

UDAY SHANKAR

Personal Reminiscences

Rajendra Shankar

Indications of greatness, it is said, are evident from a tender age. But in the case of Uday Shankar his recalcitrant childhood portended, if anything, his developing into a vagrant with a gloomy future, disinterested in studies and disinclined as he was, to conform to decent norms of behaviour expected of a child of good breeding from a decent family.

Born in Udaipur on December 8, 1900, he travelled with his parents from place to place in Rajasthan, as his father moved from one State to another and finally settled down in Jhalawar. During periods of shifting, his mother would take Uday to Nasrathpur, a village near Ghazipur and 60 miles from Varanasi, where her father was the Zamindar. She once even went to Kalia, Uday's paternal place in Jessore, now in Bangladesh. These stays would often get extended when his father went abroad on lecture tours, or accompanied the Maharana of Jhalawar.

Uday found no roots or companions of his own age, his next brother being nearly six years younger, and so learnt early to fend for himself. While at the village of Nasrathpur he would roam around in the garden or the lush corn fields, climb trees to pick up birds' eggs or catch fledglings, go fishing or swimming or join his uncles going out for duck shooting. He would catch young ones of koels, bulbuls or dahiyaals and order the brother next to him to look after them. When these died, generally from overfeeding, they would both weep and bury them. Then he tried to domesticate squirrels, mongooses, dogs and a fawn, and took infinite pains to train them to do tricks to the amusement of the servants and the villagers.

During Holi he would watch the dances of the Chamars and specially their leader, Matadin, who created a strange fascination for young Uday with his curious movements, sometimes comic and vulgar and sometimes very soft and serious. He also admired the virility of the Ahirs who would dance with abandon. Thus Uday was practically brought up in the various colour-

ful festivals of Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal, till he was admitted to the Victoria High School at Ghazipur.

Boyhood Escapades

Living there in the Zamindar's Kothi with his mother and brothers, he soon joined a gang of boys of kindred spirit, who preferred to forage into orchards, go vaulting and swimming in the Ganges in spate, on picnics, rowing or street entertainments like *Nautanki* or even to *Baiji* dances. He often returned home late with sometimes a cigarette butt in the pocket, to the great distress of his mother. In those days of strict purdah in Uttar Pradesh, she could do nothing once he went out, except pray and cry and talk to him, which always ended in his promising to give up everything and study. Occasionally one of his maternal uncles came to the city and at his sister's lamentations would try to set things right by beating up young Uday, locking him up in a room without food and threatening his friends, if they dared call on him, with dire consequences. As soon as the uncle left Uday would start again with a vengeance!

His hefty grandfather, who had been a wrestler in his younger days, in one of his unheralded visits to Ghazipur on a court case found Uday's drawing all over the floor and the walls, his hair grown, groomed and parted with a comb sticking out of his pocket, and lips red with chewing pan. Being a man of action he summoned a barber to shave Uday's head and made him wipe all the chalk drawings with a wet cloth. He also appointed a private tutor enjoining on him not to spare the rod.

He then wrote a lengthy letter to Uday's father in London, listing all the lapses and advising him to put his precious son in a boarding house, otherwise he would turn into a goonda, a '*bhand*' (itinerant street entertainer) and a '*konhar*' (potter who painted toys) in the company of the riff-raff of the city, and become a thorough disgrace to the family.

Nothing daunted, Uday once again started on his wild escapades and one evening caught hold of the descending cane, broke it up and with the aid of his next brother cut off the pig-tail of the tutor, who never returned even to claim the few rupees due to him for a week of tuition.

But, as always, he promised his mother to be good and study by himself. Whenever he heard her approaching steps he would loudly recite: " 'Tis a lesson you should heed, Try, try again; If at first you don't succeed, Try, try again! . . . " After a few days asked by his mother if he had no other lessons to memorise, he would switch over to "Twinkle, twinkle little star, How I wonder what you are. . . ." as a variant!

Uday revolted against many senseless restrictions. For instance hen's

eggs and chicken were forbidden for caste Hindus in those days and so he would go to the house of his friend Noor Mohammad and eat them on the sly.

First Serious Interests

Things were going from bad to worse when the drawing master of the school, Ambika Charan Mukherji, found him exceptionally good at drawing and sports. He began to take interest in him and being a widower with no children, he slowly helped Uday to give up bad company and at his house provided him with all the things that interested him, like music, painting, magic tricks, cameras and magic lanterns. Along with this, Uday began to evince great interest in the stories of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and books with pictures of great temples with statues and the lives of great saints and sages of India. This period of reformation and the debt he owed to 'Master Moshai' he tried to bring out in his film *Kalpana*.

Uday now started to try out striking magic tricks with his next brother as the assistant, try out magic lantern projections with slides painted by him, or teach his brothers to sing with music provided by him to entertain his mother. His mother, having no daughter, often dressed him in a sari, put on bangles and ear-rings to make Uday look like a girl. To the amusement of all, Uday would start moving coyly and gracefully and try to dance like the women he had seen in Rajputana. Incidentally, when he did his famous Marwari Dance for the stage in Paris, people could hardly believe that it was a man dancing, so perfect was the impersonation.

Towards the end of the First World War when his father returned from London, the family shifted to Jhalawar. The grandfather heaved a sigh of relief.

Finding his son interested in drawing and music, Uday was put under a drawing teacher, and Mr. Pinto of the state band came to teach him the violin. Here Uday got interested in playing cricket and in going out shooting in the forest. He became a good batsman and wicket keeper, and also a good shot with his father's twelve bore and the rifle. He also had a panther cub as a pet whom he tried to train, and even years later, the panther would recognise him and give him the paw for 'shake hands'. It was nearly 20 years later that he practised shooting again at Almora, but his night vigil to shoot a mirauding panther proved abortive, because he could not sit quiet. He would imagine the poor goat, tied as a bait, trying to dance and enchant the panther, like Mohini in the case of Bhasmasur! He wondered what style of dance would pacify the panther, and so on. He even thought of the possibility of the animals coming together and waging a war against man. As the night advanced his imagination became more rampant, and those with him would burst out

laughing. The panther never turned up and the poor goat survived without having to dance.

In Jhalawar he gave a demonstration of magic to the delight of the Maharana and the courtiers. Seeing his aptitude for painting the Maharana advised his father to send Uday to the Art School. It was just after the severe outbreak of influenza of 1918 that he went and joined the J.J. School of Arts, Bombay.

Widening Horizons

Here he got double promotion and became more interested in music and Indian instruments. He used to visit the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya where he saw for the first time the *saranga*, enlarged version of the *sarangi*, which later he had specially constructed for his Paris Orchestral group to provide base notes. In Bombay he also came in contact with different aspects of life, students from different provinces, and became friendly with Shantilal Shah, the son of the owner of the Jain Boarding House where he stayed. On weekends he would go to Ghatkoper where Shantilal lived and here he ate Gujrati food and delicacies provided by Shantilal's mother, who loved Uday like a son. They remained great friends and met when Shanti went to Europe for business, and where he later married one of Uday's former German partners.

In August 1920, Uday sailed by *S.S. Loyalty* for London to join the Royal School of Arts. His father was there and had instructed Uday to take with him various musical instruments like the *veena*, *sitar*, drums, flutes etc. With him sailed in the same boat a young scientist who became famous and a Fellow of the Royal Society, Dr. Meghnath Shah.

Uday had his first experience of the modern stage in London when his father staged a fantasy, *The Great Moghul's Chamber of Dreams*, written by him, performed in aid of the bereaved families of the Indian soldiers killed in the First World War. This was perhaps the first occasion when scenic effects were projected on the stage through slides painted by Uday. He also worked out the magic tricks to give the illusion of fairies flying in and out of the chamber, besides helping with music and playing instruments.

Thus his craze for fiddling with machines, rigging up gadgets like the magic lantern and trying out magical feats proved useful and made the show a great success. Uday considerably perfected this technique in later years, to present the life of Buddha in colour, projected on a gigantic curtain for a mass of thousands in the open air.

Used to looking after himself, it was easy for him to adjust to all conditions and in London, with generous pocket money, he soon became a well-

dressed dandy, smoking rose-tipped cigarettes and starting to paint with dramatic flourish those big canvases in the modern genre of painting. This was the period when he felt happy and satisfied with life till the principal, Sir William Rothenstein, one day came up and saw his work, and then called him to his office. Sir William, a lover of India and a friend and admirer of Tagore, minced no words and, instead of praising, as Uday had fondly expected, decried his work and attempt to ape the modern Western trend. He told Uday how wonderful Indian art was and that he should go to the British Museum instead of attending classes and study the magnificent paintings and specially the miniatures.

In Ghazipur, Ambika Charan Mukherji had impressed him with the great culture of India and now Rothenstein was telling him that Europe had nothing to teach him in the sphere of painting.

Thus started Uday's studies at the British Museum, pouring over tomes of Indian paintings and sculpture. For the first time he realised how India still maintained its culture through paintings and works of art in different parts of the country and that even the potters made and painted toys in such characteristic ways. He had been impressed with the Elephanta Caves near Bombay. Now he saw how the whole country was full of objects of art, a veritable treasure trove!

His studies and discoveries at the British Museum thrilled him. Paintings, sculptures, dances and musical instruments which had instinctively attracted him, and which were considered degrading as callings for decent people, now, with the growing appreciation of foreign indologists, entranced and energised him. He felt inspired and became the first Indian to stand first in the final year, winning two prizes, for a self-portrait and a nocturne, and a scholarship to study at Rome.

Meeting with Pavlova

It was at this time that the great Russian ballerina, Anna Pavlova, back in London from a tour of India, was keen to enrich her repertoire by some colourful Indian themes, and was on the look-out for someone to help her. Thus fate brought Pavlova and Uday together. He accepted to choreograph two dances and also to dance in them as her partner.

He was very excited but worried and apprehensive of the task he had undertaken. He spent days at the British Museum again seeking materials on the Radha-Krishna lore, made innumerable sketches of costume, ornaments and scenic background. In his reminiscent moods, he would say that he could think of nothing else at the time but movements, dreamt of them, and riddled with a fiery imagination, he would work feverishly, sketching thousands of possible movements for Radha and Krishna and practise them till he felt

exhausted. And thus, finally, the dance numbers *Radha-Krishna* and the *Hindu Marriage* were completed and presented at the Covent Gardens, London.

The great success overnight dazzled him and when asked to join the troupe for a tour of the United States, he opted for dance and joined Pavlova. In the troupe his innate disposition for hard work received a great boosting by the way the dancers worked and rehearsed with unflagging energy and almost religious zeal. But on the American tour the Indian items were given on rare occasions, and only in big cities on change of programme. Not wishing to accept a large salary and remain idle, he suggested to the ballet master that he could easily learn the steps for which often supers or extras had to be engaged, and thus be more helpful.

When Pavlova heard of it she flared up and told him that he should feel ashamed of himself wanting to learn ballet steps when his country had such rich varieties! This was a shock but also an encouragement and incentive to strike out on his own. Full of future dreams and cock-sure of himself he left Pavlova after the American tour.

It was after his great success with Pavlova that his picture appeared in the "Illustrated Weekly of India". Two of his next brothers then studying at the Benaras Hindu University were shown the pictures. The brothers were stunned at the scandalous news made public and felt so humiliated! This was a period, hard to imagine today, when decent people looked down upon dance and music and considered it debasing for members of good families to take up the arts professionally. They were considered the preserves of Baijis, Devadasis and Mirasis.

When Uday returned his father referred to him as the most well-dressed man in London without a penny in his pocket! But he was chockfull of confidence. With his album of photographs and rave notices he went from one agent to another. They seemed impressed but the final query was: Yes, it is all wonderful with Pavlova. But what are you by yourself?

Anyone less dogged and determined would have given up and fallen back on painting, or run to Papa and Mamma for help. Uday did neither. He left for Paris, his imagination fired by visions of pictures and paintings, temples and statues all magically alive, beckoning him, holding out untold promises.

Period of Struggle

Then followed a period when he never got in touch with his family or asked for help from anyone. He struggled, starved, worked and sweated but never gave up. He got hold of many dance partners, French, German, Italian,

English and even Arab, to build up dance items and present them in cabarets. He had to drink with customers to boost sale of liquors and so was taught to swallow an ounce of olive oil before so that he could later throw out the drinks. He saved bread and cheese from his share to economise on food and hire a studio for an hour each day to rehearse new items. Though tired without sleep he would go to the Louvre and pour over materials for help and inspiration. Coomaraswamy's *Mirror of Gestures* inspired him to create the *Indra Dance* which became one of his most famous solos. But with all this hard work and relentless striving after making his dance career a success, he lost weight and became very thin. A Maharaja watching him one night felt nauseated at the protruding ribs and asked him to be taken off. Incidentally, he stayed as a state guest of the same Maharaja when he returned with fame to India!

Simkie joined as a student. Resident of Paris and a pianist she showed great aptitude and helped him in the orchestration of his music and finally became his partner. Things were looking up and he got a chance to perform at the Paris Exposition Internationale of 1925. Here he got the opportunity also to see dances from all over the world, Africa, Latin America, Arabia, Java, Bali, Kandy, Burma etc. It was here that the Swiss Sculptress, Alice Boner, saw him and asked him to pose for her. His dances also caught the attention of several agents and he was booked to perform in different parts of France and Europe. The overall expenses were low because he and Simkie formed the troupe, they packed their costumes in a box and had copies of notated music which would be handed over to the local orchestra for a few rehearsals and then the final show.

For anyone struggling hard this might have proved a very satisfying achievement, but not for Uday. He now dreamt of the time when he could have music from real Indian instruments, real ornaments and costume, and more authentic spirit and atmosphere. He discussed it with Alice Boner who was interested in his ideas and dreams and they finally decided to go to India to make a thorough study and engage dancers and musicians for a real troupe. Thus was formed and registered in Paris the 'Compagnie Uday Shankar de Danse et Musique Hindoue'. And, after a lapse of nearly ten years, he returned with an unsatiable curiosity and infatuation to rediscover India.

His brothers were still shy to talk about his dance exploits. What kind of a dance did a grown-up man perform? Ravi Shankar was born just before Uday had left and was in his tenth year when he saw his big brother for the first time. Uday went to the village to meet his grandfather, who was happy to meet him, but disappointed that he had not become a barrister and great scholar like his father. He was not told about the dance career, but was quite sceptical about painting, always associating it with 'konhars'!

Then the first thing Uday asked for was to meet Matadin, the chamar

tenant and dancer. Matadin arrived and stood respectfully at a distance, bowing low. Seeing him Uday rushed and hugged him and looking at the crowd that had gathered said, "He is my real Guru, for he inspired me to dance." Poor Matadin, dazed, did not know what to do. A Brahmin young man, coming from Europe, grandson of the Zamindar, embracing and praising him, an untouchable, and in public, proved too much for him to sustain his tears.

Uday and Miss Boner were guests of many Maharajas where they saw demonstration by the court dancers and musicians, the fabulous collections of jewels and ornaments, books and musical instruments. He could hardly believe when he saw the art collection by Salarjang at Hyderabad which required seven palaces to contain it. But despite his busy and extremely absorbing and educative tour, he managed to see his old friends. In Ghazipur he visited his friend Noor but felt disappointed to learn that 'Master Moshai' had retired, his whereabouts unknown.

At night he would get up from bed at sound of drum beats and go to the village or *basti*, where people gathered round a bonfire, played and sang. He loved the simplicity and beauty of these songs sung at harvest or festivals, childbirth or death; he was reminded of his old days and felt quite at home.

Rediscovering India

He was fascinated and inspired by the rich variety of folk dances and the highly stylised classical forms. He was so enraptured by *Kathakali*, which he first saw at Guruvayur, that he raved about it at Calcutta. Many learnt of its very existence for the first time when the interview was printed. He went to Manipur and other states, but had a humorous but sad experience when he went to see the Naga dances near Shillong. The dancers appeared in shirts, trousers and boots! When asked about the absence of their traditional costume he was told that the district officer felt that their bare bodies would be indecent and shock the guests coming from abroad. Uday persuaded them to get rid of their garb of decency and then they were treated to the vigorous dance movement, which later he incorporated into his film *Kalpana*.

He had a similar experience when he visited the Travancore Festival. Some lawyers and newspaper people learning of his coming all the way to see *Kathakali*, opined that he might be disappointed at its crude and rustic qualities. Uday told them that he believed *Kathakali* to be the most outstanding dance style created in the world, which owed a debt of gratitude for this unique gift from Malabar. It was here that he met Guru Sankaran Namboodri, and they fell in love with each other at first sight.

He toured all over India with avid interest to see all possible existing



Shankar with Pavlova in : "Radha-Krishna", 1924





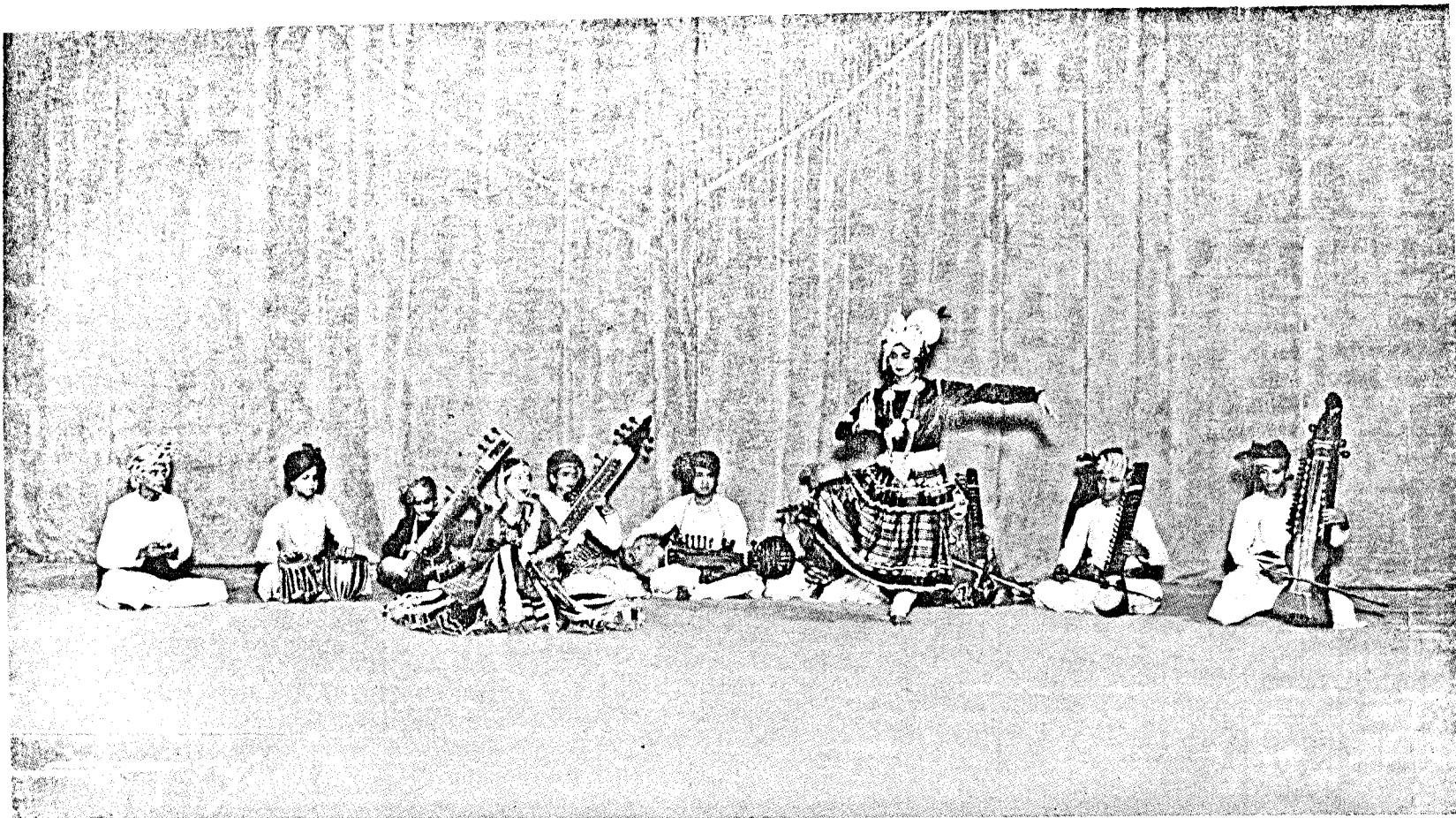
Above: Practising "Gandhara" with Timar Baran (Left) in Calcutta 1930. Below;
As "Indra". Autographed photograph, 1927.





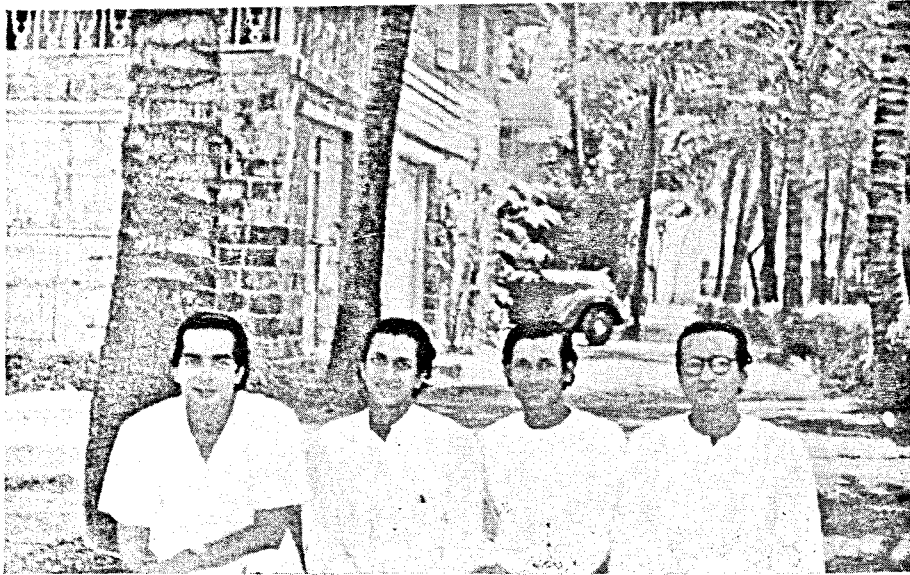
Above: Four brothers in "Gajasura Vadhan"; Uday (Shiva); Debendra (Gajasura); Ravi (strings); Rajendra (drums). Below: 1932 on boardship after U.S. tour. Shankar with camera and telescopic lens.



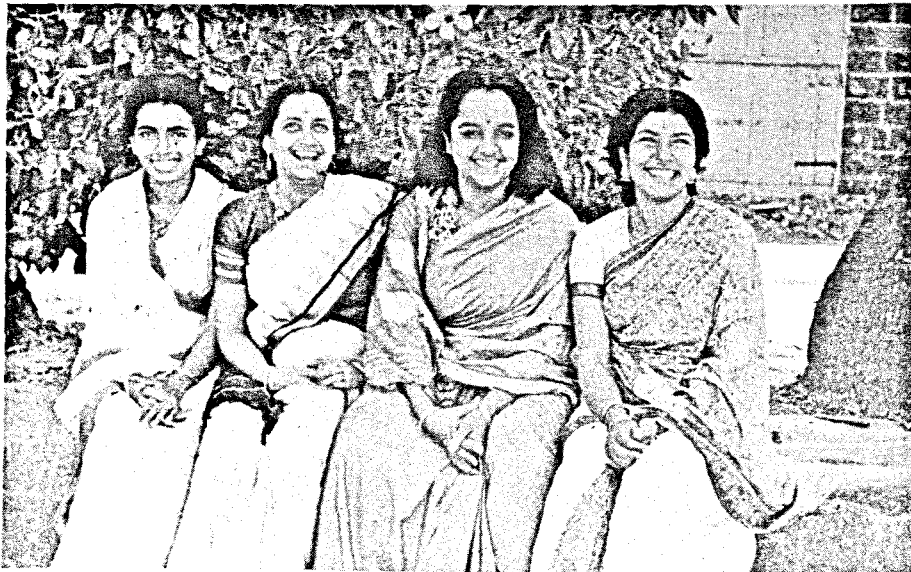


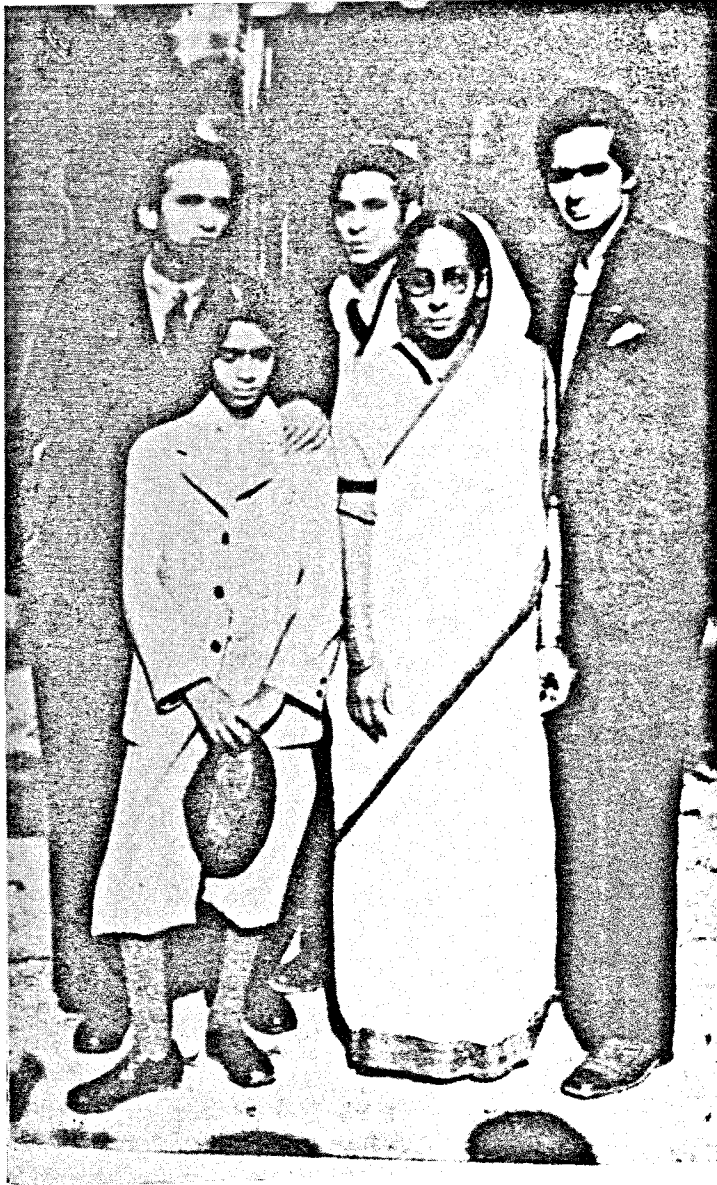
Above: 1930 "Radha-Krishna" with Simkie. Musicians (L to R) Kedar Shankar, Vishnudass Shirali, Ravi, Rajendra, Timir Baran, Bechu, Kanaklata, Matul, Debendra. Below: "Astra Puja" (1934) with Kanaklata and Simkie and (L to R) Sisir, Rajendra, Debendra, Matul.



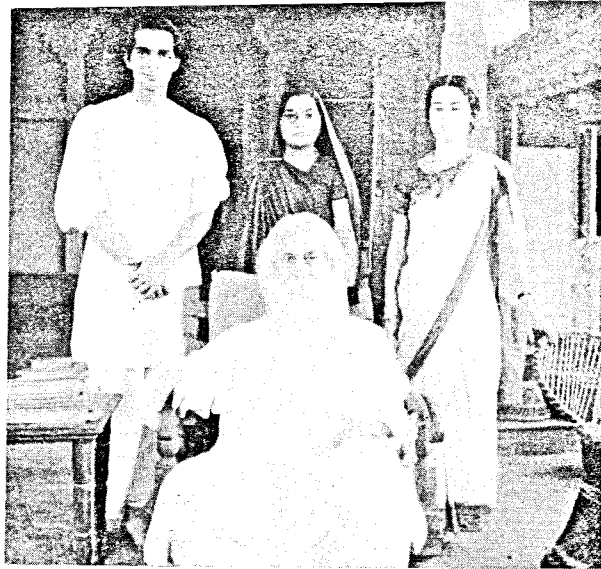


Above: 1949 in Uday's Juhu home, Uday, Ravi, Debendra, Rajendra, Below: Their wives, (L to R) Annapurna (Ravi), Krishna (Debendra), Lakshmi (Rajendra), Amala (Uday).

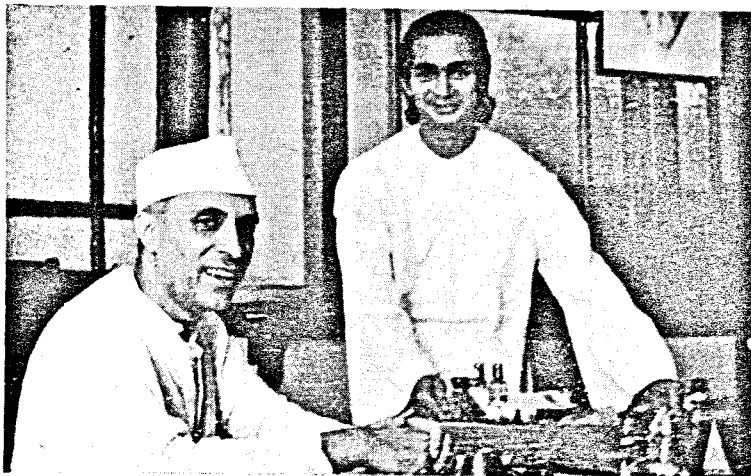




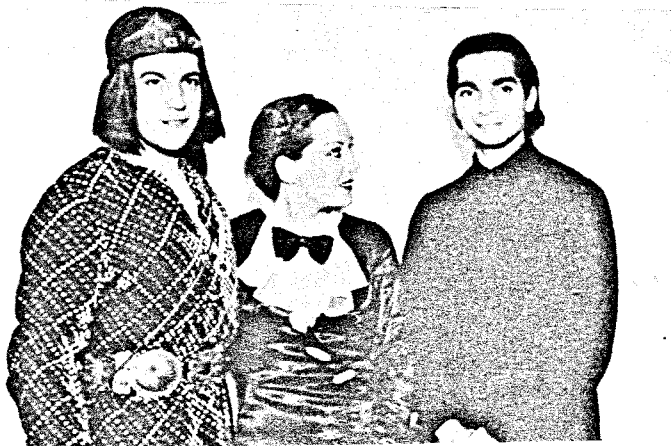
With Mother in Paris. Ravi in front with (L to R) Debendra, Rajendra and Uday.



Shantiniketan, with Tagore; Simkie at right.



Above: With Nehru 1933. Below: Hollywood with Ramon Navarro and Lupe Valez.





Above: Sri Lanka 1933, with the chief Kandyan dancer. Below: with Lord and Lady Harewood, Calcutta.





*With his son, Ananda, during the production of "Kalpana", 1945-47.
(Photographs, Rajendra Shankar).*

styles, folk and classical. He visited temples with magnificent sculptures of gods and goddesses and exquisite dance poses. Thus he went to Ajanta, Ellora, Chidambaram, Badami, Halibed, Konarak and other famous temples. The temples in the South appeared to him like veritable culture centres, where dances, *natakas* and discourses were regularly given. He raved about them and often seemed lost in reverie or exclaimed in excitement what great wealth of art he had missed all his life. He was reminded of remarks by Rothenstein and Pavlova or of great savants like Sylvain Levi or Coomaraswamy and others. Alice Boner was so fascinated that she later made India her home and stays at Varanasi.

Uday also collected musical instruments, fabrics, ornaments, typical prints, characteristic toys and earthenware from various places. He and Alice were amazed at the varieties of drums made of wood, metal or clay, and he always felt so proud to repeat that India could boast of nearly 280 varieties of drums alone. But his collection of instruments did not include any harmonium or violin.

In Calcutta Haren Ghosh was perhaps the only person at the time who could be ranked as an impresario of sorts. He became very attached and helpful to Uday and Alice Boner, and requested Uday to give a demonstration. This was arranged at the Oriental Club where a society lady played the piano and Uday gave his *Gandharva*, *Indra* and *Dagger* dances. He also presented an impromptu folk item, inspiration from Matadin, with his brother Rajendra playing the *duff* and singing a '*viraha*' with the chorus.

Abanindranath Tagore had been invited. After the items he came on the platform and hugged Uday. He said, "when I heard that a dancer, a male, coming after years in the West was going to dance, I came prepared to suffer some kind of '*khichri*' performance. But what I saw created a strange effect. It is nothing like what we see or know of and yet its soul seems Indian and very stirring. . . ."

Thereafter a few regular shows were given with orchestral music composed by Timir Baran, a *sarode* player and disciple of Ustad Allaaddin Khan, who was at the time building up an orchestra with mostly Indian instruments. The few shows presented in Calcutta were a great success and received wide publicity.

Uday went to Shantiniketan and was greatly impressed by Tagore's personality and blessings. Tagore humorously said that he had been blamed for making boys and girls of decent families sing and dance in his dramas. So Uday should be prepared for criticism. People generally miss the soul and go after the decadent form. After all it is water that is important, whether it comes from the spring, lake, river, pond or well or, as now, supplied through taps. The water should be clean, pure and healthy.

Touring Abroad

In 1930 Uday sailed for Paris with his new group, consisting mostly of his brothers, 2 uncles and a cousin. Timir Baran and Bechu were the only two outsiders. In Paris, Vishnudass Shirali, already in London, and Simkie joined, making a group of 11 dancers and musicians, with Uday.

All the artists, except Simkie who had her home in Paris, stayed in a big house with a garden near Bois de Bologne, with the big basement hall left for rehearsals.

A strict routine was followed. A maid looked after the other floors while the mother supervised meals, but the rehearsal hall was left for the troupe members to look after by turn—sweep, clean and wax the floor, heap coal in the cellar furnace for central heating, clean and arrange places for musicians and instruments. The instruments had to be tuned and kept ready before the hour of rehearsal so that no time would be wasted.

Before things were fixed up and rehearsals started, Uday took the members to see all the important places, Louvre, other museums and galleries, Notre Dame and other churches, Eiffel Tower, gardens, palaces and Versailles. He took only the male members to the Casinos, Folies Bergere and even one of the registered showhouses of prostitution. And thereafter he had a sincere open talk with them and said how good and bad were there all over the world. But a foreigner seeing an Indian for the first time would judge the whole nation by the impression created by that one person. Hence each of them was responsible and should behave with dignity, sobriety and decency in keeping with the fair name of India. This left such an impression on the group members that during the eight years of extensive travelling all over the world, there was hardly any incident that could create a scandal. Thinking back one has to admit that Uday had come a long way since those turbulent days of early youth!

It was a unique experience to see the dances taking shape and the new orchestral dance music evolving. Not a single Western instrument was used. But, in the beginning both Timir Baran and Shirali got irked when Uday after hearing a composition, would suggest the addition of some effect, like perhaps the twang of the *gubgubi* or *ektara*, or some special sound from the clay drums and so on. "What you have composed is wonderful. I am not a musician but I feel you could give it some emphasis here and there to enhance the effect of the movements and bring out the emotional impact." He never dictated but got what he wanted by experimenting with the group and meekly and persuasively advancing suggestions and when the final version became remarkably impressive, even the two music directors marvelled. And soon thereafter they agreed to follow his musical hunches.

The first show was presented in May 1931 at Theatre des Champs Elysees in Paris. It was a great success, hundreds could not get tickets and the show had to be repeated. It is always a matter of luck, but in the case of Uday he would remain adamant till he got the effect and polish he wanted. Even after several shows he would hold rehearsals to make the items more crisp and perfect, being a stickler for details. This striving for thoroughness has influenced his students and all who worked with or under him.

Ravi Shankar, referring to Uday's towering influence says, "To me he was a superman, and those years with him did a great deal not only to shape my artistic and creative personality, but also to form me as a total human being. . . . It was he who taught me to understand and appreciate our ancient tradition and art, and all our culture; and my apprenticeship under him in stagecraft, lighting, set-design and general showmanship was of great value to me in later years."

Amala, his wife, says: "Everything I owe to my husband, a new vision of life and art, creation and presentation. . . ."

Lakshmi Shankar in an interview in Los Angeles said, "Dada (Uday) not only taught me dances but more importantly the art of showmanship and presentation on the stage. He used to emphasise that we should feel the pulse of the audience. The little success I have I owe it to Dada's training and influence."

Sachin Shankar, Narendra Sharma, Bhagwandas and other students are carrying on creative work inspired by Uday. Late Shanti Bardhan established the Little Ballet Troupe which is doing wonderful work. Late Guru Dutt became a good film actor, director and producer who notched up a place in the annals of Indian films. Mohan Segal is a leading film director and producer, while Sardar Mallik is a music director and film producer. Devilal Samar has established the Lok Kala Kendra at Udaipur with a huge open-air amphitheatre, perfecting the art of puppetry which has won worldwide renown. Sundari Shridharani has established the Triveni Sangam, a remarkable art centre, in New Delhi. In short, all those who came in contact with him felt a kind of artistic awakening, and the pride and dignity of being born an Indian.

The Almora Centre

Not being satisfied with the great success of touring all over the world for eight years, he wanted now to establish a place in the Himalayas, an ideal art centre in the sublime atmosphere of the mountains. In this he got the financial help and encouragement from Miss Beatrice Straight and the Elmhursts of Dartington Hall, Devon, England. It was at the Centre that

Ramayana in shadow play was for the first time presented in a natural amphitheatre nestled in the hills, accommodating more than 5000 spectators. Later he developed shadow-play in colour on the *Life of Buddha*, and it was for the first time that he used decor and stage effects with spectacular light effect when he presented '*Samanya Kshati*' on Tagore's birth centenary.

When due to the exigencies of the Second World War, finance was hard to come by, Uday launched on his film *Kalpana* which proved a financial flop. But the settings and dances in the film, dealing with different aspects of life, including a satire on provincialism, are great achievements.

He liked Madras so much, after shooting the picture there, that he built a house there with a regular stage and auditorium occupying practically the whole house. Here he built a new troupe with which he toured China, Europe and America.

By the turn of the sixties he shifted to Calcutta where alterations were made in the troupe. It was from this time his health began to deteriorate. While performing in Assam he had a heart attack. After a little rest he again began working but in the American tour of 1968-69 he had a stroke after cerebral haemorrhage. Discharged from the hospital at San Diego, he stayed with Ravi at Los Angeles till he fully recovered and returned to India.

Unable to dance or exert much he started on his old ideas of mixing stage and screen which he called Shankarescope. It proved a tremendous success in Calcutta.

There were certain things he felt grieved at. One that surprised and distressed him was when critics and others ascribed his success to mere showmanship, acquired from the West. Actually he went for simplicity and avoided all scenic effects for he knew that he could not even compete with the ordinary Vaudeville shows, leaving aside the spectacular ones put up in Moscow, London, Paris or New York. He wondered why even the educated belittled their own country and ascribed everything to the West.

Showmanship he found inherent in life, all over the world, starting even with babies who instinctively know how to attract attention. The imposing temples, churches, mosques, *viharas* and magnificent edifices and palaces of kings and potentates are, after all, attempts to create show pieces. The inspiring worship of deities with incense from various shaped censurs, mysterious lighting, *aratis*, flowers, choirs or chanting of *mantras*, costume of priests right from the time of the medicine man, the colourful costume at festivals, are but evidence of attempts at great showmanship. India has had an elaborate ritual of consecrating the stage with chanting and worship of the *Jarajara* staff of Indra, before the show actually started. This created not only a visual but a tangible spiritual effect that heightened the atmosphere of expectancy.

He even found the itinerant sellers of pills and herbs on the pavement assuring eternal youth and potency, great showmen! But with the performing arts in eclipse during foreign domination, the great art and discipline of presentations were forgotten, and everything worthwhile or new credited to the West. "I did not have to learn it from the West, it has always been there for any sentient showman. All I did learn from the West was to avoid what was not Indian."

Contemporary Relevance

He always felt that dance themes, choreography and presentation should be commercially viable and culturally and artistically relevant to the times, nearest to the psyche of the people and the ethos of the country. That is why he always emphasised the 'conscious' method of his training so that one part of the mind would be always alert to guide and criticise.

A year or so before his death the papers raised the canard that Uday was starving, living as a destitute without money or help. When asked why he gave out such an impression he felt that the papers had rather played it up, having nothing sensational to print during the Emergency!

But it is true, however, that Uday, like all great artists, had gone through his share of the agonies and ecstasies of creation and like quite a few of them, the agonies of non-creation in old age, and the loss of love and attachment of all those who had mobbed him in admiration. The taproot of mental illness is lovelessness which many in ill health are liable to magnify, when even a little lack of attention hurts. These are hazards of incapacitated old age, specially when the mind is still active but the body is incapable and dependent on help of others. There was enough money in his bank account after his death, so the question of starving did not arise. Actually Ravi had offered to take him to stay and rest at any place he preferred in Europe or America, but Uday was loth to leave Calcutta till he felt strong enough to travel.

Strangely enough he had an uncanny sense through a kind of sub-conscious channel, to distinguish between what to reject and what to accept. Surveying the stretch of his life one finds how at different levels of participating in the rough and tumble of existence he always remained tuned to the pulsations of life and never feared to face a challenge. He had no formal education but one cannot help admitting that he did graduate with honours from the stiff University of Life.

Thinking back on his growing childhood and his loudly repeating 'Tis a lesson you should heed, Try, try again....' and then switching on to 'Twinkle, twinkle little star...', to keep up the pretence of studying, it is

possible that it subconsciously moulded his character; for he did go on trying, and he did want to reach the stars.

He passed away in Calcutta at the dawn of 26th September, 1977. Till the last waking moment his brain was clear but he felt that the end was near. He blessed his wife, son and daughter, and asked them to continue their good work. He forgave them all lapses and wished them well. It seemed as if he wanted to shed all his emotional burden and tensions and travel light to the unknown.

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