DRAMA IN RURAL INDIA—MATHUR

ASIA

Drama in Rural India

J.C. Mathur

RAR
792.0954
MAT

INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS

Numerous dramatic forms are prevalent in Indian villages. But, though he may get bewildered by this variety, an observer is bound to notice points of similarity among forms surviving in regions far distant from each other. The existence of these common features is no coincidence. It shows that drama in Indian villages has been much more than a spontaneous expression of folk-life or a local folk-device to entertain the community. It is both an off-shoot of and a root that has nourished the traditional, classical culture of India. So widespread and continuous has been the process of exchanges between traditional-classical and traditional-folk drama in India that 'pure' features of the one or the other are hard to come by. To this process, therefore, the drama in Indian villages owes its all-India character despite differences in languages and long distances.

Printed literature on traditional village drama in India is extremely scarce apart from articles in periodicals. This book is a modest attempt to survey, in an all-India perspective, traditional drama as staged in different parts of the country. It is one of a series of books designed by the Indian Council of Cultural Relations for those who are keen on getting acquainted with Indian culture and the Indian way of life. Much of the information included in these chapters is based on firsthand observation, for, in addition to several books and articles, the author has also had recourse to notes made while seeing, on the spot, performances given in remote village shrines and fairs. What distinguishes this book from others of its kind is the unmistakable rapport with the rural folk, his delight and affection for the villager 'at play' which come through on every page, surely and infectiously, to make this book above all a pleasure to read.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

PRS
75

DRAMA IN RURAL INDIA

Acc no 76.
dist dt. 23/2/86

Prabhu Book Service
INDIA.
Tel. 2588
GURGAON.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

DRAMA
IN
RURAL INDIA

J. C. MATHUR

INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS
ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE
BOMBAY CALCUTTA NEW DELHI MADRAS
LUCKNOW LONDON NEW YORK

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

© INDIAN COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL RELATIONS, 1964

792.0954
MAT

PRINTED IN INDIA

BY J.M. D'SOUZA AT THE NATIONAL PRINTING WORKS, 10 DARYAGANJ, DELHI, AND PUBLISHED BY P. S. JAYASINGHE, ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE, BOMBAY

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my friends and colleagues in All India Radio who helped me, when I was serving that organization, in meeting artistes and performers from villages in different parts of India. Even though much of their work lies among these artistes, the help rendered to me was a labour of love undertaken not without considerable personal inconvenience to themselves.

I wish also to acknowledge the ready and willing assistance given to me by Mr. O.P. Bhasin, Mr. Muthuswami and Mr. R.L. Sinha.

J.C.M.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Contents

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

DRAMA IN RURAL INDIA

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

Introduction

When, nearly twenty years ago, I came under the spell of traditional village-drama in India, I looked in vain for printed literature on the subject. The position is not very different in 1963, though stray articles in newspapers and magazines do occasionally give interesting bits of information about one or the other regional dramatic form as a type of quaint artistic activity. The fact that dramatic entertainment in rural India is more than a quaint and exotic activity and that its place in the cultural life and heritage of the country is comparable to that of any serious and mature art is by no means brought out in these passing glimpses.

This book is a modest attempt to survey, in an all-India perspective, traditional drama as staged in different parts of the country. It is not an exhaustive study. Several omissions may be noticed. It is also not marked by weighty scholarship. As one of a series, the book is designed for foreign readers keen to get acquainted with Indian culture and way of life. But it is bound to appeal to Indian readers also, because, in the first place, some of these forms are not known even outside the rural areas where they are practised; and, in the second place, much of the information included in these chapters is based upon first-hand observation. I have consulted several books and articles of which the particulars are given in the bibliography. But, primarily, the book is based on the notes I made while seeing, on the spot, performances given in remote villages, shrines and fairs. Perhaps that is the strongest justification for the appearance of this book.

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

Numerous dramatic forms are prevalent in Indian villages. But, though he may get bewildered by this variety, an observer is bound to notice points of similarity among forms surviving in regions far distant from each other. The existence of these common features is no coincidence. It shows that drama in Indian villages has been much more than a spontaneous expression of folk-life or a local folk-device to entertain the community. It is both an off-shoot of and a root that has nourished the traditional, classical culture of India. So widespread and continuous has been the process of exchanges between traditional-classical and traditional-folk drama in India that 'pure' features of the one or the other are hard to come by. To this process, therefore, the drama in Indian villages owes its all-India character despite differences in languages and long distances.

In Kashmir, for example, the village drama is noted for songs appropriate to different situations. Every song conforms to a particular mode called *maqām*, a Persian term that corresponds to the Sanskrit term *rāga*. The names of these maqāms are, often, the same as those of rāgas in the Indo-Gangetic plains or down south. The structures of the maqāms bearing these names have not yet been compared with those of the rāgas of the Hindustani or Karnataka schools of music but it is obvious that names like Jhanjhoti, Āsāwari, Todi, Kalyān, Bihāg, etc., could not have been bestowed on the maqāms without a basis common with that of the rāgas going under those names in the classical schools.

Likewise, in most dramatic forms known in Indian villages two stock-characters are easily identified—the clown (vidushaka) and the narrator-cum-stage manager (sūtradhāra). Originally inherited from classical Sanskrit drama, these stock-characters in folk and regional rural plays perform several functions and, unlike those in classical drama, usually stay much longer or make frequent appearances. They interpret the story to the audience, provide links in the absence of scenes and acts and add a touch of contemporaneity to tales of long ago.

Indeed, one reason for the long survival of folk plays—until the cinema came with its unprecedented techniques and began its relentless operations—has been their capacity to adjust old themes, and distant ideals, to the idiom and comprehension of contemporary audiences.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Various devices are employed—comments by the sūtradhāra, stray bits of naturalistic dialogue, moralistic exhortations directly addressed to the audience, appearance of characters from modern life in an earlier setting. Some of these anachronisms and irrelevancies are disagreeable to urban taste. But the blend that folk-drama in villages presents to its audiences is not a forced blend. It has been achieved through a gradual and imperceptible response to the changing situation. Seen through the eyes of rural spectators, these performances seem ageless in pattern and refreshingly novel in their appeal.

An impersonal medium of this kind cannot be a vehicle for ideas that a sensitive intellect gathers in its explorations of life. Sharp individuality is out of place. Drama in villages is the forum for didactic messages and a morality that transcends age and times. This ethical outlook expresses itself in different ways according to the nature of the theme. A devotional play from the epics may highlight moral action, a romantic tale of the northwest may linger over a moralistic message from the hero about to die, a burlesque in the Himalayas may show the ludicrous plight of the 'bad' man. But the moral vein is unmistakable, and it is never resented because the message is seldom shallow though often platitudinous. It arises from the basic things of life.

Moreover, drama in Indian villages encompasses almost the entire inner personality of the villager. It seeks to meet all his intellectual, emotional and aesthetic needs. Unlike urban and modern drama, it freely uses songs, dances and instrumental music besides dialogue. This multiple approach results in a form that is self-contained and 'complete' entertainment for the audience to whom it is directed. It is more than an entertainment; it is a complete emotional experience and aims at creating an environment of receptivity in which communication of ideas is an effortless process.

But the future of folk and traditional drama in Indian villages seems to be in doubt. It could adjust itself to a changing society but urban influences have a new weapon of matchless power in their hands—the cinema. Its shadow is already cast over village drama, not merely as a formidable rival but, what is more tragic, as a heartless polluting agent. The springs of good taste are drying up and many plays put up in villages are marred by hasty and crude importation of film-methods.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

The account that follows might well be the echo of a swansong. But there is some hope. For free India, with its ideals of equality and its concern for the humble, has brought recognition and confidence to folk-culture that far exceed the patronage which princes and shrines gave in old times. Perhaps drama in villages may still have distinctive character and a dynamic role to perform in the life of the community.

New Delhi
October, 1963

J.C. Mathur

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

I

PLACES OF PERFORMANCE

PLACES FOR PERFORMANCE OF DRAMA IN INDIAN VILLAGES are chosen on the basis largely of custom or of the wishes of the patron or 'sponsor'. In old days, the temple or the shrine was the community centre; not merely a place of worship. On the walls of ancient temples are carved segments from secular and devotional life. Crowds of devotees who came with their offerings to the deity had in these carvings glimpses

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

of their own toils and joys; their eyes feasted upon beauty in myriad forms; and the minds awakened through senses that had received stimulus from aesthetic experience absorbed, often unconsciously, the message of good conduct, the immortal tales of prophets and heroes and even the intricacies of the fine arts and letters.

Temple-Premises As Theatres

With the art of the sculptor, drama was a partner in giving to the devotees a comprehensive picture of life and messages from saints and sacred texts. But just as the *sanctum sanctorum* in most shrines is bare while the outer walls and structures pulsate with figures and patterns, so also the enclosure close to the deity could only resound with the sober refrains of hymns and for the rich colours, rhythms and songs of drama, provision would be made for a separate *mandapa* or covered platform in the temple-premises or in its immediate vicinity. In a village temple in Mugud (near Dhārwār in South India) there is an inscription of A.D. 1045, referring to the construction of a *nātak shālā* (theatre) by a minister—Shrimanmahāsāmanta Mārtandayya. It seems that during the 11th to the 14th centuries in Northern India and right down to the 18th century in the South, the nātak mandapa or theatre enclosure was regarded as an important adjunct to the temple. Till the beginning of the 20th century, temples in Tanjore, Chidambaram, Trivandrum and several other places in Southern India used to have regular dance-performances by danseuses dedicated to the deity—as it were. The temples in Orissa—in particular, Puri—have had a similar continuous tradition. Music and dance dedicated to the deity seem to have gained popularity during these centuries partly under the inspiration of Jayadeva—an eighth century singer-poet whose

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

brilliant Sanskrit poem *Geeta-Govinda* was designed for what would today be called the presentation of an opera-cum-ballet. *Geeta Govinda* is a love-tale of Lord Krishna and the cowherd maidens based on some entrancing passages from *Shrimadbhāgwat*—the rich treasure of the legends of the Vaishnava cult. Its success gave to the temples a delightful instrument for popularising creeds and attracting devotees. Themes from not only the *Shrimadbhāgwat* but also the other Puranas and relating to the Saiva and other cults of Hinduism lent themselves well to stage-presentation. Consequently, temples built during this period usually had provision for platforms and enclosures for such performances. Big temples had *pukka* structures; elsewhere the courtyard was thoughtfully designed to enable the setting up of temporary structures.

Today, however, the temple-theatre is in use only in a few regions. Why it went out of use elsewhere is another story not relevant to this account of contemporary situation. The most striking examples of the current use of the premises of temples or places of worship for dramatic performances are the *kootāmbalams* of some temples in Kerala and the *bhāonāghars* or *rabhās* of the Vaishnava monasteries (or *satras* as they are called) in Assam Valley. The former is a mandapa or open hall built within the premises or in the vicinity of the temple and used for the performance of old Sanskrit plays liberally mixed with the local regional language, Malayālam. The tradition of these temple performances goes back to nearly 1000 years, its present form being ascribed to a king named Kulashekhara Varman who was himself the author of two plays. The kootāmbalam is a regular structure though sometimes made of wood, and its best examples are in the temples of Trichur, Perumanam and Irinjalakkuda. In Assam Valley,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

which is almost in the other extreme corner of India, bhāonāghar or rabhās are large open halls built close to places of worship (or nāmghars) in monasteries. Assamese Vaishnava devotees do not worship any image of Krishna or Vishnu; instead they place a sacred text—*Shrimadbhāgwat* in the sanctum. Their monasteries are really small village-communities and are called satras. In some satras, performances may be held in the nāmghar itself, but in most a separate structure called bhāonāghar or rābha is built of wood, straw and bamboo; and is maintained over the years.

Though the Braj region to the south-east of Delhi is the legendary home of Lord Krishna and its villages are at all seasons gay with songs, dances and dramatic pieces (called Rāsalilās) about the romantic god, the existing temples in these villages were mostly built during the last two hundred years and are, in comparison with the temples of the South, small and modest. Near some temples, small open halls called *rās mandapas* have been provided for the performance of Rāsalilā. These may be permanent brick-and-mortar structures as in the little temple-town of Vrindāvan or may be temporarily set up for festive occasions. Mostly they are outside the shrine, though, in the pretty temples in the villages of Barsānā (legendary home of Rādhā) and Nandagaon, the halls immediately facing the sanctum are sometimes used for these performances.

Temporary theatre halls (made of bamboo and wood or of tent-cloth) near temples are, however, a common feature all over the country. In the Tamilnād village of Melattur, near Tanjore, a mandapa is built every year for the festive presentation of the Bhāgwata Mela plays, in the street facing the Nrisimha temple (shrine of the lion-god—one of the incarnations of Lord Vishnu). Bengal's famous Jātrā performan-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

ces—a form still vigorous and impressive—are often put up in courtyards of temples. Bhavai of Gujarat in Western India is sometimes ritually performed near the shrine of Ambaji not far from Mt. Abu. Likewise, the Kariālā, a rustic revue-like show in the Himālayan State of Himāchal Pradesh, is sometimes presented near the temple of the local deity—Bijju Devatā or Valrāj. But neither Bhavai nor Kariālā is concerned with religious and mythological themes. They have satire and social criticism and local folk tales, but no emphasis on a cult or creed.

Theatres or places of performance in or near the premises of temples are thus not necessarily used for plays directly related to the deity or even religion. Secondly, reverence and dedication to the deity is clearly indicated so that, when the theatre is built separately, the idol or its symbol is sometimes brought out and installed at a prominent spot in the performance-place. Thirdly, the temple is directly responsible for the maintenance of the theatre only in Kerala and in the satras of Assam and to a limited extent in Melattur and Braj area. At some other places on the occasion of festivals, the temple authorities may help the performers in different ways. But their direct responsibility is small, and consequently their patronage is neither extensive nor regulatory nor censorious.

Fairs, Streets and Private Premises

Country fairs provide a natural forum for the rural drama. In one of the biggest rural fairs of India—the Sonepur fair of Bihar—several folk drama troupes put up their own open platforms and give performances. Of these, the best known is Bidesiā, a form of social play based on the life of north Bihar villagers. Improvised theatres are also common at country fairs of Mahārāshtra for Tamāshā parties, and even in Delhi one can see on the roadside, at the

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

annual Urs of the Muslim saint, Nizāmuddin, small enclosures at which rather inferior dramas on mundane themes are shown.

However, only fairs which last several days attract dramatic troupes from outside. Itinerant troupes do still manage to get invited by individual patrons. The fees are small and the set-up required is very elementary. The occasion usually is the wedding of a son or the birth of a child or some religious festival. Swāngs or Sāngeets of Uttar Pradesh and East Punjab are often performed at the houses of such patrons—in the open or in a verandah. Some rural parties like the Rāsalilā groups of the Braj region are invited collectively by admirers or devotees in distant places; some Rasalilā troupes go as far as Calcutta, Bombay and even Burma. Performances are given in private premises in an improvised tent or in the open. Street crossings are a common place of performance after nightfall, particularly when the performance is financed jointly by several families. Village orchards and market-squares lend themselves very well to such performances. Commercial theatre-houses are unknown. In the city of Poona a simple theatre-hall is maintained by Abdul Jamba who lets it on nominal rent to visiting parties of Tamāshā performers from villages and small towns. Recently under the programmes for rural community development, platforms for dramatic performances have been constructed at a few community centres. But these are hardly ever used for traditional performances.

Premises of temples and other places of worship, courtyards and verandahs, etc. of private houses, country-fairs, street-crossings and markets—these then are the places normally used for performance of rural drama. While the source of patronage determines choice of the place, the structure of the theatre does

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

not depend upon the patron. If the patron is rich, it does not follow that the theatre would be lavish and elaborate. In fact, Indian drama—be it rural or urban—had never, until the 19th century, succumbed to the magic of scenic splendour. This led to a very desirable emphasis upon literary values, so that much of rural drama is, in its poetic imagery and its awareness of literary allusions, far more sophisticated than the spectacular 19th century urban drama that grew in elaborate theatre-halls. Simplicity of the places of performance and of the background urged producers to seek colour and glitter in costumes, and audio-visual effects in songs and dances. Places of performance are, therefore, so arranged as to reveal the beauty and colour of the costume and the intricacies of the dances to everybody and to enable the audience to share intimately the pleasures of poetry, the rhythm and melody of the songs.

Structure—Auditorium

A common feature of the rural theatre in India is the absence of enclosing walls, though modern urban troupes visiting villages and charging admission fees and some of those performing in fairs have to improvise screens to keep out intruders. Indian climate and the well-defined seasons are a great help. Most festivals and other gay functions are held during the months following the rains (Sharad season) and in the Spring (Vasant season). In the south, the winter is very mild, and even in the north it is short. Thus, the rainy season is the only period when special protection could be necessary, but that is the time when the farmer is busy and festivities involving large numbers have to be avoided. Walls, therefore, are a redundancy. Not so the roof. At day-time performances the sun can be scorching for bare heads. And at night-long performances, a common feature all over

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the country, the audience require, particularly in northern parts, protection from dew and chill. Besides, the mandapa or covered hall open at the sides is a customary feature of all auspicious and ritual occasions and weddings.

Some performances are invariably held in the open. Thus, there is a type of Yakshagān (traditional musical drama of Southern India) in North Karnataka which is known as Bayalāta,—*bayālu* means 'open ground' and *āta* is 'play'. Bayalāta Yakshagān (which has other names also such as Doddāta) is almost always performed in the open. Surprisingly enough, rural theatre in the two coldest regions—Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh—is open to the sky. *Bhānd Jashn*, the Kashmir rural play, is performed in the open, both in day time and in the night, and so is Kariālā of Himachal Pradesh. At many performances a big fire is lit and it cheers up the crowd and the performers and keeps the percussion instruments in good trim.

Covered theatres in which the stage and the principal auditorium are both under the same roof are rare. Perhaps the rabhā or bhāonāghar of Assam Valley, referred to earlier, is the only fully-covered theatre-hall in that sense. It is about 60 yards long and 20 yards wide. It has a double roof resting on large wooden pillars; the first layer is of corrugated iron sheets and then there is a layer of thatch. The inner ceiling is usually of cloth, covering the iron sheets. The ground of this rectangular open-hall is plastered with mud. The pillars are wrapped in beautifully coloured cloth upto a height of 5 feet and higher up are displayed various kinds of masks and some decorative pieces. Another, more or less, fully covered mandapa is that of the Bhāgwat Mela (traditional plays from the Puranas) in the village

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Melattur in Madras State. A street about 100 yards long and about 10 to 15 yards wide is covered over with palm leaf-mattings supported by bamboo poles. On one side is the stage and the other side extends upto the shrine. This mandapa is, however, put up for the occasion and is not a permanent feature.

Temporary mandapas and shāmiānas (large canopy-like tents) are used for dramatic performances in different regions, but they are not specially designed for theatrical purposes. They are hired for weddings and other festivities and may, at the wish of the sponsor or patron, be hired for a particular dramatic performance also.

Structure-Stage or Arena

The peculiarities of the dramatic tradition in different parts of India are, however, much more in evidence in the structure or shape of the stage proper, or the arena for performance. The commonest is the arena which may or may not be demarcated, and may or may not have a canopy above it. In Himachal Pradesh the open space in between hillocks, where a fire is lighted and the orchestra takes its seat and actors of Kariālā appear in batches or singly, is called *akhārā* which, in Hindi, means an arena. The akhārā of Kariālā is perhaps, despite its crudity, the prototype of the modern fashionable arena theatre. The audience sits on three sides and leaves a long alley through which actors come and go, the green-room being located at the rear of the spectators. This acting place encircled by the audience is on the same level and there is no raised platform. In some villages in the Purnea district of Bihar State, a folk-play called Bidyāpat Nāch (named after Vidyapati, an outstanding Maithil poet of the 15th century) is performed, likewise, on level ground in the midst of the audience. This performing area is called lilāsthali—the place for

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the lilās or enactments of Lord Krishna. In the Jātrā of Bengal a rectangular area is marked on the ground by stretching strips of cloth. But in the more elaborate Jatra performances, the stage consists of a high platform with a canopy on the top. The entry for actors is from one side of the platform over a sloping rampart. The audience could thus sit on three sides. Jātrā performances in the neighbourhood of Bengal, *i.e.* in Orissa and parts of Bihar, do not usually have a raised platform.

A very interesting arena stage is that of the bhāonā-ghar or rabhā of the Assam Valley. At one end of the large rectangular covered hall is seated the orchestra-cum-chorus and at the other end is placed the *thāpanā* or the pedestal containing the sacred text. In between—a length of nearly 40 yards and width of about 6 yards—is the *rangasthali*, almost like the 'runway' on an airfield: it is ground-level with the audience sitting on both sides. Entrances and exits for actors are from the side of the orchestra-cum-chorus, the green-room being at their rear. The centre of the rangasthali is indicated by a small canopy hung from the ceiling of the hall. Under that canopy the main action takes place, but there is an attractive device for showing simultaneous action at different locales. On both sides of the rectangular rangasthali, small low-plinth pavilions are made—wooden-platforms with their own low canopies. These represent different localities such as the palace of the king, the temple for worship by the princess, etc. Quite often, actors having performed a scene do not leave the arena; instead they sit on the pavilion or stall to which they belong awaiting their next call. In the play *Rukminiharan*, the heroine's messenger 'travels' from Kundinpur to another city—Dwarakapuri—supposed to be thousands of miles away; the journey is, however, from one pavilion to another. This device is similar

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

to that employed in Easter plays of medieval Europe. According to Allardyce Nicoll (*World Drama*), in these plays performed in the church-premises, there used to be small platforms or structures showing such places as the sepulchre, the garden, a spice-selling booth, etc. From a picture of the stage of the mystery play at Valenciennes, in the National Library, Paris, it appears that these 'booths' used to be arranged, one beside the other, on a large platform, visible from a distance. The little pavilions in the arena of the Assamese rural theatre are more homely, more intimate with the audience.

For the arena with vast spaces and spectacles one should see the Rāmlīlā of Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, performed in small towns and cities in the month of October and attracting eager and thick crowds from surrounding villages. A large piece of ground—about 500 yards by 500 yards or sometimes rectangular in shape—is fenced around. This enclosure is called the *bārā* and inside it are constructed, at different spots, independent structures representing such locales as Chitrakoot, the hill on which Rāma spent part of the period of his deportation; Lankā, the golden palace of the demon-king Rāvana; and Panchavati, the jungle-hut where Sītā was abducted by Rāvana. Big spaces in between are used for the battle-field and other action. The entire bārā is thus a large acting place—a vast world of action and conflict, and from outside the fencing of the bārā, milling crowds watch the happenings—by no means quiet, but certainly under the spell of an environment that transports the multitudes to a different world altogether.

But to go back to the more intimate 'theatre', it seems that troupes that earn their living by giving frequent performances and move about from village to village and fair to fair, prefer to put up raised plat-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

forms so that the audience can watch the performances from at least three sides. In Mālwā, a territory of Madhya Pradesh (Central State) the traditional romantic musical drama is named the Mānch. This name itself means a raised stage and is derived from the Sanskrit *manch*. In Bharata's *Nātya Shāstra*, there are detailed descriptions of the *ranga-manch* (the stage for drama) and *ranga peeth*. The Mānch of Mālwā is a much more recent institution but is obviously descended from an earlier tradition. The Mānch stage is about 10 to 12 ft. high and seems to have been even higher in old times. According to Sir John Malcolm in his memoirs of Central India written in the early part of the 19th century there used to be in Ujjain (in a locality known as Sinhapuri) a performance called Teen-Khan-kā-Khel (the Play of Three Storeys) in the month of Phagun (July-August). On a street-crossing a three-storeyed stage would be constructed. On the first storey the scene of an indoor game, Chaupar, would be enacted, mid-floor had a dance performance by Rāmjani—a dancing girl, and on the top storey, an indigenous game of cards —ganjafā-kā-khel—would be shown. It is interesting to recall that the Elizabethan theatre had also provision for vertical spectacles of more than one locale.

The mānch of today is not so high but is still the tallest stage in India. The wooden platform is about 20 cubits wide and 25 cubits in length. A canopy rests on poles fixed at the four corners, and is gaily decorated with paper-buntings and other articles. In Rājasthan, Khyāl is a dramatic form very similar to the Mānch. In fact there are three names for this kind of performance in Mālwa and Rajasthan— Mānch, Khyāl and Turra-Kilangi. Similar legends and heroes appear in both, though the Mālwa Mānch has a metaphysical strain. In Rajasthan there used to be, until recently, the practice of building two tall

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

structures representing palaces and one lower platform in between. Actors would descend by steps to the platform for performance. The use of two levels is also noticed in another North Indian form—Sāngeet or Nautanki—a purely secular and romantic type of drama. Just below the main platform, a few planks form something like a 'cat-path' which is used for special situations such as the scene in which the lover, Gabroo, in the play *Siyāh Posh* (The Soldier in Black Armour) throws up a rope to climb to the bower of his lady-love.

The Curtain

There are several other rural dramatic performances in which the raised stage is customary, but raised platforms seem to be more popular with professionals and more common in the north. Whether it is an arena or a platform, a clear view for the audience seated on three sides is a basic requirement of rural drama. That is why the curtain of the modern picture-frame theatre is unnecessary; on the contrary it is unwelcome because it divides the world of performance from that of the spectators. The theatre in rural India seeks to create a different world for both and whatever assists this experience is accepted. The curtain is, therefore, used for a different purpose in several rural theatres of India; it introduces important characters by stimulating curiosity. Ancient treatises on dramaturgy and the theatre in India refer to the curtain as the *yavanikā* or *pati*. Scholars have argued about the connection between the yavanikā and the Yavanas—the name given to the inhabitants of ancient Greece. One theory is that as the task of holding the curtain used to be given to slave-girls usually from Greece and Western Asia, the curtain itself came to be called yavanikā. Today, it does not matter who holds the curtain, but the curtain, a

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

feature of some traditional forms only, has both ritualistic and psychological value. Though Kathakali of Kerala—one of India's best known classical dance-forms—is not drama in the strict sense—dialogues by the actors being non-existent—the holding of the curtain before important characters like Bhima, Rāvana, and Hanumān is a most dramatic spectacle. The character stands behind the curtain and special music evocative of the personality begins. The actor himself holds the upper edge of the curtain with his fingers and as the music gets into a higher tempo, the actor shakes the curtain a little and the audience gets an occasional glimpse of his face—sharp and fleeting like the shimmer of a rapier in the sun. After such excitement, the final and full-dress appearance of the actor is the climax to the building up of a fantasy. We are transported into another world and from then onwards we are in an unmistakably receptive mood. What an elaborate set and imaginative interplay of light and shades do to the first scene in a modern play, the *yavanikā utthāpan* (the lifting of the curtain) does to a traditional play. In Rāsalilā of Braj in Northern India, this use of the curtain is made for giving the audience, consisting of devotees, glimpses of the Divine Lovers—Rādha and Krishna. The term used—*jhānki*—itself means 'a glimpse'. Such *jhānkis* are introduced at two or three places in the course of the performance and sometimes mark turns in the progress of the story. Perhaps Rāsalilā is one of the few types in which a backcloth is also used. *Pichhwai* is the name given to the backcloth and literally it has that meaning. The *pichhwai* is usually displayed at the back of the *singhasan* or the lion-seat of the Divine Couple. Assam's Ankiyā Nāt—the Vaishnava play of the Monasteries—was greatly influenced by conventions of Braj area and though the *pichhwai* is not used in this play, the front

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

curtain is a common device for introducing important characters. It is called the *aar kāpar*—the cloth that provides a temporary screen. The music and dance behind the curtain, particularly by the sūtradhār (stage-manager-cum-narrator) are an important preliminary, reminiscent of the description of the song accompanying curtain-lifting (*Utthāpani Dhruvā Geeti*) given in the ancient text of Sanskrit dramaturgy—Bharata's *Nātya shāstra*. A remarkable example of how an ancient classical tradition re-appears in unsuspected places is the *jaminika*—a preliminary musical 'overture' mainly on drums, which illiterate performers of the rural play Bidyapat in North Bihar, give at the commencement of their performance. *Jaminika* seems to be a corruption of the Sanskrit *yavanikā* (curtain) and the musical piece corresponds to the one which the ancient text prescribes as a 'curtain-raiser'.

In the more traditional performances like the Doddāta or Bayalāta of Karnātaka and Bhāgwat Mela of Melattur, the curtain is used only at the beginning as part of the preliminary rites and not thereafter. In both these forms, two persons come holding the curtain—and behind the curtain is seated Ganesha or Vigneshwar (the elephant-headed deity who is supposed to remove all obstacles). The chorus sings the praises of Ganesha, after which the curtain is removed and Ganesha comes forward and afterwards goes out. Another curtain is held up for a similar appearance of Saraswati—the goddess of learning.

The curtain in the rural and traditional theatre is, thus, not a screen between the world of illusion and of the spectators. It is rather (*a*) an exciting introduction to principal characters—individually, or (*b*) part of a preliminary ritual of homage to the deities.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Entries

Introduction of principal characters in the rural theatre is also done in another, more spectacular, manner, namely, ceremonial and processional entry of the cast. Entries can be either from behind the stage, or through the audience. Where the entry is through the audience, it is generally in the form of a procession. Ramlilās in U.P. and Delhi are noted for the processions of the cast. The procession is from the temple where the performers stay during the 15-day period of the Rāmlilā, to the arena or bārā. The distance sometimes is over a mile or two and special carriages or *rathas* are used for the actors. Rama's *ratha* has wooden horses and a mechanism inside, operated by men. On certain days, new carriages with tableaux depicting other characters are added. They are called jhānkis. On arrival at the arena, the procession makes a round along a fenced passage nearest the spectators before the actors take their position on the stage. By contrast, the 'procession' of the actors in the modest Kariālā play of Himachal Pradesh is a small affair. Emerging from the green-room behind the audience, the characters strut about, wending their way through the spirited audiences, some of whom literally pull their legs. The Bhānd Jashna of Kashmir shares this convention with the Kariālā; only the Bhānd Pathar actors are better clad and their steps conform to the music. In certain folk plays in Orissa, actors similarly walk through the audience. In the Yakshagān of Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh, the processionists are accompanied by persons sounding gongs and carrying torches.

Place for the Audience

Processional entries seem to have evolved as a device to bring some order among the audience whose

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

high-pitched excitement finds a release at the sight of the cast slowly moving towards the stage or arena.[1] This does not mean that audiences at rural plays are volatile and indisciplined. Centuries of conventions have set a pattern of behaviour so that auditoria are hardly a necessity. The ancient text—Bharata's *Nāṭya Shāstra*—shows that it was not always so. There is an interesting story in the *Nāṭya Shāstra*, of how at the very first play put up by the sage Bharata and his sons at the behest of Brahmā, there was so much commotion and rowdyism by a hostile element (the Daityas or the anti-gods) in the audience that the play had to be given up. It was then that Brahmā advised Bharata to build a nāṭya mandapa or auditorium and laid down specifications for various kinds of mandapas, and how and where people belonging to different communities and castes should be seated. Caste-distinctions are not actually observed in the seatings in mandapas, though where a play is held in the premises of a shrine, the priests are given a place close to the deity. In the Mānch, the right side of the auditorium is reserved for the elders and men of judgment, who may, by means of gestures, point out any defect in the performance. In front of the stage are four pillars called *bandi-ke-khambe* near which are seats reserved for 16 young men and two officers of the police (Jamādar and Thānedar) and one *Bādshāh* or 'emperor'. Actually, there is no 'emperor' or police officer as such. In the feudal days, these must have been seats reserved for important persons from the State. But this kind of demarcation of the auditorium bears the impression of Bharata's instructions. In some rural theatres (as in Kariālā), men sit on one side and women on the other, of the auditorium. The term 'auditorium' does not signify anything like a

1 Uday Shankar, one of the pioneers of the revival of dance-dramas in India, used to make deft use of this device in his abbreviated Ramlila shadow play.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Greek amphitheatre. Bharata has prescribed tiers for seating in the mandapa, but in hardly any rural theatre does one come across tiers. Only recently have stools, benches and chairs for important guests been occasionally permitted; otherwise *durees* and straw mats (known by local names in different areas, such as *kath* in Assam) are spread out by spectators on the ground and all are on the same level.

Some locations of audiences are, however, very interesting. Thus, in a Rāmlilā performance, which is like a passion-play on a vast scale, thousands of spectators are accommodated on two sides of the outer enclosure or bārā. They may bring their own *asanas* or *durees* or keep standing behind the fence. In some towns, a row of canopies is set up alongside the fence and these are occupied by the gentry. For purdah-women, there used to be an interesting provision; wooden platforms used to be raised on poles, somewhat like the *machāns* raised in Indian jungles for big-game shooting. *Chiks* would be hung above them. Space for these high platforms or *tānds* used to be given on rent. The view from these tānds used to be very clear. With the disappearance of purdah, tānds have gone out of fashion. While in the Rāmlilā large audiences sit on both sides of the performing arena and stage, the spectators of the Prahlād Nātaka of Ganjam District in Orissa, occupy the space between two parties of performers! This is, however, an extraordinary arrangement. Normally in a rural play, the audience encloses the performers from three sides, if not all the four. In Melattur village, (as in several others in the South), the performance is held in a narrow street and the audience crowds the street itself as also the neighbouring house-tops and shops. (Plays performed in the streets are sometimes called Veethi Nātakam). Covered auditoria are usually confined to temple plays as explained earlier

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

in this chapter. The *shāmiānā* or *pandal* is now getting into vogue more and more. It gives an impression of prestige and, since electricity is now available in small towns and country fairs and several villages, it facilitates display of lights. However, the basic simplicity of auditoria still remains; plain ground is the normal seat for everybody, and the stage or arena of performance is surrounded by the audience on three sides if not on all.

The 'Green-Room'

With no side-wings and, generally, no backcloth, the 'green-room' has either to come out into the open, or to be so far removed from the stage as to require performers to make their way through the audience. In ancient dramaturgy of India, two words are used for the green-room—*nepathya* and *sajjā-griha*. The word nepathya has two meanings—one, the costume of an actor and hence the place where actors attire themselves, and the other, 'behind the scenes'. In rural drama, the nepathya is used principally as the place for make-up and costumes, seldom as the source of heavenly voices or sound-effects or voices of characters absent from the stage. But the latter convention has continued in some monologues like those of Chakyars of Kerala, in a symbolical manner. They sometimes imagine that somebody is speaking from 'behind the scenes'—the nepathya, and repeat to the audience what they are supposed to have heard.

Nepathyas as places for make-up and costumes have various forms in the rural theatre. Thus, in Bayalāta Yakshagān of North Karnatak, it is called *chauki* (literally 'a special square seat'). It is an enclosure, about 10 yards away from the stage, screens on three sides and a cotton sheet on the top. One corner of this green-room is earmarked for rituals and is called *swastikā*; a handful of rice, two coconuts, some

I.G.N.C.A. LIB.
86-927
Deptt. of Arts
17-3-86
GOVT. OF INDIA

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

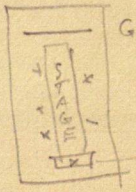
flowers, betelnuts and a traditional lampstand are reverently placed on a broad banana-leaf over this swastikā. Two 'regal headgears' or *kireets* are also placed near the swastikā. In Kootiyattam, the green-room is usually to a side of the stage, screened off, but is not actually used for elaborate make-up operations—only for small changes. A big drum is, however, specially kept in this enclosure. Far more functional is the improvised green-room of Bhavai——the Gujarat folk play. It is usually the verandah of the house of the village headman or of a nearby temple. Away from the sight of the audience, this corner is not only a green-room but also a rest-room; a bed or two are available to actors for stretching their limbs until their turn comes again in these night-long performances. In Assam's Ankiyā Nāt, the green-room is called *chha-ghar* (derived from either the Sanskrit *sajjā-griha*—dressing room—or *chhadma-griha* —make-up room. It is an apartment in the main building of the monastery, not far from the rabhā-mandapa, and houses costumes as well as elaborate property like the *rathas* (carriages), large dolls, masks, etc. Perhaps the property-room of the Rāmlilā of U.P. is the most lavish; it is the temple from where the daily procession starts and where all the actors for the evening's programme get ready. Some other property like masks, or paper models of animals and birds, are carried to the arena. Small changes, if any, are effected in the view of the audience. Weapons are handed over to the combatants during battle scenes. The audience does not mind the incongruity. That is why in the theatre of Mānch of Mālwā and Khyāl of Rajasthan, there is no green-room at all; the chorus sitting in the back-portion of the platform is what may well be called the 'green-room base'. After doing his part, an actor would 'retire' to this 'base'. If he has to remove his

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

turban and put on a wig, he would do so there, assisted by the members of the chorus-cum-orchestra.

Place for Chorus-cum-Orchestra

The position of the chorus-cum-orchestra is, therefore, strategic. Called *Gāyan-Bāyan* (singers and instrumentalists) in the Ankiyā Nāt of Assam, the group of musicians occupies the ground opposite the pedestal of the sacred text, the rectangular space in between being the arena for performance. Every actor going towards the arena passes by the musicians who are also able to give instructions from behind. The sūtradhār or the narrator stands or sits near the *Gāyan-Bāyan* and goes forward off and on to explain the progress of the action. In Bhavai, the folk drama of Gujarat, which is otherwise secular, the musicians are given a special platform called *paudh* which is treated as sacred; it is a circular pedestal—10 feet radius—and two actors are commissioned to build it according to instructions. The Rāsalilā musicians are also the 'directors' and narrators, there being no separate sūtradhār. They have, therefore, to face the performers and to be not very far from them. They are on the same level with the arena and the audience is partly behind and partly on their right and left. Prompting by musicians is a very common feature of rural drama and in Mānch, there is a special seat right behind the stage; it is called the tek-kā-pat (literally, 'the seat for repeating the refrain'). Musicians sitting on the tek-kā-pat, fill up the gaps in the songs and keep up the choral refrain.



This function of keeping up the refrain—so very necessary in the absence of an elaborate orchestra—is more faithfully performed by the chorus in Tamāshā of Maharashtra, because the group keeps standing throughout the performance, immediately behind the actors. In most rural drama in the South, this is

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the practice, and it is interesting to note that in the northern-most State—Kashmir—the musicians keep on standing almost in an identical manner close to the rear of the actors. Till about 50 years ago, the chorus in the rural play of East Punjab—Sāng—used to remain standing, but lately, on grounds of respectability, but more in imitation of the neighbouring Rāsalila of West U.P., the position of the musicians in a corner of the stage itself has been widely accepted. In Bengal's Jātrā, the orchestra is more elaborate and effect-music sometimes creeps in. The orchestra-cum-chorus remains seated at the edge of the stage in one corner. Very probably Rabindranath Tagore followed the Jātrā practice when he decided to place the orchestra in his new dance-drama on the stage itself with a low cloth-fencing, thus rejecting the idea of an orchestra-pit.

Stage-Property and Lights

It might seem that with the chorus on the stage or inside the arena, the place would be congested, leaving little room for action. But the near-absence of what we call property and sets gives to the actors in rural drama space as well as freedom. Most characters remain standing, and it is only for royalty or a venerable sage that a stool may be arranged as in the Bhāgwat Mela of Melattur. In Bengal's Jātrā in a play on the life of the famous saint Chaitanya, a bed was placed on the stage in order to indicate the bed-room where Chaitanya leaves his wife sleeping, in order to become an ascetic. A court scene in U.P.'s Nautanki or Sangeet needed only a chair with a carpet thrown over. Only in the Ankiyā Nāt arena of Assam, are small pavilions or platforms raised to represent different localities. There is, however, no attempt to give a distinctive character to the pavilions; Mathurā may be like Gokul. Realistic

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

property used to be arranged in the temple plays of Kootiyattam in Kerala at one time and legends are still current of how Garuda—the divine bird—would be shown flying through a complex mechanism of strings. Suicide scenes in Kootiyattam and hanging scenes in Nautanki of U.P., are more or less similarly arranged, though the two dramatic forms have grown in two far-flung areas and in different languages.

Until the gas-lamp invaded the Indian village, theatre lights were graceful though faint. Gas-lamps and, recently, electric-light have taken the magic out of rural drama and magnified the loud make-up and shining costume meant originally for display under the gentle wick of the oil lamp or torch. Regrettable though this development is, its pace is fast and unmistakable, for the performers and directors themselves wish to have brilliant light, little realising how much it exposes them. However, the oil lamp is not yet played out altogether, for the sanctity of tradition can still prevail. Thus, in most dance-dramas as well as other kinds of plays in Kerala in South India, a 3 to 5 feet high brass lamp is placed in the centre towards the edge of the stage. One wick is towards the performers and the other towards the audience. The rest of the theatre may be lighted with gas-lamps or oil torches. Yakshagān Bayalāta of Karnātak had a useful provision though it may seem comical to the moderns; two torches would be held by persons who moved forward and backward in the steps of the dancing performer, creating a fantastic beauty by throwing a diffused reddish light on him. Later the torches (called *deevatige* or *panju*) were fixed on either side of the platform. Hundreds of miles away from the Bayalāta, in the arena of Assam's Ankiyā Nāt, a similar device, but more artistic, is employed, literally to highlight the entry of prominent characters. Two persons hold a wooden arch on the

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

top of which are lit four or five small torches. The actor—only the prominent one—enters the arena passing underneath this arch. His face is lit up and brightened stylized features establish his personality on the minds of the audience. This arch called *agni-gher* (literally 'wheel of fire') is lighted afresh every time a prominent character makes his first entry. The mandapa or auditorium in the Ankiyā Nāt has other lights too, such as lampstands made of the thick and smooth stem of the banana-plant.

These are examples of an artistic tradition surviving in the corners of the country, in spite of the far more convenient and simple, but alas, unaesthetic alternatives of the gas-lamp and electric light. Practical difficulties have hitherto compelled the Kariālā performer in the interior of the Himalayas to be content with the cheerful and warmth-giving but unstable light of the logs of wood in the centre of his arena. But soon, very soon, he may succumb not only to the new lights but also to the ugly and gaudy coloured transparencies that are clumsily pressed against spot-lights even in the course of such a highly conservative drama as the Bhāgwata Mela in village Melattur in Madras State. Indeed, those who devotedly organise the rural theatre in villages are, on the one hand, very particular about conventions of acting, music, entries, exits, etc., and, on the other, often under the spell of modern contraptions. This is no surprise, for technology is magic for the village, and magic is so irresistible. Also, fashions from cities gain prestige in no time. Thus, the painted curtain and the picture-frame stage are beginning to be used for even such highly traditional forms as the dance-drama of Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh.

An observer from outside witnessing a performance in the village may be puzzled and distressed to see,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

in the theatre or place of performance, a peculiar mixture of pleasing and locally apt traditions and clumsy and alien modernity. Had modern lights and other contraptions been ushered in with softness and suggestivity, the intrusion would not be so unwelcome. As it is, the effect is jarring, very much like that of the neon-lights in the sanctum of the great Madurāi temple, complete with the name and address of the supplying firm!

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

II

GETTING READY

Make-up and Costumes: Objectives

As in other respects, the drama in rural India exhibits, in the make-up and costumes of its actors, a whole spectrum ranging from the most elementary to the most elaborate and sophisticated. But sophistication does not imply an attempt to achieve verisimilitude. Realism is a feature neither of the folk nor of the traditional art of India. The principal

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

objective in the make-up and costume of traditional drama is two-fold; first, in decorating different limbs and parts of the body, the attempt is to give them shapes and shades as described in traditional literature; thus, the eye of a beautiful heroine is often compared to the fish and through the ages painters and sculptors have given it a certain form identifiable as the 'fish-like eye.' Those conventions passed on to the make-up man in drama also. Secondly, in the choice of colours, the combination of make-up, and the selection of costumes, the determining factor are the characteristics—of temperament and behaviour—associated with the particular type of character. Thus, the hero of several plays is of magnanimous nature and the colour for the face of such a person should, in Kerala, be red. There is an elaborate language of colours and costumes and in Bharata's *Nāṭya Shāstra*, these directions are classified under the category of *āhārya abhinaya* or acting with the aid of make-up and costumes.

Dramatic representation in the South has, on the whole, been nearer this concept of stylized make-up and costumes than that in the North. And yet there are some features strikingly common among forms that have developed in far-flung areas. Thus the clown, wherever he is, carries in his hand a crooked stick. Here is the description of the clown or the vidushaka in Kootiyāttam of Kerala: rice-flour smeared roughly over his face, chest and arms; red marks on the forehead. nose, cheeks, chin, chest and arms; the eyes heavily overlaid with collyrium which extends on either side as far as the ears; moustaches, one end up and the other drooping down; his *dhoti* (lower garment) covering the hips is thick and bulging. He has a stick with him which he can keep on his lap while sitting. In Rajasthan, the Khyāl on the story of Tejāji has a character who is the friend of the hero and very much like a clown; he carries a stick with him

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

always. In the distant North, Kashmir, the clown is called maskarā and carries a stick with him always and when he talks to another person encircles the stick with one leg.

Stylization and Variations

Stylization on the basis of the types of characters is indeed a marked feature of folk drama all over the country. A king must always appear with a *kireet* or *mukut* or other appropriate head-dress, even if he is supposed to be in his bed-room. But two factors have been responsible for variations in the styles; first, the preservation, in the South, of old traditions, and secondly, the influence of Persian and other foreign elements on the way of life in the northern and central parts of India. Climate has also led to some variations though some of the heaviest clothing and thickest make-up are to be seen in plays put up in the warm climate of Kerala, while bare bodies have been noticed in the Himalayan plays. An example of the elaborate and gorgeous make-up and dress in the South is that of the artist who plays Bannada Vesh—the leading role in the Karnataka Yakshagān. The literal meaning of the words Bannada Vesh is 'character in colour'. His make-up, etc. takes about 5 hours, like the make-up of the principal characters in the dance-drama of Kerala—Kathakali. His garments are the *kavacha* (a tight vest), *challana* (tight trousers), a full sleeved shirt in colour, a *veeragācche* (dhoti worn in a style appropriate to a hero). In order to give an idea of the elaborate make-up of actors in Karnataka I can do no better than quote from Dr. Ranganatha: "If the role is of Yama—the God of Death, or of Narasimha—the human with lion's head, or that of a demon, the girth... will be increased three-fold with the help of thick sheets of cloth or sarees tied round the body. Loose garments

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

in appropriate colours, to reveal the innate quality of the character—dark for the demon, and reddish brown for kings, gods and chiefs (mahā nāyakas)—are worn over; and then comes the waist-coat, embroidered with pieces of glass. The ornaments used are: bead necklaces and garlands, *patti*, *koralahāra*, and *sage* around the neck, *bhujakeerti* for the elbow, *tola pavāda* for the wrist, gold plates for the arms, crown for the head with karnapata (wings attached to the crown), *kennappā* for the ear, *dagale*—the flowing piece of embroidered cloth falling in front from the waist, and jingles around the ankles. There are significant head-dresses and crowns with pronounced differences in shape and size. The most prominent crowns are *battālu kireeta* with a great halo, worn by royal characters like Dasarath and Dharmaraja, *pombe kireeta* worn by characters like Rāma and Arjuna, *rākkasi kireeta* with peacock feathers worn by demons like Shurpanakhi, and *Hanumanthana kireeta* for Hanumān. A circular halo of the head-dress made of white and black cloth decorated with silver lace-tape and peacock feathers is called *sirimudi* and is worn by characters like Krishna and Abhimanyu. Colours used for painting the face will be chosen with care. 'Gods' are usually painted in reddish soft white.... Krishna is painted in a pleasant blue.... Originally all the basic paints were made with the help of different indigenous colours called *āradāla*, *ingaleeka*, *kadige* and *balapa*. It is over this foundation painting that careful working of the features of the character is made in red and white.... In the case of imposing characters like Narasimha, Rāvana, Chandi and Yama, the nose is uplifted with a lump of cotton, eyes are made to look three times their natural size, and a string of bordering white dots provide a decorated frame-work (called Chutti)".[1]

[1] *The Karnataka Theatre* by Dr. H.K. Ranganatha.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

In several other forms of South Indian drama, conventionalized make-up and dress of the kind described above are, with loving care, being continued. The make-up of the Jātrā characters in Bengal is far simpler and that of characters in Mānch, Khyāl and Rāmlilā is more flexible. The Rāsalilā of Braj, near Mathurā in the North, is more conservative than many other forms in the neighbourhood, but the costume of Krishna has a distinct Mughal influence. The women cover themselves with a shawl called *pichhorā*. The headgear is brilliant in the case of Krishna. In the arena theatre of Rāmlilā celebrated in October with great eclat all over U.P., the costumes and make-up have imbibed features from the dress of the aristocracy of the late 18th and 19th centuries. Thus, Rāvana wears a long coat, normally blue, with decorative motifs in shining brocade. He wears tight velvet or silk pyjamas, long hair, and *tilak* on the forehead. Rāma as a prince would have velvet and silk dress with brocade and embroidery, but, as an exile, would have a *dhoti* (lower garment) tied in the Rajput style and a *kurtā* (shirt) in light shade.

Common Features of Costumes and Make-up

It is not possible to describe the details of costumes and make-up in vogue in different kinds of folk and traditional drama in the country within a limited space. But certain general features are noteworthy:

(*i*) The make-up is usually loud and clothes that shine and have attractive patterns and brocade-work are preferred. Even where, as in the case of Kariālā of Himāchal or Sāng of Hariyānā (East Punjab), imposing and gorgeous clothes are not possible, bright colours and strange and ludicrous dress are used. In dim light and in the midst of impatient crowds, this kind of loud—even bizarre—make-up immediately engages their attention.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

(*ii*) Stylization is common both in the North and the South. It is nearer the ancient texts in the South, and influenced by the Mughal Court in the North. However, realism is making its appearance, particularly in drama that is not mythological such as Nautanki and Mānch. Even Jātrā which began as a form of devotional representation has admitted naturalistic dress and make-up.

(*iii*) Masks are still used in most mythological plays, though there are some non-mythological plays also with animal or comic masks such as Bhānd Jashna of Kashmir. In mythological plays, demons and superhuman characters are generally provided masks. Rākshasas and demons have elaborate masks in Ankiyā Nāt of Assam, and the Rāmlilā of U.P. They may be made of clay or wood with attractive colours. But the North Indian masks are not so lavish and striking as some of the *papier mache* masks of Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh. The Kuchipudi mask for Narasimha is about 2 feet by 2 feet; it represents the lion god and the bright yellow of the face, the red mane and the brilliant headgear have an awe-inspiring beauty not easy to forget.

(*iv*) In the midst of stylized costumes and make-up, a touch of contemporaneity is often seen in the form of some characters from daily life such as *sādhus* (hermits), beggars, priests, barbers, etc. It is a peculiarity of drama in rural areas that it simultaneously moves on two planes. Characters such as these provide an occasion for 'leg-pulling' and social satire, and while the costumes of the principal characters re-create the old world, those of these minor ones bring intimacy and hilarity.

(*v*) Most of the make-up and costumes are indigenous. Production of the articles and colours, etc., promote local arts and crafts and has preserved

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

some beautiful designs and traditions of workmanship. In the satras of Assam Valley, the whole community gets busy and painters and craftsmen spend hours in a pleasant and satisfying community-task: Rāmlilā, though a Hindu festival, gives work to numerous Muslim craftsmen who prepare masks and paper-effigies. In Kerala and Karnātak, make-up men for Kathakali and Yakshagān are superb artists. So are the makers of crowns and other headgear, some of which are rare museum-pieces. Thus, the dramatic art is indirectly the promoter and patron of other fine arts and crafts in villages. With the introduction of urban costumes and make-up, this opportunity of participation in a community-festival is being denied to thousands of humble rural workers.

(*vi*) Despite bewildering variety, costumes and make-up have some common features in different parts of the country. Characters in mythological plays being of common origin, the descriptions in the *Purānas* and the epics are the basis for dress and decoration. Certain forms of drama have travelled far and wide and forms like Tamāshā of Maharashtra and Sannatā of Karnātaka and Naqal of Northern India have much in common including clothes and make-up.

Preliminaries to a Performance

Even more than in costumes, the essential unity of Indian traditional and rural drama is seen in the 'preliminaries' to a performance. Here one marvels at the survival—almost throughout the country—of a custom introduced over two thousand years ago in the text of Bharata's *Nātya Shāstra*. By making the 'preliminaries' a sacred ritual, Bharata raised the dramatic art to the level of a priestly act, ensuring

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

better consideration for actors as a class and for their art. He enjoined upon producers and directors not to omit the preliminaries, in the absence of which a play was bound to founder like the very first play performed in the presence of Indra, the mighty ruler of the gods. Classical Sanskrit playwrights kept up the tradition of preliminaries and thus, to any practitioner of the dramatic art, the preliminaries had a strong sanctity.

Bharata has described two kinds of preliminaries— *Ranga Pujan* or the ritualistic worship at the stage, and *Pūrva Ranga* or introductory verses, dialogues, music and dance before the main performance. In performances given in Indian villages, it is not generally possible to identify the two kinds distinctly. In fact, neither rural nor urban drama in India could build up rigid formalities appropriate to a priestly ritual. Actors are, as anywhere in the world, a Bohemian lot. Thus, while Bharata's precept was not forgotten, many pleasant irrelevancies came to stay. In one respect, however, the preliminaries serve rural drama well. They function as a signal for collecting the audience and preparing its mind and mood for what follows.

Examples Of Elaborate Preliminaries

It is possible to refer here only briefly to the preliminaries in some of the traditional forms. Perhaps the most detailed preliminaries are observed in the Kootiyāttam of Kerala, there being as many as seven stages—extending over three evenings! (A Kootiyāttam performance takes seven days and then too a selected act only can be presented). First, a group of drummers plays upon *milavu* and other kinds of drums and cymbals. This is followed by the recital of *Nandi-Shloka* or benedictory verse by the nambiyār (drummer) who also sprinkles holy water on the stage. After another instrumental piece, the sūtradhār or

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

stage-manager enters the stage dancing in a special style called *Kriyachavuttuka* or stepping out action. He then recites some verses, dancing all the while. This is followed by the *sthāpanā* or the announcement of the main theme of the act or of the main character by the sūtradhār. All these five processes take the whole of the first evening. On the second day, the principal character makes his first appearance and gives an introduction known as *Nirvāchana*. On the third day, the clown or the vidushaka comes on the stage and for three days expounds, through a monologue, *Pūrushārthas* or the principal aims of human life. Instead of mentioning the noble aims mentioned by sages—*dharma* (good conduct), *artha* (reasonable collection of money), *kāma* (restrained indulgence in sensual enjoyment) and *moksha* (final liberation from the cycle of life and death), he ironically mentions *vinod* (enjoyment of pleasures of life), *vanchanā* (deception), *asana* (feasting) and *rājasevā* (service under kings) as the principal objects of the life of the people who are in the audience. This gives him an opportunity indirectly to expose some of the evils and corruptions of society. Finally, while describing the kings under whom one should do rājasevā, he points out that the hero of the play that is to follow is the most worthy king. Thereafter the main performance begins.

It seems that in Kootiyāttam, one portion of the preliminaries—namely, the vidushaka's appearance and his 'irrelevancies'—has been given so much time in order to allow free play to the talents of the traditional mono-actor of the village, the *Chākyār*. In distant Assam in the other corner of India, though the broad outline of the preliminaries is similar, the preliminaries take only three or four hours and the local clown is not allowed to intrude so prominently at this stage. However, another indigenous element is highlighted and given most of the time, viz. the drummers.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

The drummers, sometimes numbering as many as forty, form two parallel rows in the rectangular arena between the chorus and the *simhāsan* (special seat) of the sacred text. They give a brilliant display of combined and individual drumming; this display, called *Dhemāli*, lasts two to three hours and is rounded off with a dazzling demonstration on ten drums simultaneously by the head-drummer who is known as the *bar bāyan*. The head-drummer is honoured with a special garland from the sanctum and given a piece of the sacred cloth. After this glorious overture, the sūtradhār enters the arena, dancing, and as he proceeds towards the centre of the arena, the chorus sings the Nandi—the song of benediction, the sūtradhār illustrating the song with gestures. Thereafter the sūtradhār recites the *Bhatima*, a stylized recitation (not song) of the exploits of the hero of the play. Finally the sūtradhār asks his companion (*sangi* who may actually be a member of the chorus) about the instrument which is being played in the heavens. The *sangi* mentions the instrument traditionally associated with the hero of the play (e.g. the flute for Sri Krishna). The sūtradhār informs the audience that the hero is now about to arrive. With the arrival of the principal characters, the main play begins.

There are several common features in these two temple-dramas from two corners of India, since both hark back to the traditions of Sanskrit drama and Bharata's *Nātya Shāstra*. But in the temple-drama of Rāsalilā (concerning Krishna) in north-west U.P., the preliminaries are nearer the worship of the deity. Krishna and Rādhā being the hero and heroine of practically every Rāsalilā play, they are seen together on a throne right at the beginning. The leader of the performing party touches their feet and sings a devotional song; every member of the chorus does so and afterwards joins in a chorus. Thereafter, one of the

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

sakhis (maids in company of Rādhā) performs *ārati* (ritual worship by slowly waving a lamp near the faces of Rādhā and Krishna), to the accompaniment of a song, and then requests the 'Divine Couple' to enter the dance-arena and perform *rās*. Thereupon Krishna himself rises and with folded hands invites his consort to descend into the arena. She joins him and the two proceed towards the central space where the performance is given.

Worship: Significance Of Ganapati

Local deities and practices seem to have crept into the preliminary rituals in different regions, since the players had to conform to the rituals of their patrons. In Bhavai, light as the symbol of mother goddess is worshipped by the Nāyak or leader of the performing party. He draws a circle in the arena, sprinkles red powder or *kumkum* over this circle which is called *chāchar*. A barber holds the torch and the leader applies the red powder to the torch which is the symbol of mother goddess. Sometimes an earthen lamp with four wicks is thus worshipped. Prayer songs follow and quite often the audience joins in. Then there is an odd interlude—a few songs from the romance *Dholā Māru* popular in Rajasthan and Gujarat! Thereafter the Nāyak invites his fellow performers to come into the arena. Finally, Ganapati—the elephant-headed deity—makes his appearance followed by the fierce female goddess Kāli, and there is a dance. Another interesting interlude follows; Kāli engages in a dialogue with the leader, in the course of which she informs the audience that she would eat up those who malign the Bhavai performance.

In most folk and traditional plays, homage is paid to Ganapati who is regarded as capable of overpowering the *gaṇas* who create trouble and disturbances (*vighnas*). Gaṇesha or Vigneshwar (the deity

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

with an elephant-head) is brought on the stage—as a masked figure—mostly in South Indian plays such as Bhāgawata Mela of Melattur. In Maharashtra, the worship of Ganapati is almost a 'national' ritual. A performance of *Lalit*—dramatic form of Maharashtra which was originally confined to mythological themes—begins with the appearance of Ganesha or Ganapati, moving his trunk; he is worshipped by the sūtradhār who seeks his blessings. In the preliminary songs of Mānch, praises of Ganesha are sung invariably and so also in Khyāl of Rajasthan, in the Sangeet of U.P. and Bidesiā of Bihar. But the worship is not confined to Ganesha; usually a female deity like Saraswati (Goddess of Learning), Kāli or Durgā or Ambā (Mother Goddess) is also worshipped, and there are some beautiful verses about them in Mānch, Kārialā and other rural plays. Worship of deities in order to ward off evil influence is the result not so much of superstitious fears (though such fears are always there) as of the tradition dating to Bharata's *Nātya Shāstra* which describes how after the first performance was disturbed by *asuras*, the worship of *gaṇas* was prescribed by Brahmā. How strong this tradition has been is shown by the fact that Muslim players of Bhānd Pathar, a Kashmiri rural drama, begin their performances with an invocation called 'Poozā-pāth'. Though the invocation is to Allāh and expresses the desire for his *deedār* (divine glimpse), the manner of recital is similar in pace and accent to the *nāndi-pāth* of Sanskrit drama. In fact, immediately after this invocation, there is another mock *Pooza-pāth* by two *maskharās* (clowns) who imitate the original Sanskrit invocation and make fun of it!

The Clown and Other "Curtain-Raisers"

The appearance of the clown is another common element in the preliminaries of rural drama, again a survival from an interlude called *Trigata* described

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

by Bharata. *Trigata* is the sudden appearance of the vidushaka before the sūtradhār to whom he puts some irrelevant questions. It is remarkable that an almost identical intrusion by the jester in the Bidyapat 'show' of North Bihar is strictly observed by the rural performers. The jester is called Bikatā. Here is a sample of the dialogue between the leader (nāyak) of the party and Bikatā :-

Bikatā :—Hallow, Nāyakji ! Why this noise—this rib-rib-dhātin-dhātin—so early in the evening ?

Nāyak :—You seem to be a *vajra* (incorrigible) fool. I am praying to the deities and here you are with your silly pranks. Fie, fie !

Bikatā :—Hold your 'fie, fie', Nāyakji. True, I am a *vajra* fool or a *jabra* (powerful) fool. You, at any rate, are a scholar, a pandit. Tell me, why have all these lights and decorations been displayed to-day ? To me, all these appear to be senseless.

Nāyak :—You Bikatu Rām———

Bikatā :—Stop it ! How can you name me Bikatu Ram ? I am none else than Udhava (companion of Lord Krishna).

Nāyak :—All right, all right, Udhavaji, to-day we are going to put up, at this place, the *Pārijāt Haran Līlā* (the play of the capture of the heavenly tree—Pārijāt).

Bikatā :—I see. Parjāt Haran (Parjāt=another caste). You are going to take away the castes of all the people and put them in some other castes ? I see, I see.

Nāyak :—Sure, you are a fool, bringing disorder into a happy function. It is Pārijāt, not Parjāt.

And so on. Much of it is impromptu, though obviously it is neither so elaborate nor so learned and

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

refined as the sallies of the vidushaka in the Kerala play Kootiyāttam described earlier. In the preliminaries of the Kariyālā of Himachal Pradesh, the clown comes dancing along with a female character called Chandrāvalī. The two give a pantomimic show, while the chorus sings. The Naqqāls of U.P., who were popular performers until recently, used to begin with the entry of the jester on 'horse-back' (hobby horse); the jester would describe the virtues of his hobby-horse to the amusement of the audience.

The cleaning up of the stage, the spreading of carpets or *durees*—these and other simple tasks are also raised to the level of a ritual in several types of rural drama. The *Nātya Shāstra* refers only to the sprinkling of the sacred water over the stage by the stage-manager—the sūtradhār. In Mānch of Madhya Pradesh, a water-carrier (or *bhishti*) appears in the beginning and singing a song about his origin. He acts as if he were sprinkling water. Then enters the *farrāshan* who spreads out the carpet and sings of her family and relations.

Apart from these 'curtain raisers', practically every folk or traditional play has an introduction or *prastāvanā* in which an idea of the play that is to follow is given. This *prastāvanā* in Sanskrit plays is in the form of a brief dialogue between the sūtradhār and his female companion-Natī. In Doddata of North Karnataka, this dialogue is between the head-singer (bhāgwatar) and a character called the *sarathi* (literally charioteer). The chonpdār (or the marshal in attendance) announces the introduction, in Mānch, and the sūtradhār does so in Ankiyā Nāt. In Bhāgwat Mela of Melattur village, the characters are introduced one by one in the course of a sprightly dialogue between two characters, one of whom is called Kattiyakkaran. He carries a stick and narrates what has happened before

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the commencement of the story. There are some dramatic forms such as the Naqal of Muzaffarnagar in U.P. in which the principal characters introduce themselves and the Khalifā or director of the play afterwards introduces the play itself.

The Call Of The Drum

The drum, more than any other object, is the herald of drama in rural India—from Kashmir to Cape Comorin, from Gujarat to Assam. Whatever the play—and wherever—drummers send out the call; it is gorgeous and also sharp; it is overpowering and also pleasing to the ear. In the drummers lives the perennial rhythm of tribal life. There are grounds for believing that, centuries ago, drama was evolved through a process of blending the culture of the tribal people with the more sophisticated culture of the learned. The latter were wise enough to give to tribal elements a prominent place and to provide for participation by skilled performers from among the common folks of the village and the jungle. The preliminaries—the *Pūrva Ranga*—were the most convenient and accommodating form for this purpose, since the main play was not affected. Thus, powerful drumming at the beginning of the performance is symbolical of the importance given by the learned to folk-culture.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

III

ON WITH THE SHOW

What Marks A Village-Performance

THREE ASPECTS OF DRAMATIC PERFORMANCES IN INDIAN villages cannot but strike even a casual observer. First, performances proceed at a leisurely pace. The night is ever young and even where a performance is given in day-time, hurry to conclude the performance is never in evidence. Slow pace brings no boredom to the audience nor fatigue to per-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

formers. Secondly, a play before a rural audience is almost always mixed entertainment; dialogue, music and dance make a fine mosaic. Even the tradition of classical Sanskrit drama emphasised poetry, music and gestures, but prose dialogue and verses dominated. In drama for the villages, it is easier for performers to know their part if it is in songs, and the meaning of lines and the progress of action are clearer if illustrated by means of dance and gestures. Thirdly, most performances abound in occasions and situations in which the audience is directly addressed. Rural drama uses words primarily in order to communicate with and not merely to dazzle its audience. Music, dance and costume are the devices for impressing them. Exhortations to the audience are plentiful but the atmosphere is not that of a class-room. Audiences are not passive; there is much give-and-take and the mood is that of a fun-fair in which the performers as well as the audiences are all active participants.

As anywhere else in the world, a dramatic performance in an Indian village is usually associated with a festive occasion. It may be a religious festival, a seasonal festival, a fair, or a personal function such as a wedding or sacred-thread ceremony. There is no dearth of professional groups such as those performing Rāsalilā, Sāng, Nautanki and Sāngeet, on contract, in different villages. But, generally, persons who invite these professional troupes do so when they have celebrations at their homes or villages.

Some Performances Seen By The Author

To witness a play is indeed to take part in festivity, to share the excitement and elation that hundreds and thousands of simple-minded people feel on such occasions. The account below of only some of the dozens of dramatic forms the performances of which I have seen suffers from a serious handicap.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Except some performances of Rāmlilā and Rāsalilā that I saw as a child (when I could mix with this crowd and when the prison-house of modernity had not cast its shadows), all the others were witnessed from the front but isolated seat of an important visitor or a detached observer. Therefore, in these accounts the spirit of the performance could hardly be captured.

In Karnataka

Doddata is a form of drama very popular in North Karnataka (in Mysore State of South India). It is an open air performance and the one that I saw was given on a platform with a canopy and a back-cloth. The performers belonged to one of the twenty troupes that are famous in that part of the country. The leader of the team is called a bhāgwatar. The play began with Ganapati pūjā (explained in the preceding chapter) and Saraswati pūjā, both the deities appearing on the stage one after the other, with the bhāgwatar singing the songs of benediction. After the preliminaries entered the sārathi who was supposed to be the charioteer of the carriage of the play and who came dancing in a manner suggesting that he was driving horses. The sārathi asks the bhāgwatar: "Who are you people, disturbing the village ?"

Bhāgwatar:—We are not disturbing the village; we are only giving a *bhāgwatā katha*.

Sārathi:—Will you employ me as one of your group ?

Bhāgwatar:—Yes, we can give you the part of a messenger in the royal court. But what will you do with the big salary you get from us?

Sārathi:—I shall buy snuff and sneeze like this (*sneezes*).

In the meanwhile, Arjuna, the hero of the play,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

has arrived on the stage and is sitting in *samādhi* (meditation). The sārathi approaches and asks him: "Who are you, sitting in this rigid manner?" Arjuna informs him that he is the great warrior, the second Pāndava, holding penance in honour of Lord Shiva. Then follows a brief dance-interlude without any words. The sārathi leaves the stage. Lord Shiva (a tiger-skin wrapped around his body and a trident in his hand) and his consort Parvati (sporting a *saree*, a glittering girdle and a crown-like headgear) appear on the scene. Parvati asks Shiva (in prose) why the world is so full of misery. Shiva tries to give a philosophical explanation. The chorus (called 'Himmel' in Doddata sings a hymn in praise of Lord Shiva, and, strangely enough, Parvati herself joins the chorus here and there and sings a refrain or two! She also gives a brief dance-number in fast tempo while singing, and her consort Lord Shiva is sporting enough to enliven the dance by a step or two of his own. Another prose dialogue ensues in which Shiva explains to Parvati that those who sing His praise and are His devotees go to heaven and those who do not and are immersed in evil deeds go to hell (I was told that the performers belong to a sect called Lingayats who are noted for their devotion to Lord Shiva). The chorus gives another *stuti* or hymn in praise of the Lord but this time on behalf of Parvati. While the Himmel (chorus) sings, Parvati would intervene occasionally and utter the words: "Oh Lord, listen to me. I am singing your praise"; to which Shiva replies "Yes, my dear, go on." Exchange of such formalities between two characters in the midst of a lengthy song is a special feature of Doddata. It comes as a break in the song.

By this time, the audience has had enough of prayers and praises and it is time to go back to the story. So we see Arjuna coming and occupying a corner of the stage where he worships a symbol of Shiva. This fact

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

is disclosed to us in the course of a prose-dialogue between Shiva and Parvati. Parvati sings a song requesting Shiva to go and bless this devotee and grant him his wish. Just then enters Nārada, that ubiquitous and ever-willing informant and messenger in the world of gods, fast like mercury and always a busybody. He wears a long saffron gown called *kapini* and has a *kartāl* (two wooden pieces that are used as a rhythmic accompaniment) in his left hand and a rosary in his right. He is singing a hymn in praise of Lord Vishnu and narrates the ten incarnations of that deity. He accosts Lord Shiva and informs Him that Arjuna's penance is purely out of a spirit of devotion to Shiva and not in order to become Indra—the king of gods. Again there is a duet dance of Shiva and Narada before the latter departs.

Now Shiva puts on the role of a kirāta—an ordinary hunter with bow and arrows and goes towards Arjuna who is wrapt in meditation. At this point, a wild boar comes in between the two. (The boar is a large stuffed doll, thrown by a member of the chorus on the stage). Arjuna gets up and both he and the hunter simultaneously draw their bows and strike the boar. Both hasten to grab at the corpse. There is a heated argument. Arjuna gets angry and says:- "O hunter, do not take me lightly. I am the great Pāndava warrior." A combat ensues. Arrows are handed over to the two combatants from time to time by the other members of the troupe. The bhāgwatar sings a martial song and the two protagonists move in various directions according to the rhythm given by the bhāgwatar. It is noteworthy that the effect is not comical, and a plausible illusion of a battle-scene is created on account of stylized movements. Occasionally the combatants take half-reclining positions, one leg bent with the knee on the ground and the other knee raised a little. It is thus that in a small acting

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

area, without the aid of the contraptions of stage warfare, an unforgettable battle-scene is enacted.

The climax of the battle comes when Arjuna, the greatest warrior among the humans, is defeated by a mere hunter. He laments his defeat and attributes it to the breach of his vow which was to hold the penance without any diversion. The hunter mockingly asks him: "Who is the Lord to whom you are paying this homage? I want to put his powers also to a test." Stung by these words, Arjuna resumes his penance-seat and begins offering flowers to the symbol of Shiva. After some time he observes a peculiar phenomenon. The flowers that he places on Shiva's symbol reappear at the feet of the kirāta—the hunter. Another member of the party was placing flowers at the feet of the hunter from behind. But, this does not seem to matter to the audience who 'witness' this phenomenon through the words of the bhāgwatar and of Arjuna.

In a flash, Arjuna realizes that the hunter who had humiliated him was none other than Lord Shiva himself. Arjuna goes down on his knees before the kirāta and offers his prayers. He requests his Master to grant him the powerful weapon *pashupata* which is readily given. Parvati is also pleased with Arjuna and pats him like a son and gives him her blessings. At the end of the play, all the characters line up and sing the concluding song of benediction called *mangalam*, standing with folded hands. The mangalam is a kind of epilogue with the difference that it refers less to the story or even to performers and more to the need of peace and joy among the audience and in society in general. In classical Sanskrit drama it is known as *Bharata-vākya.*

Though the play had been shortened to suit my convenience, I was able to notice several interesting features. For instance, the sūtradhār and sārathi kept on reappearing on the stage at various turning points

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

in the play. The band had both pipes and percussions and the pipe would repeat the lines sung by the bhāgwatar. A complex system of body-movements and stamping of feet was observed by the actors. Hand gestures were interesting; a female character would move her hands upside and downwards making a loop, while a male character would keep his hands hanging down, palms facing the audience. There was a humorous interlude in between scenes of the main play, so that the main characters could get ready. The comic scene concerned a money-lender. When the comic is on, the bhāgwatar does not sing. The comic character (called Adosogu) has to do his own singing and talking.

This story of Arjuna and the kirāta has been immortalized in a famous Sanskrit epic *Kirātārjunīya* by Magha. But I have seen the same story enacted in tribal villages of Bihar. However, the Doddata play in Kannada seems to be based largely upon Magha's epic. While this is an example of a performance directly influenced by the classical tradition, the performance that I saw in a Kashmiri village shows other and perhaps more interesting influences.

In Kashmir

The performance is commonly known as Bhānd Jashna (the festival of Bhands), but the plays are known as Bhānd Pathar. The word *pathar* seems to be derived from the Sanskrit term *pātra* meaning *dramatis persona* while *Bhānd* is obviously from Sanskrit *Bhāṇa*—one of the forms of satirical and realistic dramas—usually a monologue—mentioned in the ancient texts on dramaturgy. The Bhānd Pathar is, however, not a monologue, but a kind of social drama with a mixture of legend and contemporary social criticisms. Bhānds are a Muslim community and the performance that I saw was given by Bhānds of village Wahthore.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

These plays are enacted both in day-time and in the nights. I saw a day-performance. After the preliminaries (called Poozā-pāth) and the playing of a tune by the orchestra (which stood lined up near the arena), the Commander from the invading Dard tribe from the North comes in a procession followed by his soldiers. He walks in a slow and majestic gait. He wears a long *jāmā* or coat (Kashmir embroidery) and has in his left hand a *palav* (a shawl—the Sanskrit term is *pallava*), and in his right a *tabarzeen* (an axe). His followers also hold palavas (one palav for two persons). They offer salaams and give a brief dance, moving in pairs. The palav comes handy for showing a variety of movements. Finally, these soldiers again form a row and collectively move backwards and forwards.

Soon we see two attendants holding a curtain (called *kanāt*). Behind the kanāt stand the king of Dard country and his two mistresses. Special music is played by the orchestra and the curtain is held up to reveal the three important characters. As the curtain is held up it becomes a canopy above the head of the king and his party. The king has a splendid turban, a brocade girdle and embroidered *jāmā*. He advances majestically. The impressive air is suddenly broken by the appearance of a villager who is also something of a buffoon (maskharā) and who is oblivious of the presence of the Dard king. His dress, by contrast, is naturalistic; a white pyjama, an ordinary waist-band and shirt. On seeing the tyrannical king, he is terror-stricken and runs about in fright, much to the amusement of the audience. Soon another villager comes, feet crooked and tied with rope, and he too is taken aback on seeing the Dard king and his retinue. A third villager comes laughing and his laughter is suddenly stilled. The fourth one makes his way in between the king and his mistresses,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

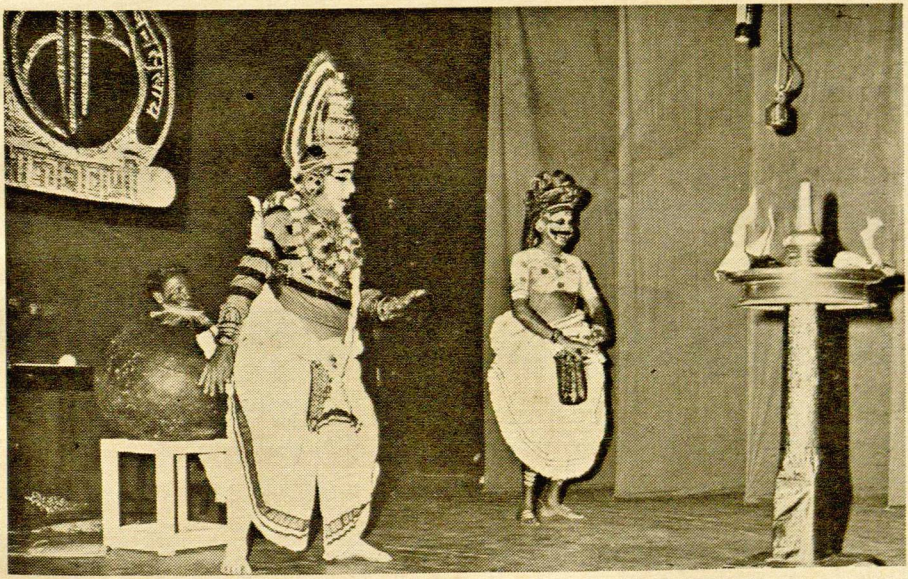
BHAND JASHNA—Drama of Rural Kashmir.
A Scene from Darde Pathar: The Dard King and his Retinue.

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

BHĀGWAT MELA—of Village Melattur in Madras State.
Masked Warriors of the Demon-King.

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

ANKIYĀ NĀT—of Assam.
Krishna and Uddhava in the Arena. Note pavilions on the side and the drummer at the back.



KOOTIYATTAM—of Kerala.
A Scene from *Subhadra Dhananjayam* presented by Painkulam Rama Chakyar and party. See artist at extreme left playing on the *mizhavu*. Traditional lamp in the foreground.

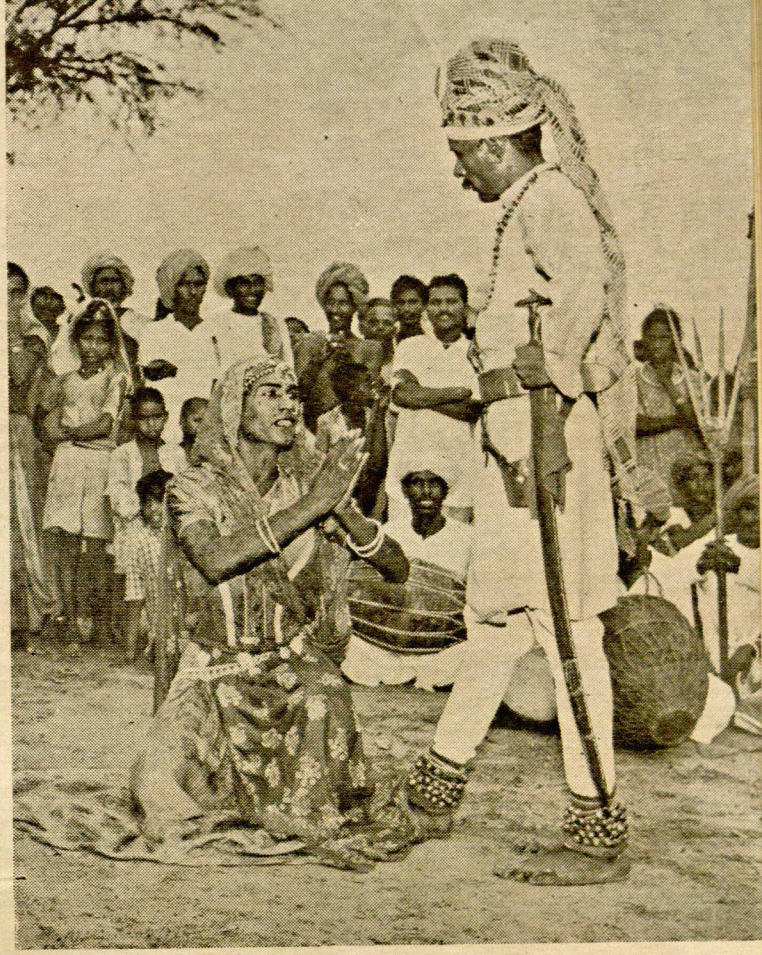
Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

KUCHIPUDI—of Andhra Pradesh.
Satyabhāmā—a female role played by a male artist.

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

KHYĀL—of Rajasthan.

Tejaji and his Bride.
Audience at the back.



CHAVITTU NĀTAKAM—Christian drama of Kerala.

Duel between the son of the Turkish emperor Feremebras and Oliver, one of the twelve peers of Charlemayne.

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

A Comic Interlude in "Bhavai".

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

little realizing who they are. When he does and is suddenly face to face with the frowning king, he is the picture of unspeakable fear, his hands trembling, his legs shaking as if to break like brittle stuff and his body slowly but surely sinking in terror. The mute action by the four funny villagers was accompanied by pipe-and-drum music from the orchestra, and was a vivid portrayal in each case.

Though the king's presence struck terror in their hearts, his handsome mistresses (boys donned as girls) or *māshooqās* excite their curiosity and one or two villagers try to make love to them and blow kisses towards them. The Dard king is furious and uses his lash (made of rope). A dance number expressing his anger follows; one of the dance-movements is the shaking of his shoulders and is similar to a movement in the Kathakali dance of Kerala. He and his two mistresses have a joint dance also, using the *palav*.

The Dard king is an outsider and the play shows how he lords it over the local peasantry by means of force. Using the lash frequently, he makes them do his bidding. The peasants grind under his heels. Having suppressed opposition, the Dard ruler indulges in luxury and intoxication. He drinks liquor without a pause and is soon half-asleep. With his hands around the neck and waist of his mistresses, he walks unsteadily forward. Watching him, the villagers exchange remarks about his state. When they are satisfied that the Dard tyrant is too drunk to make any resistance, the villagers take away the mistresses, one by one, carrying them on their shoulders.

On coming back to his senses, the tyrant discovers to his discomfiture that he has been deprived of his mistresses. He begins flogging the villagers indiscriminately. One by one he calls up the villagers for cross-examination but sometimes he is cross-examined

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

by the villagers themselves. He tells one of them that he has come from Dard country for sight-seeing and lost his mistresses. When he uses the word *māshooq* (in Urdu: 'beloved'), the villagers ask him "What is a māshooq?" He tries to answer in Urdu and there is much leg-pulling at this stage. The king tries to tempt one of the villagers with a reward of Rs. 200/- if he discloses the whereabouts of the mistresses. He speaks in Urdu but the villager says, "Speak in Kashmiri and if you do, I might try." The Dard tyrant tries to speak in Kashmiri and his mispronunciation enables the cunning villagers to play on words. The puns are as amusing as those of the Chākyārs in Kerala. The tyrant's discomfiture does not end; another villager accosted by him begins telling a yarn about a *nāg* (stream) in a *bāg* (garden). While the Dard king gets involved in this word-play, another villager butts in with the silly question: "Are māshooqs like legs or have they other parts of the body also?"

By this time, the tyrant is exasperated and feels relieved on hearing a song from a distance in praise of his mistresses. He sends for the singer who is one of the peasants. This peasant agrees to whisper into the tyrant's ear the name of the place where his māshooqas have been concealed. But the moment he tries to whisper, he breaks into laughter. On being asked to explain the reason, the villager replies that when he takes his lips near the tyrant's ears, the hair coming out of the ears tickle him and he cannot help laughing. More horse-play of this kind follows and by the time a sober-minded villager comes to him, the tyrant's nerves are all frayed. This last villager tells the tyrant that only on one condition could his mistresses be restored to him; he must undertake not to indulge in tyranny and not to flog the villagers. The king agrees but the villager insists upon his giving it in writing which he does. The women are restored to him. The

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

play ends with a dance item followed by a composition by the orchestra.

Though the play had a thin plot, the performance held our attention throughout. The contrast between the pompous ways of the tyrant and his followers and the natural manner and irrepressible humour of the common people was telling. Though the language of the play as a whole was Kashmiri, some characters occasionally broke into Persian, Punjabi, Hindi and Urdu. There was a lot of improvisation and the audience was directly addressed without any embarrassment. The performance was given in an open ground not far from the village school and there was no raised stage. The performance area was more or less surrounded on all sides, with only a small portion at the back for the orchestra and for entries and exits.

Plays By Muslims and Christians

The Bhānd Jashna is a tradition kept up by the Muslims all through the medieval period, though theatre in general never received encouragement from Muslim rulers. But the common Muslim population could not altogether escape the spell of drama. In the heart of the Mughal capitals of Delhi and Agra and in the well-known centre of Muslim culture, Lucknow, there were Naqqāls and Bhānd (different from the Kashmiri Bhānds) who gave amusing mono-performances that developed into multi-character-acts also, often presented at weddings and other celebrations at the houses of nobles in towns and landlords in nearby villages. The Indian rural scene has even a tradition of Christian drama—though only in one corner—in the Malabar coast of Kerala in the South. It is known as the Chavittu Nātakam and developed under the Portuguese influence. The performance that I saw was at places as impressive as the Kathakali, but unlike Kathakali it had regular dialogue also. In fact, the script

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

(the story of Charlemagne) was said to be over three centuries old.

Hindu Mythological Play in Assam

An equally old script was used in a performance of Ankiyā Nāt that I saw in a village near Naogaon in Assam Valley. The play named *Rukmini Haran* is the work of the great Vaishnava Saint Shankar Deva who was also a remarkable musician, poet and performer. He had travelled widely and learnt techniques of presentations in different regions of Northern India. A remarkable genius, he saw the effectiveness of drama as a vehicle for the propaganda of his creed of love and devotion.

After the preliminaries (described in an earlier chapter), the sūtradhār (stage-manager and narrator) dances to the tune of the *nandi* (song of benediction sung by the chorus) and then recites the Bhatima. While doing so, he uses some uncommon gestures; thus, when he addresses the audience, the sūtradhār places his right elbow joint on the left-hand palm as if it were at rest, while the fore-arm in a vertical position is moved above. The sūtradhār announces that Krishna, accompanied by his friend Uddhava would soon be in the arena (*rangasthali*); he then withdraws to a position near the chorus. Krishna, wearing a *dhoti* and shirt, with a crown on his head and a decorative chest-piece (called *tangaali*) enters with a *chakra* (circular weapon traditionally associated with him) in his hand and trinkets on his feet. He and Uddhava give a dance of entry (Pravesh Nritya), and while the chorus describes their characteristics, their gestures and movements illustrate those characteristics one by one. Thereafter they move forward holding each other's hands as a token of friendship and then occupy a seat under a canopy to the right of the arena. A guard stands on a watch, with a *gadā* (mace) in his hand.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Again the sūtradhār comes forward to announce the arrival of Rukmini in the company of her friends. Rukmini also illustrates her characteristics in a dance and sits under a canopy to the left of the arena. Announced by the sūtradhār, a Brahmin messenger or bhāt comes (red turban, yellow *dhoti*, a begging bowl and an umbrella). He sings to Rukmini of the beauty and heroic deeds of Lord Krishna. She falls in love with Krishna, is pleased with the Brahmin and gives him many presents. The sūtradhār announces the arrival of Bhishmaka, the father, and Shashiprabhā, the mother, of Rukmini. Being elderly royal persons, they move slowly in a dignified manner and do not dance. Bhishmaka has a long coat with a decorative chest-plate. During the ensuing conversation it appears that the parents are inclined to marry Rukmini to Krishna—the Lord of Dwārkāpuri. The sūtradhār announces the coming of Rukma, Bhishmaka's son. His impetuosity and perverse nature are shown in his gait; he stamps his feet and strikes the ground with his sword. His stylized movements also follow the rhythmic notes on the percussion instruments. Bhishmaka and his party occupy another pavilion not far from that of Rukmini.

A *Swayamvara* (ceremony for the selection of a husband from among several contenders, by a princess) is announced. Soon candidates who are all kings from various states arrive each displaying his prowess and wealth, and walking in a way different from the others. There are seats for them on one side of King Bhishmaka.

Rukmini is distressed when she is told that Krishna has not been invited to the *Swayamvara*. In a highly-impassioned voice and stylized but clear-cut movements she sings and dances her sorrow. To her relief, Vedanidhi, a Brahmin messenger who is friendly towards her, consoles her. Vedanidhi brings the fresh air of natural behaviour in the midst of stylized talk and manner.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

His movements are natural, his talk humorous. He undertakes to convey Rukmini's message to Krishna. Krishna's pavilion—though only a few yards away—is, in the story, very distant. So Vedanidhi makes several rounds of the arena before arriving at Krishna's mandapa. On hearing of Rukmini's woe, Krishna gets ready to go to her succour.

Krishna leaves the place of performance. The green-room is behind the orchestra-cum-chorus. Krishna reappears this time at the other end of the arena driving a chariot—an elaborate piece of workmanship complete with a life-size cardboard horse ! An amusing interlude follows; on account of the supposed fast speed of the chariot (ratha), Vedanidhi almost faints and his incoherent talk sends the audience into roars of laughter. Vedanidhi gives the good news to Rukmini and then departs.

Rukmini is asked by her brother to perform the worship of Mother Goddess (Bhawāni) before the *Swayamvara*. Accompanied by her maiden-attendants, she moves gracefully towards the place of worship (another pavilion on the side of the arena—close to the sacred *simhāsan*) and a choral hymn is sung.

The *Swayamvara*-scene: All the pompous rājās await Rukmini's decision. She moves past them, ignoring their beseeching looks and love-talk, proceeds towards the extreme end of the arena where Krishna stands near his chariot. Rukmini puts the garland around Krishna's neck and Krishna lifts her and places her inside the chariot. The other kings get up in fury and a battle scene ensues. The bow that Krishna uses is strikingly beautiful. The battle is very orderly; the movements of the combatants follow the *tala* (beats) of the drums, slow at first and then very quick. There is a splendid flourish of swords and appropriate martial songs, interspersed with angry exchange of challenges

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

between the combatants and expressions of sorrow and fear by Rukmini. Eventually, the kings are defeated and Rukma who had supported the other kings is also disgraced; his life is saved upon the prayers of his sister. On the conclusion of the performance, the sūtradhār recites a *mukti mangal*—a recital praying for peace and happiness for everybody; at every fourth line of the *mukti mangal* there is a drum-beat. A song of blessing for the chief guest is sung by the chorus, upon which he makes his donation. (I was the willing victim that evening). A song of gratitude follows and the chief guest receives a gift of betel-leaves offered in a brass vessel (called *sarai*).

Here was a feast of colour, music, dance, romance and battles—leavened over with piety and prayer, which could not have been reproduced in a setting other than that of the community of devotees. The strange thing is that much of the verses and dialogue of this Ankiyā Nāt is in an archaic language with which the audience is not altogether familiar. The story is, however, well-known, the gestures are a language in themselves and the spectacles and costumes are impressive.

A Waft Of Fresh Air

In spite of similarities, every rural dramatic performance seems to have its distinctive individuality. It does leave a vivid impression, but it calls for responsive spirit among spectators. Sometimes even a crude rural play appears to be a thing of beauty. Once I had an interesting experience. I had been invited to see a modern play about rural life. But the play did not ring true. The picture-frame stage with its bright and gaudy curtains, its glaring lights, its pre-recorded and redundant sound effects, its actors pathetically trying to behave like villagers, its script having neither the merit of poetry nor the punch of the market-place—all these left us cold.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

We came out of the hot and stuffy hall and its din into the fresh bracing air of midnight and walked back through the deserted streets of the market. Soon the sound of a drum came floating to my ears. It came from the direction of a crowd. I hastened to the spot. A play was on. Under the open sky, at the point where four roads met to form a large quadrangle, sat about fifty people and another thirty or more stood around while there were a few onlookers in the corridor of the back row of shops, all closed. In the centre of the crowd were the performers; two or three of them were on their legs and the others sat in a group on a *durree*. A harmonium and a drum were the only musical instruments. The audience and the performers seemed to be part of one fraternity. It was a Sāng or Nāutanki performance of U.P. and the troupe had come up to that hill-station town in order to entertain not middle-class tourists but hotel-servants, labourers, rickshaw-wallahs, petty shopkeepers—mostly men who had come from their villages in order to earn their living and who welcome this entertainment as a waft of the breeze they know. It was obvious that a rural play is in its element among the unsophisticated audience for whom it is meant, for they can so simply identify themselves with the performers and suspend their disbelief. There was no property, no setting, very little of costume. It was primarily a play of speech (which created the real situation so well) and song (which provided the desired entertainment so abundantly). There was no need for the actors to make an effort to evoke an atmosphere. It came to them so naturally.

The dialogue had a delightful mixture of the funny and the didactic. Thus, the jester, while discussing the problem of finding a twenty-year old bridegroom for a girl of 16, innocently suggested : "What about two bridegrooms each ten years old ?" Later when the parents of the girl to be married came to perform the *tikā* (aus-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

picious mark on the forehead) ceremony of the bridegroom, the same jester suddenly gives an exposition of the word *tika*: "There are three kinds of *tikās*," he observed, "one, the mark that you make on your foreheads while worshipping a deity in the temple; the second, when one is to be married, and receives presents along with the *tikā* and the third, when one is in disgrace over an unworthy act and therefore symbolically gets a *kalanka-kā-tikā* (a mark of unworthiness—a popular idiom in Hindi)."

Standing behind the responsive crowd, one could only wonder how the genial current had been frozen among us townspeople.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

IV

THEMES AND SOCIAL PURPOSE

Two Trends

THEMES OF ALMOST ALL THE FORMS OF DRAMA STILL popular in Indian villages show an intermingling of two trends; first, country-wide and universal liking for mythological stories and characters, and secondly, an awareness of social changes and, occasionally, a sharp reaction to social conditions. These two trends have not continued in isolation; they have often, by a seeming-

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

ly naive and psychologically plausible device, been synthesised into one element. In other words, what is generally understood to be the heroic drama has not only co-existed with but sometimes been pleasantly intertwined with the drama of social purpose. Profound notes and sharp timbre have combined to produce what is not a harsh cacophony but a refreshing and lively symphony.

While these two trends have been universal, there is a subsidiary trend which is independent of religion and social and economic situations. The romantic tale is a very old inheritance of the social life of the Indian village. Mythological themes that are preponderant in much of Indian village drama can be traced back to the period of the ascendancy of the Puranas and the dominance of the cult of Vishnu known as *Bhāgawat-dharma* in the 9th to 16th centuries. But long before that, Indian villages had known romantic tales like those of Udayan (a king of the 6th century B.C.), so engagingly told in that unique storehouse of stories—the *Kathā-saritsāgar*. Religious movements came and passed. So did invaders and rulers. But these tales remained, though names of heroes and heroines and the setting, etc. changed with territory and times. Performers in rural areas made liberal use of these themes and carried them from region to region, language to language. Sometimes the same romantic tale reappeared in a changed form in areas far removed from each other. A little before the time that the leaders of the Bhagwat cult employed the theatre for propagating the message of devotion to Vishnu and his incarnations, popular romantic tales were utilized by sundry schools of mystics and similar creeds for spreading their ideas. The strain of mysticism and of faith in the preceptor then incorporated in folk drama has lingered on in certain forms prevalent in Mālwā, and was particularly appealing to Muslim performers

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

because figures from Hindu mythology—particularly deities—were dropped and secular heroes and heroines spoke not only of love but also of morality and mysticism.

Romantic Themes

Perhaps that may be one reason why romantic tales have been the themes of Sāngs and Sāngeets that are popular round about Delhi and Agra. One such story—*Nautanki*—became so popular that the title 'Nautanki' has come to signify any Sāng; it has become synonymous with Sāng or Sāngeet. Nautanki, the princess of Multan, is famed for her beauty and coveted as a bride by many a prince. In another State live two brothers, Bhup Singh and Phool Singh. Bhup Singh is married but Phool Singh is still a bachelor—a handsome young man of parts, fond of sports and adventure. Once on his return from a hunt, he asks his sister-in-law to serve his dinner quickly. She chastises him for his impatience and adds that from the way he is ordering about everyone it seems that he has married no less a person than Nautanki. These words touch Phool Singh to the quick. He declares that he will leave the home and show his face again only when he can bring Nautanki as his bride. This throws the whole household in confusion and everybody tries to dissuade Phool Singh from going after Nautanki, for the Badshah of Multan (father of Nautanki) is notorious as a cruel person and there is danger to Phool Singh's life.

However, Phool Singh, accompanied by his loyal friend Yashvant Singh and carrying a bagful of *asharfis* (gold coins), rides off to Multan. On the outskirts of the city the two notice a beautiful garden and bribe the royal gardener (*mālin*), a woman, into letting them stay there for the night, without disclosing their identity or object. When the mālin is preparing a garland for the princess Nautanki, Phool Singh, who is an ac-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

complished garland-maker, offers to weave it for the princess so that the mālin may get the dinner ready. The garland he makes is of such extraordinary beauty that when the mālin gives it to the princess Nautanki, she suspects it is not the mālin's work and asks her to disclose the name of the person. The mālin has to concoct a story—her nephew has married a girl from Gujarat, who happens to be on a visit and who is very clever at making garlands. The princess orders her to bring this talented girl in her presence. The mālin is in a panic but when Phool Singh hears her tale of woe, he offers to put on a woman's clothes and make-up. The mālin takes Phool Singh in woman's garb to Nautanki. The latter is so taken in with this 'girl' that she wants to make her a special friend (*bhāina chāri*) and detains her for the night. She insists that the two should sleep together; after all, they are to be intimate friends. Phool Singh asks her why she is not married yet. "No man worthy of me is available. I wish you were a man. We would make an ideal pair." Phool Singh advises her to think of the deity to whom she is devoted and express the wish that one of them might become a man. Nautanki does so. Phool Singh claims that the blessings of the deity have had a quick effect. She has become a man! At first the princess suspects and protests but is later credulous enough to believe Phool Singh. A romantic scene follows. In the following morning when the maid-servant of the princess hears the story from the princess, she informs the father who is furious and orders the Commander to arrest the young man and condemns him to death. Nautanki first wants to commit suicide but then decides to wait until the sentence on her lover is carried out. She arrives on the scene with a sword in one hand and a cup of poison in another. There is a tender scene between the two lovers at the place where Phool Singh is to be impaled. The king repeats his

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

order, upon hearing which Nautanki bandies her sword, drives away the executioner and throws a challenge to her father. The father is impressed with her valour and eventually agrees to the marriage of Nautanki with Phool Singh.

This story has all the elements of exciting drama and romance and its popularity was immediate. Several Sāngs written subsequently and very popular these days, use similar situations and characters. *Siyāh Posh* (the Warrior in Black) is the work of Nathā Rām Gaur and tells the story of Jamāl, daughter of the wazir to king Mahmud of Syria. When she is reading the Quran on the terrace of the palace, Gabru Syed of Herat passes by. He stops on hearing some mistakes in the recital of the sacred text and points out the mistakes. On being invited by Jamāl, he scales the wall and teaches her how to recite the Quran passages correctly. Love—of a platonic kind—develops between the two and the lessons continue every night secretly. One day he is caught trying to scale the wall. His father, who never approved of Gabru's nightly excursions, refuses to stand surety for him. His faithful friend, Qamruddin, offers bail so that he may be able to visit Jamāl before he is executed. The night before he is to be executed, Gabru calls on Jamāl. She promises to stand by him in life as in death. Her plan is to visit the site of his execution, dressed as a warrior in black armour. This she does, sword in one hand and poison in the other. It is there that her father, the Wazir (who had passed the sentence of death on Gabru), recognizes Jamāl. However, the king, who had secretly heard the talk between the two lovers during one of his incognito sojourns of the city, is convinced that the love between them is true and ideal. The execution is cancelled. Jamāl is adopted as a daughter by the king who proclaims Gabru as the successor to the throne and Qamruddin as his right-hand man.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Several plays by Nathā Rām of Mathras and Dip Chand and Lakshmi Chand of Harayānā and a host of other writers are built around the romances of princesses with the stock characters of the mālin, the faithful friend, the executioners, etc., with variations on the basis of mistaken identity and other favourite tricks of the theatre. Titles like *Padmavati*, *Khudā-dost*, *Sārande*, *Chandra-Kiran*, *Kunwar Nihālde*, are well known in this region. An interesting development is the shift in recent years from princes and lords to the middle-class lovers of contemporary life. *Rangili Reshmā* is the story of the tragic love between Ranvir, son of a Jat, landlord of village Roopnagar, and Reshma, only daughter of Surat Singh of village Kundanpur. *Lilo-Chaman* is a post-1947 story and has a reference to the Partition of India.

Romantic tales in the *Khyāl* of Rajasthan and *Mānch* of Malwa have a lyrical quality and deep idealism which are wanting in the themes of *Sāng* and *Nautanki*. This is because Rajasthan is traditionally a land of valour and the bards of Rajasthan have kept alive glorious tales of heroism, self-sacrifice and nobility. Love and valour have been the principal inspiration of drama in this region, but it is not the great historical Rajput princes whose exploits are enacted in the plays. Humble men who became legendary figures among the poor and downtrodden are preferred, for the masses who constitute the audience are moved by their tales. Tejāji is one such figure. He was married as a child in a village in another State, but as there was some dispute between his family and that of his bride, Tejāji was not even allowed to know that he had been married. Once, when he had already grown up into a young man, his brother's wife delayed bringing his midday meal to the field where he was at work. Angry words were exchanged and the sister-in-law said that if Tejāji wanted fresh food and in time, he had better go and fetch

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

his own wife. Tejāji thus came to know of his marriage and left his home with the resolve to bring back his wife. On the way, an old snake who was hoping to end his unwanted life in a jungle-fire was saved by him. But he wanted to bite Tejāji who promised to return to him after seeing his wife. In the village of his father-in-law, he encountered many difficulties before he could meet his wife. However, just when he and his wife were to be together, word came that some robbers had taken away by force a herd of cattle belonging to the Gūjars of the neighbourhood. Tejāji rushed to rescue the cattle. There was heavy battle and Tejāji managed to overthrow the robbers, but got numerous injuries all over his body. He was on the point of death when he recalled his promise to the snake. Straightaway he went to the snake who said that his body was so full of injuries that he did not know where to bite. Tejāji extended his tongue. The snake bit him all right but gave him the blessing that his name would be a legend and that whoever worships him would be immune from snake-bite. That is why several fairs are held in Tejāji's honour all over Rajasthan.

With some variations, the story of Tejāji is enacted by Khyāl and Mānch parties all over Rajasthan and Mālwā. It has inspired several other themes and points of similarity between the first part of the story and Nautanki are obvious. An ideal of a different kind has inspired the play called *Jasmā Odan* in the folk form called Bhavai in Gujarat. Sidhraj Jaysingh, the king of Gujarat, becomes enamoured of Jasmā, the wife of an earth-digger. He invites on purpose the entire community of earth-diggers to dig for him the lake 'Sahasralinga'. Accosting Jasmā in a lonely spot the king entreats her to become his queen. She spurns his offer. The king resorts to force, but his attempts are foiled owing to the power of 'Sati'—the chaste wife, and he falls prostrate before her.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

There is a sizable dramatic literature in Northern India of these rural plays based on romantic tales. Some of these are available in print—not at book-shops of serious literature but on the pavements and at fairs. Playwrights are also active pursuing their vocation among people who perform and witness these humble shows, but almost unknown to the main stream of contemporary literature.

Of the romantic tales which became the vehicle of mystic philosophy, those of Raja Bharthari and Rani Pingala are most popular as Mānch plays. In fact, Raja Bharthari's story, originally from Bengal, has inspired playwrights all over Northern India in different languages. It seeks to expose the futility of physical love and affirms the value of devotion to the preceptor (giver) who illumines the path to the Supreme Being.

Some Features of Romantic Themes

In the treatment of romantic tales in the village drama, the playwrights and performers seem to show four distinct preferences. First, apart from some recent plays, in most others on these themes, the ending is sad. Supporters of the happy-ending formula in popular films may be surprised to find that 'tragedies' are by no means an anathema to the 'common man' in the village for his entertainment. In fact, numerous folk songs and ballads of unknown authorship on the lips of people in the midst of their work and toil speak of the wife separated from the husband away in town, or of the daughter pining for her parents or of the lovers not re-united. But, it is not the tragedy of utter waste and annihilation that these plays depict. There is a kind of inevitability tempered with fulfilment in the affairs of men—a reconciliation in every tear, a chastening experience in suffering for higher ends. Secondly, love, howsoever idealistic is never divorced from pas

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

sion. Eroticism is a common feature; there is little inhibition and songs and dialogue abound in references which to urban taste may appear crude and obscene. Thirdly, didactic passages recur with a frequency and ease that indicate their total acceptability to the audience. In the play *Siyāh Posh* (The Warrior in Black), while the audience is moved by the ups and downs of the plight of the lovers, the pronounced emphasis upon the bonds of friendship is not lost upon the audience. Standing below the death-noose when the sentence is about to be carried out against him, Gabru, the hero of the play, exhorts his wife to conduct herself worthily as a widow and stresses the value of simple life and high thinking for women in that situation. Perhaps these passages would be quoted as freely by the elders in the audience as the songs of bodily passion would be hummed by youth. Fourthly, while love is dominant in most plays, idealism and self-sacrifice are highlighted in several others. It may be loyalty to friends, desire to help people in distress or the sacredness of vows taken and fulfilled at any cost—basic virtues upon which the structure of faith among village people has continued to exist in spite of sloth and selfishness in day-to-day life. Like pigments of a race, the responses have been persistent though skin-deep !

Influence of Devotional Movements

Bhagawat Dharma

As pointed out earlier in this chapter, the romantic tale is a subsidiary (though far more ancient) trend in the themes of contemporary rural drama. The main body of drama in Indian villages is concerned with mythology. In classical Sanskrit drama also themes from the epics were used, but the treatment was more or less like that of legends of Greece and Rome in the heroic drama of Europe; mythology furnished characters and rudiments of plots, but not the basic sentiment or

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

'ideology'. Forms of drama to-day current in Indian villages developed mainly during the centuries after the golden period of classical Sanskrit drama. From the 9th to the 16th centuries, political turmoil and uncertainties were accompanied by the emergence of powerful and popular religious movements. Part of the strength of these religious movements came from a widespread moral reaction against (*a*) ritualistic excesses of certain creeds that had arisen out of decadent Buddhism, (*b*) unmoral and unethical outlook of the petty courts, as reflected in the later Sanskrit drama (and literature) such as the *Bhānas*, *prahasanas*, etc. The Bhagawat Dharma (the cult of Vishnu and his incarnations and the exaltation of Bhakti—the spirit of devotion and self-surrender) was the popular aspect of this reaction. The drama that followed turned to mythology not only for characters and stories, but also for moral content and devotional inspiration. This was fortunate for the Bhagawata movement also, because drama became the vehicle of the concept of Bhakti—devotion, whether the deity be Shiva or Vishnu or Chandi. Since this period coincided with that of the Muslim conquests when royal patronage to local religious movements was no longer available, folk drama had no rival in the hearts of the people. It would be no exaggeration to claim that it is the folk forms of art—including the drama in temples and villages—that perpetuated the cult of Bhakti among the common people. These were the media of mass communications that religious leaders like Vallabhacharya, Chaitanya, Shankardeva and several others used freely, and that were not available to religious movements before and since. Buddhism lost ground among the masses not merely because of the disappearance of royal patronage but also because its growing rival—the Bhāgawata cult—managed effectively to use audio-visual media, folk drama, music, poetry, puppetry, etc.

National Centre for the Arts

and thus got seated in the hearts of the people. For nearly 400 years this process went on in spite of the Muslim rule. So thorough-going has been this process that the characters from the Bhāgawata pantheon became part and parcel of the life of the common people.

Powerful Themes From the Epics

That is why several themes are common in plays performed in regions separated by thousands of miles. Like springs with a common source, these stories well up in Bhāgawata Mela of Madras State, Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh, the Lilās of Uttar Pradesh, the Ankiyā Nāt of Assam and the Jātrā of Bengal and Orissa. Thus, the story of Hiranya Kashyapu, the demon king and Narsingh, the lion-incarnation of Vishnu, is a theme with an all-India appeal. Hiranya Kashyapu, an enemy of the heavenly beings and in particular of Lord Vishnu, has a young son Prahlāda, who ironically enough, became a devotee of Vishnu. Hiranya Kashyapu put him under a guru in the hope that the child's ideas would be moulded on the right lines. But Prahlāda managed to convert his class-mates who all began to recite the name of Nārāyan (another name of Vishnu). Hiranya Kashyapu was in a fury. He put Prahlāda to all manner of torture; he ordered him to be flung down a high cliff; he had him thrown into fire, but the boy came out unscathed and kept on taking Narayana's name with even greater gusto. Finally, Hiranya Kashyapu dragged him into the pillared corridor of his own palace and challenged him to call upon his God Nārāyana to save him since he would put him to sword himself. "Where is your God ? Tell me." Prahlāda replied unruffled and with supreme confidence, "Inside this pillar, sire." Hirayana Kashyapu struck the pillar with his sword, and, lo and behold ! out came Vishnu as a lion incarnate, fierce and awe-inspiring. He laid Hiranya Kashyapu on his

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

knees and drew out his entrails. Prahlāda was saved and the spirit of devotion triumphed over brutish strength and empty pride.

In fact, it is a favourite theme of mythological plays to show the fall of pride and pomp, the instrument of the fall being two contrasting forces, namely, the immense and endless power of the Lord in his ten incarnations and the disarming humility and utter surrender of the pious devotee. The more haughty and arrogant is the enemy of the Lord, the greater the impact of his fall and of the deeper virtues of a dedicated life. *Parashurām-Vijaya*, *Ravana-Vādha*, *Rukmini-Haran*, all these stories from the epics give a chance to the 'villains' (Rāvana, Rukma, Parashurāma, etc.,) to appear on the stage in all their glory. The most accomplished actors take these roles, and the most breath-taking make-up or mask and costume are reserved for them.

Mythology In Lighter Vein

But the Bhagawata cult had ôther more pleasant and homely ways also of turning hearts to the Lord's grace and light. In *Pārijāt Haran*, Lord Krishna appears as a common husband, out to please both his wives and initially finding himself in a quandary. Rukmini was the elder wife and Satyabhāmā, the junior one. Nārada, the mischief-making messenger of the gods, brought a Pārijāt flower from the solitary tree in the garden of Indra—the king of gods. Krishna makes it over to Rukmini; this brings on Satyabhāmā's ire. In order to alleviate her anger, Krishna sends word to Indra through Nārada, asking for the tree. Indra refuses. Krishna, therefore, invades Indra's capital; there is a battle in which Indra is defeated and the tree is planted in Satyabhāmā's palace. There are interesting interludes in between, such as the wordy quarrel between Satyabhāmā and Shachi, the wife of Indra,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

on the battle-field, or between Satyabhāmā and Rukmini regarding the planting of the tree. The character of Satyabhāmā—as the young and favourite consort—has been particularly developed in the Kuchipudi performance of Andhra Pradesh, and, in fact, the appearance of Satyabhāmā on the stage is treated as an independent presentation under the name Satyabhāmā-Kalāpam in the Kuchipudi form of drama; all the skill of the best performer goes into this portrayal. One of the finest interpreters of this role has recently been honoured with a National Award.

Lord Krishna as a young cowherdsman with his pranks among the maidens of Braja has been the central figure in numerous plays of Rāsalila of Mathura and Vrindāvana near Delhi and of Ankiyā Nāt of Assam. *Dān Lilā* which draws large crowds to Rāsalila performances, shows Krishna preventing the Gopis (the maidens of the households of cowherdsmen) from going out to Mathura city for selling curds and milk, without paying the *dān*—the share to Krishna and his gang who regard themselves to be more important than the ruler of Mathura. In another play, Krishna and Radha (the principal Gopi), who are shown as lovers, have a misunderstanding. Krishna goes to Radha's house but is caught by the Gopis and compelled to appear in a maiden's clothes. There are *lilās* (acts) about joyous festivals like Holi. In all these plays, the human and attractive aspects of Krishna are brought out, the aim being to arouse among devotees the sentiment of affection for one who, though the Lord of the Universe, chooses to move among the humans like one of them and brings them the sense of joy in the midst of suffering.

The same attitude towards the Supreme Mother known variously as Durgā or Chandi is emphasised in the Jātrā plays of Bengal. *Chandi-mangal* is the story of Mahadeva and his consort Chandi or Durgā whose

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

home-coming in October is treated almost as a national festival in Bengal. It is as tender as the home-coming of the daughter of the family and in the Jātrā plays this sentiment is exploited to the full. The Jātrā is one of the highly-developed dramatic forms and complex plots and stories bring it nearer the urban theatre of Calcutta which bears, even to-day, a strong influence of the passion and simplicity, of the vehemence and subtlety of the Jatra theatre. The Vaishnava movement also continues to exploit the Jātrā for popularising the Bhakti cult, and one of the most impressive Jātrā performances has as its theme the life and deeds of the famous saint, seer and singer—Chaitanya Mahāprabhu of the 15th century. In fact, there are two distinct forms of the Jātrā tradition in Bengal; one the purely devotional and the other, the theatrical, using mythological themes.

Plays Of Social Purpose and Criticism

We have so far discussed themes based on traditional tales of romance and love, and those that have stemmed from Hindu mythology—the epics and the *Purānas*. But it is the play of social purpose and social criticism which more truly reflects the native intelligence, wit and sharp reactions of the Indian villager. These are not so well known and histories of Indian and Sanskrit drama often overlook them. This is because mythological themes were also the themes of some of the best Sanskrit plays of which the tradition continued with the literary people. Social criticism was a theme of the *Bhānas* and of several other varieties of short plays which do not, however, figure very high in the literary heritage. Besides, references in such plays were so much to the conditions prevailing at the time the plays were written that, with each generation passing, these themes also seemed to be forgotten. But the changes in the rural society are much slower

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

and customs, characters and situations linger on in the Indian village much longer than in the cities. That is why plays built around social problems some of which are no longer current are not yet out of date for a rural audience. There are memories and echoes of some of those problems still alive. Moreover, in the rural play which is mostly unwritten, gradual changes are indicated in the additions and modifications made from time to time.

The Kariyālā of Himachal Pradesh is a remarkable example of how the village shows its awareness of economic and social problems. The plays are crude and the plot is generally loose and built around certain character-types and their *swāngs* (acts), rather than regular stories. Thus, there are the swāngs of the moneylender or sāhukar, the swāng of the nambardar (village revenue official) and of the thānedar (village police official), the swāng of the shepherd, the swāng of the dāyan (or witch) making fun of some village-superstitions, the swāng of the aged peasant with two wives showing the harmful effects of polygamy, the swāng of the Saheb and *Maim* (the madam—a European lady) which caricatures foreigners and the swāng of the sādhus (or mendicants). In the last-named play, about half a dozen sādhus visit a village, dancing. The headman of the village requests them to give sermons to his people. While the sermons are full of wisdom, the play soon exposes the hyprocrisy of the sādhus. On the one hand, they recite verses, expounding the distinction between gyān (intellectual knowledge) and dhyān (meditation as a means of intuitive knowledge), and on the other, they pester the headman with demands for large quantities of milk and logs of wood! The senior sādhu asks his disciple to bring a jug of water from the Gangā. When the sacred Gangā water comes, there is a noisy quarrel among the sādhus on the question of priority for the bath. The protocol among the

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

sādhus is a notorious point of dispute at the Kumbh fair held every twelve years at the confluence of the Gangā and Yamunā rivers at Allahabad and at Hardwar; the Kariālā play obviously has a 'dig' at these disputes of the holy men. In another play, the swāng of the *dāyan* or witch, a villager addresses the witch as Bhābhi (sister-in-law) and asks her what she was doing. The witch is busy with her make-up in front of a mirror, and says "I am going to appear in film *Madhu Makshi* (*The Bee*, though the real name of the film is *Madhumati*—a romantic heroine). The swāng of the peasant who marries a second time at the age of seventy causes much mirth and laughter and gives scope for ribaldry.

This theme of unequal marriages is popular also in the Bidesiā plays of Bihar. The Bidesiā in its present form is a recent phenomenon, about 50 or 60 years old, but it seems to be the continuation of an older tradition. The author Bhikhāri Thākur, an illiterate barber, left his home in West Bihar when he was a boy and formed a roaming team of performers. The name Bidesiā (a person who has emigrated from his home) began to be applied to these plays, probably because in his first play he depicted the plight of a young wife whose husband had gone away for employment to Calcutta which to her is almost like a Bidesh, i.e. a foreign country. The pathos of the play finds response in countless hearts, because many villagers from West Bihar go to Calcutta for employment as guards and constables and some of them form attachments with city-women, neglecting young wives in their homes. Bidesiā became extremely popular because it reflected a contemporary situation in a direct and uninhibited manner. Bhikhāri Thākur then took up the theme of unequal marriage and its evil consequences. How the young bride of an aged bridegroom suffers in silence and what temptations beset her is the theme of more than one Bidesiā play. The dia-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

logue ranges between the obscene and the uplifting; the performer switches from one mood to another with remarkable ease and manages to carry the audience with him.

Compared to Bhikhāri Thākur, Phatte Bapu Rao who died in 1947 and was the leading Tamāshā writer in Maharashtra, had a rich cultural background. He led a most dramatic life himself, giving up the society of people of high caste for the sake of his lady-love who belonged to a lower caste. His story *Mitthā Rāni* is based on a folk tale about the vicissitudes of lovers, the princess who forsakes the life of comfort in the royal palace for the sake of the poor lover obviously echoed Phatte Bapu Rao's own experiences. In the traditional tamāshās that were prevalent in Maharashtra State before Bapu Rao, references to contemporary matters were more direct and that tradition still continues. The opportunity for such situations is provided by a stock situation. When the hero accompanied by his nitwit friend goes to town, the two meet a sophisticated lady who is actually a dancing girl. In the course of an amusing dialogue, the woman puts a chain of questions, some bordering on the metaphysical and some on mundane affairs. The answers—both the funny ones by the idiotic companion and the pointed ones by the hero—contain many a sally at the contemporary society.

Drama in villages does not face the dilemma that confronts the modern sophisticated drama—keen to be treated as a social institution but pulled towards the introspective realm of the abnormal individual. Rural drama is not torn between these opposing desires. It can entertain without inhibition; so can it preach and sermonize without reservation. It is aware of its validity as a social instrument and realizes that it can subsist only so long as it not only entertains but also tries to uplift society.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

V

ACTING AND AESTHETIC PLEASURE

IF MANY CHARACTERS IN RURAL DRAMA DO NOT RESEMBLE real-life human beings, it is because they are not meant to do so. In fact, Indian dramatic tradition does not regard drama as imitation (*anukaran*) or even as creation (*utpatti*). It is the revelation and manifestation of aesthetic pleasure (*rasa*) through the process of suggestivity (*vyanjana*). Suggestivity is produced by those ensuants and moods which are

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

appropriate to the particular kind of aesthetic pleasure sought to be achieved. Nine kinds of aesthetic pleasures such as the erotic, the heroic, the terrible, the humorous, etc. have been enumerated. A character in traditional drama may stimulate one or more rasas in performing his role, and he does so through (*a*) gestures and movements, (*b*) speech, (*c*) facial and other expressions and (*d*) costumes and make-up—all appropriate to the role he is taking and the rasas he is expected to stimulate. Elaborate instructions have been laid down in the ancient texts for actors and producers about how the rasas can be stimulated through these devices. Classifications and sub-classifications abound and there are detailed commentaries and interpretations.

Drama in rural areas has been widely influenced by these tenets, but not in details. However, the rasa theory has two distinct characteristics—first, variety is achieved not through the portrayal of the shades of behaviour and speech of real life but through the communication of the myriad and subtle shades of moods appropriate to the particular aesthetic sentiment. This leads to stylization, but it makes communication easier and moves the audience more effectively. Secondly, some characters emerge as types, identifiable in different plays, and expected to exhibit qualities and characteristics appropriate to the type. Since so many folk plays have to manage without written scripts, type-characters are a convenient basis for improvisation. In fact, some plays get known through the 'types'—the *Nondi Natakam* of Tamil rural areas has a lame person as the principal stock character; the word *Nondi* means a lame person.

It may appear that elaborate traditions of this kind would leave no initiative to the individual performer. In fact it is not so. Interpretation of moods is a challenging task and performers can enliven it by

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

their distinctive manner. Besides, improvisation is so plentiful that tradition is often nothing more than a frame within which a performer is able to throw colours and deepen lines and shades to the extent he is capable of doing. (In most Indian forms, this kind of synthesis between tradition and individuality is achieved; classical Indian music is another example).

Language of Gestures and Expressions

However, in certain forms of drama, the need for the maintenance of tradition has led to specialization by families and communities. Kerala has been the home of tradition in this respect and performers of Kootiyāttam are painstaking in adhering to the four aspects of acting mentioned earlier. Gestures, for example, are used not only to convey the meaning of sentences and passages but also of individual words. Each word is uttered slowly and the gestures are shown sometimes for the stem and the suffix of a word separately. Also, not only has the text to be explained but also the traditionally accepted characteristics of the particular role. Sugrīva is the monkey-king in a play called *Bālivadhanikā*. The actor playing Sugrīva has first of all to indicate through steps and gestures that he is a monkey. He would catch hold of branches of trees and shake them, pluck leaves, grin repeatedly, scratch his head and hips, handle his own tail and make various noises peculiar to the monkey. (Of course, there is no tree on the stage—all this is done through gestures). Having established himself first as a monkey, he will proceed to display the characteristics of a king and so on. Facial expressions are important for depicting subtle shades of moods. A facial expression is called *stobha* in Kerala and consists of delicate movements of the eyes, brows, lips and cheeks without gestures of hands.

For gaining mastery over such a complex language of expressions and gestures, ordinary training would

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

not do. That is how a whole community of actors has grown up in Kerala over centuries. They are known as Chākyars. Initial training among Chākyars may be from father to son, but the *guru* gives specialized training and there is a *guru* attached to every shrine. There are about six Chākyar families in Kerala who still perform Kootiyāttam, but the tradition is on the decline. Chākyars are assisted by Nāmbyars; the latter are drummers primarily, and their women, called Nānyars, appear in female roles, and are given the additional task of singing the accompanying songs and playing the cymbals.

Specialization and Individuality

This kind of division of functions is seen in several other forms of drama. In village Melattur of Madras State, a number of families have been 'assigned' different roles in various plays of Bhāgwat Mela. Thus, there may be one family which has to present Harishchandra, the king of Ayodhya who gave up his all in order to keep a vow. In that family, the grandfather, father and grandson may all have taken Harishchandra's role in their time. A high standard of specialization was thus possible. There are families of Hiranya Kashyapu, Chandramati, Leelavati, etc. It became a family responsibility to keep the role going whatever happened, for omission to do so might, it was believed, bring bad luck to the family. This fear was effective for centuries, but is losing its spell in the modern scientific age. Boys of these families serve as clerks and officers in towns and are often not available for performances. Several plays have been given up and it is with considerable difficulty that the tradition is being kept alive.

In Ankiyā Nāt of Assam, the satras or monasteries are facing the same difficulty, for the satra is no longer an effective economic unit and young men can no longer be tied down to these sacred responsibilities. Acting

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

in Ankiyā Nāt follows traditions dating to the 15th century, because it was possible for the satras to preserve them. But the language of gestures and expressions is not quite as complex and elaborate as that in Kerala.

Certain forms of drama make special demands upon performers because of the emphasis placed upon particular sentiments. Thus, in the Yakshagān of Karnātak, the dominant tradition is of the heroic mood. Vigorous battle scenes are enacted in every play. An actor should, therefore, be physically strong so that he can indulge in vigorous movements and bear the weight of heavy costume. In the Rāsalilā of Vrindāvana near Delhi, the *līlās* (or enactments) concern the life of Krishna as a boy and also as a romantic lad who is the sweetheart of maidens of the entire countryside. For this reason, boy-actors are preferred; in fact, adults seldom appear on the stage; as soon as a 'hero' grows up he joins the samājis or the choral group. Acting is stylized but is built around speech more than around gestures and facial expressions. Prose dialogue is mostly witty and consists of exchange of sallies between Krishna on the one hand and all the Gopis (milkmaids) on the other. Verse-dialogue is more attractive because the metres used are good for declamation.

In non-devotional romantic drama, acting is most impressive and moving in the portrayal of sorrow. Nautanki of Uttar Pradesh, not distinguished for subtle acting, can be overwhelming when a tragic situation is being depicted. Incidentally, Nautanki or Sāng has an interesting feature—the use of some gestures such as raising the pointing finger now and then when the other person is speaking. Silent gestures of this kind are neither symbolical nor always connected with the dialogue, but they break the monotony. In Sāng, as in several other folk plays, characters who generally keep standing often exchange positions in the midst of

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

dialogue. This enables the audience from all sides to see every character.

Declamatory dialogue is likewise a pronounced feature of the rural drama is Rajasthan, Mālwā and Uttar Pradesh. Every passage is delivered with a sense of fulfilment as it were. Of course, actors are expected to have clear enunciation and to mouth every syllable distinctly. All over this region, actors modulate their voice at a high pitch. 'Base' is practically unknown. There seem to be two reasons for this, first, the same person may sometimes take the male role and sometimes the female role. Therefore in a small troupe it would not be economical to have specialized male and female voices. Secondly, rural drama in India belongs to the pre-microphone age. Though in imitation of public meetings the microphone is, alas, intruding rather impertinently on the rural stage, generally actors are expected to have high-frequency voices that can reach the spectator at the back often distracted by other noises and the rather informal atmosphere of festivity.

While characters in the Mānch, Khyāl and Nautanki move the audience through the portrayal of sorrow, those in Gujarat's Bhavai and Maharashtra's Tāmashā entertain them perhaps more effectively through the light touch. Bhavai is essentially character-drama. The same evening's performance would have a number of short plays each built around a stock character. Such playlets are called *Veshas*. Apart from gestures and movements connected with dances by various characters, drama unfolds itself in a chain of questions and answers and witty repartees. Tamāshā of Maharashtra makes use of this question-answer technique very effectively and actors and actresses are well-versed in keeping the ball rolling through improvisation. In the play *Mitthārāni*, the princess puts to her suitors what would be called a 60-thousand dollar

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

question ! There are questions like : what came earlier —the hen or the egg, the sky or the earth? and the suitor who fails to answer forfeits a sum of Rupees $1\frac{1}{4}$ lakh ! One of the earliest instances of the question-answer method of imparting information is in the epic *Mahābhārata.* While in exile, four out of the five Pandavas were almost struck dead when they failed to answer questions of this type put by a Yakha—a super-being who had taken the form of a stork near the stream where the Pandavas went to fetch water. Ultimately the eldest Pandava, Yudhishthira, answers those questions, nearly eighty of them. That dialogue seems to have been the model for many a play, and has also passed into folk-lore in different parts of the country. In fact some scholars have wondered if the Mahabharata made use of an earlier folk-lore in giving such a dramatic turn to the episode.

All this goes to show that acting in rural drama is a mixture of inherited formulae and improvisation. In one and the same play actors may show both kinds of talents. Thus the jātrā actors (of Bengal), in the play on the life of the Vaishnava saint Chaitanya Mahāprabhu, would deliver highly emotional and impassioned speeches in measured tone and with appropriate gestures; and yet in a comic interlude the same actors would switch over to the realistic manner effortlessly. Though a certain amount of specialization is inevitable, versatility seems to be a basic requirement in one who would succeed on the rural stage. He should know his verses, be a professional singer and should be able to improvise prose dialogue according to the situation. He should be an expert in devising quips.

Stock-Characters: *The Clown*

Few troupes can manage to have more than one or two persons of this calibre. That is why folk drama builds up some stock characters, the outstanding among

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

whom keep the play going even if there are weak links. Here we shall discuss only two stock characters common to most rural drama in India; the vidushaka (or jester) and the sūtradhāra (or the stage-manager-cum-narrator). The jester or clown may either appear as a stock-character with the same name irrespective of the story, or he may be one of the dramatis personae of the particular story. Thus in Doddāta, the jester is called Adasogu, whatever the story. He is usually dressed in an exaggerated manner, pot-bellied, with long moustaches, a stick in hand, etc. In Mānch of Mālwā, Central India, the stock comic character is called Sher-mār-Khān, an amusing name meaning 'the Khān who kills the tiger'. He is the companion of the hero (irrespective of what the story is) and it is not clear why he should bear this name, even when the hero is Bharthari, the Hindu King who became a hermit. However, Sher-mār-Khān is not a mere jester, he also provides the link-narrative. What is more, he would sometimes do 'relieving duty' for the hero. This is a device peculiar to Mānch and is called *Talwār denā* or 'handing on the sword'. The hero usually carries a sword and when he is tired, or has to go to the green-room for a glass of water, Sher-mār-Khān would 'take the sword' and this means he would carry on the dialogue on behalf of his companion. The jester in the Rāsalila of Braj is called mansukhā. He is a companion of Krishna in his many pranks and is at once a shrewd mischief-maker and a butt of the women-folk. This arrangement of having the jester as the companion is the most widely prevalent and also convenient. It follows the age-old practice of kings having a court jester who could take liberties even with his master. In many classical Sanskrit plays, the vidushaka has been introduced as the friend of the hero; thus in *Shakuntala* the hero Dushyanta has Madhavya who is fond of good food. Since the Kootiyattam of Kerala is nearest the classical

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Sanskrit tradition, the vidushaka in it gives plenty of time to a discussion of food of different kinds and is usually a friend of the hero. He also interprets the Sanskrit text in the colloquial language of the people. In doing so he parodies the original, makes fun of the Brahmins, exposes court intrigues, refers to current evils and spares nobody. He has a folded betel-leaf inserted in the right-ear-lobe. That is a guarantee that he is free to ridicule anybody in the audience (even kings were not immune from the vidushaka's lash) and would not be taken to task for taking such liberties. Of course, the vidushaka (who belongs to the Chakyar community—the preserver of the great tradition of the stage arts in Kerala) clothes his criticisms in clever figures of speech and innuendos, and even the victim cannot help enjoying the joke. He follows certain mannerisms of speech ; thus he keeps chewing something every now and then. Occasionally he adjusts his *yajnopavit* (the sacred thread of a Brahmin); sometimes he rearranges the tuft of his hair, or seems to squeeze his cotton shawl as if it were saturated with water. He speaks often with a nasal twang.

Though the traditional temple-drama of village Melattur in Madras State (Bhāgawat Mela) has often a comic interlude, the main appearance of the clown is in the beginning. He is called Konangi, and is somehow regarded as the caricature of a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Konangi literally means the crooked one, and the cap that he dons is crooked and expresses his character. On his forehead he wears the mark (*tilak*) associated with the devotees of Vishnu. He has a flowing beard, a blue coat and carries a garland in one hand and a piece of entwined white cloth with a red rag attached to it in the other; this is supposed to ward off the effects of the evil eye upon the performances. The main function of Konangi is to ask the audience to be attentive and again and again in the midst of his pre-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

liminary dance and even later he would pause and utter the word *Soddhu* ! which means 'silence, please !'

The Sūtradhār

Where the vidushaka becomes the narrator it is difficult to distinguish him from the sūtradhār or narrator-cum-stage-manager. The Bhavai of Gujarat has usually a stock-character variously named as Ranglo, Rangi, Daglo and Samla. He is a clown, but quite often he also makes announcements in between the appearance of principal characters and explains the progress of the story. But, generally, in folk and traditional drama, the narrator is a serious-minded leader whose words are a signal for the appearance of other characters, who makes preliminary and intervening announcements (so that scenes and acts become unnecessary), and who time and again highlights the moral of the story. Perhaps the most complete example of this role of the sūtradhār can be seen in the Ankiyā Nāt of Assam. Here the sūtradhār is the first to appear and addresses the audience directly and, except in the beginning when he has a little dialogue with the *sangi* or his companion, he comes forward alone, and asks the audience to 'listen and see carefully' the next item. As the texts of Ankiyā Nāt plays are available in manuscript or printed form, it can be clearly assessed how functional is the character of the sūtradhār in this type of drama. Perhaps that may be the reason why the dress of the sūtradhār in Ankiyā Nāt is far more traditional than what the other characters put on. He has a white shirt called *churi* (that makes dancing easier), pink *Gāthi Sela* (shirt) with long and loose sleeves, a turban and *Gāthi kāpar* (waist-band). He appears when the chorus sings the song of benediction, illustrating it with gestures and dance-movements, he recites the verse introducing the hero and his exploits, and in fact gives the introductory song for every

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

principal character. His commentaries and announcements are stylized and are indeed part of the script. It seems that in this particular form of drama the sūtradhār is a continuation of the tradition of the kathākār, that is, learned men whose function it was to read out or recite from memory stories from the epics and the Purānas. Shankardeva, the great saint of Assam who in the 16th century decided to use drama for carrying the message of his creed of devotion and love to his people, converted the kathākār (story-teller) into a sūtradhār. Very probably he himself appeared in the role of the sūtradhār in the plays written by him.

In the Veethinātakam (literally 'street-drama') of Tamilnād (Madras State) as well as in the Bhāgāwat Mela of Melattur village in the same State, the sūtradhār does not make such frequent appearances, but in his main function, namely that of introducing the principal characters in the beginning, his role is similar to that of the Assamese sūtradhār. He comes on the stage dancing and uses the language of gestures and poses in order to illustrate the introductory songs. He is called Kattiyangāran and it is not necessary for him to repeat his visits because the process of the introductory appearances of the principal characters takes place right at the beginning.

While in these forms the sūtradhār broadly retains the features described in the ancient texts and to some extent followed in the classical Sanskrit drama, another type of sūtradhār has developed in areas where the temple has not been the main formative influence on drama. The sūtradhār here is primarily the leader of the troupe who often makes the preliminary announcements and even intervenes in some situations in the play; but his main function is to guide the progress of the play and to supervise the other members. In Bhavai of Gujarat he is called Nāyak which literally means 'leader'. The

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

importance attached to the leadership of a drama troupe and the esteem in which the leader is held by followers and spectators are shown most pointedly in a relatively less-known type of 'show' prevalent in West Uttar Pradesh under different names such as Naqāl and Bhagat. The leader in both these forms is called Khalifā—a Muslim designation. He usually appears in the beginning and explains the outline of the evening's performance. Thereafter, he guides the play usually seated in an important position. The Bhagat is an informal kind of drama that has remained confined to Agra town and its neighbourhood. Bhagat parties exist in different localities and each party has its Khalifā who has to be an actor, a versifier and a good organizer. An actor desirous of being recognized as Khalifā would extend an invitation to the Khalifās and other prominent figures of the Bhagat troupes of other localities and as a token thereof would give some cardamom to them. Then he would recite a verse before the other Khalifā who would improvise a verse in reply. There would be such a contest in every *mañalla* and on being satisfied with the candidate's suitability for being admitted into the fraternity, all the Khalifās would assemble; tie a turban on the candidate's head, have another series of verse recitals and would then declare the candidate to be a Khalifā.

Female Roles

However important the position of the leader, he does not cease to be an actor. He must be prepared to step in and take a part if necessary. Drama in villages is not a work of specialists. That may be one reason why most rural drama troupes consist only of men. Some young men manage to give very convincing roles as women, the most noteworthy being the female roles in the Jātrā of Bengal and Kuchipudi of Andhra Pradesh. Centuries ago in all drama in ancient India,

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the cast included both men and women. Numerous sculptural and rural depictions of groups in dancing and musical poses on the panels of old temples and caves give an idea of actual performances. The internal evidence of classical Sanskrit Drama (such as *Malvikāgnimitra* of Kalidāsa) also indicates clearly that female parts used to be taken by women. A change seems to have come in this respect in the middle ages for two reasons. First, the presence of women temple-dancers led, sometimes, to immoral practices. Since the revival of drama during the 11th to 16th centuries in many parts of the country was due to the moral and devotional zeal of the great saints, they promoted drama troupes in which such practices might not grow. Women performers were, therefore, kept out and a new institution of Bhāgawatars was encouraged in the South and of the Bhaktas in the north and north-east. Secondly, the unsettled conditions in the north, consequent upon the invasions by Muslims, among whom the segregation of women was almost a religious tenet, broke up mixed troupes. The Persian influence upon the arts in general favoured the young male as the object of the finer erotic sentiments. Thus Sāngs, Nautankis, Bhānds, Naqāls, Khyāls, Mānch and numerous other forms all have boys and young men appearing in female roles. However, the women belonging to the performers' families—wives, sisters and daughters, contribute to some of these performances by joining in the chorus. This does not, of course, apply to devotional plays like Rāsalila, Ankiyā Nāt and Kuchipudi.

Still, there are some forms of drama in villages in which women appear on the stage. Kootiyāttam performances in the temples of Kerala have generally women to take the female roles. Womenfolk belonging to the families of the drummers (or Nambyārs) are enjoined by convention and trained to take these roles. Whether this practice will continue in the future re-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

mains to be seen. In Tamāshā, the social play of rural Maharashtra, women have come in only recently, perhaps in imitation of the urban theatre. The change has made Tamāshā livelier. Very different from these professional or near-professional women artists are the girls and women from rural families in Mithilā, North Bihar, who get together in the month of Shravan (round about July) to put up performances with an all-women cast. In fact those who take the two principal roles have to be unmarried girls though other women help. The performance is called Jat-Jatin and though it does not have all the elements of drama, some of the musical dialogue has dramatic turns and excitement. The jata is supposed to be the bridegroom and is dressed as such, while the jatin is the bride. The participants stand in two rows facing each other and a number of short acts are presented such as the marriage scene, the sale of fish, the disappearance of Jatin, and Jata's search and her eventual recovery.

Professionalism and Training

Jat-Jatin is one of the few examples of purely amateur kind of rural drama. Most other forms have actors who are professionals or semi-professionals. But the standard of professionalism varies considerably. It is only in the South, particularly in Kerala, North Karnatak and Andhra Pradesh that strict standards laid down by tradition are observed. In North Karnataka, there is a treatise dating to the 17th century entitled *Sabha-Lakshanā* in which detailed instructions for actors have been given. These are still the basis for the training of actors in Yakshagān. Similarly actors in Kootiyāttam in Kerala depend upon treatises like *Āttaprakāra* which explain how the meanings of verses can be acted through gestures and movements, without a break in the story. Texts of this kind are mostly old and inaccessible to ordinary rural-drama troupes in

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

which training is mostly oral and is imparted by the leader or teacher called *guru* or *ustād*. In Kerala itself actors of the Christian rural drama Chavittu-Nātakam are trained by the instructor called 'Aran'. The place of training is called *kalari* (lit. Gymnasium). Chavittu (like the Doddatta of Karnatak) specializes in vigorous movement and battle scenes and hence actors are first given intensive physical training and also taught to use swords, lance, cudgels and daggers. Thereafter, a course in dancing particularly in the distinctive steps for which Chavittu is known, is provided. The Aran or the instructor has obviously to be a man of parts and he commands the respect of actors who pay homage to him at the time of the performances in the presence of spectators. Training of actors for most North Indian rural forms such as Mānch, Khyāl and Swāng is informal and is given by the leader of the party. No distinct course is followed and young actors learn more by participation than by precept. However, boys who appear in the Rāsalilā of Braj are more systematically taught both the dialogue and the dances and have sometimes to put in long hours of practice.

Practice and painstaking efforts are not without compensation for actors. Acting is not a well-paid profession in rural India. Most itinerant troupes used to have until recently an arrangement suitable to a different economic system. Food, basic amenities, a limited number of clothes, etc. would be provided to every actor. At the end of the play, a plate (thāli) would be shown round among the audience and collection thus made would be the actors' earnings. In some forms like the Tamāshā, rich people in the audience ask for an encore of a song, and for every such encore the particular artist receives a few rupees as a gift. Quite often, a kind of rivalry develops among these special patrons, and artists make good money. In Rāsalila and Rāmlila the *Arati* (worship) of the principal

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

characters at the end of the show gives an occasion to devotees to make offerings of cash and even jewelery to those artists. These systems are now undergoing a change. No longer does the actor find it possible to depend upon these uncertain sources of supplementary income. Most groups have, therefore, now introduced regular monthly salaries, even though the leader only gets contracts for performances.

The rural actor is not a glamorous figure. Though a hero in the eyes of young people he is, to most people in the audience, a modest entertainer with no airs about himself. But he knows his audience, and that is his greatest asset.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

VI

MUSIC AND DANCE

Drama—A Blended Form

DRAMA IN RURAL AREAS MEANS A PERFORMANCE IN which music and dance are as much used for expression and communication as dialogue. In fact, in most local and regional drama, song is the main vehicle of ideas and artistic expression and prose dialogue is the lever for advancing the plot or story. Dance constitutes the decorative setting and also the principal aid to the build-

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

ing up of particular moods. Unless all three are present—the proportions vary according to local traditions—it is not drama. The use of terms like 'opera', 'ballet' and even 'dance-drama' is not appropriate for most of these forms. These terms developed in the west and have not much relevance to the situation in the Indian countryside. Regional and folk drama has been a mixed form embracing dialogue, dance and music and has been so for the last 1000 years or so. There are various reasons for the persistence and popularity of this form. First, there being no regular supply of new scripts (except, lately, in Sāng, Nautanki and Jātrā) in traditional drama, it uses current musical tunes for adjusting itself to changing times and tastes. This does not mean that tunes keep on changing, as in the modern film, every year. In village drama, tunes last ten years, even a whole generation and in traditional drama for centuries. But gradually new tunes are also incorporated. Secondly, except in troupes performing in shrines most performers may be illiterate and memorization is much easier with songs. Thirdly, in villages, until the recent improvement in roads and communications, it was necessary for dramatic performances to extend throughout the night so that spectators coming from far and near may not have to journey home in the dark. Therefore dances and songs were a necessity for they protracted the performances in a lively manner. Lastly, only landlords and feudal chiefs could, in old days, afford singers and dancing girls for their entertainment. This need of the common people could be met by drama-troupes whose dances, though sometimes lacking in finesse, are communicative, colourful and rhythmically very appealing.

The fact is that from very early times, Indian drama in general has treated music and dance as its essential ingredients. There is a significant reference in the fourth chapter of Bharata's great work on dra-

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

maturgy, *Nātya-Shāstra*. When Bharata at the instance of Brahmā, produced two of plays called *Amrita-manthan* and *Tripurdāh*, he had not included any dances in them. The plays were shown to Lord Shiva—the deity who is regarded as the originator of dances. It was Shiva who advised that instead of having pure acting, drama should include songs and dances also and said that such a mixture would lend variety to dramatic productions. He then went on to explain the varieties of dances and songs for drama and taught them to Tandu who passed them on to the others. Thus, the dance-form came to be known as Tāndava.

Whatever truth this legend may have, it is clear that classical Sanskrit drama was often under pressure of the popular liking for songs and dances. Dr. V. Rāghavan has explained in his essay entitled *Sanskrit Drama and Performance*[1] how songs called Dhurvas used to be fitted on by stage-musicians to the play. "The songs which were in Prakrit dialects and symbolic language were composed by stage-musicians on the basis of the verses and situations in the drama and an idea of these can be had from a stage-version of the highly lyrical fourth act of Kalidas's *Vikramovarsiya* preserved in certain manuscripts.... In fact we know of ancient music mostly as a handmaid of drama and the name Sangita applied primarily to the theatrical art aided by singing and instrumentation."

I have found a confirmation of Dr. Rāghavan's statement in several medieval plays that were written and performed in Mithila (North Bihar), Nepal and Assam during the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries. However, I have come across a more specific name for this kind of mixed drama than the general term *Sangita* mentioned by Dr. Rāghavan. The specific term is 'Sangitaka'. It does not, so far as I know,

[1] *Madras University Journal* (Section A), Vol. XXIX, No: 1, July 1957.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

occur in the well-known Sanskrit works on dramaturgy. But one of the earliest references to sangitaka is in the Sanskrit mono-play (Bhāṇa) entitled *Ubhayābhisārikā* by Vararuchi. This is one of the four Bhāṇas included in the collection called *Chaturbhāṇi*. The mono-play refers to courtesans of the palace taking part in two Sangitakas namely *Madanārādhana* and *Purandaravijaya*, and expecting to be lauded for their performances by their lovers. Such Sangitakas, mixed dramatic performances predominantly musical, seem to have burst into a fresh wave of popularity after the poet Jayadeva wrote his great work of rare lyrical and musical beauty—the *Geeta-Govinda* in the 11th century. Perhaps no single work has exercised a more powerful and widespread influence on subsequent dramatic forms than *Geeta-Govinda*. Its success on the temple-stage must have been phenomenal for imitations followed in scores and though the poet was from Bengal, his refrains travelled down to Cape Comorin and northwards to Kashmir. Mithilā's great poet Vidyapati wrote in the 15th century a play called *Goraksha Vijaya* and in it the sūtradhāra clearly states that he would present a Sangitaka. The Sangitakas have also been described in an earlier prose-work (7th century) by Baṇa-Bhatta, called *Kadambari*.

All this goes to show that popular preference for songs and dances seems to have transformed the literary and aristocratic Sanskrit drama into present-day regional forms during the 11th to 16th centuries and that the success of the *Geeta-Govinda* assisted this process. Traditional and folk drama today represents thus almost a revolution in the dramatic history of India.

Stage-Music : Some Common Characteristics

Technical aspects of Indian music and a comparison with western music would require a learned dissertation. But characteristics that have made music the vehicle of

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

drama in Indian villages have grown out of practical considerations and are intelligible even to the uninitiated. Thus, drum-music is used for several purposes in regional drama all over the country; it is the rallying call to villages across hills and vales, fields and streams. No signal could be more irresistible to audiences in open space. Secondly, there being no curtains and hardly any written script, it is the drum beats from which actors get the directions for moving from one situation to another, one piece of dialogue to another, one kind of pace to another. Thirdly, the drum-beats quite often imitate human speech and repeat bits of dialogue in rhythmic patterns that give much-needed breathing space to singers and actors. Drum-music is the overture, the basic orchestra and the unfailing prompter—all rolled into one—for Indian folk drama. It is its most universal and unmistakable characteristic, and one in which a very high degree of skill is displayed. Perhaps the most spectacular and prominent use of the drum is in the Sangit of Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. The instrument is nagārā, a drum which is played upon with small sticks. But it will be unfair to single out this form as being superior, for the drummers of Assam are brilliant and gorgeous performers, while the drum in Chavittu of Kerala is the vehicle on which the whole panorama of battles and fights moves.

Another common characteristic is the existence of what for want of better terms can be described as narrative and lyrical music in the same play. The arrangement of songs in Indian folk or traditional play is not conceived as an architectural whole. There is a string of songs, and each song has its own mode or *rāga*, and its own *tāla* or rhythmic sequence. The narrative-rāgas, used mostly in the linking commentary of the sūtradhār as also in the exchange of brief repartees between any two characters, are usually not more than three or four in number. The lyrical rāgas

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

on the other hand, are numerous and there may be sometimes in one play as many as 20 to 30 rāgas. The number of songs is, of course, more, there being several songs in one rāga or mode. These songs seek to create the sentiment appropriate to the character or the situation. At the same time they constitute the bulk of the dialogue.

Two parallel traditions have contributed to the varied texture of *rāgas* in Indian folk drama. First, the local or *deshi* styles of singing and second, the classical or *mārg* styles. But to-day, it is difficult to treat the former category as being less classical than the latter. Regional modes such as Mārwā, Kānharā, Sorath, Goojari, which have been named after geographical regions, are in vogue all over the country. With variations, and with constant usage and refinement, during the four or five centuries, they have become as settled as the modes with older or different ancestry, such as Bhairavi, Asāvari, Bāgeshwari, etc. Interchange between folk and classical styles has been a continuing process and in fact it is not possible to be certain which rāga is of folk origin and which is classical. Consequently, the overall impression of music in these plays is similar to that of classical music ; ephemeral tunes and 'hits' get absorbed in this texture and adjusted to the general discipline. In South India, music of rural drama is as sophisticated as the concert music given in cities and on the radio.

Poetry and Stage-Music

That is not quite so in the north. To some extent the recent divorce between literary content and musical expression has been responsible for the difference between chamber and concert music on the one hand and drama-music on the other. The Mughal courts were great patrons of music and in the sophisticated environment of the the royal chamber, singers perfected

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

techniques of brilliant improvisation and highly skilled ornamentation in which words ceased to matter. Only two lines of the text suffice for a brilliant exposition lasting two hours or more by a soloist! In Drama, however, words and their meanings have to be conveyed to the audience, clothed of course in appropriate musical forms chosen to increase the intensity of the meaning. If one were to listen, for example, to a brilliant exposition of some rāgas by an *ustād* (maestro) in a concert hall in Delhi and then drive over to Vrindavan—90 miles away and hear the same rāgas in a Rāsalila performance, one would be struck by the intellectual quality and preciosity of the former and the emotional and dramatic impact of the latter.

Thus songs in these plays are both meaningful and poetically expressive; the quality of poetry has meant also, in most cases, adherence to metres. In India, the basis of metrical forms is not accent but the duration of a syllable. Metrical forms that grew popular during the medieval period were primarily those that lent themselves well to recitation, long-drawn out singing and dance-accompaniment. Ballad-singers, minstrels and court-singers were in plenty during the medieval period when India was divided into numerous small States vying with each other in glorifying the exploits of their heroes. Bards and minstrels popularized metres which passed into the regional plays. The synthesis between poetry and music has also been promoted by the temple which was the sanctuary for both during the unsettled times in the 11th to the 16th centuries, in northern India. Some of the greatest poets of that period in the regional languages were saints and devotees of the Vaishnava temples and monasteries (like Soordas, Tulsidas and Shankardeva). Their poems were meant to be sung at the shrine and as they were themselves well-versed in music, their compositions set a pattern for musical poetry that has been readily adopted by drama.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

That is also perhaps the reason for devotional music occupying in folk plays a place equal in importance to heroic and romantic music. Broadly speaking, musical poems in these plays fall under the categories : devotional, heroic and romantic. The *kirtana* of the Bengali Jātrā-play is an example of devotional music, the *lāvani* of the Khyāl play of Rajasthan is an example of romantic music, and the *pavāra* of the Tamāshā performances of heroic music. Rhythmic flow or *laya* and time-beats or *tāla* are distinct in each and fit in with the words of the songs which thus symbolize a fine synthesis of music and verse, of tune and meaning.

Dhruva and Orchestra

The role of the chorus has been explained earlier. Repetition of the refrain in practically every song is one of the principal functions of the chorus. The refrain is called *dhruva* (or *daravu*) in some south Indian plays as also in Assam. The term *dhruva* has another connotation also in Sanskrit drama. Dhruvas were songs meant to be sung at different points in a play; thus according to Dr. Rāghavan there were dhruvas to indicate entrances and exits, to indicate a change in context, to burnish a situation further and to cover a tense suspension or a gap in the performance. It may be that these songs being sung by the chorus, anything which the chorus sang to sustain the performing artist came to be called dhruva. The literal meaning of dhruva is 'that which is constant'. In Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Malwa a refrain is usually called *tek* (literally 'that on which one rests'). An interesting device is to employ some words or sounds that are not related to the meaning of the song itself, they are like fillers or drones in an orchestral aid. Thus Rajasthan's Khyāl performers use the words ('Mere Bhaiya' my brother) and the tamāshā chorus has a drone-'Jee-Jee-Jee' which sometimes is so perfectly attuned to the sound of the ek-tārā

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

(one-stringed pluck instrument) as to be indistinguishable from it.

Except in some of the modern versions of Jātrā of Bengal, the orchestra is simple. Four kinds of instruments are usually employed: the drum, the pipe or flute, the string (pluck or bow) and the bell or cymbals or both. There are numerous varieties and names of instruments but they fall in one or the other of these four categories. The pipe is usually the sustaining instrument particularly in South Indian performances. Its place is taken in the north by bow-instruments like the sārangi which is unsurpassed in its capacity to imitate the minutest shades of the human voice. The cymbals may be tiny as those in the Kootiyāttam of Kerala or may be heavy and noisy as in Assam where they are called Bho-tal a derivative of *Bhot* (Tibetan) *tāla* (percussion instrument). Lately, the harmonium with its fixed keys and unaesthetic sound has intruded upon the rural stage as one of the symbols of modernity. Another pernicious trespasser is the microphone; it magnifies music that is already loud and intended largely for outdoor audiences. Placed near the instrumentalists and the chorus, it drowns the dialogue as well as the singer on the main stage.

Dance in Drama: Principal Uses

Dance in rural drama has not been subjected to such corrupting influences. That does not mean that artistically every dance-form comes to a high level of excellence. There are some crude dances also like those in the Sāng of east Punjab, in which sturdy young men, decked out flamboyantly, as heroines, with faces wrapped in veils, make vigorous circular movements and fling about their arms. But, taking the country as a whole, the survival of some of the basic formulae concerning dance in drama, as prescribed in Bharatā's *Nātya Shāstra* and subsequent texts, have

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

given to these dances a classic quality and a universal language.

Folk and traditional plays use dances (a) for establishing the distinctive characteristics and temperament of important characters on their *first appearances*; (b) as a device to illustrate the imagery and action of the dialogue—inter-weaving the dances in the texture of the dialogue or placing them as 'terminals' to individual utterances; (c) as spectacles to enhance the effect of particular actions and scenes or even at the beginning or the end or as a 'filler'—without direct relevance to the theme, and mostly as a group performance.

As A Spectacle

Of the last, a remarkable example is the group-dance in the rustic and unrefined drama *Bidabat* of north-eastern Bihar. The story is of Lord Krishna when he had become the ruler of Dwarika and relates to a quarrel between his two queens—Rukmini and Satyabhāma—over the rare flower Pārijāt. But before the story is unfolded comes a group with Radha in the centre, giving a rās, even though Radha is the heroine of a much earlier phase of Krishna's life. The sūtradhār explains that the rās as the 'Divine Play' is a necessary prelude to every performance. In the Rāsa-lilā of Braj (near Agra) this group-dance or rās directly arises from the theme and in fact the story is often built around the rās. Very different but perhaps more impressive are the spectacular battle-dances in the Christian play Chavittu-Nātakam of Kerala. When the forces of Saladin and Charlemagne approach and engage each other in sword-play, visual and rhythmic splendour transports the spectator to a different world. Battle-scenes in rural drama are a contribution of tribal dances and in giving this robust element prominence and seemingly disproportionate time rural drama once

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

again manifests itself as a synthesis of folk and classical culture.

As an aid to Speech

For, dance as a device to illustrate imagery and meaning in the course of or as a terminal to bits of dialogue is greatly stylized and these stylized forms have directly or indirectly descended from the classical forms and detailed instructions given in Bharata's *Nātya Shastra.* Chapter IV of Bharatā's *Nātya Shāstra* enumerates the 108 basic *karanas* or postures involving hands and feet only; all these karanas are illustrated in sculptural panels of the Chidambaram temple. Combinations of karanas are called *angahārs*; there are 32 of these angahārs which are like phrases in the language of dance. Facial expressions or *mudrās* are the other essential ingredients of this language, and the *tālā* or rhythmic beats are both an ornament and a kind of punctuation mark. A combination of gestures or movement of limbs, facial expressions and foot-work enables the actor to illustrate his meaning and even if spectators at the back are unable to hear all the words, these illustrative dance numbers convey the sense. In this use of dance, the performers of Kuchipudi village in Andhra Pradesh are outstanding. What is known as the Kuchipudi dance-drama is a kind of devotional drama that developed in South India in the 16th and 17th centuries and for which the general name is Bhāgawata Mela. But in Kuchipudi, the dance element has been refined and intensified in what are known as *kalāpas.* A kalāpa is the representation through dance and gestures (and in an elaborate and extended manner) of a single situation with a specific major sentiment and its auxiliaries. The flow of the story is interrupted, as it were, and we witness a single situation magnified, elaborated and profusely decorated. The best known kalāpa is *Bhāmā-kalāpam* of which an excellent interpreter is Vedāntam Satyanarāyana.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

In Bhavai of Gujarat neither the gestures nor the facial expressions are so classical. But the foot-work is impressive, quick and tripping. The dance numbers usually follow an utterance, and are given by the jester (Rangilā) and his wife (Rangili) who appear in between scenes. Their dances bear affinity to the Kathak dance—a north Indian classical form that developed in Lucknow, Delhi and Jaipur from the 17th century onwards mainly under the patronage of the courts.

Entrance-Dances

Bharata makes a special mention of the entrance-dance and that tradition seems to have continued to the present day in most regional drama, even in the Muslim play—Bhānd Jashna. The entrances of the king followed by his courtiers, of the commander followed by his soldiers and of the landlord followed by his companions are each identified by distinctive steps and gestures of the hands. Some hand-gestures resemble the karanas of the classical dances, though only remotely. As the procession enters the arena, pairs move out, one after the other, holding a *palva* (a large handkerchief). The *palva* is displayed in different ways. Sometimes the two dancers would be face to face, holding each other's hands, and in that position try to pull each other—a movement known as *hikat*. Another way to conclude the entrance dance is to form a circle; the dancers would then move the upper portions of their bodies only.

In contrast to these simple movements, those of the entrance dances in Kootiyāttam are very complex. The general term for these movements is *chāri* and a variety of chāris are mentioned in the texts which are observed in every detail. The gait of every character who appears discloses his identity—the face and steps showing his temperament, and the gestures illustrating some telling incidents from his past life. Though lacking the finesse and elaboration of the entrance dances

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

of Kootiyāttam, those performed in the Ankiyā Nāt of Assam likewise establish the antecedents and temperamental characteristics of the more important dramatis personae. In the play *Rukmini-Haran*, a popular piece in the repertoire of Ankiyā Nāt, the entrance dance, Pravesh Nritya as it is called, of Krishna, accompanied by his friend Uddhava, consists of a series of gestures and steps that speak of Krishna's early exploits as the young leader of the cowherdsmen of Braj, and as the beloved of their maidens. Later in the play, the entry of Rukma—the hot-headed prince who is opposed to the marriage of Krishna with his sister—is marked by a dance in which he stamps the ground and strikes it with his sword alternately in a rhythmic sequence suggestive of his passionate and perverse nature.

In some regions, entry-dances grew into long and self-contained sequences in which individual actors could show their skill in conveying, through a combination of gestures, movements and foot-work, stories as gripping and vivid as the main drama. This led to an interesting development. Dialogue in such plays began to be discarded. Even the unfolding of plots became secondary. What came to the fore was the exposition of powerful characters through the medium of brilliant and meaningful dances by accomplished masters, the chorus providing the link as a constant accompaniment. Scenes of this kind of dance drama consist mostly of duet-dances, declarations and replies, exchange of abuse or challenges or sentiments of love between two characters at a time, all through dances; Kathakali, the world famous dance-drama of Kerala, is perhaps the most noteworthy example of this process of specialization. By giving unlimited scope to the dancer for exposition through his own art, it produced almost a race of masters for whom the spoken word is as redundant as it is to the great Khyāl singers of the north.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

Glorious as are the achievements of Kathakali and other specialized forms of dance-drama, they are but a diversion from the main stream of traditional and folk drama. That main stream is more like the sacred confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati at Prayag, in which the dialogue, songs and dance mingle to produce an all-pervasive aesthetic environment.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

VII

PUPPET-DRAMA

An Ancient Art in Neglect

PUPPETRY IS PERHAPS THE MOST ANCIENT STAGE-ART of India, but to-day it is one of the most neglected. Two kinds of puppet shows can be seen in Indian villages—the marionettes and the shadow-play. The shadow-play is today confined to South India, mainly to Andhra Pradesh and Mysore State. Marionettes are known both in the north and the south. But there

Indira Gandhi National
Centre for the Arts

is one big difference; the marionette-player of the south uses stories from mythology—the epics and the Purānas —for his drama. His lyrics and themes have come from the devotional movement of the later medieval period when much of present-day rural and folk drama struck its roots. Puppet drama in the north has survived to-day only in Rajasthan;[1] though the performers, like migratory birds, spread out all over northern India for eight months in the year. These Rajasthani puppetteers have drawn their stories and inspiration from the ballads of the later middle ages; the pageantry of the court and heroism of warriors interest them more than saints and devotees and their deeds.

Rajasthani Puppeteers

Rajasthani puppeteers are called *Bhātas*—a caste-name that used to be applied to professional minstrels and court-poets. Actually the puppeteers were never court-bards—their patronage also came originally not so much from the ruling princes as from the prosperous but humble community of weavers. These weavers known as *Bhāmis* live in villages like Kuchamān and Parbatsar in Rajasthan and the puppeteers also have their homes near about. In the past the puppeteers would give their shows at weddings and other festive occasions at the homes of the particular *Bhāmis* to whom they were traditionally attached. During the last 50 years, all this has changed and though occasional performances at the homes of their erstwhile patrons are not unknown, their principal source of income are the fees they get during visits to outside towns and villages.

No stage, not even a platform, is required by the Rajasthani puppeteer. All that he wants are two bedsteads. These would be placed vertically, the inside of one facing the inside of the other, the space between

[1] There are a few stray parties in Orissa and Bengal also but for all practical purposes the art is extinct.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

the two being about 5′ to 6′—the length of the performing stage. The width of the bedsteads is the width of the stage. Upto half the height of the bedsteads a proscenium is hung, with small arch-like formations and no drop-curtain. Above the proscenium, a decorative screen is stretched across, so as to conceal the manipulator of the puppets. At the back is spread out a dark backcloth up to the height of the proscenium leaving the rest open for the manipulator. A hurricane lantern is placed on a wide near the proscenium. Sometimes, a third bedstead is placed horizontally to support the back-cloth, its legs providing the pegs on which to hang the puppets.[1]

Technique and Stories

The puppets—usually ranging in size between 9″ and 18″—are made of light wood and cloth. The head is carved out of wood—stylized medieval feudal faces painted with firm lines and in bright colours—eyes wide-open and the other features prominently displayed. Cloth stuffings are used to form the chest and the arms, while the portion from the waist downwards is indicated by a long skirt, there being no legs and feet. This skirt is like the *jāmā* that men in the 16th to 18th centuries used to wear. The puppeteer has stuck to this apparel, for, by avoiding the legs, he is able to keep his puppet light-weight. Black strings are tied to the arms, hands, the skirt, and other parts of the body. Stylized and highly attractive animal figures are also made and the Rajasthani horse, the snake, the elephant all make their appearance. Tricks such as the dancer lifting her skirt are managed by means of pins which can raise the cloth unnoticed. There are various other tricks which, until recently, were closely

[1] I have since 1952 attempted other kinds of frames for the Rajasthan puppeteers, but none has been a real improvement upon the indigenous improvisation.

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

guarded secrets. Manipulation is by means of the strings, the loops of which slide into fingers. Unlike the western puppets these ones do not have any rods. Nimble movements are no doubt facilitated by the fingers, but simultaneous action and quick exits and entrances are not possible in the Rajasthani technique.

The manipulator who is the sūtradhār, stands behind while his wife sits outside near the proscenium with a drum. The manipulator manages the puppets with both his hands and with a wooden-chip held between his teeth, he produces a peculiar whistle-like sound to indicate the speech of the puppets. His wife interprets these sounds to the audience in ordinary language. Thus the dialogue creates a fantasy in which the individuality of puppets is maintained and communication between the world of puppets and that of the humans is achieved. In between action and dialogue, the wife of the puppeteer sings beautiful lyrics of love and sorrow, of joy and suffering, from the Rajasthani homes and fields—not connected with the story and yet, somehow, quite in harmony with the gentle environment of colours and subdued light.

The stories are few and, alas, with hardly a plot. In old days there must have been full-fledged dramas. But now-a-days, most of the traditional puppeteers are able to present only one story—the story of Amar Singh who being called into the presence of Emperor Shahjahan at Agra refused to bow to him, fought the lords and plunged down the rampart of the fort on horseback. The last action is not shown. The emphasis is upon the pageantry of the court and the subsequent fighting. The first to appear on the scene is the water-carrier who sprinkles water and is followed by the clown and the royal herald. One by one the courtiers arrive and are announced; there is much leg-pulling and it is amusing

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

to see the courtiers roar with laughter over the clown's jokes. When the emperor has 'taken his seat' (he does not actually sit) the court-dancer, the snake-charmer, the gymnast and other performers come in to show their skill. It is in these items that the manipulator displays his skill, and that are the highlight of the show. After these brilliant interludes, the interest both of the performer and spectators in the rest of the story flags and the subsequent fighting is almost an anti-climax.

One reason why the Rajasthani puppeteer has a restricted repertory is that he enjoyed the patronage neither of the court nor of the shrine. Moreover, tricks of manipulation interested the audience more than the drama and thus the story ceased to be important. Unfortunately there was no incentive to developing new tricks; and without new dramatic situations, ingenious tricks cannot be introduced. Thus the primary need of the Rajasthani puppeteer to-day is for new plays.[1]

Marionettes in South India

The South Indian marionette play does not suffer from the paucity of stories, for the performers are well-versed in the epics and organize their productions no less seriously than do the producers of drama proper. Very often the stories and the music are common and the dialogue has the same literary flavour. Mani Iyer and his troupe come from Kumbhakonam near Tanjore in Madras State. His marionettes are much larger in size than the Rajasthani ones—1½ ft. to 3 ft. high. They are far more artistically carved and painted, and the material used is light wood, stuffed cloth and pith. Costumes and jewellery are elaborate and

[1] Some years ago I was able to experiment with a new story for a traditional puppeteer—Sāgar Bhatt—and his wife. Using traditional costumes and several folk songs I introduced the tale of Kunwar Singh, a warrior of the 1857 rising, who was almost a legendary figure. Sāgar Bhatt and his wife (both illiterate) got the entire play and songs by heart and have popularized the play so well that it is almost accepted as a traditional play of unknown authorship!

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

correct and facial features are pleasing and a little more realistic. Mani Iyer is fastidious about movements and therefore manipulates the puppets by means of thick black rods—not altogether camouflaged by the dark back-cloth. The controls are held not only in the two hands but also operated by the movement of the head of the manipulator ! This is arranged by tying the strings from the head of the puppet to a circular disc placed on the head of the manipulator. As the latter moves his head so does the puppet. Mani Iyer's forte is the Bharat Nātyam dance with near-perfect rhythm and movements given by one such puppet.

The dialogue is interspersed with songs—all in the correct classical style. The manipulators sing and also speak the dialogue while they pull the strings or control rods. Nobody sits outside the curtain. The frame-work of the stage is a little more elaborate than the Rajasthani one, but Mani Iyer can manage without it as he did on one occasion by utilizing the empty cycle-stand of an office as the basic structure. Like other forms of folk drama in India these marionette plays are a remarkable blend of sophistication and simplicity.

String puppets are also popular in northern parts of Mysore State—villages in the Dharwar district. The 'speeches' of the puppets are marked by alliteration and elevated diction. There is a comic character also named Hanumānāyaka and the repartees between him and his wife are quite a treat. The puppet-heads are so constructed as to allow for lip movements—a device practically unknown to the Rajasthani puppeteer.

Shadow Puppets

Shadow-puppet plays are known as Bommalāttams and were until recently very popular in Andhra Pradesh and Mysore. Bommalāttams have probably the

Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts

same ancestry as the Javanese shadow-play—Wayang. Both seem to have originated from some early form of cut-out puppet popular in ancient times all over India. Bommalāttams are cut out of highly seasoned and almost transparent deer skin, richly painted in attractive colours. Different parts of the body are separately cut and are then tied to each other so as to allow free movement. Every puppet is held aloft by a stick from below and the limbs are manipulated by means of strings. A white screen is stretched across the place of performance, a little above the head of the pupeteers who sit crouched, with the puppets held up against the curtain from behind. Bright light is thrown from behind the puppets so as to project their shadows on the curtain to be seen by the spectators on the other side. The colours come out beautifully and figures are dexterously magnified or shortened by varying the distance between the light and the puppets. Intricate movements like sword-play, hand-to-hand fights, riding on horseback, hunting elephants, etc. are shown to the accompaniment of appropriate sounds. There is boisterous fun too, as also anecdotes and references to contemporary events. The performers in Mysore State are called Killiketars. The leader of the group is usually a man of considerable learning, having the texts by heart and knowing where and to what extent to depart from it.

There is thus much more drama in the South Indian puppets—whether of the string-variety or the shadow-figures—than in the Rajasthani ones. Unfortunately both have fallen on evil days and it is sad but true that many a puppeteer is trying to make money by selling off his puppets as curios or dolls. There is a move to organize puppetry on modern Western lines in schools and towns. But that may well mean the final disappearance of the Bhātas and Killiketars from the rural scene.

I.G.N.C.A. LIB.
86-927
Deptt. of Arts
17-3-86

Mr. J. C. Mathur, a member of the Indian Civil Service, and a former Director-General of All India Radio, is also well-known in India as a Hindi author and playwright, an expert on Indian folk drama and on the Hindi Theatre, and an educationist who has given much thought to the relationship of mass media and education. Of his several Hindi plays, one—*Sharadiya*—has won the Kalidasa Award instituted by the State Academy of Madhya Pradesh. The other—*Konark*—woven around the story of the ancient Hindu temple on the Orissa coast has been staged and translated widely. He is the Honorary Editor of the quarterly *The Bihar Theatre* (Patna), and was, until recently, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Vaisali Sangha, an organization devoted to the encouragement of rural culture in North Bihar, and was one of the founder-members of the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama, New Delhi. He is a member and Vice-Chairman of UNESCO's International Committee for the Advancement of Adult Education. Mr. Mathur is co-author (with Paul Neurath) of *An Indian Experiment in Radio Farm Forums* (UNESCO). His recent book, *New Lamps for Aladdin*, concerned with the impact of mass media on underdeveloped countries, is in press. Mr. Mathur has also to his credit some short plays in Hindi for puppets.

THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY—A NEW PATH TO PEACEFUL UNION (AZAD MEMORIAL LECTURES—1963)

WALTER HALLSTEIN

In these lectures, Dr. Hallstein broadly dwells upon the internal aspects of the Community, its impact on the wider world, historical circumstances which led to its emergence, its new political and economic nature, its constitutional structure, its achievements within Europe, and some of the problems of India, and suggests some of the ways in which, in his opinion, these and other questions might be tackled.

"In his vision, the European Community is not uniting *against* anybody but uniting *for* an ideal. He believes that only as the smaller communities become fully integrated, develop their fullest personality and achieve and maintain their self-respect, that combination between them to form larger communities can be successful. As these larger communities grow and attain their personalities and their full nationhood, there is the possibility of still larger combinations, so that the world moves towards that one common human family in which alone the problems of the modern world can be resolved"—Prof. Humayun Kabir.

INDIA IN CEYLONESE HISTORY, SOCIETY AND CULTURE

M. D. RAGHAVAN

A comprehensive study of the wide range of links and reciprocal relations between India and Ceylon, fascinating in its moving pageantry of peoples and cultures from the legendary days to the modern. A vivid narration of folk memories reminiscent of Sita's sojourn in Lanka, the days of Ravana; a survey of the influx of immigrants into Ceylon; the social system of the Sinhalese correlated to caste in India; the Indian period of Ceylon history; the court life of Sinhalese royalty; an analysis of the Buddhist links; the worship of the high gods contrasted to the folk cults; art and architecture; dances and plays; the *Angam* of medieval Ceylon; society and social complex; Jaffna relations and the chronicle of the coconut in Ceylon are among the main themes presented in this book.

ORIENTAL JONES

(A BIOGRAPHY OF SIR WILLIAM JONES)

GARLAND CANNON

This work is the first full-dress biography of the man and scholar, Sir William Jones (1746-94). Drawing on rich manuscript sources, it places in modern perspective his pioneering achivements in introducing Sanskrit and that great literature to the West. It chronicles his work in general linguistics, law, literature and Orientalism. It shows his prophetic belief in a humanistic exchange of material and cultural resources between East and West, a belief unfortunately predicated at a time when colonialism and mercantilism dominated European thinking.

Presently Associate Professor of English at Queens College, City University of New York, Garland Cannon has been doing research on the life and achievement of the celebrated English Orientalist, Sir William Jones (1746-94), for fifteen years. A linguist himself, he has explored the technical aspects of Jones's linguistic discoveries and the literary and historical aspects of Jones's life through articles in numerous journals.

ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE

BOMBAY — CALCUTTA — NEW DELHI — MADRAS
LUCKNOW — LONDON — NEW YORK