath managed to create an impression of being up-to-date by using ill-digested terms and ideas like supraconsciousness, loss of communication, alienation, divided self, futility of existence, etc. and produced play after play as if to assert his versatility and eclecticism. Sometimes he translated popular Hindi film-scripts into Oriya and forgot to acknowledge his sources, e.g. Hrishikesh Mukherjee's *Anand* and *Bawarchi* and Rath's *Chandrabindu* (The Moonspeck) and *Anya Ākāsha* (A Different Sky). The other plays that helped him find a place among the new dramatists are *Swargadwara*, *Jeevan Yajna*, *Ishwar Janey Yuvak* (God is a Young Man), *Mu Duhē* (I, Both of Me) etc. All his plays appear to have been written to meet deadlines—the haste shows in the work. His treatment of the tragic, suffering which partly comes from the sufferer's character (as in Shakespeare's four great tragedies, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Hardy's *The Mayor of Casterbridge*) in *Swargadwāra* and his treatment of the pathetic, i.e. suffering caused by forces over which the sufferers have no control (as in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* and Miller's *Death of a Salesman*) in *Mānsara Phula* (The Flower of Flesh) are too melodramatic. As he has an eye to the multilingual character of all-India competitions, his language is a jugglery with Sanskritized words.

Other dramatists like Akshaya Kumar Mohanty, Harihar Mishra, Prasanna Kumar Mishra, Jagannath Prasad Das, Subodh Patnayak, Gopal De, Kshitish Purohit, Rati Ranjan

Mishra, Bijay Mohanty, Rabindra Nath Das, Manmatha Kumar Satpathy, Bijay Kumar Satpathy, Purna Mullick, Ranjit Patnayak, Shankar Tripathy and others including the present writer tried to approach the new drama at some time or the other in their career. Many of them later changed course and became practitioners of *lok natak*. Some, like Panigrahi, turned to the popular and paying Jatras, and some others, like Bijoy Mishra and Subodh Patnayak, turned to writing for the cinema.

The plays were being staged by a limited number of amateur groups at a few centres like Cuttack, Bhubaneswar, Sambalpur, Rourkela, Berhampur, Baripada, Bargarh, Hirakud and Jatni. These were the centres where the 'new' people met and performed. Now the question is: who were the people who went to see the plays? No second thoughts are needed to say that intellectuals, students of literature and middle-class professionals formed a large section of the audience. The number of times a play was staged was extremely limited; very few plays were lucky enough to go beyond the premiere or trial show.

Thankfully, those days are over and the spectators are not expected to go to the forest or cry for light or long for motherhood every time they visit a playhouse. □