

MANKIND OCCASIONAL PAPER : 16

A LIFE OF SURFEIT AND OVERFLOW 1927-2008

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FOR REVIEW

Chapter 3:

SOME MISSED EVENTS

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A LIFE OF SURFEIT AND OVERFLOW

1927 - 2008

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A LIFE OF SURFEIT AND OVERFLOW : 1927-2008

CHAPTER 3 : SOME MISSED EVENTS

CRISS-CROSSING OF PATHS IN BHOWANIPORE AND IN COMPRADOR SOCIAL LIFE

Since I never made notes or maintained any diary of personal interventions in the flow of social existence; since further, I never intended to live long enough to be able to pronounce profound words of wisdom (my father had passed away just as I was reaching 12 years of age and I always had an inner conviction that I would also not reach much beyond 51 as he had failed to); I considered note-taking, diary-keeping as pretty boring 'pass-time' activities.

But to my enduring surprise, I just kept on living and found that diabetes, cerebral strokes, heart attacks, pace-makers, were all grist to the mill; pushing me towards an endless excess! I have now outlived my parents, my siblings except one, the allotted time-spans of all my ancestors and collateral branches. Of course, I want to hurry up, for one heart beat in five is being contributed by the pace-maker, and one never knows how long the other four will continue to be provided by the ganglionic center in the lower chamber.

The sense of adventure and the opening of ever newer vistas has not ceased. All I can do is to hurry and run faster and harder.

RANI BIBHAVATI

The first thing that I missed out on was the traumatic childhood experience of being seized by Rani Bibhavati of Bhowal's gang of gardeners, having been apprehended red-handed whilst stealing *white jamuns* (*syzygium jambos*) on the other side of our garden wall; and being carried weeping and thrashing by the same devils to the Rani's court of justice after which due process, I was left sprawling on the marble steps of the Rani's sumptuous quarters.

I had earlier seen her stark naked sun-bathing on a raft that was gliding with swan-like serenity in the *pukur* that lay between her palatial mansion and the white *jamun* grove where I had been caught, and which grove abutted on our compound wall.

I am not sure, but her elder brother, Satyababu, as identified in Murad Fyzee's *A Prince, Poison and Two Funerals*, 2002, as the evil genius of the Bhowal Sanyasi Case (1909-36) that agitated the Bengali *babu bhadralok* (elite) society for over two decades, was actually seated on the same raft as the naked Rani or whether my mind's eye coalesces the two images of the naked lady sunbathing on the bamboo raft, and the evil center seated on a chair on a similar raft, with a dividing curtain forming a partition between the two figures.

On some unlucky afternoon, in the year 1935, I was meted out rough justice by Rani Bibhavati who probably knew that we stared at her from between the large gaps in the compound wall.

As a result, I was not liberated from her personal custody till my father came home several hours later on the fateful evening and had to supplicate for my freedom to the august lady, who was of course, then fully dressed in the typical gentlewoman's Bengali saree of white with a red border.

My father soundly rebuked Ramlal, our full-time servant and my constant companion. He, of course, made me promise never again to climb the compound wall to pluck the white *jamun* fruits.

I was never caught again, though I have a faint memory that I continued to steal the *white jamun* bunches with Ramlal's help.

This Murad Fyzee met me in December 2002 at the Strand Book Stall in Mumbai, and gifted a copy of his book *A Prince, Poison and Two Funerals* inscribing therein the following lines :

"For Dr. Vinayak Purohit who as a child lived next to Rani Bhibavati at Lansdowne Road, Kolkata in 1927-38".

In my father's library, partly stolen a few years ago by my younger brother, I distinctly remember to have read a brown cover bound fat little volume of the Bhowal Sanyasi case as it stood at the end of the judgement of the trial court of 24th August 1936.

THIN COMPRADOR ELITE LAYER

It was a distinguished neighbourhood. We were at 23 Ray Street and Rani Bhibavati's palatial *kothi* was on the adjacent Lansdowne Road, where at one time, we had lived in a rented bungalow between the *kothis* of Shri. B.N. Sirkar who became the head of New Theatres in the years to come; and on

the other side, the Bose family seat from where Subhash had run away to Berlin via Peshavar and Afghanistan about two years after my father's demise and our coming away to Mumbai, then known as Bombay.

At one time, Gaganavihari Mehta resided at the corner of Ray Street and Lansdowne Road, and bang opposite our Kalibabu's *kothi* of 23 Ray Street lived for many years, the distinguished Gujarati literateur, Ramnarayan Pathak.

On one side of our home not far away, was Jivanlal Shah's sprawling residence where on occasions M.K. Gandhi was a house guest, and where lived Viren Shah who was to become my employer from 1957 to 1967. Also nearabouts were the residences of the Kamanis who were later to meet me at Mukand Iron and Steel Works at Kurla, Bombay where once again our paths crossed. Kamanis and Mukand had factories on adjacent plots at Kurla in Bombay.

The constant crossing and re-crossing of individual paths has been a feature of my entire life. I am still meeting and hailing unexpected encounters in Pune, Panchgani, Chennai, New Delhi, Hyderabad, Vadodara, Jaipur, Ahmedabad, Bangalore, and so on.

I believe that the real reason for these infinite inter-connections and endless criss-crossings, is the extreme thinness of the "creamy layer" within the comprador ruling elite. Consider the following concrete instances.

(i) That Gaganavihari Mehta who was my neighbour in Bhowanipore in Kolkata, was the branch manager of the nationalist shipping company, Scindia's, which I had joined as junior officer before I was enticed to link up with Mukand Iron and Steel which was a partnership firm of Viren Shah and Kamalnayan Bajaj.

(ii) Viren was my classmate in the Bhowanipore Gujarati Shala which had been started by my father as president and my mother as secretary of the institution.

Kamalnayan became my classmate in the Pupils' Own School in Vile-Parle as Viren had been a fellow student in the Bhowanipore Gujarati Shala in Kolkata.

Gaganavihari had two pretty daughters – Nilanjana or Nilu and Uma who was my earliest girl friend. Nilanjana became the central character in Indian National Theatre's Gujarati production of Acharya

Atre's *Lagnachi Bedi*. As a theatre critic, I consistently criticized the crass commercialization of the Gujarati theatre in Mumbai. Atre met me frequently in the 1950's along with Madhu Limaye as a Lohiaite Left Socialist. Uma, the younger childhood flame of mine ultimately became the wife of Priyavadan Randeria who was my classmate in Elphinstone College.

I can point to dozens of such coincidences and crossings of biographical paths. The reason has to be the extreme thinness of the creamy layer of the comprador upper middle class.

(iii) Take another example. The B N Sircar who I mentioned earlier was the father of two sons, Ashok and Dilip, who became my classmates in first and second standards at the St. Xavier's School in Kolkata. Dilip, I read in the papers, became the head of New Theatres Studios for some years. I don't know why I never contacted him again, though I kept on visiting Kolkata almost every year till the early Seventies.

I can go on but the socio-political explanation that I have conjectured seems to me the only possible one.

LOUIS MALLE AND HIS ANTICS

Another omission was about Louis Malle and his wayward ways.

Louis belonged to a long line of French colonialists who have sought to belittle and humiliate India.

We, in colonial India, face peculiar difficulties in dealing with and understanding White Continentals, and the absolutely real horrors of the Hitlerite episode in human history, which was a very brief occurrence from about 1930 to the end of the so-called Second World War in 1945. Even if we go back to the end of the First World War in 1919, and include the various putsches, assassinations of important international figures of the Left, like Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht in 1919 and count from Mussolini's March to Rome in 1921-22, we would only reach the conclusion that the two international conflicts formed a continuum. The first part of this gory episode was played out from 1914 to 1919 by the Allies, who consisted of principally England, France, Italy, Japan and Russia, which coalition of forces, USA joined very late in 1917. The then enemy countries were Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey.

In the so-called Second Episode of 1939-1945, the Allies redesignated themselves as United Nations, and consisted of the same two North-West European countries, viz. England and France. But this time both Russia and USA joined the war belatedly in 1941 May and December respectively. Italy and Japan changed sides and went over to the Central Powers to form the Axis. Spain, though intimately associated with Germany and Italy, who had assisted Franco very substantially during the Civil War of 1936-39, remained neutral, as Holland had in the First Episode. Turkey also remained neutral, as did small countries like Switzerland and Sweden. Finland fought a separate private war with Russia with substantial German aid (1940-41)

But the important point for us colonial Indians is that England was out-Hitlering Hitler in India. It had forced famines upon the de-industrialised, ruralised and pauperised Indians, which carried away at least 8.5 millions from 1765 to 1947. (Wadia and Merchant, *Our Economic Problem*, Vora & Co., 1952, pp 207-8, supported by R.C. Dutt, William Digby, Dadabhai Naoroji and Montgomery Martin. All sourced in *Mankind Occasional Paper No. 2 – A Non- Comprador Account of the British Loot of India*, 2004)

That is the **First Major Reason** for our non-appreciation of the true dimensions of the Hitlerite horrors.

"It is estimated that in all the camps of Nazi Germany and its occupied territories, 18 to 26 million persons - prisoners of war, political prisoners, and nationals of occupied countries, were put to death through hunger, cold, pestilence, torture, medical experimentation and other means of extermination such as gas chambers". (EB, 1983, Micro, Vol. 3, p-61)

The number of Jews killed has been estimated at 6 million, but this is less than one-fourth of the total killed of the 26 million quoted above.

Even if we take the estimate of the killed between 18 and 26 million at the mid-point of 22 million, the number of Jews killed would be only 27 percent!

If we were to raise the Indian genocidal killings to a more realistic level from 8 ½, to say double that, it would still be less than the number exterminated in the Nazi Camps.

We have to add to this, the millions killed in Stalin's Gulag Archipelago (See A. Solzhehitsyn, work of the same name, 1974).

Anyway, the enormity of the crimes against humanity committed by Hitler and his gang (as also Mussolini and Stalin, and other smaller European tyrants), was not easy to be fully grasped by Indians because the First Big Reason was, our situation as colonials :

a) The enormity of the crimes committed by British imperialism in India and all over the world (Newsinger, *The Blood Never Dried : A People's History of British Imperialism*, 2006, which provides a journalistic review, without economic data, of British atrocities);

b) They were committed by Germans against our enemy, i.e., British imperialism, and enemy's enemy is our friend, from Kautiliya's days to the present; and

c) They were committed by the Whites mainly against other Whites which did not much bother us. (The nature of totalitarianism has been studied in depth by Hannah Arendt's trilogy : *Origins of Totalitarianism*, George Allen and Unwin 1951, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 1963, and *The Human Condition* 1958. EB, 1983, Micro, Vol. I, p.498)

The Second Big Reason for our failure to fully appreciate the menace of European totalitarianism was the ingrained comprador tendency to uncritically accept the British imperialist canard that their successes in conquest of India were uninterrupted. On the contrary, British imperialism suffered many setbacks in India. For instance, several campaigns by General Lake and the defeat at Vadgaon.

The biggest chastisement that the White Britishers received, was delivered by Aurangzeb's Subedar at Surat towards the end of the 17th century. According to the British historian Mill,

"The English were humbled. They stooped to the most abject submissions and humbly petitioned that the ill crimes they have done may be pardoned" (Mills and Wilson, *The History of British India*, Vol. 1 p 86, quoted by Tara Chand, *History of the Freedom Movement in India*, Vol.1, p 206)

Aurangzeb issued a new *firman* in 1690 to the E.I.Co. on condition that the company paid all the dues of the Indian merchants, and recalled Sir John Child from India. (Tara Chand, op. cit)_

What happened at Surat was repeated at Masulipattam, Vishakhapattam and Bombay. "The Company had learnt their lesson. For the next fifty years, they refrained from giving any offence to the rulers of India. On the other hand, they resorted to fawning and flattery

in order to ingratiate themselves into the Mughal emperor's favour" (*Ibid*, p. 207)

Thus, rejecting the comprador myth that the British conquest of India was an easy and uninterrupted success story, was a difficult task for Indian historians.

The **Third Big Reason** was that of caste. Caste sabotaged the sense of Indian unity. The Last War of Indian Feudalism waged in 1857-60, mistakenly termed the First War of Indian Independence by our compradors, ended in Indian defeat, because the 'High' Castes, Brahmin and Rajput soldiers of the Bengal Army, were beaten by the 'Low' Castes of the Bombay and Madras Armies, assisted by the Gorkhas and the Sikhs. The so-called great British imperialist victory of 1857-60 was actually a great comprador victory over the remnants of *pendhari* feudalisms in India. (See various issues of the revived *Mankind* 1995 – 2000, for detailed phase-wise studies of Indian feudalisms of the Sangha, Samanta, Iqta, Mansabdar, and Pendhari periods)

Caste disrupted Indian unity. For instance, at Surat, which was the principal Mughal port of 1556-1765, the 'higher' castes were usually referred to as "*Ujali Paraj*", i.e., the fair ones, and the 'lower' castes were termed "*Kali Paraj*" i.e., the dark ones. (*Paraj* is derived from *Praja*, Sanskrit for 'people'.)

Surat merchants like Virjee signed *hundis* (Letters of Credit) which were accepted all over the country, of amounts exceeding one crore, and Aurangzeb's two daughters, Jahanara and Roshanara, participated in the Surat export-import trade.

The **Fourth Big-Reason** for Indian confusion about the true nature of Nazi and fascist totalitarianism was the ideological slant of the Stalinist Progressivists, who exonerated the state capitalist dictator, Joseph Stalin, of his creation of the Gulag Archipelago overlapping with the Hitlerite concentration camps. See *State Capitalism in Russia* by V. Gluckstein a.k.a. T.Cliff, mimeographed 1956, and Alexander Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago*, 1974

The Stalinists had managed to capture the Indian Council of Historical Research from the communalists and they were deliberately obfuscating a correct understanding of Hitlerite horrors.

For the Stalinists, the 1939 War began as an "imperialist" war, and continued to be such during the entire period of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, under which Russia occupied the Eastern half of Poland, and

the three Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It remained an "imperialist" war even after giant Russia invaded little Finland in November 1939. Sweden and Norway refused to allow transit rights to French or British troops to aid Finnish Resistance, and their respective Communist Parties supported this policy of neutrality.

The same "imperialist war" suddenly became anti-fascist "People's war" after Hitler attacked Soviet Russia in May 1941.

The Indian Stalinists remained united after British imperialism released them from Indian prisons in 1941. They immediately turned around and betrayed the August 1942 freedom fighters to the same British imperialist police which had incarcerated the leaders of the unified CPI; a few months earlier.

The Fifth Big Reason -The confusion about the true nature of the 1939-45 World War was further compounded by the pseudo-neutrality of certain European countries like Spain, Switzerland and Sweden. In the case of Spain, Franco had received massive military aid from Italy and Germany during his own Civil War of 1936-39. In spite of Norwegian neutrality during the Russo-Finnish War, Hitler attacked Norway in 1940, though he allowed Sweden to remain a "friendly neutral".

The neutrality of these countries (Sweden, Switzerland, Spain and Turkey) was not a sort of conscientious objection on a national scale. It was often a "pro-German stance".

Thus, the Leninist line of Revolutionary Defeatism was openly subverted by the then unified Communist Party of India.

RESISTERS VS. COLLABORATORS

The European continental intellectuals, by and large, collaborated with the Nazi war machine and the satellite governments which they established in Occupied Territories. The Petain-Laval government in Occupied Southern France was one such supportive set-up.

Louis Malle and his family had long established textile bourgeois interests. But Louis and his family were not alone in dining and wining with the German generals. Jean-Paul Sartre, who later turned an extreme leftist of the Maoist persuasion, established himself as a dramatist during the years of German Occupation. He wrote ambiguous, Existential texts like *No Exit*, etc. (See Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*, George Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1988) Similarly Pablo Picasso sucked up to the German commanders. After the War,

he suddenly came out with the heraldic device of the *Dove of Peace* and the post-War Stalinists who had disgraced themselves with the Hitler-Stalin Pact of 1939-41, and the Occupation of Poland and the Baltic Republics, and the Russo-Finnish War of 1939-41, suddenly became the discoverers of this former collaborator.

Louis Malle also employed the Existential umbrella which was known in French cinematic circles as the *nouvelle vague*. (Malle had begun his cinematic career under producer Jean Thuiller, as assistant director to Bresson)

As the Hitlerite horror grew (see Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, Avon Books, 1980, especially about the enormous regime of forced labour imposed upon Occupied Countries by Hitler) two tendencies developed among the European intellectuals. On the clear, forthright side were arraigned those who **resisted**. They developed guerrilla movements which fought the occupying armies of the three Axis dictators of 1939-41, i.e., Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin, as well as their ideological allies in distant Japan led by Tojo. In May 1941, this Grand Alliance of Four Dictators split up, when Hitler's Germany attacked Stalin's Russia. (Japan did not declare war on Russia till the end)

The second tendency which established itself amongst Europeans was that of **collaboration**. We cannot go into too many details here, but the two most significant Collaborationist configurations were those centred around the Petain-Laval Vichy government of 1940-45 and the Bodoglio Italian government of 1943-45. The Bodoglio government permitted the Italian film-makers who had been active all through the Mussolini period of 1921-43, to rehabilitate themselves under the umbrella of Neo-Realism. De Sica who was a leading actor-director smoothly transformed himself in the service of the new bourgeois regime to make *The Bicycle Thief* and *Miracle in Milan*, supposedly great Neo-Realist masterpieces. Rossellini produced *Roma-the Open City*, *Paisan* and so on. There were other luminaries too like Antonioni and Fellini. Gunter Grass of *Tin Drum* fame, has recently admitted that he had joined the Nazi Youth Front.

In France, the same Collaborationists called themselves Existentialists or members of the *Nouvelle Vague*. Louis Malle as quintessential collaborationist even made a film about a small man who discovers self-respect and social prestige by joining the Nazi Movement.

As we have noted above, Malle was not alone. Sartre, Picasso, also were on excellent terms with the Nazi occupying forces. (Paul Johnson, *Intellectuals*, 1988, quoted earlier.)

I must say that the Europeans meaning the Continentals have always been less hypocritical than the Englishmen proper, who belonged to an archipelago of some 5000 islands lying in the North-West of Europe, abutting on North Sea.

I would refer the interested reader to a journalistic account recently published : *The Blood Never Dried : A People's History of the British Empire* by John Newsinger, published by Bookmarks Publication, London, 2006, as also to my more analytical study, *Mankind Occasional Paper No. 2 : A Non Comprador Account of the British Conquest Subjugation and Loot of India*, Nov. 2004. The full list of *Mankind Occasional Papers Nos. 1 to 16* in English, Gujarati and Marathi, will be found on the Back Cover of this monograph.

Louis Malle belonged to the hoary colonialist stream of *Ganga Din*, *Jungle Book* and *Elephant Boy*, all three based on stories by Kipling, *Gandhi* by Richard Attenborough which presents in a chronological sequence three views of Gandhi by three White journalists – South African, European and American – projecting essentially the same White racist outlook. And finally, Rossellini's *India : 1958*, which was made just a few years prior to the television series *Phantom India* by Malle.

There are any number of rascally racist accounts by White Europeans and Americans of India; past, present and future. In fact, a plethora of neo-colonial literature has arisen in recent times of this racist fascist nature. Since very often the West prefers to project its own erroneous notions of India through the mouths of surrogate Whites like V.S. Naipaul, Salman Rushdie and other writers in English.

Some "native geniuses" and Nobel Prize winners and aspirants, projected by media barons and publishing houses, have revelled in this form of canards.

I repeat that the only difference between the Continentals and the Blighty Islanders has been the degree and level of hypocrisy.

Louis Malle belonged to a textile magnet's family which was known in France as the immediate circle surrounding the

collaborationist Vichy Government of Petain and Laval. They were the first Frenchmen to collaborate with Nazi monsters, and who immediately after the defeat of the Hitlerite war machine in 1945 launched into the *Nouvelle Vogue* wave of French cinema that claimed to be "above politics" and "Neo-realistic" and "Existential".

Malle suddenly arrived in the middle of an afternoon in an station wagon, carrying his cameraman and sound recordist seated on the luggage carrier, followed by a crowd of street urchins running down my street. There had deliberately been no prior warning delivered to me. He had actually come to interview Raj Narain, who was supposedly to be my house-guest on his way to the Kutch-Rajasthan-Pakistan tri-junction.

I found that so profoundly ignorant had Malle chosen to remain about India, where he had been shooting for the preceding several months, that he neither knew nor cared to find out the geographical extent and global positioning of India, nor did he have any idea of the size of its population. or any information about its economic situation.

He left me that evening after tea and snacks to return to his rooms in Taj. But early next morning, I received a telephone call from him wanting to substitute me for the absent Raj Narain. I had no reason to spurn the offer, since we, Lohia socialists, are instinctively attuned to free expression of our anti-establishment views.

Louis interviewed me over a length of about two hours, with lights shining in my eyes and the microphone boom hovering a few inches from my mouth.

Louis was very keen on making suggestions about Indo-Pak amity at the cost of territorial adjustments along certain ill-defined stretches of the frontier. I told him to openly advocate an adjustment of Alsace and Lorraine along the Franco-German frontiers in the same spirit of promotion of international peace and amity. He was taken aback by my presumption to advise White statesmen of Europe!

I never saw *Phantom India*, since it was banned from public viewing in the country, but my friend Madan Mohan, music director of a score and more of Hindi films, saw the tele-series in London, and immediately identified me. Malle had devoted a lot of footage to me!

I am afraid I was careless and did not insist upon a written agreement with Louis Malle which would compel him to include my friendly exhortation to White European statesmen to have equally friendly border adjustments in Alsace and Lorraine.

I have still not seen *Phantom India* at the time of this writing and I really do not care whether Louis was careful enough to include the parallel I had quoted. It really doesn't matter, for he was a Vichy collaborationist and a loyal supporter of the Petain-Laval set up. Nothing could be more diametrically contrary to my nationalist and socialist views. I merely record the perfidy involved, of actually editing out my reference to Alsace & Lorraine from the final cut.

**NOTE ON MALLE'S PHANTOM INDIA A TV SERIES OF SEVEN
SHOWN ON FRENCH TV IN THE SUMMER OF 1969**

A letter to the Times of India Mumbai edition, which appeared on April 18, 1981.

Sir, - As I was out of town, I could not react earlier to Ms. Amita Malik's reference in her *Sight and Sound* column (March 7) to my telefilm interview by Louis Malle in his infamous series on India. Ms. Malik's mention of me, though apparently innocuous, carries the implication that Malle's coverage of India was comprehensive and fair. Whilst I have nothing to do with Mr. Chowla's contribution, and have nothing to say about the views of the imperialist propagandists of the BBC, I should like to stress that Mr. Malle's attack on India was neither the first one he made on colonial peoples and cultures, nor was the Indian comprador acceptance of such neo-colonial postures, the first of its kind. But before I illustrate these two parallel aspects, let me draw attention to three features of my filmed interview. One : The interview almost opens with my statement that Hindi is the most important language of India. Mr. Malle's voice sarcastically intervenes - "This was stated to me in English!" Was I supposed to have told him this in Esperanto, which neither of us knew, or in Hindi, which he did not know, or in French, which I did not know? Two : Apropos the Kutch border dispute with Pakistan, I had drawn Malle's attention to the European and World Wars fought over Alsace and Lorraine, in the context of the arbitrary marking of the Indo-Pakistan boundary by a British imperialist judge. I also drew his attention to the arming of Pakistan by USA continuously since 1954. Mr. Malle erased all references to Alsace-Lorraine from the final print despite

his specific oral promise to me. *Three* : The interview concludes with my voice fading away whilst my face remains on the screen with my mouth opening and closing, with hundreds of library books all around me, creating an impression on the audience that Indian intellectuals, especially radicals and leftists, are just endless talkers, whilst the genuinely concerned Mr. Malle pans the camera to scenes of horrifying poverty and degradation.

Possibly Malle had his revenge on me because in the course of our meetings, I had discovered and brought out into the open, the astounding fact that though he had been travelling and filming for months, he was ignorant of all basic Indian socio-economic parameters like per capita income, linguistic distribution; land-holding patterns; sectoral growth rates; and so on. Louis Malle's *L'Inde Fantome* (1969) forms a series with his earlier arrogant 1964 telefilm on Bangkok and the later *Lacombe Lucien* (1974), about a young French labourer who gains self-esteem by becoming a collaborator of the Nazis, whose concentration camps were a mere joke, taken, too seriously by the unsophisticated! In India. *L'Inde Fantome* forms a series with Rossellini's *India* (1958) and Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi*. Indian compradors are incorrigible masochists. They compulsively embrace and lick the boot that kicks and tramples them. Nevertheless, I stand for the total abolition of censorship by the bourgeois state and hence for the free screening of Mr. Malle's series, which should be denounced by means other than censorship.

GRETA GARBO AND DRY LATRINES

Talking about films, I am reminded of my trip to Stockholm in 1981, when Prof. John Alpers of the Royal Institute of Technology took me out on a tour of Apslund's well-known cemetery one fine morning. As we passed a certain notorious part of the Swedish capital, I was told by John Alpers that this had been now converted into a heritage site and all the old structures had been preserved for posterity. In fact that is where Greta Garbo's father had operated many decades ago as a dry latrine municipal contractor. Garbo's father had made a fortune out of the civic contract. These profits had paid for an expensive dramatic education for his daughter. Greta earned a vast reputation as an enigmatic Swedish beauty in Hollywood. Probably she did not speak too often to the journalists of the day; since she wanted very avidly to forget the stench of "dry latrines" out of which her father had made his fortune.

FROM FELIXSTOVE TO GOTHENBERG

I had reached Sweden, per Tor Line cruise ship departing Felixstove, a port on the east coast of England, after travelling by bus from London through some manicured English countryside with rolling downs and lush green lawns superbly maintained. This is what the Indian Loot had done to England's landscape: neat, without a speck of garbage, rich with bumpless roads, and altogether a look of meticulous care and civic welfare.

I do not remember too much of the departure from Felixstove, but as we reached Gothenberg harbour, a pilot launch towed and guided our giant multi-storied cruise-liner through a churning, muddy, icy sea, as though it was a scene from an imagined nightmare of all hell broken loose.

I will take up this point about the most magnificent and enchanting natural wonders which I experienced in the course of my round the world journey in 1965-66 at a later stage in this account of autobiographical reminiscences and musings.

Let me return to the Tor Line cruise ship as it docked at Gothenberg quay. First, scores of cars rolled down from the gaping large mouth of the huge liner for those motorists who had opted to take a roadway holiday.

It was the end of December or early January when I found myself crossing the customs barrier at Gothenberg. I was taken aside to a large cubicle where I was made to strip down to the bare skin while a uniformed couple of custom officials examined my clothes for what I thought was vermin or lice. As a matter of fact, I learnt the real reason, only after I met my host, Prof. Hans Nordenstrom, teacher of architecture at the Chalmers Technical Institute, Gothenberg. My thorough customs examination had consumed two or three hours during which Nordenstrom had patiently waited outside the wharf. My apologies for making him wait were cut short by his informative interruption that just a few days earlier, a group of 18 Sikh men and women had passed through the custom barrier carrying kilos of cannabis. As I nodded my understanding of the set-up, I told him that stripping down to the skin was no novelty for me, having experienced the same thrice at the behest of the colonial British police imperialist rule. The only novelty was that each time my weight was then measured, there was a juggling of figures to alibi the jail authorities, in case a later

inquiry was forced upon the authorities. We were marked down by a few pounds, since it had not yet become a metric international region in those days. Later monitoring was bound to reveal a rising weight curve, to the credit of the detaining administration! This was the perfidious jail administration bequeathed to us in 1947 which we have preserved intact to this day! (I had been later arrested twice by the comprador Congress state)

HANS NORDENSTROM

There were several interesting social and historical tit-bits that I learnt from Nordenstrom and his wife, who was a professional fur-matcher. (She put together fully-matched pelts in order to form garments.) I learnt from Hans that the Swedes had a rich vocabulary for snow which encompassed some 40 distinct types temperature-wise, whilst the Lapps of the Northern Nordic region used as many as 90 in order to convey precisely what they meant when they talked of snow and ice. For instance, they had distinct terms for that kind of snow which collected at the tips of branches of conifers when the crystals sparkled in the sun and when the snow covered ground made the footsteps sound "choo-choo".

This bit about multiple terms for snow and ice made me aware of the scores of variants that we used in India in Sanskrit, for "water" or "elephant". (See Talageri, *op.cit.*)

One evening, Hans and his wife told me of the "heroic deeds" performed by Gustav I Vasa, the then ruler of Sweden. The Vasa dynasty had ruled Sweden from 1523 to 1818, and in the 17th century had made Sweden the dominant power in the Baltic Sea area. The Vasa Empire at its height, included in its domain parts of the Baltic Trio (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania); Polish, German and Danish coastlands; as well as the whole of the Nordic Trio (Finland, Norway and Sweden)

Sigismund III Vasa had ruled Poland from 1587 and was king of Sweden from 1592 to 1599. He was supposed to be a great and grand hero who actually invaded Russia, holding Muscovy for two years (1610-12), but lost the Swedish crown in 1599. Though he had conquered Livonia, Poland, part of Russia and Moldavia, he never regained the Swedish crown.

Like all supposedly "great" "*chakravartin*", "king of kings" and "emperor of emperors" of the feudal period of Europe, who were invariably minor princelings by Indian standards; of principalities,

known as Livonia, Moldavia, Prussia, Germany, Muscovy, Burgundy, France, England, Normandy, etc. , this Sigismund III Vasa of Sweden was an absolute *chirkoot* (ball of rags) who was like King Arthur or Emperor Charlemagne, merely a living myth!

With Gustavus II Adolphus (1611-32) began the Age of Swedish Greatness. (See *EB 73*, Vol-21, p. 490). His greatness was based upon his navy. His flagship *Vasa* was the pride of the Swedish fleet, and has been salvaged almost intact in 1961. It stands today within Stockholm harbour as a museum. The joke is that it sank on its maiden voyage in 1628!

We had an uproarious laughing session on mighty Sigismund III Vasa upon an evening which I still recollect.

Hans Nordensfrom, apart from being a professor of architecture, was also a notable cartoonist of strips that worked without captions or legends.

I also recollect avidly my success in discovering the lost contacts with Sonia and Pedro Iribarne of Chile during this trip in 1981 to Sweden. I had lost contact with the Chilean friends after the killing of Salvador Allende and the coming to power of the swine Pinochet. More of this later.

I have another recollection of my 1980-81 trip to England.

I was taken to a comical costume parade by the surviving remnants of the guild of wall-paper designers, by Gavin Stamp, the pompous and friendly Lutyens critic and art cognoscenti. The third member of our trio was Mrs. Cristina Cory-Smith, who objected, genially and gently, to the heaving mass of men in that London Guild Hall.

The star speaker of the evening was one learned gentleman who explained and demonstrated at great length the various knots which one can tie on to and into ropes. I have never experienced the solemn silence with which his words of wisdom were received.

Suddenly, at the end of the learned discourse, there was a sound of bugles, and almost the entire assembly of many scores converted themselves into a parade of fully costumed and caparisoned guild stalwarts.

Gavin saw the wondrous expression on my face and immediately apologised for the abstruse and intricate "discourse on knots", fully illustrated.

During my world tour of 1965-66, I broadcast and telecast from many radio and television studios as I had very little money, after buying my round the world air ticket. It had been for just about Rs. 12,000/- in those days. I had to earn at least part of my boarding and lodging expenses by carrying out journalistic chores.

My hard times remind me of my cell-mate in Mumbai of the 1942 freedom struggle days.

KISHOR THAKKAR

When we Trotskyists entered the Worli Development Chawls Nos. 115-119, in the middle of 1943, we found that the place had been neatly divided into rival ideological camps. We Trotskyists of the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India, Burma and Ceylon, were not welcome in hide-bound, conservative Gandhian and Congress Socialist party circles. The only lot who welcomed us aggressively and emphatically were the Forward Blocists who had spread themselves out on the second floor of Chawl No. 117.

That is how I met Kishor Thakkar, who, through thick and thin, through lean days and five-star hotel days, was to remain my closest friend for three decades, till the morning when I attended his cremation ceremonies at Banganga, Walkeshwar, Mumbai.

Kishor had left India in 1931 or so, flagged off by Yusuf Meherally who was the first youthful Congress Socialist Mayor of Bombay. Meherally was a progressive Muslim, which meant in those days, a nationalist who did not accept the communalist Jinnah line.

Kishor was a very secretive fellow who never gave any details of his life and deeds. The account that follows has been pieced together by many years of inquiry and cryptic conversations. I cannot now say what I learnt when. It is all a jumble of marvels and wonderments.

Kishor had three other youthful companions, at least two of them Parsi and one otherwise *chakram* (crazy). The foursome planned to go round the world on their bicycles, of course, the bicycles were to be carried across oceans by ships, but the squad would be riding them across land masses. They left India by the North-West Frontier and soon enough fetched up in Iran, from whence at least the two Parsi boys turned back.

Kishor had been a physical training teacher in Bombay

schools, and therefore, performed feats in the population centres that they passed through. Like having a motor car pass over a board placed on his chest or pulling a vehicle with a rope tied to his teeth or some such feat of physical prowess. He would exhibit to a crowd before he passed the Gandhi cap around for donations.

I never knew what exactly happened to the fourth member of the quartet. Anyway, Kishor reached Marseilles one late evening in the middle of a snowing winter.

His chest was deep, though his stature was a comical one, the legs being of normal length; but the top half was highly squeezed and compressed; so that the span from the waist to the shoulders was merely a foot or so. Kishor's total height was about 4 ft. of which three feet or thereabouts were taken up by his legs. (Kishor always thought of himself as a Japanese lost in Indo-Aryan India.)

Kishor also spoke the English language with peculiar turns and twists; and never cared for any grammatical accuracy. In fact, as he told me after a long time, he deliberately cultivated a mispronounced English full of grammatical solecisms.

In Marseilles, an American dowager in a passing taxi took pity on the Indian boy, and sent him on to some Indian diamond merchants settled in North-West Europe who paid for his passage to East Africa where a large number of Indians, originally taken there as indentured labourers, had settled down to become permanent *émigrés*.

In an Uganda Club, as usual, Kishor instructed the fat Gujarati ladies and a sprinkling of rich *émigré* men, certain basic signals which were to be followed when he performed his acrobatic feats. One involved the raising of both arms to signal a hard pull with a noose fastened around his neck by the strongest and heftiest members of his audience from the right and the left. When his hands came down, they were to release the pressure on the rope.

Kishor's explanatory introduction to the gymnastic feat was entirely in vain, and as soon as the double noose was placed around his neck; the two sides of the excited and babbling crowd started pulling with gusto and vim exactly contrary to his instructions. Kishor found himself flat prone on the ground strangulated. The rich club members took pity on the young man and carried him

to the local Kampala hospital where Kishor negotiated a deal with his guilty benefactors. He was to be shipped passage free from Mombasa to Yokohama, or wherever else Rashbehari Bose had established his underground training school for Indian patriotic youth.

Kishor, in due course, reached Rashbehari's school and was duly seconded and initiated into the Japanese Air Force Training Programme.

CENTRE TABLE AT WAYSIDE INN, KALA GHODA, MUMBAI

Now I will turn to the informal lunch club of which I became a member at the invitation of Kishor Thakkar in the fifties and sixties of the last century.

Kishor and I parted ways after our jail terms, rather detention camp terms. My retirement from trade union and Socialist Party politics in 1952 has already been dealt with in the earlier sections of this autobiography.

I had been suddenly bewildered by the comprador bourgeois surroundings. I had been thrown on the heap of the unemployed lower middle class mass of the educated youth. There were no employment exchanges in India then.

I was generously granted a magnificent monthly salary of Rs. 100 basic pay plus Rs. 45 of Dearness Allowance by the so-called uncle, Govardhandas Dutia, who had been helped by my father to earn millions. My mother who had foolishly decided to shift from Kolkata, where my father had built a lifetime's intimate network of millionaire friends and clients; to Mumbai where we were totally unknown and helpless; felt that I should have been grateful to Govardhankaka for his munificence. I doubted the generosity of the comprador plutocrat's miserly heart, but suffered in silence. There was no alternative. I had to live with whatever came my way. Within a year, I had shifted to the National Insurance Company in Kolkata on the same generous terms; but with the prospect of being trained to take over a branch in Hong Kong. That was never to be. My budgetary allocations out of the monthly grand emoluments were humble and simple. I paid per month Rs. 20 for *sarod* lessons to Radhika Mohan Moitra and a flexible amount was sent back to Mumbai. This often necessitated starvation at dinner time and a five-mile walk towards the end of the month from office to home in Lake Dhakuria area, as I frequently did not have the bus fare.

This hard life led me to concentrate more avidly on the London Insurance Institute exams which I passed standing first in the Kolkata center. But the body could not take the physical and mental strain. I came down with pleurisy. Fortunately by that time *Streptomycin* and *Isoniazid* had come into use, and I survived the crisis, after I returned to Mumbai on a stretcher .

I had lost touch with Kishor who also seemed to have had a misadventure, first as a pilot of the leper Alagappa Chettiar's Jupiter Airways and immediately thereafter as a bribe-giver on behalf of a friend, to obtain a fertilizer contract with the Government of India. I never learnt the full details from Kishor or his associates, but received a picture postcard from him suddenly one fine morning with the colorful photo of the Seychelles palm tree with an inset of the double fruit. This double coconut had a cleavage line in the centre that depicted the vaginal cleft surrounded by a bush of pubic strands. Kishor had merely signed his name on the reverse.

I knew that Kishor had been for years "ordered not to reside within one and a half miles of any Indian airport", and that Jupiter Airways had with great difficulty overcome the ban.

How difficult it is to get out of the entanglements of the colonial regime, I have already indicated by reference to the Vile Parle Rifle Club formation in 1950, where I had been specifically excluded from the list of members for having been associated in 1943 with the Trotskyist Fourth International's Indian Section, which was the BLPI.

It seems Kishor had decided to precipitate himself in the Seychelles and nearby East African countries, then under British rule, for a year or two. Since it was Kishor's secretive principle not to reveal any personal details, I never knew the full story of his Seychelles misadventure. I met his partners and associates, but all of them observed an *omerta* on Kishor's movements, physical and psychological.

WAYSIDE INN LUNCH CLUB

Wayside Inn was almost opposite Elphinstone College and was sandwiched between the Rhythm House, music center, and Chetana, which was a vegetarian joint, that encouraged long occupations of tables by chess-players.

The members of the center table club possessed varied

backgrounds. Dr. Parmar, an eminent surgeon holding the rank of an honorary colonel in the British Indian army, was the informal president. Next to him in seniority was Sharma who edited a society pictorial weekly called the *Outlook*. Beside him usually sat Malhotra, the lawyer, a fine gentleman of the old white-haired school. Then there was Jasbhai of Johnson and Johnson whose boss and wife Sunshine, I met, of all places, in Rio de Janeiro and Petropolis in Brazil in mid-1960s, when I was knocking about the world.

Apart from Jasbhai, Malhotra, Sharma, Parmar, Kishor and myself there were two or three noteworthy individuals and their families. First of all, there was Char and his son who owned Standard Batteries, and then there was the Ghia crowd which included Bhupatrai or Kika Ghia who was the elder brother of my *Nupur* associate Bachu or Damodar Ghia. Kika usually came with his son, and sometimes with Jayakrishna Harivallabhdas, ex-mayor of Ahmedabad and Kika's brother-in-law.

I almost forgot to mention Balkrishna Mehta who became head of Harkisandas Hospital and one Rusi Patel who was Kika's business associate.

This Centre Table Club met nearly every day and engaged in animated political and social discussions. A lot of banter went on; and Kishor, who brought a bunch of bananas every day as a health-giving dessert, was a great favourite of the entire crowd.

I must mention that Pervez, the proprietor of Wayside, encouraged the club by providing all sorts of extras and possibly concessional fares. Wayside Inn had been a bar throughout World War II, patronised heavily by the sailors who roamed all over Fort area when their ships were anchored in Bombay port. It had per force fallen on lean days after the war, but somehow the Centre Table Club kept it going.

I may mention that after a heated exchange, I had accepted a bet from Sharma at 10 to 1, or Rs. 100 to Rs. 1000, on an electoral victory for George Fernandes against S.K. Patil in 1967. Sharma's loss was to be paid in installments of monthly dinners in a round robin fashion. I greatly enjoyed all the dinners where I was the virtual host. (The Wayside Center Table Club has been noticed in Mumbai Society circles, and a number of columns have recently appeared in the newspapers and journals.)

The next encounter with Kishor happened in a peculiar way. He

acquired a plot of land at Worli's main Annie Besant Road, almost bang opposite the prestigious locations of the Bombay Television Center and Glaxo Pharmaceuticals. There was an encroachment by a temple priest-cum-gangster and I helped Kishor to overcome the nuisance. Kishor built the prestigious People's Mobile Hospital Centre on the plot with a large donation from one Ruparel who had a Russian mistress. This mistress had a close association with a Russian architect who carried out numerous design projects for Ruparel that entailed payments of large designing fees. These fees were defrayed through the People's Mobile Hospital which involved some accounting jugglery.

I often ribbed Kishor about the numerous marvelous design projects that entailed large payments by the People's Mobile Hospital Centre, and steadfastly refused Kishor's steady overtures to take over the management of the Center after his passing away.

I am sorry to have disobliged Kishor who made my jail days pass in such tranquillity and joy, inspite of the various hunger strikes and the long solitary confinement that was inflicted upon me by the Malaysian jailor.

Kishor showed me how to place a dollop of pickle in the centre of a roll of *roti*, and how we could start biting it from one end and reverse the process when one reached the middle, and nibble away from the other end till the last delicious morsel at the center could be chewed.

I salute my old comrade Kishor Thakkar. His passing away has robbed the Indian freedom movement of one of its most colourful and courageous fighters.

I wish that there were some place where we, the old 1942 August Movement participants, could occasionally gather and remember the Kishor Thakkars of our prison days.

MY PLAYWRITING

Let me now take up a few incidents connected with my play-writing activities.

So far, *Steel Frame* has been the most frequently staged play of mine.

Rajendra Nath of *Abhiyan*, Delhi, was the first to stage the play, and I think he paid me my modest royalties.

Pratibha Agarwal of *Anamika*, Kolkata, was meticulous in clearing the royalty accounts, but sad to note, she chose to pay me at the rate Rs. 20 per performance, whilst she decided to pay Rs. 80 per same performance to Dharmveer Bharti who was a mere translator of *Steel Frame* in Hindi. Of course, he was editor of *Dharmayug*, the prestigious Hindi weekly brought out by the *Times of India* Group, which today claims to be publishing "the largest English daily in the world". Bharti had been a joint translator of my *Steel Frame*. The original translation had been by Raja Ram, Madhu Limaye's private secretary in the 60s and '70s.

Satyadev Dubey was originally associated with Theater Group, the pre-eminent comprador theatrical organisation that had Ebrahim Alkazi, an Iraqi expatriate; Alyque Padamsee, a lion of the advertising jungle, Deryck Jeffries, and several other members of the Anglo – Christian, Anglo-Parsi and Anglo-Muslim, comprador creamy layer. Whilst Hindus, Jains and Sikhs of India are despised as reactionary communalists; Muslims, preferably Sunnis, Parsis and Christians are almost invariably greeted as progressives, if they profess cosmopolitan, globalising, pseudo-internationalism. This is a legacy of the colonial period, when to support Great Britain and United States was not only a must for all progressives, but also "secularly liberal".

The most rabid Muslim, Roman Catholic, Protestant, Anglican and other sectarian Christians, are all free from communal bias and any party approved by the British colonial regime amongst Muslims, Parsis, Christians and Anglo-Indians was, from birth, *ipso-facto*, modernising, liberal, secular, and internationalist.

The greatest concession made by Indian comprador circles, which had attained junior partnership status in 1947, was to the Muslim minority opinion and socio-political postures. The Muslim minority in India as well as in Pakistan; and from 1971, the residual Bangladesh, were to be appeased at all costs in order to please Great Britain and the new imperialist master of the world, USA. It was not a question of this or that individual development and singular dynamic, but it was a general subservience to the Anglo-American thesis that the Muslims were not a part of India; that the same civil law did not apply to them, and even if the Muslim League had failed to achieve majority in any of the five parts that made up the old Pakistan, viz, Bangladesh, West Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province. In the elections held

under the so-called 1935 Constitution which was still born, the princelings of the Third Chamber never participated. This aborted monstrosity was held up as the democratic ideal by the Congress, Ambedkar, the self-appointed spokesman of the Depressed Classes, as well as the *naukarshahs* and other hangers-on of this riff-raff.

In United Bengal, the Krishak Mazdoor Praja Party of Suhrawardy and Fazlur Rahman, had won. In United Punjab, the Unionists led by Sikander Hyat Khan had won. In Sindh, Allah Bux had been victorious. In Baluchistan, then not distinguished as a separate entity, no distinct pattern could be discerned; and in the old NWFP, Gandhi was used to ensure a walk over by Qayyum Khan of the Muslim League, with guarantee of abstention by the Khan brothers and their Red Shirts.

A student agent of the British Secret Service in Cambridge viz; Rahmat Ali, had been induced to propose a Tri-Partite Pakistan: the current North-West, an expanded East inclusive of Assam plus Bengal, and a third part centred upon Hyderabad and Mysore.

This crazy quilt arrangement was sold to Jinnah, then settled in England and was voiced by the Muslim League through a Kashmiri poet Iqbal for the first time in 1940.

Within seven years, the schema was approved by the imperialist administration, and Pakistan was fashioned out of the above listed reluctant five parts. (Hyderabad and Mysore were left out.) At the same time, a Transfer of Power was engineered to appease the lust for power and pelf of the aging Congress leaders including the octogenarian Gandhi, the septuagenarians Rajendra Prasad and Rajagopalachari and fast-aging Patel and Nehru, by forming a powerless Interim Government in September 1946, almost a year before the so-called "Freedom at Midnight" on 15th August, 1947. The electorate that rubber-stamped this absurdity that was called Twin Constituent Assemblies of India and Pakistan. In a population of 40 crores, the sanctioned electorate was just about 10 or 14 percent, and the actual number of those who exercised the franchise was almost 1.9 crores divided in 70 different kinds of communal and otherwise privileged varieties of constituencies. (See *Mankind*, March 1997 and *Mankind Occasional Paper No. 14* in Marathi)

The imperialist pattern of "Divide and Rule" which had been implemented repeatedly not only in India, but also in Ireland, Palestine, Cyprus and Rhodesia, was not to be alluded to. Somehow, Anglo-American imperialism was to be accommodated with a repeated display of appeasement of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Azad Kashmir. Kandahar hijack and release of convicted terrorists was to be arranged.

Whatever thwarted imperial designs in non-secular Pakistan, Pakistan-occupied North Kashmir, or Talibanist Afghanistan of yesteryears, was to be strongly opposed and Kandahari accommodation and Afzal-Sarabjit exchange clemencies were to be systematically arranged.

Thus, *ipso-facto*, any one who opposed Anglo-American neo-colonialist policies in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq and the Middle East and Arab-Berber North Africa, was narrow-minded, non-secular, anti-liberal and anti-internationalist, communalist and was to be hounded down and repressed without mercy. It is not possible to find the point where appeasement of and neo-colonial approval of Muslim communalism is to end, and where precisely secular, anti-neo-colonialism is to begin. If we condemn the Nawab of Dacca who was one of the founders of the Muslim League in 1906, or paint Aga Khan with a black brush, for his extreme loyalty to British imperialism, or call Rahmat Ali a police agent, or Mohammad Ali Jinnah an NRI, holding the British brief, or describe Iqbal in disparaging terms, we are obviously being communalist. If we either refer to all the above five in laudatory terms, or at least non-critical terms, we are pure progressives, 100 percent secularists and liberal internationalists, who have faith in the globalising village that is the world in the 21st Century.

Let me turn away from the grand schemas of Rahmat Ali, Jinnah and Mountbatten to take a conspectus of my humble activities as critic and practitioner of the arts.

ARCHITECTURE

I think I did some of my best work as architectural critic and historian as also a practitioner who got a chance to realise his monumental design *Gitai Mandir* at Wardha. We will take up this *Gitai Mandir* realisation in a little while. In the meantime, we may just list the critical studies that I made in the area of architecture. What I note below should be construed only as a sample of my

endeavour, since by now I have lost track of all my writings. This indicative list may include the following :

- i) *Vistara*, A Note on the Sociology of Indian Architecture, 1989.
- ii) I cannot recollect the precise issues of *Sanskriti* which studied Corbusier's monumental design of the Ahmedabad Mill Owners Association building, or some other critique of the urban monstrosity known as Chandigarh.
- iii) My post-doctoral study for the ICSSR : *Sociology of Twentieth Century Indian Architecture*, 1982.
- iv) *Living an Housing Environment*, BHEL Township, Bhopal, 1982.
- v) *Interface : Technology and Architecture*, 1984.
- vi) "Oh Bombay : No Relief in Sight" in *Indian Architect & Builder*, April 1993.
- vii) "A Balance Sheet of Indian Architecture", Ninth anniversary issue, *Indian Architect and Builder*, 1995.

But apart from the most extensive historical and aesthetic critical studies, my greatest satisfaction was achieved when the Bajaj Memorial Trust finally constructed the *Gitai Mandir* at Wardha.

GITAI MANDIR OR WARDHA SAMADHI

I had finalised the design of this monument soon after I had returned from my world tour of 1965-66. Kamalnayan Bajaj then passed away leaving behind in his will an injunction to his heirs that they should build this monument with a novel design concept, as formulated by Vinayak Purohit. I was informed about this will and its stipulation by Viren Shah of Mukand Iron and Steel, who was otherwise chagrined with me for deserting Mukand.

I would like my readers to hark back to the Kashmiri Shaivite philosopher, Abhinavagupta's concept of *dhwani* as elaborated in his critical commentary *Dhwanyaloka*.

I had conceived of a triple *dhwani* with three levels of ironical reverberations.

I first wrote about this ideologically conceived monument in my column which I was writing in those days in *Dharmayug*, a Hindi weekly of the *Times of India* group. My column was titled *Kaal Ki Pratidhwaniyan (Echoes of Our Times)*, which itself was a resonant reference.

The first layer of *dhwani* or reverberating/resonating indirect reference, was to the immediate physical surroundings of the *Gitai Mandir* which was often called *Wardha Samadhi*.

The monument was without a plinth or roof. It was an arrangement of 700 slabs laid out in the form of a cow with the lowered head with horns, and four legs with udders hanging down, when viewed from one side. On the other side, it was a *charkha*, or the Gandhian spinning wheel, prolonging its felly into the tail of the animal; and the whole ensemble could be viewed as an ever-changing kaleidoscopic cloud-ship.

The site was situated between Wardha town proper and Sewagram, where Gandhi had his *ashram*. Gandhi had shifted to Sewagram in 1935 ostensibly to be near the geographical centre of the country; but really to be close at hand to the properties belonging to Jamnalal Bajaj, the Marwari treasurer of the Indian National Congress Party and the biggest donor to Gandhi's so-called constructive programme.

Incidentally, the Lakshminaryan Temple in Wardha city was owned by the Bachharaj family whose adopted son was the same Jamnalal Bajaj.

In this Gopuri area, there already existed two or three Indian trees, each of which had the ashes of one Bajaj or another buried in urns placed near the roots of these trees. There was a Bakul tree (*Mimusaps elengi*) where Jamnalal Bajaj's own ashes lay sprinkled; a peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) where lay the urn containing the ashes of Janakidevi, Jamnalal's wife; and a tree whose species I do not recollect, where lay scattered the ashes of Kishorilal Mashruwala, who had been Gandhi's colleague and successor-editor of *Harijan*, the weekly published in various Indian languages and in English by the Gandhian ginger group of the Congress Party.

I think there was a fourth tree where Kamalnayan was trying his best to persuade Vinoba Bhave, Gandhi's arch-disciple, to consign his ashes. Bhave was the founder of *Sarvodaya* and *Bhoodan* Movements which were originally intended to combat land seizures by the landless in Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh. (See P. Sunderayya, *Telangana People's Struggle and Its Lessons*, CPI(M, 1972)

I went all the way to Baripada in Orissa to explain my

monumental design concept to Bhave, and interview him at the same time for the *Dharmayug* weekly. I cannot exactly remember the date on which my column covering the design of the *Gitai Mandir* (a.k.a. Wardha Samadhi), and the interview with Bhave about the state of the Bhoodan Movement appeared in *Dharmayug*.

The *Gitai* was a play of words by Bhave for his translation of the *Bhagwad Gita* in Marathi. (*Gita + ai*, mother in Marathi) The text consisted of exactly 700 *shlokas* or couplets divided into 18 *adhyayas* or chapters.

The individual granite slabs were to be about 7 feet above ground each embedded two or three feet below ground level to be firmly held in position.

The 18 different kinds of stone slabs were to be brought from 18 corners of the country like the Makrana marble; Mathura red stone, Jaisalmer yellow, Porbandar brown, Cuddappah slate, and so on. On each slab was to be inscribed one *shloka* or couplet of the *Gitai*. The silent slabs standing stark and erect would by themselves proclaim the unity of the country. In fact, India itself has

been defined as a unity within immense diversity; tribal, regional and otherwise.

I wrote in my Hindi column *Kaal Ki Pratidhwaniyan*, (Echoes of Our Time) about this first layer or level of *dhwani*. There were two other layers or levels which I deliberately left unsaid.

The second layer or level of *dhwani*, the Gandhian including Sarvodaya and Bhoodan ideologies, lay around the landscaped interior of the natural rise and fall of the land form. The Gandhian ideology lay totally in shambles, scattered in a living ruin.

The third layer or level of *dhwani* was suggested by my totally atheistic outlook. The whole of the religious ideology as crystallised in the *Bhagvad Gita* was in shambles, tattered and torn, lying in utter ruin.

From my world tour of 1965-66, I had seen and walked around many buildings and structures, particularly in East and West Germany, where the heritage lovers had actually intentionally preserved the bombed premises. For instance, the Lipstick and Powder Compact at Kurferstendam in Berlin where they had rebuilt and partly preserved the ruined tower of the old church. There were

many such sights carefully kept intact, in the ruined state, all over Berlin, Munich, Leipzig, Magdeburg and elsewhere.

In fact, an Austrian sculptor Fritz Wortruba, had created ensembles of ruined, destroyed, bombed pillars and beams as exhibits for general public viewing, placed in several museums that I visited.

I do not wish to deny the influence of the artifacts collected in the museums which I visited in 1965-66. But the second *dhwani* of Gandhian ideology in shambles and the third of religious ideology, as such, equally in ruins were, my own contributions of which I am unhesitatingly proud.

I want the reader of these lines to visualise my *Gitai Mandir* as explained layer by layer in the above paragraphs.

I would certainly wish him to visit Wardha and Sewagram, Gopuri, to see my monumental crystallisation built by the Bajajs at a cost of about Rs.18 lakhs. I cannot say how I managed to persuade Kamalnayan Bajaj, Abdul Gaffar Khan, Vinoba Bhave, Radhakrishna Bajaj of Wardh, Rahul Bajaj, M.P. and other friends of Bajajs to agree to this construction.

Anyway, I am satisfied that the *Gitai Mandir* a.k.a. *Wardha Samadhi* will stand for quite some time as a living ruin of Gandhian theology.

My voice may be small and isolated today, but it is not going to remain entirely unheard!

SCULPTURE AND PAINTING

We may now take up the remaining two of the visual arts trio of Architecture, Sculpture and Painting.

The dozen or more contributions which I made to *Design* monthly, Mumbai and Delhi, in the period 1956-63, have been conveniently listed in Ratan Parimoo's *Studies in Modern Indian Art*, Kanak Publications, Books India, N. Delhi, 1975. The list may be found in the elaborate Select Bibliography on pp. 120-147 of this source.

I followed the same pattern : First,

A plunge into critical appraisal of works, artists and their times, accompanied by and followed up with intensive reading of Western,

Oriental and other historical traditions. Next, I would experiment with *praxis*. I would attempt little practical exercises.

The final step would be a total ideological presentation of the subject and a tentative integration into a philosophical *weltanschauung* or world-view.

I followed the same procedure with regard to the two media of sculpture and painting.

In fact, in considering the historical tradition of Indian architecture, I had highlighted in my writings the structured heap of sculptures that often masqueraded as architectural design in India.

DRAMATIC TABLEAU

I had referred to the frozen tableaux that unified varied tribal and totemic iconic elements. The central figure of the God or the Bodhisatva, i.e. the icon, sported multiple arms which carried the emblems that defined the icon's nature and powers. Each *ayudh* was a totem of a particular tribe.

There was often a vehicle on which he or she was mounted, or which he or she rode, a rat, a peacock, a goat, a lotus or anything that was held sacred by some tribal group or another; and whose allegiance was now claimed by the composite figure. Shiva might himself be merely one face of the *linga* or he might be holding various *ayudhs* (weapons) in his multiple arms; whilst a Parvati would be seated in his lap and his elder son, Subramanya or Murugan or Kartikeya, is depicted riding a peacock, and Shiva's other son, the elephant-headed Ganesha mounted on a rat may be hovering around.

Shiva may be standing on a Vamana (dwarf) on one foot and the other foot may be raised in the pose of a *tandava* dance gesture, and the whole ensemble may be surrounded by a flaming horseshoe or circular arch or circle.

Episodes from the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* would be depicted in the friezes, and the end of each episode would be signalled by a half-closed door with a figure standing in the other half.

In fact, from within Indian art historical tradition, it is impossible to say where sculpture ends and architecture begins or *vice versa*.

The whole of the immense Kailashnath temple at Ellora is carved out sculpturally from a hill slope, top downwards with elephants and *dhwajastambhas* (flag bearing pillars) left standing in the courtyard and the freizes carved on all the walls of the multi-storied, central structural temple with *shikhara* (top finial) belonging to the living hillside. The whole pile or ensemble was hacked out downwards like a built-up structure, but actually it was a carved out singular rock slope with hundreds of craftsmen working in unison for two or three decades as per the plans laid out by a master artist who was known as *sthapati*, (overall dimensions 300 ft x 175 ft of a hill slope which left standing in the middle of a courtyard, a large isolated mass of rock over 200 ft. long, 100 ft. wide and 100 ft. high at its apex. (Percy Brown, *Indian Architecture, Vol.1*, Taraporewala & Sons, Mumbai 1971, p. 74)

It is not only the most stupendous work of art executed in India, but as an example of rock architecture, it is unrivalled anywhere in the world.

Thus in Indian art history, it is not possible to separate architecture and sculpture.

Anyway, my study of Indian art trends began with the series of articles on Indian artists that I wrote for *Design* edited by Patwant Singh from Mumbai, and later from Delhi. This was in 1956 or 1957, about the same time as I began writing music criticism for the *Times of India*.

MY DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

For my Ph.D. dissertation, *Arts of Transitional India*, 2 Vols. 1986-88, published by Popular Prakashan, Mumbai, I chose three art forms for detailed study. Chapter 4 was assigned to painting, a medium in which the modern had completely supplanted the medieval, miniaturist and Tantric and *ragmala* visualisations in favour of contemporary modernised figurative and abstract compositions.

Besides painting as one of the three art forms chosen for intensive and detailed study, the other two were music, where the classical form had undergone hardly any change, and the last was film, which was a completely new art form. I had suggested that the three together, one completely transformed; one more or less unchanged and one completely new, would cover all the theoretical possibilities in aesthetic philosophy.

As far as painting and sculpture are concerned, I wrote extensively in many journals published from Mumbai, Kolkata, Hyderabad, Ahmedabad and Delhi in several languages like English, Gujarati and Hindi. I can refer to some of my major contributions :

- 1) *The Social Setting of Indian Sculpture*, 1989
- 2) *Art Systems of Russia and India in Gorbachevism*, etc. 1989.
- 3) *Compradorism, Times of India and M.F.Husain*, 1989.

All the above three were published as part of *Sociology of Art and Politics*, 1989-92.

Apart from the foregoing theoretical and critical studies, I consider the two lectures at the Vadodara M.S. University's Faculty of Fine Arts in 1976, and the most recent one on a trip to Bhopal in January 2008, as the most significant. I summaries the two in the following paragraphs.

AVANT GARDE ART

At the Vadodara Faculty of Fine Arts, I summed up my findings at the end of the world tour of 1965-66, when I had in particular observed the art scene in Euro-America.

I termed the entire Euro-American art scene as Post-Modern, Avant-gardist, eclectic hotch-potch, lacking in ideological depth and breadth of vision. I gave the concrete example of N. Abe, who was known to the entire Vadodara faculty as a friend and companion of N.S. Bendre, who had been the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts since its inception in the fifties.

I met Abe in Rome in 1965. Abe was a typical moon-faced, stocky, strong Japanese male who had a statuesque, big-breasted, tall Yugoslav secretary-cum companion, who was about a foot taller than Abe. All three of us trudged, from Spanish Steps to Place de Popolo, from one end of Rome to another.

One evening, Abe introduced me to Pasolini who was a well-known Italian neo-realist and Marxist film director. That evening, a new art gallery, for the benefit of his mistress, was opened near the Place de Popolo and we were greeted at the gallery entrance by another Serbian beauty, who handed us the supposed souvenir which all of us opened single fold, double fold, four-fold, eight-fold, front and back, totally blank. We milled about through the four or five rooms exhibition area, and saw hanging on the numerous

walls totally white, blank canvases in various shapes and sizes, triangles, circles, rectangles of 6 feet diameters, hypotenuse and sides. All of them were white, blank and without a brush mark on their surfaces. This was proclaimed as sensational, in big headlines in the next day's morning papers, and was supposedly the curtain raiser for the following month's real opening by the same artist.

The next example I gave was that of Margaret Greenwood's show in New York. Each of us paid \$ 10 at the entrance gate to be guided to one of the sides of a swimming pool of Olympic dimensions filled to the brim with transparent blue water in the center of which seated on a black metal chair was the artist wearing a gas mask playing an unheard melody on a stringless cello across which a bow was being moved with vigorous and expressive movements. After a while, the concert ended and all of us dispersed. There were several examples which I proceeded to elucidate ending with a exhibition by an Italian who erected a sliding spiral around a pole which he climbed strenuously, all the while masturbating and finally ejaculating at the top.

I finally ended my discourse with a description of the new colour, I K B, International Klein Blue, which was created by Franz Klein at whose opening in the various capitals of France, Switzerland, Netherlands, USA and elsewhere, the artist invited a selected audience to witness the serpentine movements of a naked woman on whose breasts, hands, legs, thighs, hips, etc. thick splashes of blue had been previously applied prior to their transference to the 8 ft. x 15 ft. canvas framed and spread out to receive the impressions from prominences like the nipples, etc.

The totality of the post-modern, avant-garde, Euro-American art scene, was the same as in a Bollywood or Hollywood stunt or science fiction film. Each scene or event was intended to provide a shock bigger than the preceding one. Each artist at his opening tries to go one better than the last weird mark made by his rival. The Surrealists, the Abstract Expressionists, the Blau Reiteres, the Minimalists, the Primitives, the Pop, representatives of every kind of ism and tendency, said nothing except that my signature is different, my brand name distinct and my specific presentation a unique crystallisation of a private vision.

As a matter of fact, all the great personal visions put together merely represented the bourgeois, neo-colonialist or comprador world-view. (the two being reverse and obverse of the same coin).

It was like viewing the outer reality through the well known Eames Keleidoscope, of three mirrors and a lens arranged in a manner that converted the field of vision into a stereotyped repetitive pattern.

I was presented with an Eames keleidoscope, by Mrinalini Sarabhai several decades ago when I was became her house-guest at *Chidambaram*, Ashram Road, Ahmedabad. I amused myself with this ingenious device which with the three mirrors turned any field of vision into a colorful textile pattern with embroidered, repetitive motifs. I have misplaced or lost this American contraption, since I got sick after a while of the continuous patternising that one was subjected to, entirely predictable, mechanically repetitive and terribly claustrophobic.

Let me continue with my story of sculpture and painting. Finally, in the mid sixties, when I stayed in Delhi for long stretches in the Ferozeshah Road quarters of MP-Kamalnayan Bajaj, I amused myself with some mounted canvases and paints and brushes borrowed from old friend of the Vadodara School, Shanti Dave. I remember to have sold one collage or ensemble painting to Shri. Ravi Jain of the Sunder Nagar Art Gallery. I believe I was paid something like Rs. 1100/- for the effort titled *Gramdevata (Village God)*; or perhaps Ravi only offered to pay for this modest effort of mine. I cannot exactly recollect.

DANCE AT THE EXCELSIOR AND NEW EMPIRE THEATRES

I had danced on the Excelsior and New Empire stages in South Mumbai in a Tagorean dance ballet called *Varadan*. It was the story of Buddha and his struggle to attain *nirvana* (ultimate enlightenment) Mara, the devil, sends his troupe of *rakshasas* (evil spirits) to frighten and terrrise Gautama Siddhartha, in order to disturb his meditation. I remember the refrain "*Shanko chere birbalata....*"to this date, almost 60-70 years later.

The dance remained etched in my memory because of the terrific "once more" that we received from the audience. I believe that not merely our dancing or terpsichorean prowesses, were responsible for the enthusiastic reception. I suspect that the endless whining and sorrowful song-and-dance sequences that had been going on for an hour or more preceding our explosive entrance, was at least partly responsible for the acclaim. We had disappeared into the green rooms when our Aunty (Kunvarben Vakil) who was the producer of the show and Vice-Principal of our

Pupils' Own School, rushed in and pushed us back on the stage for a brief encore of our routine with raised weapons. At that time, we were too dazed and dazzled by the lights and the noise to fully absorb the fantastic warmth, with which our "devil dance" had been received. But it was indeed a most unforgettable memory.

Many years later, I was introduced to the creators of modern Indian ballet through the agency of my elder sister Veena, who had an amazingly photogenic presence, though quite an ordinary looking woman in real life.

ASIAN RELATIONS CONFERENCE

The Asian Relations Conference was to take place in Delhi in early 1946 or 1947. (It was before the bogus Independence of August 1947) Uday Shankar's Almora center had broken up. Uday had hitched up with Amala and a few others to settle down in Madras to produce *Kalpana*, the only Indian dance ballet film.

His lifelong companion, Simkie, had broken away with Prabhat Ganguly, her "second liaison". All the three Shankar brothers – Rajendra, Devendra and Ravindra – had decided to follow Simkie and Prabhat, Shanti Bardhan was also with Prabhat, Simkie and the Shankar Brothers. Sachin Shankar and Narendra Sharma who were later to become known as independent choreographers, were also with the breakaway group.

In the meantime, the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA) had come into existence along with other organisations of writers and artists, each in their own specialised fields. (Progressive Writers' Association and Progressive Group of Painters). They had all been formed as fellow-travellers, wings of the Communist Party of India, whose leaders had been released in May 1941 from the Deoli Camp in Rajasthan. The Stalinists had swung behind the Allied War effort after Hitler's invasion of the then USSR in 1941.

P.C. Joshi, the then CPI General Secretary, had renamed the "Imperialist War" that had begun in September 1939 as now metamorphosed into a "Peoples War". All strikes were henceforth to be proscribed. No mass peasant agitations or student and middle class protests were to be organised. Maximum effort was to be made to increase war production.

P.C. Joshi needed some diversionary strategy to draw attention from the raging inflation and the sky-rocketing prices which

precipitated the terrible Bengal Famine of 1943. This famine took an enormous toll of the poor and was really not confined to merely Bengal, but was widespread all over the country.

IMMORTAL INDIA TO DISCOVERY OF INDIA

Joshi scripted privately a dance drama called *Immortal India* to collect funds for the Bengal Famine. The 1943 all-India famine caused by inflation and speculative hoarding of food-grains (especially by Muslim League leaders like Isphani and Suhrawardy in Bengal) had been renamed and denigrated as the Bengal Famine of 1943. This was promoted as a regional crisis by the Communist Party of India in order to divert attention from the acute economic problems faced by the country, especially the Sterling Balances Crisis, whereby the British war machine had bought Indian supplies by making payments in currency notes that fuelled a terrible price-rise spiral.

The rising tide of popular nationalist opposition to World War II was evident everywhere in the country as exemplified by the August 1942 Movement and its aftermath. (For Bengal Famine causes and results see Kolkata University's Report and B.M. Bhatia's *Famines in India*, 1963. For P.C. Joshi's scripting of *Immortal India* for IPTA, see Raj Thapar, *All These years, A Memoir*, Seminar Publications, Delhi, 1991, p.15)

His *Immortal India* concoction was refurbished as *Discovery of India* for the Asian Relations Conference that was arranged in Delhi as the first grand presentation for Jawaharlal Nehru, the great comprador freedom fighter who was soon to "liberate" partitioned India under the India Independence Act passed by the British House of Commons in 1947.

Under this Act, India and Pakistan were to be created as two Dominions out of the old Government of India, under certain detailed formulae for demarcation of boundaries.

The Asian Relations Conference of 1946 was to herald the entry of Jawaharlal Nehru as a great Asian Leader. His *Discovery of India* was a work to be immortalised as a magnificent *libretto*. P.C. Joshi's diversionary *Immortal India* was to be re-concocted as a terpsichorean masterpiece. Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya; Socialist wife of Communist Harindra Chattopadhyaya, was to organise the entertainment side-show to the Asian Relations Conference and properly impress the international delegates with

the pomp and glory of India that had been British India for the last two hundred years or so, at least from 1765, when the East India Company had obtained a revised *Sanad* from the Mughal emperor in Delhi, conveying the transfer of revenue collection rights in the *Subahs* of Bengal, Bihar, Orissa and Northern Sircars.

Unfortunately, the members of the troupe fell out. The Shankar brothers appropriated the entire proceeds of the all-India tour of the *Discovery of India* ballet ensemble that had followed the Delhi performance on the margins of the Asian Relations Conference.

Though still wearing short pants, I plunged into the affair at the instigation of my sister, Veena. Shanti Bardhan and Prabhat Ganguly visited my little office at Bhai Jivanji Lane in Girgaum, South Mumbai, just above the Marathi Grantha Sangrahalaya. I helped them in every possible way, getting letters typed, going to legal advisers, holding conciliation meetings with INT officials, and so on.

Ultimately, a tragi-comedy of sorts was enacted at a "peace meeting" in Matunga, Central Bombay. As Prabhat recollected recently, I informed the little group right at the outset of the confabulations, that "who wants conciliation? What we want is justice and due recognition of Shanti's significant contribution." In comprador conditions, only rotten compromises were feasible. So far as I know, Shanti and Prabhat lost their case and after two or three years of stay in Andheri, North Bombay, they set up shop in Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, from whence after a decade or so, they shifted to Bhopal. (In the meantime, the incident of Ravi Shankar's arrest and week-end stay in police lock-up at Borivali, occurred, as already described.)

Nehru came to know of the injustice done to Shanti Bardhan and managed to wangle a plot of land for the Little Ballet Troupe (as Shanti had renamed his group). This plot near Dehradun was ultimately sold by Gul and Prabhat, and the proceeds utilised to acquire a plot in the prestigious Shyamla Hills enclave of Bhopal. There, after many more years, a theatre-cum-library complex was constructed.

I have just visited this Shyamla Hill complex in January 2008, when Prabhat Ganguly's first death anniversary was commemorated. During this January trip to Bhopal, I spoke to a group of painters, graphic artists and sculptors and ceramicists who live near Devilal Patidar's housing colony, Sahyadri Enclave.

DHWANI

I drew the attention of the group to the Indian aesthetic concept of *dhwani* or reverberation/echo/indirect reference/irony as analysed by Abhinavgupta in his *Dhwanyaloka*, an 11th century treatise on aesthetics.

I gave the concrete examples of (i) Giorgio De Chirico (1818-1878), an Italian who utilised the senses of wonder, mystery, loneliness, fear and enigma to create his landscapes and city scapes with metaphysical connotations.

(ii) Rene Magritte (1898-1967) who was a Surrealist painter from Belgium whose bizarre flights of fancy blended horror, peril, comedy and mysticism in *The Rape* (1934), in which a woman's torso has become her face. The breasts had become her eyes. In another portrait of a male he transformed the nose into an inverted penis with two testicle like eyes.

iii) Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527-93) an Italian master of social satire depicted grotesque compositions of fruits, animals, books and other objects. These were transposed into portrait busts in his *Summer and Winter*. The senile grimace of winter is juxtaposed with the ugly smile of summer. Grapes, carrots, other vegetables and leaves became warts, eyebrows piled up on each other, as features of the head, neck and shoulders.

iv) Fritz Wotruba (1907-75) an Austrian sculptor who utilised the bombed-out ruins of European cities in the post World War II era to convey his sense of foreboding, total destruction and living collapse.

I crystallised my own experiment in *dhwani* through the three levels of connotations which have already been described above, when discussing my design for the *Gitai Mandir or Wardha Samadhi* at Gopuri, Wardha near Nagpur.

I suggested to the Bhopal group that *dhwani* was an essential ingredient when projecting a work of art. *Dhwani* was like a metaphor, something ostensibly stated, behind which lurked another meaning or suggestion. Something was crystallised; and on the surface, the work of art seemed to shimmer, pregnant with a hidden meaning.

Just a pretty landscape, or portrait, or still life, did not possess

any inherent beauty, unless it reverberated and caused echoes to emanate from the depiction.

From amongst the several score lectures which I delivered at various universities across the country, I consider the above two on Avant-Garde Art at Baroda and on *Dhwani* at Bhopal to be the most significant contributions which I have made unravelling my philosophy of art.

RITUSAMHARA

I would like to mention a failure too. I decided to make a prestige documentary film for Ayurved Sevashram, one of the most profitable enterprises that the Bajaj family had launched. The company had its headquarters at Udaipur, with small manufacturing units scattered about in Hyderabad, Banares and some other places.

I took up as script or text, a long poem attributed to Kalidasa called *Rutusamhara* or a Garland or Cycle of Seasons. It had been translated into English by my Sinhalese friend, Harold Peiris, who was married to the painter George Keyt's sister, Peggy.

Unfortunately, I made the mistake of choosing an unreliable collaborator V.S.S. Shastri, an Andhra Trotskyist, who had married an English ballet dancer in London, arrived in India sometime in 1946 or 1947. I joined forces with him and pushed for a merger of the BLPI with the Socialist Party, which was in 1948 becoming an independent entity for the first time after its foundation in 1934. The BLPI was to act as a ginger group within the Congress Socialist Party. It had an independent platform of its own, and had been organised in Nasik Jail whilst its leaders were incarcerated there in 1934.

Originally, the Indian Communist Party had also been a part of the CSP. Before 1948, the SP had been a ginger group within the Congress. Led by Namboodiripad, the Stalinists had broken away in 1938 or 1939 just around the time when the Second World War started.

V.S.S. Shastri was a sad alcoholic. He introduced me to one Jag Mohan who was a *lumpen* with literary pretensions. Jag Mohan, too, was an alcoholic and he had a partner who was a *mona* Sikh, i.e. a Sikh who did not sport a beard or keep long

hair. This Sukhdev Singh was the worst alcoholic of the trio, and passed away a few years ago due to cirrhosis of the liver.

Jag Mohan and Sukhdev Singh flitted about and around the Bombay film world, now known as Bollywood. They had together and severally made some one reeler and two reeler documentaries.

After I joined Mukand Iron and Steel company in 1957, I was given all sorts of assignments, advertising, public relations, interior decoration, and a hundred different jobs, because my school mates, Viren Shah and Kamalnayan Bajaj found in me certain versatility. It was extremely economical for the duo because I was not a career-minded employee.

In the course of the varied assignments which came my way, I was asked to make a documentary depicting the setting up of the Bajaj Auto factory in Pune Chinchwad.

Somehow, through Shastri's recommendation, I accepted the Sukhdev Singh-Jag Mohan duo for this simple industrial documentary.

Kamalnayan had somehow acquainted himself with the concept of prestige publicity and thought of the Ayurved Sevashram as the sponsor.

I had recently been a house guest of Harold Peiris in Colombo, and thought of *Rutusamhara* as a prestige vehicle, without any direct or hard sell. It was monsoon in those days, and I picked up the *Varsha* canto as the first sequence that could be cinematized.

By that time, I had an inkling of the unreliability of Sukhdev Singh and insisted that directorial control was to remain in my hands and he was to merely assist me with the technicalities.

But I underestimated Sukhdev's drinking problem as well as his reckless undependability.

There were six seasons described in *Rutusamhara* :- *Varsha* or monsoon; *Sharad* or autumn; *Hemant* or frost, *Shishir* or winter; *Vasant* or spring and *Grishma* or summer.

I chose the magnificent little 11th century temple at Ambarnath near Mumbai; and chose Anjali Kadam, a little known Marathi actress, for the role of the heroine, pining away amidst the gathering clouds, lightning and thunder, and wanted to carry the story further to Mahabaleshwar, which was about a hundred miles south of Pune.

We completed the shooting of *Varsha* at Ambarnath and Mahabaleshwar, bitten by leaches, whenever we stepped onto the grassy margins. (I still sometimes shudder at the recollection of the leaches pulled away from the armpits and the legs.)

In the course of my world tour of 1965-66, I had occasion to speak to Abe and Pasolini about my cinematic venture, and had admitted to them my dissatisfaction with the effort.

Anyway, Jag Mohan and Sukhdev Singh and V.S.S. Shastri have all passed away and at least two, Shastri and Sukhdev's deaths were caused by excessive drinking. Shastri was an old man of about 70 at the time of his death at Cudappah, Andhra Pradesh but Sukhdev Singh passed away at a relatively young age of around 50.

My encounters with the film medium were not to be as satisfying as in respect of the other arts. After all, this is a true autobiography and not a recital of unending triumphs in every direction.

I was a visiting professor at the FTII, Pune, for more than a decade when N.V.K. Murthy, V.V. Gopal, John Shankarmangalam, were the successive heads of the Films section of the FTII.

I lectured in the Television wing of the FTII only for a year or two, and in the Film Appreciation Vacation Course for a year or so. My classes were well attended and took place in the larger lecture hall known as the theatre-cum-classroom at the western end of the central avenue.

Usually a number of members of the teaching faculty at the FTII attended my lectures, along with the yearly bunch of 30 to 60 students.

I cannot possibly remember the names of all my students, but Sai Paranjape was one of them, and some years ago there was a Khosa who won a few national and international citations. In the late 90's, Bindu Nair and Shammi Anand jointly directed a half-hour documentary titled *The S Spot and the Orgasm* in which I made several personal appearances on screen. In the same year, another graduate submission by a final year student also featured me in a small acting role.

During the Deanship of Dr. Mohan Agashe, the students of FTII went on a strike about the mismanagement of their study courses,

and I spoke up for them on several occasions to the administration. Once Saeed Mirza and K. K. Mahajan, ex-alumni of the FTII, came down to Pune from Mumbai to intercede on behalf of the striking students. In those relatively turbulent times I had humorously spoken to the students citing my long experience as "strike expert" since 1942, as student of Elphinstone College and as Socialist trade unionist.

I am grateful to the various heads of the film section of the FTII especially John Shankarmangalam for his happy reception of my ideas and iconoclastic views. Perhaps I was the only member of the visiting faculty who openly and forthrightly attacked the false, anti-nationalist comprador views of Satyajit Ray. Ray not only glamorised poverty (*Pathar Panchali*), but also suggested that Avadh was annexed in 1856 because of internal breakdown of law and order (*Shatranj Ke Khiladi*) and actually pictured a final technicolour pan shot in *Ashani Sanket* suggesting that overpopulation in India was the real cause of the 1943 national /Bengal Famine.

Apart from my lectures at the FTII for a decade or so, from mid-sixties to mid-seventies, I frequently reviewed films in various dailies and journals. My review of *Ek Adhuri Kahani* by Mrinal Sen was much appreciated, and similarly, my comments on *Kshudita Pashan* by Tapan Sinha were applauded by Ali Akbar and Amir Khan. I could go on citing more examples of my writings and my lectures but the above lines should suffice for the time being. I may add a note here that in the course of my extensive travels across the world in 1965-66, I made it a point to see *Schweigen* (Silence), a Swedish film by Ingmar Bergman and *8 ½*, an Italian film directed by Fellini, in whichever Euro-American capital or large city I happened to be.

I found that both films, more especially *Schweigen*, was cinematized from the point of view of a child who observes his lesbian and onanistic mother, as also his nymphomaniac aunt in silence. The aunt actually fornicates on the floor between the pews of a church where she has been followed by a waiter of a sidewalk café.

The censor boards of various countries edited and cut out scenes of different sorts from the exhibited versions, and I thought of writing a roving review in an academic journal on cinematic

art about the differing proclivities of the various national censoring authorities.

I found the Belgian and Dutch versions of *Schweigan* the most complete and with the least number of excisions.

The Anglo-American authorities had cut out the fornication episode on the floor of the church between pews. Other authorities in Austria and Germany had excised the scenes dealing with onanistic orgasm underneath a *bedsheet*. Some others had eliminated some other lurid episodes. It was quite interesting and very funny to observe the vagaries of the different state and official committees.

On the whole, I enjoyed my encounter with the medium of films as critic, lecturer and producer-director. I developed many new friendships and met several interesting personalities. After all, that is what life is about.

I had cast my net wide. Possibly, I had harboured a wish to forge the missing link in Marxian or historical and dialectical materialist *tour de horizon* which Karl Marx had once upon a time wanted to fill up. The gap in human knowledge had been stressed and brought to my notice many years ago.

I took up as a challenge the gap in knowledge outlined by Max Raphael, *Economic Base and Artistic Superstructure* in Melvin Rader (ed.) *A Modern Book of Esthetics, An Anthology*; 4th edition, Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc., New York, 1955, at pp 478-480)

I was very young when I took up the problem for intensive study, during the years that I was working on my Ph.D. thesis at the Mumbai University.

NAUKERSHAHI CONTINUITIES

I have already mentioned the continuities in so-called Independent India of imperialist and neo-colonial practices of a by-gone era. I had referred to the Bombay Police removing my name from the list of members of the Vile Parle Rifle Association in the 50's, since during British rule, I had been a member of the Trotskyite Fourth International. I had also referred to my stint as the proprietor of the Akar Advertising Agency from 1971, when the *Times of India*, already owned by Indians for 25 years, refused to publish my advertisement, since I had displayed untranslatable Hindi musical syllables सा रे ग म प ध नी सा, in a design promoting

a dairy product. I contended with Ahluwalia, a Sikh Ad Manager at Times. that सा रे ग म etc could not be rendered in any Western Sol-Fa system without indulging in a musical falsification and travesty. *The Times* Board was forced to accept my contention and ultimately did publish the ad with Hindi letters !

There is another instance of colonial continuity which I can adduce. It was truly a bizarre incident.

ADDA AT RITZ BAR

I had opened my Akar Advertising Agency in 1971. Its office was located bang opposite the Lions Gate on Rampart Row. I had got into the habit of taxying to the Ritz Bar behind Eros cinema for my pre-lunch glass of beer.

It was a very ebullient and effervescent circle that joined me at the Ritz Bar. It was not quite the Calcutta adda, but very near to it. Its members were self, Madan Mohan and Jaidev, music directors of Bollywood's films, Har Kishan Lal, the painter, and a varied group of journalists and intellectuals, including Zul Vellani, an East African émigré who had settled down in Bombay during the Second World War and had become a documentary film-maker. (Emigres were well placed in Bombay of those days, e.g. Ebralhim Alkazi, the Iraqi drama man, who later headed the National School of Drama). Romesh Thapar had been recently eased out of the Films Division (see Raj Thapar, *op. cit.*), and Zul had almost replaced him as a narrator-commentator for the F D, whose documentaries were compulsorily screened over all the several thousand cinema halls across the country. Even today, cinema halls have to screen Government approved documentaries of about 1000 feet length during all shows against a payment of 1% of their total exhibition receipts, to the makers of the approved footage.

I will not go into the details of this *naukarshahi* diktat and its strict legality or otherwise. It is a part of Indian comprador socio-political existence, that numerous bureaucratic restrictions continue from colonial times which make life almost unlivable in this benighted land. (Preventive detention is a notorious example of the laxity, with which our supreme court has undermined our democratic pretensions).

Let me return to Zul Vellani. I had been just then reading *Labyrinths* by Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986), the nearly blind Argentinian librarian, who had included his famous story "The

Babylonian Lottery" in this collection. I outlined the structure of the said story : how monetary reward is gradually replaced by injunctions of various natures so that fate or *niyati*, replaces history in remote Babylonian times, regretfully long gone by.

Zul and other friends were terribly impressed by my recital of the story. Zul immediately borrowed my copy of the *Labyrinths* which he failed to return. Just then the Films Division had asked Zul to do a commentary on a gigantic Bhutanese or Sikkimese *Thangka* painting, as large and wide as the facade a two-story building in the capital Thimpu or Gangtok. Since no one in the Films Division knew anything about Bhutanese or Sikkimese art, or about any non-Western art tradition, they had the documentary on their hands. They suggested that for the gigantic *Thangka* ceremonially unrolled with a dance performance in a monastic square, the sound-track may remain silent.

I gave a short lecture to Zul and company about *Thangka* Painting, Tantra Art, Bhutanese-Sikkimese culture traits, Himalayan, Ladakhi and Tibetan art cultures and related matters.

Zul wanted me to "script" the commentary he would mouth for Films Division. But Films Division first needed an official Central Government clearance of my name as script-writer. The necessary application was made by Zul Vellani and the FD team. I visited the FD headquarters at Peddar Road several times and special screenings of the *Thangka* documentary were arranged for my benefit. However, after a few weeks, an official prohibitory order was received.

In the meantime, Zul had taken me to Kaifi Azmi's Janki Kutir bungalow complex at Juhu, where I was received very graciously by H.K. Hangal, Shabana Azmi and others. Shabana served us tea and snacks. They wanted me to speak about Bernard Shaw, whose play they were planning to stage. I spoke about Shaw and his petty-bourgeois proclivities, especially his admiration of powerful dictators like Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. My remarks were not well received. The Azmi group had gone too far in their preparations to turn back on an admirer of Stalin.

Anyway, the experience chastened all of us. Zul realised that he could 'steal' my ideas and words, but could not give me credit for the Grand Cottage-frontage size *Thangka* of Thimpu (or was it Gangtok?) in an honest and decent manner, as he wanted to

do. I could not give more time to Zul, who in the meantime, was rehearsing Amar Jariwala (Sanjeev Kumar) for a movie role, that never saw the light of day. Zul had a tragic fate written all over him. I returned to Akar and its problems with Indian classical musical notations being "interdicted from the ad columns of the *Times of India daily*.

I had almost forgotten this careful preservation of the colonial legacy in "free" India. I record it with pleasure since I know that such a comprador regime that preserves the rotten British legacy so fanatically, is quite ripe for an immediate explosive end.

I have travelled a long way and made many jottings over the last forty years. I would draw the reader's attention, *inter alia*, to the five years during which I wrote for and edited the revived *Mankind*, 1995-2000.

There are many more additions and omissions to the autobiographical chapters which are welling up within me, and which must be dealt with. But this chapter has already grown large and I will take up these additional topics in the next Chapter 4.

Vinayak Purohit

* b. 1927, Kolkata

*Freedom fighter, 1942 August Movement; compound fracture of the skull due to police lathi, 9.9.42 at Shivaji Park, Mumbai; thrice arrested : once on charge of attempting to burn a policeman alive; again for production, distribution and possession of illegal literature; third time detention without trial, Worli Jail, Mumbai. Trade unionist, 1948-52, as General Secretary, Bombay Press Employees' Union; rejoined Socialist Party, 1956, as Lohia founded the party in Dec. 1956.

*Graduation in B.A. (Hons.) with History, Economics and Politics, Mumbai University, 1948; Ph.D for *Arts of Transitional India, 20th Century* , published by Popular Prakashan, in 2 Vols, 1986-88; Senior Fellow, ICSSR and UGC 1976-80; Visiting Professor, Film and Television Institute of India, Pune, 1976-85; Visiting Professor, Punjab University, Chandigarh, 1980-82; Visitor, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1981-82; Visiting Professor, Chalmers Institute, Gottenberg, and Royal Technical Institute, Stockholm, 1982; Visiting Scientist, CSIR 1980-82; Consultant, ILO Project, Maharashtra, 1983-85.

*Art, Architectural, Music, Dance, Drama, Film and Literary critic from mid-fifties for *Sanskriti, Design, Times of India, Free Press Journal, Hindustan Standard, Dharmayug, Samakaleen*, etc.

*Revived Lohia's *Mankind*, from Pune 1995-2000.

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