

New Indian Playwrights

A Marxist intellectual, facing an inquiry, stands by his commitment, even as the forces ranged against him rake up a past that is a long and painful story of humiliation, betrayal and failure. In this widely performed play, the public and the private, the ideological and the emotional interpenetrate to make this exposure/self-discovery of a highly sensitive individual a piece of intellectual history—so characteristic of its author, the Marathi playwright G. P. Deshpande, a leading Marxist intellectual himself and Professor of Chinese Studies at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

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A MAN IN DARK TIMES
LIDDHIVASTA DHARMAHALA

G. P. Deshpande

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G. P. Deshpande
A Man in Dark Times

NEW INDIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Badal Sircar, *Three Plays*

Vijay Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal*

Mahasweta Devi, *Five Plays*

Utpal Dutt, *The Great Rebellion*

Satish Alekar, *The Dread Departure*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Two Plays*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Party*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Old Stone Mansion*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Autobiography*

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar,

The Right to Rule and The Domain of the Sun

Chandrasekhar Kambar, *Jokumaraswami*

A MAN IN DARK TIMES
(*Uddhwasta Dharmashala*)

G P Deshpande

Translated from the Marathi by
SHANTA GOKHALE



CALCUTTA 1990



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Introduction

Govind Purushottam Deshpande (b. 2 August 1938), Professor of Chinese Studies at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and a leading Marxist intellectual, has obvious affiliations with Sridhar Vishwanath Kulkarni, the protagonist of his first play, *Uddhwasta Dharmashala* (literally, The Shattered Caravanserai), which the playwright himself renamed for this English version *A Man in Dark Times* after Hannah Arendt's *Men in Dark Times*. Neither Deshpande nor Kulkarni would fit the bill for the dogmatic radical, as it has been traditionally spelt out by anti-Communists and journalists. With their commitment to the Marxist ideology and the cause of social change, they carry with them a profound ethical sense, a concern for the morally right. Though the more practical demands of daily politics make their tribe an embarrassing encumbrance for the new generation of the left, bent on organization for power, they retain their primary convictions intact. In a recent conversation with me, Deshpande reacted with irritation against those who charged him with being one of those 'airy fairy' liberals, and read in Kulkarni's stance a disenchantment or disillusionment with the Marxist project. As he insisted, 'Kulkarni still functions as a Communist; he organizes the lower grade employees of the university into a union, and remains a source of inspiration, ideas and support for every single radical programme in and around the campus.'

In fact, his refusals to 'name' those with whom he had been involved in his radical ventures build up to a singular gesture of solidarity against authority. In his preface to the play, Deshpande acknowledges his indebtedness to the proceedings of the notorious House Committee on Un-American Activities that investigated alleged Communist infiltration of the American motion picture industry in 1947. Bertolt Brecht, one of the last witnesses subpoenaed by the Committee, was asked—as Kulkarni is asked by the informal inquiry committee—'Have many of your writings been based upon the philosophy of Lenin and Marx?' Brecht answered, 'No; I don't think that is quite correct but, of course, I studied, had to study as a playwright who wrote historical plays, Marx's ideas about history. I do not think intelligent plays today can be written without such study. Also, history written now is vitally influenced by the studies of Marx about history.' Like Kulkarni again, Brecht had come to the Committee ready with a written statement that the Committee, like the inquiry committee here, chose to ignore. The refusal to 'name' has come to be defined, after the HUAC hearings in 1947 and the Jeanson trial in 1960, as a moral prerogative of the radical

intellectual who considers himself to be one of the unacknowledged legislators of the world.

The trial format enables Deshpande to draw up his protagonist's life, continuously shuffled and reshuffled and sifted and evaluated by the protagonist himself and his judges, as well as to underscore the resistance in the gesture of refusal to 'name'. However, he has to break out of the constraints of the format to allow Kulkarni to come to terms with his failures in a privacy which the inquiry committee invades so mercilessly. The flashbacks have a fluidity that crystallizes towards the close of the play in two sequences that grow beyond the more realistic idiom of the play. In the first of these two sequences, Kulkarni and P.Y. step out of the bounds of the inquiry to make their statements, no longer playing the cat-and-mouse game of the inquiry, laying all their cards on the table for the first time. The deliberate stylistic lift serves to pose the issues more clearly, as a political play should. In the second of these non-realistic sequences, Kulkarni recalls/re-enacts a conversation in prison among a group of politicals, something that did not actually take place, a piece of wishing rather than dreaming.

Deshpande's handling of the two modes, the realistic and the non-realistic, has a sophistication that gets lost if the interrogators are treated as caricatures or the inquiry is turned into a farce. The facade of ceremony showing occasional cracks gives power a mask that only highlights the deadly honesty of the man who faces it.

Like Kulkarni again, Deshpande is a 'wordsmith', a writer in love with the Marathi language and its tradition of bhakti poetry, a tradition of spirituality growing out of popular consciousness. Dr Shreeram Lagoo, who directed the first production in Marathi and acted the lead, found Kulkarni's speeches 'beautifully written though the language is often highly Sanskritized—perhaps a little beyond the comprehension of most people. There were certain words and phrases which even stumped me. I had to look up dictionaries to find out their meanings. Equally, the audience might also find them incomprehensible. But I am of the belief that if the actor knows the exact meaning of what he is saying, he manages to get it across to the audience—at least the gist of it.' ¹ For Deshpande, the language is more a repository of values than a mere medium for communication, and his concern with the language is part of his larger concern with the purity of the ideology.

With *Ek Vajoon Gela Ahe* (Past One o'Clock), its title drawn from a poem found in Mayakovsky's pocket after his suicide in 1930, and *Andhar Yatra, Uddhwasta Dharmashala* is part of a political trilogy that explores the threats to ideology. *Ek Vajoon* takes off from the occasion of a veteran political leader, a Communist, celebrating his seventy-fifth birthday with his family, affected and disaffected by his politics, and

climaxes with his youngest son, a Naxalite, turning his mad rage against father and family. With his study of the craft of those in power in *Andhar Yatra*, Deshpande seems to show a positive respect for the new generation of young radicals, often lumped together under the generic denomination of Naxalites, represented in *Uddhwasta* by Samant and in *Ek Vajoon* by Uddhav, their spontaneity itself becoming a value defined against the strategies of/for power. But against them Deshpande will always keep standing the 'low-flying eagles' from an earlier generation, idealists flawed and defeated by circumstances, but idealists still. Behind Nana in *Ek Vajoon* one can see the unmistakable shadow of S.A. Dange!

A historian of ideologies and ideas, Deshpande has recently contributed the scripts for three episodes of Shyam Benegal's TV serial, *The Discovery of India*, devoted to Chanakya, Shivaji and Phule, and is reworking these into three plays which could provide models for the modern history play in India. Through all his works, from the political trilogy to the historical trilogy, Deshpande offers views and critiques of the individual enmeshed and yet struggling in dark times. As he claimed recently, 'I think I can claim that I have created the genre of the play of ideas or the intellectual play in Marathi.' Contrasting his works with Tendulkar's, he said : 'Basically Tendulkar handles human relationships and in the process ideas get thrown up. I would submit that in my plays there is a more organic and symbiotic relationship between human beings and ideas.' ²

SAMIK BANDYOPADHYAY

1. Interviewed by Shanta Gokhale, for Paul Jacob (ed.), *Contemporary Indian Theatre*, New Delhi : Sangeet Natak Akademi 1989, p. 119.
2. Interviewed by N.S. Jagannathan, for *Contemporary Indian Theatre*, pp.106-7.



Author's Preface

1

This preface needs a preface. Marathi dramatists have as a rule been quite reticent about drama. Hence I ought to first explain why I have chosen to strike a clamorous note against this complacent calm around me.

The last decade has seen the emergence of a 'new' theatre in Marathi. 'New theatre' is not, perhaps, the right phrase. For what I mean is that in the last few years the audience has woken up to an awareness of the different aspects of theatre, viz. direction, stage design, light and sound etc. They have come to realize that a theatrical event is more than its script. People have started going to the theatre to watch the work of a particular director. (Many a time have I thus ended up suffering a mediocre play!) There is at last the understanding that theatre is a collective making, with the creative process at work on different levels simultaneously. To go by the reminiscences of people from the twenties and thirties, the director did not have this dominant position then, when interest in theatre centred on the dramatist, the actors, music—and, above all, on the word. The director has come to have his own place only recently. The 'new' awareness of theatre sees in it a genre that combines literature, music, dance and the other performing arts. Predictably, people expect more from theatre now. Our tolerance for the mediocre in theatre seems to be ebbing. (Something that cannot be said about poetry.) This may not be that universal as yet, but actually theatre now does get, occasionally at least, the special kind of audience for which it is meant.

The way I look at it, there is no such thing as a specifically 'elite' or 'mass' appeal. I am yet to see a play that has 'reached the masses'. I do not think that I quite understand this phenomenon of 'an art reaching the masses'. All those who talk this language mean many different things. So let us not get into it. The point is that the availability of a special, limited audience alone can ensure a process of creative change in theatre.

In my opinion, drama, in the ultimate analysis, is a genre of literature. Words written or pronounced at an artistic level inevitably become literature. In fact, I suspect that plays are more read than actually seen. I have not seen any of Ibsen's or Wesker's plays. Why quote foreign examples? Back home, though I have read all of Khadilkar's plays, *Sawai Madhavrao Yancha Mrityu* is the only one I have seen.

This preface is aimed primarily at the reader who has to experience the play unaided by any directorial handiwork. When he reads a play as a play, should he not be provided with something in place of the visual representation to ensure that he does not feel cheated out of what the

audience gets? A preface can never be a substitute for the total visual experience of a play. But a friendly dialogue before the play opens may help build up some kind of mood.

However, that is only one reason for the preface, which is not ultimately meant for readers alone, but for the audience too. The play reflects a social reality, though all its references are not so explicit in the performance. That reality itself has a right to speak to the audience, and there are still doubts as to whether the playwright can step out of the framework of the play and say something different about it; for it may in the process circumscribe its scope unwittingly. Once a play is written, the playwright's comments on it can be unnecessarily restrictive, overbearing or even elusive. With all this at the back of my mind, I turned to the play a year and a half after it was written and tried to elaborate on its inherent social content. My word on the play is not final in any sense, but only an attempt to look into its beginning and end. This should be enough by way of a preface to the preface that follows.

2

When in retrospect one takes a look at the socio-political development in Maharashtra over the last four decades, the question of leadership comes to the fore immediately. What becomes clearly evident at once is that in society, politics and culture, leadership has invariably gone to very small people. There is not a single leader in any of these fields who rises to Himalayan heights. All those one sees are mere hillocks who, funnily enough, consider themselves Himalayan. Those dabbling in petty politics at the zila parishad (district board) level rate themselves on par with the Lokamanya. Writers of a handful of lyrics would like to be called great poets. Mere poetasters measure their poetic talents against Dnyanadeo's; writers of a dialogue or two fondly nurse the illusion of being either a Shakespeare or a Beckett reborn (depending, of course, on how well versed in western literature/theatre they would like to appear). People running an organization in some district or other think of themselves as harbingers of revolution in this country of 800 million people. Writers of 1500 word articles on political issues consider themselves prophets of the nation's future (preferably on an all-India level). While such pygmies masquerading as great men are proliferating all over the country, the observation that those in high places are not necessarily great is proving to be truer than ever before in Maharashtra today.

The result can be summed up as acute bankruptcy of thought. Never was the Marathi language so struck with bombastic slogans and worn

out cliches. Words, reduced to rolling sounds without any substance, or meaningless pebbles, fall out of the mouths of these so-called great people in a studied, well-rehearsed manner, and are habitually met with corresponding applause in the same well-worn manner. A few self-proclaimed intellectuals sing paeans to their own martyrdom to vested interests. And then a poet, equally self-deceptive, congratulates himself over his destruction of verbose hypocrisy, celebrating a victory that was never his.

Not that there is no greatness around. But it is largely defeated greatness (with a few exceptions). If there is a flash of glory somewhere, some thought, some initiative, it flows from these losers. For they may not be able to create a new future, but they keep the hope for tomorrow alive. Even in their defeat, and in the indifference with which society treats them, it is clear that they have been through something more precious than the so-called 'successful' writers, politicians and social thinkers.

Still, I don't intend to sing the glories of those defeated. For a defeat, after all, is a defeat, for which there are clear, logical reasons. For their defeat the losers have both their inherent weaknesses and the social tendencies they represent to blame. Passing over their weaknesses to glorify them would again be self-deception. Defeat is no desirable end and should not be hailed. This can only amount to sentimentality and nothing else. However, the fact that there are a few eagles among the cackling chickens need not be overlooked.

Lenin once said of Rosa Luxemburg, 'an eagle can sometimes fly lower than a chicken, but a chicken can never rise to the heights of an eagle. Rosa Luxemburg in spite of her mistakes. . . was, and is, an eagle.'

3

The quotation from Lenin appears in Professor Netti's biography of Rosa Luxemburg, a comprehensive review of which forms part of Hannah Arendt's famous book, *Men in Dark Times*, in which she argues that the last four decades of the nineteenth century were 'dark times' for Europe. In her book she writes about a few thinkers who in that period of darkness kept the torch burning and hopes alive. While I do not fully share Ms Arendt's world view, I do appreciate this particular concept of 'dark times'.

When one thinks of present-day Marathi life one wonders whether it lies under one such spell of dark times. Under a spell like this there would be no glimpse of dazzling greatness anywhere, and the pettiness of those in high places would be all the more sickening. In this decline of

greatness, the presence of a few who have lost the battle stands out because it is their misfortune that there is something arresting about their greatness, something that holds attention for some time. Without the strength to change the reigning concept of victory, these melancholy eagles nonetheless do hold a tremendous attraction for the congregation of chickens. In the dark passage between Marx and Lenin, between the formulation of revolutionary theory and the first successful revolution, the defeat of Rosa Luxemburg was indeed something that sharpened the edges of sensitivity and intellect. But then it is absolutely essential to examine this defeat closely.

Such people in dark times (not dark ages) have fascinated me for years. The reference to Arendt's book was only to explain this concept of dark times. My play has nothing else to do with it. Any number of books have been written about such people, with an overwhelming sense of gratitude, sometimes even attempting to evoke compassion for them. I have no such intention. What it is that compels these melancholy eagles to fly low is what the play seeks to explore—at an artistic level. Sridhar Vishwanath Kulkarni is a man in dark times.

4

Lenin's observation on the eagle flying low is, like all good observations, only a half truth. By 'flying low' Lenin was not suggesting 'stooping low' in any way. These people in dark times have all along been searching for some orbit, a search that has most often concluded in failure. The irony is that their failure to find an orbit is in fact the failure of society alone. In an era dominated by mediocrities, hypersensitivity and foresight are the first casualties. Though this does not justify the failures that, perhaps, are only inevitable, the presence of the eagles ultimately exposes the mediocrities.

The notion of eagles flying low is invoked to explain the failure of these people to bring about any significant transformation. And yet, set against the hillocks boasting of Himalayan heights, even this flying low is flying through the galaxy. And then, the more successful successors are obliged to acknowledge the contributions of those vanquished predecessors or contemporaries just as Lenin acknowledged Rosa Luxemburg. It is left to us to identify for ourselves from amongst those who are apparently successful the hillocks basking in popularity and the defeated souls blessed with golden foresight.

This is one question that should be posed again and again. I do not think it has ever been raised in literature. The failure of the ascetic eagles to find their orbits calls for an explanation. It is futile to shed tears over

defeated greatness. It amounts only to a miserable attempt at keeping one's slate clean without displeasing the hillocks. Celebrations of anniversaries and centenaries are products of a sense of guilt, and should in fact be banned. The point is not so much why they lose as what they have in them that causes them to be so defeated. This is the quest that this play undertakes, through a personality called Sridhar Vishwanath Kulkarni.

5

There is something peculiar to such soul-shattering defeat. There is so much to the personality of such losers that those who watch from a distance cannot help wondering about the defeat. Kulkarni is one of these multifaceted personalities. At one level he has his moorings deeply anchored in history, abiding ties he cannot escape. I have a feeling that it is these abiding ties that keep the eagles flying low. At times it is a cultural limitation, at other times it can be an extremely sensitive emotional attachment. Whatever it be, it has the power to hold them. That is why, perhaps, their search for a new horizon or a new orbit remains unfinished; I would call it a *fait accompli* because I do not know what else to call it.

This play does not present the Kulkarni case as a piece of sheer misfortune, for the multiple dimensions that surface serve to reveal the talent and creativity of a genius who undertakes a quest through politics and art, his exploration ranging from saint poetry to *Das Kapital*. The route is, of course, full of pitfalls. The play adds up to a graph of his trials and errors, punctuated with struggle, self-inflicted agony, and shifts of direction, through all of which grows a kind of shattering awareness. Personalities like Kulkarni, even as they contribute substantially to the world, live only a few intense moments, before they end up as losers. The outward defeat can be explained away somehow, but the 'weakness' that I have pointed to eventually becomes clearly evident. Sridhar Kulkarni visualizes this in his son's prospects. It is there that his role ends. To put it in a nutshell, this is the first time he confronts the truth with an open, clear mind. He realizes, as his father had once told him, that once one understands the truth, 'death comes easier'.

6

So much for the defeat of Sridhar Vishwanath. But who are those who win? In our social reality it is the hillocks that eventually emerge victorious. P.Y. is a typical representative of this class. Success to the

established does not come accidentally. That such people attain their status by accident or some foul play is again a popular misconception. Their being corrupt is only a corollary factor. This is one point Professor P.Y., who is a member of the legislative council, would like to harp on assiduously. Even if some magic wand waves away all the misappropriation and corruption from our politics, will it really be any different? Will it make an iota of difference either to politics or to the people's plight? Politics is, after all, a game of social and economic forces. Those who play it successfully begin with a proper estimation of their strength which in its turn helps them design their strategies and define their own roles. Thus as a fact to be clearly understood, those whom we call the established have only played the game of politics according to sound logic.

As of today, the opposition in India does not show much awareness of this. Hence they are swept off their feet whenever those in high places twirl or twist a pawn in an unexpected direction. In 1974 this does not call for any elaboration. Professor P.Y. pinpoints this. When those who should throw a challenge are lost in confusion, the insolence of the establishment naturally shoots up. P.Y. hits the nail on its head. And that is why, at the end of the inquiry, Sridhar Vishwanath is left hopelessly nonplussed.

7

That it is the bureaucracy alone that constitutes the establishment is again a half-truth. The Establishment as a rule is clever and smart, qualities that the great do not usually have. In bureaucracy one needs the smartness to rise in the hierarchy. In this country several movements, especially Leftist movements, have ended up creating new bureaucracies. This, perhaps, is a universal phenomenon, or else Mao would not have launched on his saga of the Cultural Revolution in China, with disastrous results. The bureaucracy has its peculiar logistics which it expects others to follow. Those who don't, have to pay the price. But those who tackle them sagaciously succeed, in the conventional sense. Not that there is nothing to such people. I make no such suggestion. In fact, I am enthralled with Saraswati's persona. While it is true—and important—that she is sharp, intelligent, dedicated to the movement, still, at a particularly vulnerable moment she falls short of the courage to let herself go before the bureaucratic challenge. The day Sridhar discovers this, the game is over for him. He keeps on looking back, but Saraswati does not.

I started writing this preface in 1974. It is now 1989. In the process this preface has become quite different from what it was intended to be, an essay for everyone, or perhaps for none.

In classical China, the Eight-legged Essay was quite an institution. In the Indian tradition *ashta* (eight) has its own significance. The *ashtapadi* (the eight-legged) is one term which occurs quite frequently, most prominently in the aesthetics of Indian music. In keeping with the oriental tradition, therefore, I have made this essay into an eight-legged one.

Nearly fifteen years after the play was written, an English translation is being published. So a few lines for 1989 are in order. The Sangeet Natak Akademi, the country's national academy for music, dance and theatre, had organized in September this year a Nehru birth centenary drama festival in Delhi. Fifteen landmarks of Indian dramatic writing in eight languages were presented at the Festival. *Uddhwasta Dharmashala* was one of them. In a document on contemporary Indian theatre published by the Akademi on the occasion, at least two directors refer to this play in their interviews. Dr Shreeram Lagoo says that I was a bit 'shaky' on the politics of the play. I am not certain what he means by that. As far as I remember the only thing I was 'shaky' about was the year in which the Communist Party of India had called off the armed uprising of the peasants in Telengana in Andhra Pradesh. Shyamanand Jalan, who produced this play in Hindi in Calcutta, claims that I was neither right nor left when I wrote this play. Nothing could be further from the truth. I can only hope that the readers will get to know my political position when they read the book.

Dharani Ghosh, who interviewed Jalan for the Akademi document, says that he did not like the play because it is about a liberal, and there is something 'airy fairy' about liberals. One does not quite see the logic of an objection like this. There is a degree of ambivalence in Sridhar's attitude. But that does not make him (or me) any the less intensely political. Nor is ambivalence to be confused with uncertainty. The ambivalence in Sridhar's attitude relates to the organized Left in India, and not to Left politics as a whole. It is important to see this. Anyway, this is not meant to be a reply to these friends. It is only a reaction *en passant*. Maybe it will be useful to somebody wanting to produce this play afresh a good fifteen years after it was first written.

Finally I should mention here that the documents of the House Committee on Un-American Activities of the American House of Representatives have contributed a lot to the inquiry scenes. In many ways these documents have served as an important source for this play.

Many people have been responsible for the play being written, staged and finally published as a book. It is impossible to name all of them. But some names have to be mentioned. Satyadev Dubey had organized a playwrights' workshop in Pune in the summer of 1973. It was there that the first draft of the play was read. Professor Ram Bapat and Vijay Tendulkar heard the draft and made several useful suggestions. All the participants in the playwrights' workshop reacted to this play, the reactions proving extremely useful to me in giving it its final shape. Dr Shreeram Lagoo and his artist-colleagues in Roopwedh made an excellent presentation of the play on stage. Ramdas Bhatkal and his Popular Prakashan published the Marathi version in book form.

Now Shanta Gokhale has done a remarkable translation of the play in English. Seagull Books have brought it to you. Samik Bandyopadhyay has taken an active and keen interest in the project. Arundhati Devasthale has translated this preface into English. I am grateful to all these friends.

G. P. DESHPANDE

Uddhwasta Dharmashala was first performed in the original Marathi by Roopwedh, Bombay at the Chhabildas School Hall on 28 October 1974, with the following cast :

KULKARNI	Shreeram Lagoo
V.C.	Anant Wartak
P.Y.	Eknath Hattangadi
KSHIRSAGAR	Kumar Apte
VELANKAR	Sumant Mastakar
SADUKAKA	Madhukar Naik
MAHADUKAKA	Keshav Deshpande
SARASWATI	Deepa Shreeram
MADHAVI	Rekha Sabnis
THE SON	Achyut Deshingkar
DIRECTION	Shreeram Lagoo
PRODUCTION CONTROL	Vishwas Khedekar
SETS	Kumar Sohoni
LIGHTS	Prakash Amberkar

A Hindi version, in Vasant Dev's translation, was staged by Mazma, Bombay, at the Chhabildas School Hall, in 1977, with the following cast :

KULKARNI	Om Puri
V.C.	Ngsceruddin Shah
P.Y.	Naresh Suri
KSHIRSAGAR	Ajay Galotia
VELANKAR	Athar Nawaz
SADUKAKA	Karan Razdan
MAHADUKAKA	Suhas Khandke
SARASWATI	Rohini Hattangady
MADHAVI	Abha Dhulia
THE SON	Madan Jain
DIRECTION	Om Puri
LIGHTS AND MUSIC	Sunil Shanbag

Yet another production in Hindi, in the same translation, was first performed on 19 May 1977 at the Shri Ram Centre, Delhi, by Abhiyan, Delhi, with the following cast :

KULKARNI

V.C.

P.Y.

KSHIRSAGAR

VELANKAR

SADUKAKA

MAHADUKAKA

SARASWATI

MADHAVI

THE SON

Om Puri

Jayanta Das

Subhash Gupta

Gulshan Kumar

Shailendra Goel

Tikal Walia

Bhupindra Kumar

Pawan Sikka

Ranjana

Daleep Sud

DIRECTION

LIGHTS

BACKSTAGE

Rajinder Nath

Sitangshu Mukherjee

Sushil Banerjee

Sudhir Pareek

Kamal Verma

Act One

Scene 1

The stage is in total darkness when the curtain goes up. The telephone rings loudly, as the lights come up. The VC answers.

- VC. Jambhekar here—the Vice-Chancellor. I see! All right! (Short pause.) Yes. Sir! you even remembered the date? You've called absolutely on time. The meeting will begin in a few minutes. Yes, the files were found . . . don't worry about that. You can depend on us to conduct the inquiry informally. What was that? Yes, of course. One has to be soft spoken if one wants to be a good academic! But you, sir, must be as hard as flint. That's the way it should be. Allow us to be as soft as flowers on your behalf. (Laughs.) It is very gratifying, sir, that you should be so concerned. No, no. Nothing to worry about at all, sir. OK! Yes, of course. I shall see you next week . . . good-bye, sir.

He replaces the receiver. The lights come on. The VC takes his seat. Velankar, the Registrar, sits a little behind him, P.H. Kshirsagar and Prof. P.Y. to one side. HE enters. All three welcome him in what would appear to be a sincere manner. Seeing through the falseness of their welcome, he also puts on an act of cordiality. He places himself on the opposite side of P.Y. and Kshirsagar. Thus the VC is in the centre, Velankar a little behind and to the side; the duo, P.Y. and Kshirsagar, further along on the same side and he alone on the other side. That is how they are now placed.

- VC. Come, Kulkarni. Sit down. I've been meaning to meet you for a long time. Finally the day has dawned. I asked Kshirsagar and P.Y., our M.L.C., also to come along. One hardly has decent conversations these days, leave alone discussions. Velankar, call for some coffee, will you? (Velankar goes out. Returns.) Done? Good.

The coffee should arrive at a convenient point during this scene. It should be passed around at least a couple of times in the course

of the inquiry according to the director's convenience.

- P.Y. Kulkarni, you were late by five minutes. You're known in the University for your punctuality. I was a little confused by your delay. This is not like Kulkarni at all, I thought. He's not a member of the legislative council like me! *(P.Y. is profoundly happy with his ability to laugh at himself.)*
- KSHIRSAGAR. P.Y., I must say your sense of humour remains the same as ever. Your election to the Council hasn't changed that one bit.
- P.Y. *(deeply gratified by Kshirsagar's praise, shrugs off the praise with a modest remark and then becomes suddenly businesslike).* So? What've you been doing lately, Kulkarni?
- HE. Jambhekar, could we just drop this informal act? It is quite unnecessary. It makes no difference to me. I know quite well that I have been asked here today for an inquiry. It's best that you get down to that business. You don't have to burn offerings to me before you start. Nor is there any need for you to try and prise information out of me, 'tactfully', as you appear to have decided to do. My life is an open book. Ask your questions. I'll give you the answers.
- VC. Kulkarni, don't get agitated, please. It is not such a simple business.
- HE. Quite right. So let's not make it more complicated than it is.
- P.Y. Kulkarni, you sound very angry.
- HE. Why? No. I'm absolutely cool as you must have noticed. P.Y., since your election to the Council, you seem to think anybody who sits across the floor from you is angry! Actually nobody even in the council is angry any more. They joke and laugh. They spout pious platitudes even when they are discussing starvation deaths! We just don't feel angry.
- VC. Kulkarni, you are aware that certain dangerous ideas have been gaining ground on the campus.
- HE. That's it! Much better to start this way. Then you don't feel awkward to ask, and I don't hesitate to answer.
- VELANKAR. Sir, shall I get a few official matters out of the way first?
- HE. Why not! Better still, let me clear them up. You can check them out in your file. Full name: Sridhar

Vishwanath Kulkarni. Date of birth: 18 September 1918. Place of birth: Jakatwadi, taluka Malshiras, district Solapur, State Maharashtra. Have been teaching Chemistry at this University since 1950. Am now Professor and Head of the Department. Jambhekar and I were in England together. He became a wrangler. I did my M.Sc. at London University and returned. Does that cover everything, Velankar?

VELANKAR. I don't have to be told that our 'Sir' was in England in those days. Why should that appear in *your* file?

HE. Of course not. There must be a different file for 'Sir'.

VC. Kulkarni, your little joke was unwarranted. You don't seem to realize that we've gathered here to help you. I appreciate your directness. But it is not always a virtue. As I was telling you, very dangerous ideas are gaining ground on the campus . . .

HE. Such as ?

VC. May I finish what I was saying? Our University was once known for its peaceful campus. In the last couple of years all that has changed. I am not going to mince words. This change is linked with you. We feel you are to some extent responsible for it. These things are on the increase. That's why I thought we could sit together and have a chat about them. P.Y. also agreed. Kshirsagar—

HE. Et cetera. Et cetera. Moreover, the Home Ministry and the Education Minister also have a special interest in the case. Maybe I'm being given a long rope because of P.Y.'s position in the Council and in the University. For old times' sake, so to say. Is it possible that you can still hear faint echoes of those times in the slogans you are now raising, P.Y.?

P.Y. ignores the comment but the VC is curious.

VC. What do you mean?

HE. P.Y. was once a progressive thinker. Ours is a very old acquaintance. We've had many long chats together. Remember, P.Y.? Those long sessions we had together after the country became independent? When we thought that the left movements in Maharashtra should come together and stand united, that there should be no rift between the mass movement and the organization of workers in cities. We had thought that a rift would harm both the movements. We'd decided to meet

Shankarrao—

Velankar stops in the middle of taking notes.

KSHIRSAGAR

and VELANKAR (*together*). You must use full names please—

HE. Shankarrao More. Shankarrao's Dabhad Thesis may not be a set text for the M.A. course, but surely you should know Shankarrao even without that, Kshirsagar. Shankarrao More was one of the founders of the Peasants and Workers Party.

KSHIRSAGAR. I thought you meant Shankarrao Deo. Of course I know Shankarrao More. I was confused only because you didn't give the full name.

HE. Did you hear that, P.Y.? Shankarrao Deo the Gandhian and Shankarrao More, the Marxist. Such a confusion over names should show you the difference between what could have been and what is! Anyway, that's not important. To come back to the story, P.Y. suddenly decided that he disagreed with Sridhar Vishwanath Kulkarni's proposal. We didn't meet Shankarrao. Of course, P.Y. continued working for some movement or the other for a few years. Then he quit. At the right time. His position today is the result of that sacrifice.

P.Y. (*angry*). Jambhekar, is this inquiry against me or against Kulkarni? This dissection of my personal history is quite uncalled for. It's not your job to do that.

VC. I'm sorry, P.Y. Briefly then, Kulkarni. Besides teaching Chemistry you are involved in many other activities on the campus. It's beyond me how people doing science find the time. I wouldn't have been surprised if you'd been teaching an arts subject.

HE. Oh dear! So you too suffer from the usual misapprehension! That it's the arts students who create problems—that the science students have no time to loaf! Really, Jambhekar! Surely you don't believe those tales, do you?

VC. What are you implying?

HE. Rebellion doesn't depend on having or not having time. It has to be in the blood—

VC. Anyway, let's get down to business. I'm not going to ask you about your education etc. Your father was a well-known man. Wasn't he a member of the Bombay Legislative Council?

HE. Yes. From 1946 until his death. That is, up to 1954.

- KSHIRSAGAR. Vishwanath Hari Kulkarni, the writer of the book *Gandhi and Tilak*—
- HE. That was my father. Who saw a continuity from Tilak to Gandhi. Who said his evening prayers and spun on the charkha devotedly every day. Who was an ardent believer and a patriot . . .
- VC. You don't sound particularly respectful.
- HE. How is respect or lack of it relevant to us here? I was merely giving Kshirsagar the information he wanted. Every word of what I have said is correct. My father was one hundred per cent honest in his religious faith, his nationalist faith, his faith in Tilak and his love for Gandhi. Such people have become rare these days. That is why one has to describe them with the accuracy one reserves for extinct species. As a student of science I did just that, without allowing my emotions to intervene.
- VELANKAR. How did you relate to him?
- HE. As a son to a father.
- KSHIRSAGAR. That's not a very useful answer.
- P.Y. Don't be dense, Kulkarni. Is it or isn't it true that you had sharp political differences with him?
- VELANKAR. Sir, there's one piece of evidence of great importance here. During the 1952 elections out there an article attacking him was published in a district newspaper under the pseudonym Hansakshiravivek. Now, the question specifically is, was that article written by Kulkarni?
- KSHIRSAGAR. It was a bad article.
- HE. Tell me, is Kshirsagar, the author of *Critical Reason*, any relation of yours?
- KSHIRSAGAR. No. Why do you ask?
- HE. I thought not. Your critical reason isn't particularly sharp.
- VELANKAR. I repeat, did you write that article?
- HE. No.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Who wrote it then?
- HE. I don't know.
- VELANKAR. According to our information, sir, four or five people used to write under that pseudonym and Kulkarni was one of them.
- VC. Is that true, Kulkarni?
- HE. Yes, it is.
- VC. Who were the others?
- HE. I will not tell you.

- P.Y. Meaning?
- HE. Meaning quite clearly that you may ask me anything you like about myself. Not about others. Unless you declare yourself to be an inquiry commission properly so constituted. Even then I'm not sure I'd answer—
- VC. Do you think we can't find out the other names without you?
- HE. Not at all! Velankar here might be able to give you some. He's just waiting for you to ask him!
- VC. You are saying, categorically, that you didn't write that article?
- HE. Yes.
- VC. Do you remember that it was soon after this article was published that your father's election meeting was disrupted?
- HE. Yes. But if you think there's a connection between the article and what happened, you're wrong.
- VC. Why?
- HE. Because that article couldn't have had such a strong effect. This country cannot be aroused with the written or spoken word—
- P.Y. You speak with such authority about the article and yet you claim that you didn't write it!
- HE. I do.
- P.Y. Were you in sympathy with the violent ideas that brought about the disruption of that meeting?
- HE. No. I am not a blind champion of violence. Nor was I so then. Is this you talking, P.Y.? My father's rival in the election belonged to your party, rather your former party. Actually I should be asking you whether you wrote that article—
- P.Y. Preposterous!
- HE. Quite right. You don't have it in you.
- VC. You are using offensive language, Kulkarni. You'd do well to avoid it. We're trying to help you. Our University has people of unimpeachable public character. I am sure you are one of them. If you could only answer calmly, without losing your temper—
- KSHIRSAGAR. Is it true that your relationship with your father had soured in the last two or three years of his life?
- HE. The words P.Y. used earlier are more correct. We had 'sharp differences'. I don't agree that our relationship 'had soured'. I always respected him. And still do.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Is it true that you campaigned against him?

- HE. Yes.
KSHIRSAGAR. And yet you insist you had nothing to do with the disruption of his meeting?
HE. That's right.
P.Y. What was your relationship with him like? I believe you were in jail when he died.
HE (*speaks with great emotion. As far as he is concerned the inquiry has stopped operating for these few moments*). I had differences of opinion with my father. In the turbulence of the 1952 elections, our voices were raised from opposite camps. Both of us had known this would happen. He saw how the new politics differed from the old. But habit kept him going in the old way. I never belonged there. In the chaos that surrounded us, our quarrel—our political quarrel—became painful for him. He disapproved of the leap I had taken. I could have explained things to him. He was a fighter. The politics of struggle and suffering and imprisonment to which he subscribed and the politics of the new generation weren't so radically different. He wouldn't have found it difficult to understand the politics of pain, rage and agitation. But there was no time. Fate didn't give me a chance. His life ended in 1954 with no explanations given. I wasn't even allowed to shed a few tears for him. In the eyes of the world, I did not have the right to do even that . . .

Darkness

Scene 2

His home. It's the day of the death anniversary rites for his father. The rites are over. He is with his two uncles.

- SADUKAKA. What time is your train ?
HE. There's still time. It goes at five.
MAHADUKAKA. It is good that you came, Sridhar.
HE. Well, of course, I hadn't said I wasn't coming.
SADUKAKA. When do you plan coming this way again? Try and find time from your busy life. You should write once in a while. Make a trip now and then.
MAHADUKAKA. Since you became a performing politician you've had no time for anything else!

- HE. Dada was a performing politician too.
- MAHADUKAKA. So this is Visu-dada's legacy, is it? Well, well!
- SADUKAKA. It's strange to hear people like *you*, who are out to pull down everything, talk of legacies.
- HE. Strange to you. Not to me.
- MAHADUKAKA. Oh? And where was this sense of gratitude in the last elections? What need was there for that outrageous public performance of the son opposing the candidature of the father?
- SADUKAKA. But my dear Bhau, his ideology doesn't acknowledge ancestors.
- MAHADUKAKA. Let's be happy that it acknowledges fathers.
- HE. Kaka, I'm not sure that even *you* know what you're talking about. Why have you been trying to needle me ever since I came? What am I supposed to be guilty of?
- MAHADUKAKA. This is a most unusual way of talking to an uncle. You people are out to pull down everything. What does this family mean to you? You sometimes forget that Visu-dada was our own eldest brother. I have seen what agonies he suffered over his only son's political bankruptcy.
- HE. Mahadukaka, I doubt if you'd ever begin to understand what politics is all about, leave alone the differences of opinion between Dada and me. It's true that we quarreled. But why talk about it today, his death anniversary?
- MAHADUKAKA. Why were you making those speeches then?
- HE. I do not wish to discuss the subject.
- MAHADUKAKA. I wish to. I had decided to ask you about it after the rites were over anyway. I was afraid there would be a hoo-ha again and we'd have to perform the rites ourselves. Just tell me, will you—where do these death anniversary rites fit into your ideology?
- HE. They don't.
- MAHADUKAKA. And yet you were good enough to grace the occasion!
- HE. Leave it be, Kaka. If you like I'll promise never to come again. But please don't get at me today of all days.
- MAHADUKAKA. Dear, dear, dear. Our brilliant nephew has suddenly developed a tender heart today. It is filled with profound gratitude for the father who sent him abroad to read and learn and grow. But such debts aren't repaid with eyes fixed somewhere in space—
- SADUKAKA. You weren't here at the time, Bhau. Dada had any amount of trouble getting a nomination for the

elections. It took a few trips to Bombay and one to Delhi to manage it. So this wise spark here read him a sermon about how the party was no longer his and how he wouldn't understand their politics. This oracle advised him to fight it, or quietly endure it!

MAHADUKAKA. Yes. Dada did mention some such thing.

Both know the whole story. But they want a repetition. Sadukaka continues.

SADUKAKA. These people felt he shouldn't get involved with something that was so contaminated with self-interest and corruption.

HE. Sadukaka, you may not know it, but Dada agreed with what I said. Only he kept repeating that he had spent his entire life in the movement. How could he quit? He said he had no choice but to stay with it. And so he had to go to Bombay and stand before Abbasaheb like a poor relation.

Forgets for a moment that he is talking to his uncles, lost in his own memories.

HE. Several factors need to work out together before you can get a nomination for the elections. For him, not a single one was working out. And so those trips to Bombay. He managed the nomination. But he came back a wounded man. I said to him, 'Dada, don't you realize what's happening? Don't let sentiments sway you. The new politics has its own logic. Different equations have been worked out now. You don't fit into them. Can't you see it?' He was silent for a while. Then said, 'I do. I see it very well.' Suddenly he remembered a saying of Lao-Tse's which he had read somewhere—'When you find the way, death becomes easier.' 'Now I am prepared for death,' he said. 'I have found the way.' And he went on to say many more things—some meaningless, some illogical. He spoke a great deal . . .

SADUKAKA. And yet you went and stood against him in the opposite camp. Or did you have Dada's blessings for that as well?

HE. No. He was a fighter after all. Whether right or wrong, once he was in the fray he made no compromises.

MAHADUKAKA. It would help quite a bit if you remembered that you were the cause of it all.

SADUKAKA. The cause of his final despair.

HE. Don't talk nonsense. He was never one to despair.

Uncle, he was a bigger man than you think.

MAHADUKAKA. Oh dear, no! It doesn't suit a leftist to be emotional.

HE. Shut up . . . I'm sorry.

MAHADUKAKA. Listen to him, Sadu-bhau. Listen to our nephew's language.

SADUKAKA. Bhau, there's more to these people than language. Their violence isn't merely verbal. They started a riot in the election meeting in Talawade.

HE. I wasn't responsible for that. I wasn't even in the district on that day. We were campaigning in Mann taluk. Don't blame us for other people's misdeeds.

SADUKAKA. You weren't there? Do you think we're babes in the wood? You plotted it all and now you pretend to have had nothing to do with it.

HE. Kaka, you're talking off the top of your head. How can I make you understand? I don't think you're in a fit state of mind to listen.

MAHADUKAKA. Oh! we are, we are. We'd like to hear it all. That is if you have anything worthwhile to tell us. The politics of young boys. With you as the one-eyed king amongst the blind. I'll eat while my brothers die. You're shrewd enough to plan things that way. Tell me what happened in the Talawade meeting, Sadu?

In the middle of Sadukaka's story which follows, Sridhar looks at the clock. He's angry. He leaves the room in disgust.

SADUKAKA. The meeting was to have been in the evening. Actually it was ten o'clock by the time we got to Talawade from the Dighi meeting. It was decided that we should have dinner at Rangrao Jadhav's place first. Dada said, it's Sankashti today. I won't eat just yet. Let the others eat. You know what it's like at Rangrao's. There were something like fifty people for dinner. One goat wasn't enough to go round. Dada's Sankashti was a godsend to people. They all fell to. By the time we reached the venue of the meeting it was nearing ten. Half a dozen petromax lamps had been lit. Fortunately Rangrao didn't hold forth for too long. Babasaheb, the taluk chairman, spoke for about ten or fifteen minutes. Then Dada spoke. His speech was like a *keertan*. It won over the audience instantly. But right then, thirty or forty people on bicycles suddenly appeared from nowhere. They raised slogans—'We don't want it, we don't want it, we don't want this government,' 'Down with Kulkarni. A vote

for Kulkarni is a vote against the peasantry.' The meeting broke up in confusion. Dada came out to them. But the cyclists encircled him. Then it started. The fight. You know Sawant's house, don't you? A stone came from somewhere out there. A petromax lamp broke. Dada began to shout, 'Please be calm. Please be calm.' He told the boys, you can speak after I've finished. We can both speak from the same platform. But those boys were in no mood for any understanding. One of them said, we won't let you get a single vote in Talawade. This hurt Dada. Sridhar's friend Medhekar was in the group. He asked him straight out, 'I may or may not get votes, but will you allow me to speak at least?' Medhekar said, 'No we won't . . .' A few more stones came flying. One of the boys was even injured a bit, I think. Another lamp in the square was broken. The meeting was totally disrupted. Dada returned to the dais. He said he'd stop the meeting. The meeting ended. This was the first and last time in Dada's entire political career that his speech went unheard—

Sridhar enters with a suitcase and a parcel of books.

- SADUKAKA. And the people who were responsible for it were he and his ruffian friends.
- MAHADUKAKA. Goodbye. Or better still, get out. I've just heard of your wonderful doings. What is that parcel?
- HE. They're books.
- MAHADUKAKA. You can't take those books.
- HE. Why not?
- MAHADUKAKA. Please explain it to the infant, Sadu. Walking off with Dada's books! You have no right to touch them. Dada treated them with a lot of care.
- HE. Kaka, I beg of you, don't do that. These memories are all I have now. I spent my most precious hours reading *Meghdoot* with Dada. I'm not asking for anything else. I've been yearning since yesterday, I don't know why, to read *Pandavpratap* again. His reading of the scriptures during the four months of fasting, that rich, and resonant poetry, Dada's sweet voice—those are the memories I want to cherish.

They practically surround him threateningly. He is deeply hurt.

- HE. Please listen to me, Kaka. Let me take this one memory with me. I won't look back after that. I've cut myself

away from so much. But how can I bear to give this up? I see Dada before my eyes now, the Dada who taught me Tukaram's song—'We'll sing and dance in emulation of you, dear Vithoba'. Kaka, I beg of you, don't take this treasure away from me . . .

Sadukaka snatches away the parcel of books.

HE. Dada . . . Dada . . .

Scene 3

The light comes up once again on the scene of the inquiry.

- HE. I have a rough idea of the kind of information you may be looking for. I've written out a statement accordingly. I'll put it before you, Jambhekar. Better still, I could read it out. Otherwise, P.Y. and Kshirsagar will never find the time to read it. *(Hands over the statement to the VC. The VC passes it on to Velankar.)*
- VC. We'll read the statement if necessary only after you've answered our questions.
- P.Y. Are you a member of the Progressive Writers' Association, Kulkarni?
- HE. I agreed to this inquiry, P.Y., because I wanted to co-operate with you people. The information you want is all there in that statement. But I suggest you don't stretch my willingness to co-operate too far! For years attempts are being made to break up this association. You are part of the attempt. I have no wish to help you in this activity. There are various forms of control. Your intention to control me is quite evident. But I shall not let you use me to control the organization.
- VC. The question, Kulkarni, is quite simple. Just say yes or no and you are through.
- HE. But all the information is there in my statement. Such questions never end with yesses and noes.
- VC. Am I to take it that you are not going to answer this simple question?
- HE. No. I am going to answer it.
- P.Y. What are you waiting for then? Let's have it.
- HE. Jambhekar, I don't think this question can be answered with a mere yes or no. Personally, I am surprised that

such a question can be asked in a free, democratic country like ours. I must know first why it is being asked.

VC. We could discuss that. But for the moment only answer whether you are or are not a member of the Progressive Writers' Association. I see no cause here to deliver speeches and plan strategies.

HE. I am not delivering speeches. This time you expect me to answer this question. Another time you might expect me, equally informally of course, to tell you whether I believe in this godman or that guru.

VC. What a strange way to interpret P.Y.'s question! There's no possibility of our asking anybody that question today or any other day. You know that, Kulkarni. We wouldn't do anything so asinine!

HE. But—

VC. Only tell us whether you wish to answer P.Y.'s question or not.

HE. But, Jambhekar—

VC. You are a resident of free India!

HE. That is why P.Y.'s question—

VC. It should-therefore not be difficult for you to answer P.Y.'s question.

HE. Of course it isn't difficult. But the fact that I am asked the question at all in Democratic India and that three eminent members of the University community like you should be asking it is what makes me feel concerned.

P.Y. So, you don't wish to answer the question. Velankar, please make a note of my comment.

HE. Also note down what I have been saying, Velankar.

VC. Kshirsagar, your question—

KSHIRSAGAR. Is it true that you have started something called the Revolutionary Teachers' Organization in the University?

HE. I know nothing of such an organization.

VC. Don't split hairs, Kulkarni. Velankar, let's have those notes on the organization. Read out the four lines I have marked.

VELANKAR (*reads*). This organization is quite informal. It is described as a Marxist-Leninist study group. The group has established small cells in several University-affiliated colleges. One of the leaders of the organization is Professor S.V. Kulkarni—

HE. 'Informal organization' is a meaningless phrase.

KSHIRSAGAR. Whether a phrase is meaningless or not is not an

- important issue.
- HE. Kshirsagar, you've just stated that a phrase in a note written by the VC is not an important issue. Just think what that means.
- VC. Please don't change the subject. You will lose nothing by answering questions directly, Kulkarni. You may even stand to gain by it.
- HE. What is the question?
- KSHIRSAGAR. Are you connected with this organization?
- HE. Which organization? To my knowledge the organization you are talking about doesn't exist.
- KSHIRSAGAR. What are those camps you organize every summer vacation then? Where do they belong? Who are the participants? Isn't their number increasing?
- HE. Easy, easy. You're going at me like a sten gun! Now if you'd asked me right at the beginning about the camps I attend, I'd have told you. But you started off on some organization—
- KSHIRSAGAR. According to our information these camps are part of this organization. Is that true?
- HE. It is possible.
- VC. What do you mean by it is possible?
- HE. I mean that if camps are being held, it follows that they are being sponsored by some organization. If you know anything more about it, please tell us, Kshirsagar.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Don't put on the Hamlet act, Kulkarni.
- HE. My dear Kshirsagar, what I am saying is all method and no madness. There's no big surprise in such an organization existing. Only, I have nothing to do with it.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Then how is it that you are specifically named in the note Velankar read?
- HE. Shouldn't you ask Velankar this question? But since you ask me, I'll answer. Velankar read my name because it is there in the note. It is there in the note because Jambhekar put it there. And Jambhekar is the Vice-Chancellor. Therefore Registrar Velankar had no choice but to read what was written.
- VC. I think you're being rather nasty.
- HE. I am just being factual as far as I can see. Jambhekar, I have a lot of respect for you. There are very few people who continue to keep in touch with Mathematics once the mantle of wranglership falls upon them. You are one of those rare people who did. So don't misunderstand

- me. The reason why you put that information in the note is—
- VC. There's no need to go into that. We're not here to collect information about me. Let's get on with it, Kshirsagar.
- KSHIRSAGAR. You still haven't told us how you are connected with this group, Kulkarni.
- HE. There's not much to tell. I get invited to the camps. I go. If the organizers ask me to speak, I speak. I advise them.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Who are these people?
- HE. I will not answer that question. To use Jambhekar's phrase, this meeting has been called to collect information about me. Not about others.
- VELANKAR. One of their circulars states belief in Marxism-Leninism.
- HE. So?
- KSHIRSAGAR. Do you share this belief?
- HE. What does that mean?
- KSHIRSAGAR. Do you call yourself a Marxist?
- HE. If you people and this University were willing to allow me to call myself what I chose, this inquiry would not have been instituted.
- VC. You are evading the question once again.
- HE. I'm being asked senseless questions once again.
- VC. Could you state your meaning more clearly?
- HE. Now here is Professor P.Y., the M.L.C. who believes in Democratic Socialism. Or so he claims. Would you start an inquiry about that?
- P.Y. I'd rather you didn't discuss my ideological beliefs.
- HE. I'm not doing that. I'd require a really powerful magnifying glass to see your ideological beliefs. I doubt if anybody would ask me questions about why I enjoy reading *Amritanubhav* or why Tukaram is my favourite poet. Why are questions asked only about faith in Marxist ideology? I like seeing Hindi films. I *believe* strongly in Helen's cabaret dances. Kshirsagar, please rid yourself of this all-encompassing word *belief*.
- VC. In short, you claim you are not in any way responsible for this organization.
- HE. No. I have an interest in the organization. I have accepted every invitation this organization has given me. All I'm saying is that I am not a founder or office-bearer of this organization. Therefore, it would be wrong for me to answer any questions about the organization, or

- rather, wrong for you to take the answers as given. I hope I'm making myself clear.
- VC. Kulkarni, this organization invites you. Sometimes, you advise them. Yet you say you are not connected with the organization. You do not wish to answer the question whether you call yourself a Marxist. That's fine by us. Your negative responses are significant. You will at least admit that you have studied and continue to study Marxism.
- HE. Yes, I have been guilty of that terrible crime. I still am. A Bombay newspaper has commented editorially on the degeneration of this University, tracing it to my Marxism. What do you feel about that?
- VC. I have not made any such statement.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Sir, I think Kulkarni should be asked questions about his knowledge of Marxism-Leninism. (*Waits for the VC's approval. Continues speaking when the VC shows approval.*) Kulkarni, when did you start studying the subject and how did you come to study it?
- HE. I'll tell you. Gladly. When I was in England the students had a study circle. There was also a thing called the Left Book Club which had a large membership.
- VELANKAR. Could you spell that for me, Doctor?
- HE. Left—L—E—F—T Book Club.
- P.Y. Do you recollect having studied the *Communist Manifesto* in this club?
- HE. Velankar, here's the spelling—C—O—M—M—U—N—I—S—T M—A—N—I—F—E—S—T—O.
- VELANKAR (*conscious of the sarcasm*). Oh, thanks. I was about to ask you.
- P.Y. Yes, Kulkarni?
- HE. I don't remember too clearly.
- P.Y. Was *The State and Revolution* one of the books you studied?
- HE. Might have been. It's difficult to say which of the classics I read as part of that course of study and which later. But P.Y., you must have read these books too.
- P.Y. (*displeased*). Yes. But we got out of all that very soon.
- HE. That of course is quite evident. Jambhekar, you and I had a chat once in London about the Left Book Club. Remember? You were rather curious, then, about the whole business.
- VC. I've never been within a mile of this Left Book Club. I do not recall the conversation you mention. Kindly do

- not cross-examine me.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Were you ever or are you still a member of the Party?
- HE. No.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Never ?
- HE. What does the word 'no' mean, Kshirsagar?
- P.Y. Were you ever a 'member at large' of the Party?
- KSHIRSAGAR. What is a 'member at large'?
- HE. I'll tell you. When a man in an important position is connected with the Party, he is more useful to the Party if he isn't a member. Thus, while he is as much a member of the party as anybody else, his name does not appear in the records as such. If Jambhekar, for instance, wants to join the Party—
- VC. God forbid! Be kind enough to use other names, Kulkarni.
- HE. He would probably be a member at large.
- P.Y. My question concerned the kind of membership you hold of the Party, do you understand? If you do understand, please answer.
- HE. I am not a member of the Party.
- VC. Have you never been connected in any way with the Party?
- HE. That would be difficult to avoid even if you wanted to, in this age of loudspeakers.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Could you explain that please?
- HE. Politics is like an all-consuming monster now. Its shadow manages to fall on you one way or another.
- P.Y. You have still not answered my question.
- VELANKAR. Sir, Srimati Saraswati Vaidya, once Mrs Saraswati Kulkarni, and member of the Party State Committee, has always been a Party member.
- KSHIRSAGAR. I think Kulkarni has some explaining to do in this connection.
- HE. Which means, Kshirsagar, that I must lay before you the story of my personal life. The funny thing is that you know most of it. What can I tell you that's new? Jambhekar, please note that a member of the University faculty is being called upon to make his private life public. Why does this menacing cloud hang over everything I write, or say, or do? Is it not enough to state that I was once connected with a certain political party? No, it isn't. Because the system of which you, Jambhekar, have become a part, would not be satisfied with that. It wants a public audit of my personal life.

And I have no choice but to give it, being a teacher, since I possess no other weapon but words. Words do not stop anything. If I were a thug off the street my words would have had their effect. The knife hidden behind the words would have done its work. I have been a consistent and uncompromising believer in a certain political thought. I have always known the heavy price one has to pay for subscribing to a certain ideology. Kshirsagar, Velankar, P.Y., Jambhekar, there's only one difference between you and me. Your ideas at any given moment of time are based on expedience. That is why you can keep the doors of your homes securely shut. It is not so with me. I have lived with my doors wide open. It has not been possible to avoid my marital life with Saraswati becoming public knowledge.

P.Y., don't look so uncomfortable. You are not to blame. We became accustomed a long time ago to our lives becoming public. We accepted it then. Now I don't have the strength for it. It hurts more now, it's more painful, that's all! But this terrible nakedness that I feel today, this emptiness at the thought that the dirty linen of my life is hanging out there in public, this is an old feeling. I recognize it better now. I can analyse it clinically, stick a label on it. Kshirsagar, I will now have to put up this public show in response to your insistent demand . . .

Darkness

Scene 4

HIS Study. He is seen sitting, an extinguished cigar in his mouth. SHE enters.

HE. Oh, so you're back? Long meeting today, wasn't it? Wait, I'll get you some coffee. Or would you prefer your favourite piping hot water? Bhagirath had it ready for you. But you were so late that I told him to go. How long could I make him wait? Finally nobody waits the way a husband waits, Saraswati.

Saraswati doesn't exactly ignore what he's saying, but she makes

no reply. She merely looks at him with a suppressed smile. He gets up and goes in. There are letters on the table. She looks through them, hesitates, decides not to read them. Sits down in an easy-chair. He enters, carrying a tray.

HE. Here we are. Your favourite hot water. I'll stick to my coffee. Have you eaten?

SARASWATI. Yes.

HE. Where?

SARASWATI. The usual. One puts something in the stomach. Who bothers about where and what? One has to eat, so one eats.

HE. Shall I get you some sandwiches?

SARASWATI. No, thanks.

HE. What happened in the meeting?

SARASWATI. What happened? The usual things. And a few new things.

HE. Such as?

SARASWATI. You are so calm. One would think you really didn't know what I was talking about. Don't you know?

HE. I could hazard a guess.

SARASWATI. Don't sit there hazarding guesses. Say something. Don't you want to say anything to me?

HE. There's nothing worth saying. Really. I've been looking around for a long time for something worth saying. Haven't found a thing. It's a good thing in a way. Perhaps it's a sign of the maturity of our relationship! Truly, it's a long, long time since we've talked to each other. I'd never thought words would seem so useless. So soon.

SARASWATI. Useless? Maybe. They certainly seem to be in short supply around here. Elsewhere of course they pour down like the first rains.

HE. Huh!

Sips his coffee. Relights his extinguished cigar. Saraswati is angry with his monosyllabic response.

SARASWATI. Is what I heard true?

HE. More or less.

SARASWATI. What does that mean?

HE. Everything you hear is always true! I admire you. The world as you see it is so clear and ordered. I don't see it that way, however hard I try. I only see confusion. That means lack of discipline.

- SARASWATI. Isn't that true?
- HE. No, no, please. Am I not trying hard to live with you so that I may be more disciplined? Carefully collecting the strands of the Party line. But I find I grow even more confused.
- SARASWATI. You can make your speeches later. First tell me—is it true, what I heard? I know it's true. What do you think you're trying to do?
- HE. What?
- SARASWATI. Don't put on the injured innocence act, Sridhar. You know what I'm talking about.
- HE. It's not very important. Why get so worked up over it?
- SARASWATI. Not very important?
- HE. To my mind at least.
- SARASWATI. Stop behaving like a child. Now, this meeting you were invited to. You didn't tell me about it. But I get to know these things.
- HE. That's what the Party is all about. It has a thousand eyes and a thousand ears.
- SARASWATI. The first meeting after Comrade Stalin's death. Don't you think we should have discussed it earlier? Planned what to say?
- HE. Why?
- SARASWATI. How can you ask me that?
- HE. There's no one else I could ask, is there?
- SARASWATI. Talk straight, please. What happened at the meeting?
- HE (*talking like a piece of advertisement*). Read all about it in your favourite newspaper tomorrow. And . . . don't tell anyone how it ends. (*Laughs.*)
- SARASWATI. If that's a joke, then I'm having problems laughing.
- HE. Oh really? I thought it was OK as jokes go. Anyway, there's no rule which says you must laugh at a joke. Some jokes make people angry. That's also natural.
- SARASWATI. Must I go back to fundamentals with you? You have a certain connection with the Party. It places certain responsibilities on you.
- HE. The Party discipline and such like.
- SARASWATI (*raising her voice slightly*). Yes. People connected with the Party cannot afford to be so self-absorbed. You must accept a certain amount of discipline. You break it too often. Stalin is not such a simple issue. It has to do with the Party's total stand. When you speak in an irresponsible manner about Stalin, you break the discipline of the movement.

- HE. So?
- SARASWATI. So? We talk all the time about changing society. We strike. We organize marches. But without discipline they're quite useless. We must think of ourselves as soldiers. And behave that way.
- HE. And obey the Commander's orders.
- SARASWATI (*she's really angry now*). What's wrong with that? When you talk of revolution you cannot afford to be irresponsible. You need to be angry and the anger must be disciplined.
- HE. In what way have I broken the code of discipline?
- SARASWATI. Why didn't you get today's speech cleared? Why didn't you tell me?
- HE. If I'd told you, you wouldn't have let me attend this meeting.
- SARASWATI. Are you surprised?
- HE. No. Therefore, I didn't tell you. And went.
- SARASWATI. Oh! You are impossible! What difference could it have made if Professor Kulkarni's judgement on Stalin's work had not been made public today?
- HE. None. But its being made public hasn't made any difference either.
- SARASWATI (*highly displeased, but explaining with great patience*). Look—listen to me—oh, what's the point of telling you what you already know? We are a political party. The foundation of all our strategies is discipline. Forget it. Belonging to a Party is not like belonging to a club. It is not politics to say whatever you want to say whenever it pleases you. And when you do it intentionally . . .
- HE. What you're saying in short is that I should have kept my mouth shut. What kind of discipline is that? Who decides about it? Are you aiming to raise armies?
- SARASWATI. Yes!
- HE (*very firmly*). No. You can't raise armies by simply wishing to raise armies. You tried it in Telengana once. For a while you gave three or four million people a taste of freedom before the orders came to sheathe your swords. The swords were sheathed. From whom and where did these orders come? And by whom and where were they accepted? When you wound up the armed revolt in Telengana you really did it with fanfare, didn't you?
- SARASWATI. You have always been critical of what happened. Did you speak of it there?

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- HE. No. We form the rear-guard even of retreaters. Who are we to say such things? But what was wrong with what I said about Stalin? What point is there in denying that blood was shed during his regime? The point is that, in twenty-five years, even if it was by bloodshed, he raised a race of tigers in Russia, a country where people had turned into timid snails. Why can't this be stated boldly? I hadn't thought sheathing swords had become so much part of your blood!
- He brought that country from the age of manual ploughing into the nuclear age. It was no work of pious celibates. If you raise tigers they will want to taste blood. This is what I said. And I will say it again. You know what Mao says, don't you? A Revolution is not a dinner party.
- SARASWATI. Et cetera, et cetera. This is just a more respectable way of saying that Stalin perpetrated atrocities. A form of Trotskyism.
- HE (*with bitter irony*). Who could this Trotsky be? I could also drop a few 'isms' you know, but that's not going to solve problems. What's the use of talking to you people? All you can say about Mao—the man who put a country of sixty crore people on its feet—is that his politics bears no trace of Marxism-Leninism. That's what your leaders said in their articles. You've forgotten the writings of 1949-50 now. If the man who awakens six hundred million people, fights for twenty years and establishes a Communist regime is not a Marxist, then your Marxism can go to the blazes. And so can ours. Your leaders think people who sit in arm-chairs in London spouting theory understand Marxism better than Communists fighting in China. And you of course think nobody understands Marxism better than Prayag.
- SARASWATI (*flaring up*). There's no need to bring Prayag into this.
- HE. Great! So the anger wasn't against my speech after all. I just have to mention Prayag and Stalin takes a back seat.
- SARASWATI. What do you mean?
- HE. You don't understand? All right. I'll explain. Once upon a time there was a girl. She had coal black eyes. Sometimes the coals in her eyes would light up and glow. Once he caught their fire. Two more eyes met. The embers glowed even more. But now those eyes are tired. They don't want embers. They don't even want the

sun.

So now there are four eyes which avoid each other. Even when they meet they don't see. Now two of those eyes, the coal black eyes, only see a ladder—a ladder that rises higher and higher—(*Saraswati silent.*)

Saraswati, my politics is now inconvenient to you. It is a nuisance and a hindrance to your rise in the Party. You are ambitious. If I see your ambitions as being smaller than they used to be, the problem is with my eyes—and that's a real problem.

SARASWATI. Problem?

HE. Does the word jar?

SARASWATI. Yes. Because it is true. You have once again understood reality clearly in all its harshness.

HE. I have just as clearly confessed to seeing it.

SARASWATI (*goes to him after some hesitation*). And yet I love you.

HE. 'Yet'. I like that word. I criticise Stalin, and 'yet' you love me. I talk of Prayag and yet you love me. Sounds rather nice, I must say.

Saraswati is hurt by this attack. She is at a loss for words. A few seconds of uncertainty.

SARASWATI. Can't you keep a hold on yourself for my sake?

HE. Saraswati, I've been doing just that all these years. I've kept a hold on myself for your sake, for the Party's sake and now for Prayag's sake. Perhaps that is the reason why people find my writing vitriolic. That's where all controls break down. Now you want me to tailor my speeches and writings to accord with your progress in the Party. To keep my mouth shut for Prayag's sake. That's impossible. (*A moment's pause.*) But do you really want me to hold myself in check? (*Saraswati doesn't understand. Looks questioningly at him.*) If I continued in this fashion it would give you an excellent excuse. Then you wouldn't have to hold yourself back with Prayag. This has nothing to do with either the Party or with Marxism. It would make you feel morally easier! You are after all a middle class petit bourgeois.

SARASWATI. Sridhar!

He ignores the interruption and continues talking.

HE. I wish I could free myself—live my life free, like jazz. But the vice-like hold of the seven musical notes will

- not loosen. Wait. Don't speak. You are free. Both you and Prayag are free. What need is there for pretence?
- SARASWATI. Pretence?
- HE. There! More pretences. Walawalkar must have told you about our meeting. The fool still thinks he can make things awkward for you by talking about me. Saraswati, he hasn't forgiven you yet. He was the jilted one before me. He must have said—(*imitating Walawalkar*) We had a meeting in the University to mourn Stalin's death today. Professor Kulkarni was the main speaker at the meeting. We, in this meeting, will have to decide what to say about it or whether to say anything at all in our journal. Prayag must have then suggested a way out. Result? Your present cross-examination of me.
- SARASWATI. Stop imagining things.
- HE. Anyway, what's the point of all this? You are free in this world. But I am free of this world. There can never be an equal fight between the two. He who is free of the world, wins. It has always been so and will continue to be so.
- SARASWATI. But Sridhar . . .
- HE. Hear me out. I am not going to retract my speech. I am going to publish it as an article. There'll be no compromises here. Now there'll be no compromises in anything. Period.

Darkness

Scene 5

Light again on the scene of the inquiry.

- HE. You asked me a question. I narrated this incident which came to mind. You probably have that article amongst your records. It was this article which ended my life with the Party. But you can't possibly be interested in all that. You are the true white-collar men. You are not even thinking about the inquiry at this moment. The question in your minds is infinitely more spicy. Wait, I'll tell you all. We did not separate then. I didn't even 'catch' her and Prayag—though that's not quite true. I'd known about their relationship for—well, for I don't

know how long. People run away from memories. Today memories are running away from me. Two years later she left me to live with Prayag. She is now a member of the State Committee. And I am Head of the Department. She has won. In her way. Her idea of success was always basically narrow. She has found her success. And I have become the victim of your monstrous inquiry.

This is not the first time it has happened though. I could see failure ahead. And yet I continued with endurance, to walk on. It was difficult. Not just politics. Even mere conversation. It became impossible. It stopped. Or rather she stopped it. Such are the defeats in store for the liberals. She stopped what I had thought I should stop. What I should have stopped. Her celebration of my defeat continues even today. I analyse my own defeat, intellectually. Her victory, my defeat—these categories are not really valid. Rather, they're not categories you will understand. Anyway, it's all over! This is how it was going to end. I should have known it. There's a poem, don't you know, which says that 'the blows fell so fast and furious that the colour of blood itself changed.'

The *People's Age* came out with an article in those days. It talked of at last seeing me in my true colours. But my colours were changing. How could they have seen my 'true' colours? Even I can't see them. And I still think she has never been able to see them.

But why am I fondly exhibiting these faded flowers? You can't possibly have any interest in them. So I'll finish this story here. Velankar, take this down—the information I have given here is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, true.

Curtain

Act Two

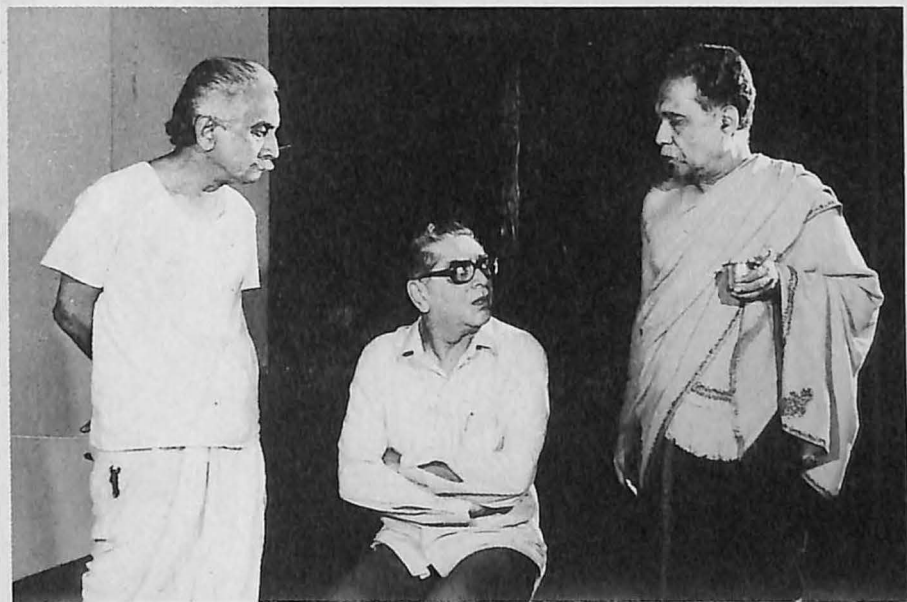
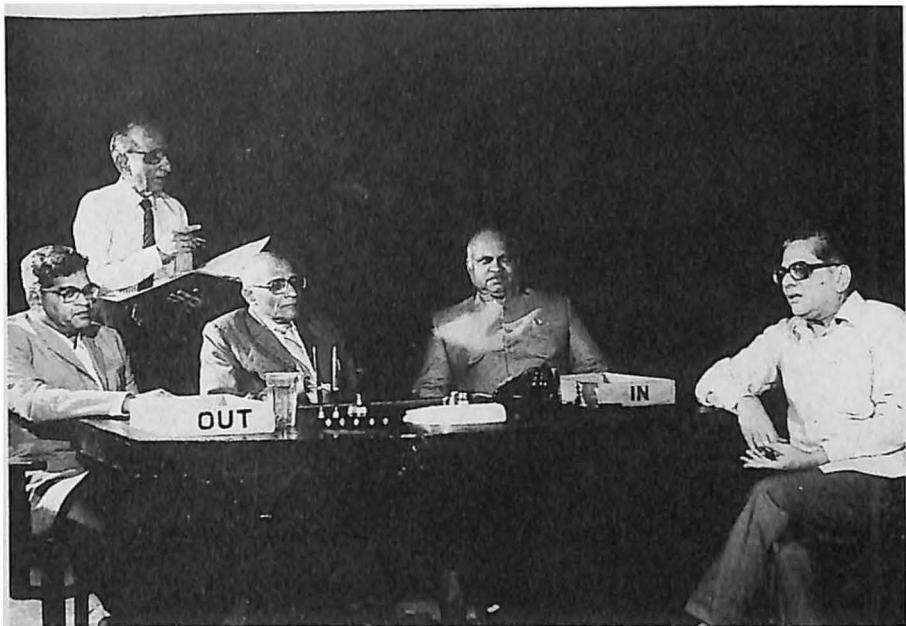
Scene 1

Lights come up on the scene of inquiry.

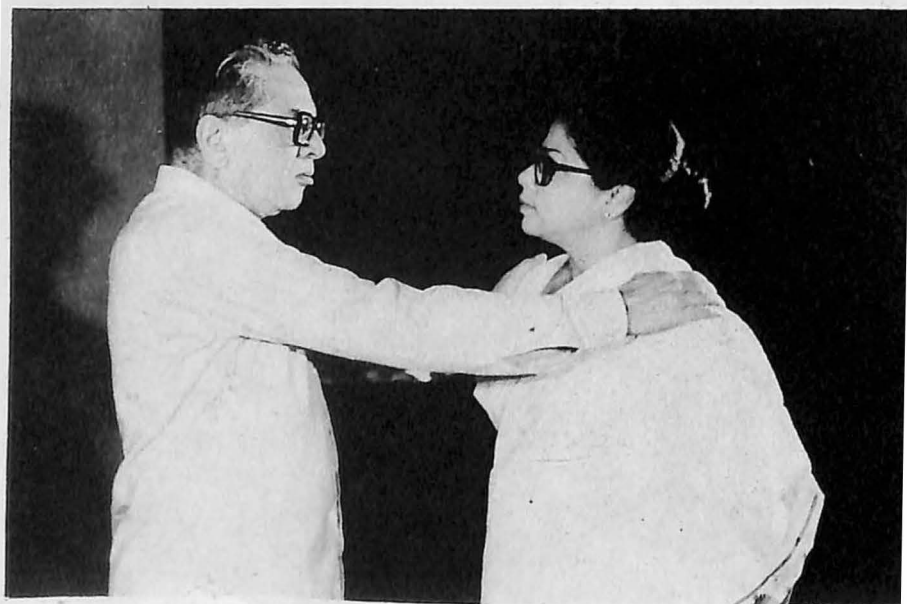
- VC. Kulkarni, why are you getting so excited? We aren't hatching a sinister plot against you, you know.
- P.Y. For heaven's sake don't try our patience too far. If you'd only keep your answers straight and simple, we'd find it easier to support you . . .
- HE. Against whom?
- P.Y. You are asking senseless questions now, Kulkarni. I have a great personal regard for you—your academic and other work, your perseverance, your deep involvement. That's why we've set this up—today. It would be so much simpler if you stopped playing games and just answered our questions. Let me assure you once again that this whole business is absolutely informal—something that Jambhekar and I took the lead in organizing. Things could be hotter for you, you know. But we wouldn't like that to happen, if we could possibly help it. Do I make myself clear?
- HE. You are always very clear, P.Y.
- VELANKAR. Have you written plays?
- HE. Yes.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Could you tell us a little about your writing?
- HE. Yes.
- KSHIRSAGAR. 'How many plays in all have you written?
- HE. Three.
- KSHIRSAGAR. When?
- HE. I wouldn't be able to say exactly—but roughly in the seven years between 1947 and 1954.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Names?
- HE. I had almost forgotten I'd ever written plays. It was ages ago. They were so different—those years. The names sound almost archaic now—*The Tender-blooded Dawn, A Haven For You, Poor Soul*. There were a couple more before that, but they were never produced. That's the lot I guess.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Who produced them?
- HE. A group called Abhinav.

- VC. Did this group called Abhinav have any political affiliations? How did you get to know them? Do you know a man named Samant?
- HE. I will not answer that question.
- VC. You probably know that Suresh Samant is a member of an extreme left group and was arrested the day before yesterday. Do you know him? Are you acquainted with him?
- HE. I will not answer that question.
- VC. Velankar, please read out the references about Samant that I have marked in that file.
- VELANKAR (*reads*). Samant is part of a drama group called Abhinav. This group performs left propagandist plays. At the time of Samant's arrest, more than a dozen scripts were found in his house. Amongst them was the script of *The Tender-blooded Dawn*. There was an inscription on this script: 'With warm regards—Shree'. Amongst Samant's old papers we found some papers about organizing a Progressive Theatre Organization. Many people were present at this meeting in Byculla.
- VC. Briefly then, are you this person Shree? Were you present at the meeting in Byculla?
- HE. I don't recall having given the script of *Tender-blooded Dawn* to the Samant you are talking about.
- P.Y. So you do know Samant. Only you can't recall having given him the script of your play. Is that right?
- HE. My words were 'the Samant you are talking about'. That does not mean I know him.
- P.Y. Do you not know him then?
- HE. I shall not answer that question. The police are free to get any information they want about the Samant you are talking about. Perhaps they've already got it. Samant is a subject I am not obliged to say a thing about.
- P.Y. Look here, Kulkarni, don't try to be too clever. You'll gain nothing by losing our goodwill. Abhinav produced your plays, Samant was connected with the group. How can we believe that you didn't know Samant?
- HE. Did you hear that, Jambhekar? P.Y. has produced an algebraic equation. A is equal to B. B is equal to C. Therefore A is equal to C.
- P.Y. Admit you are stumped.
- HE. No, P.Y. Since you have the ability to think mathematically, how can you not understand a simple thing—your algebraic statement is only a possibility,

- no more.
- VC. There, so you do know Samant. Why don't you admit it?
- HE. Just give me one reason, Jambhekar, why I should say anything about a man called Samant.
- VC. Samant has been arrested. That's why. Still, if you don't, your unwillingness to talk itself tells us a great deal.
- KSHIRSAGAR. All your plays were political in nature, weren't they?
- HE. As a professor of literature you're very good at pigeon-holing everything into categories. I'm not. To me a play is a play.
- P.Y. Which of your plays was set against the background of Telengana?
- KSHIRSAGAR. Things seem to be happening in this Telengana all the time and you don't know what the hell they are. 'Set against the background of Telengana'. What's that supposed to mean? Will somebody explain to me please—in simple Telugu?
- HE. I will, Kshirsagar.
- P.Y. Well, well. That's the first time you've offered to answer a question with such alacrity.
- HE. In 1949-50 the peasants, led by the Communist Party, staged an armed revolt. Inspired by this uprising I wrote a number of things. To me this uprising in Telengana was a *Tender-blooded Dawn*.
- P.Y. Did you have any links with the Party in those days?
- HE. The review of the play in *New Theatre* might answer your question if you cared to read it. It was too long ago. I can't remember what it said. But I could tell you what the magazine said about my second play. The critic found that the play did not propound a classic Marxist viewpoint and could thus not be termed a truly socialist realist play. Worse, the critic lamented the fact that a left writer had been so amiss as to fall into middle-class sentimentality and not recognize the class enemy.
- VELANKAR (*with the air of having won a point*). So they did refer to you as a left writer!
- HE. Velankar, you don't have a clue about how the Party works. If I'd actually been a member of the Party and written a play that was ideologically unacceptable, *New Theatre* wouldn't have as much as mentioned it and I would have quietly withdrawn it. You'll never understand these things, Velankar.



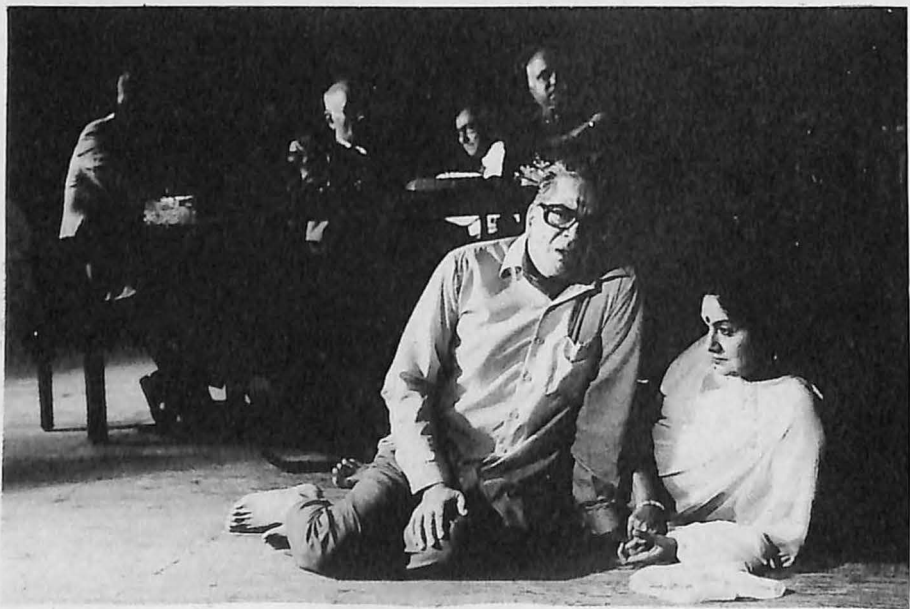
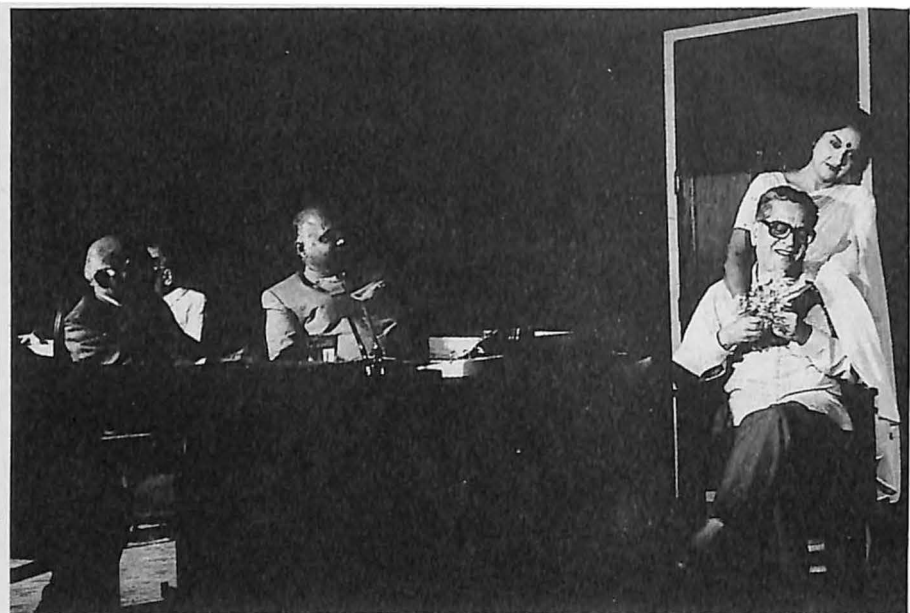
Confrontations : Kulkarni (Shreeram Lagoo) faces the inquiry (*above*)
and his uncles (*below*).



They will not let him take away his father's books (*above*). He faces his wife (Deepa Shreeram) before the split (*below*).



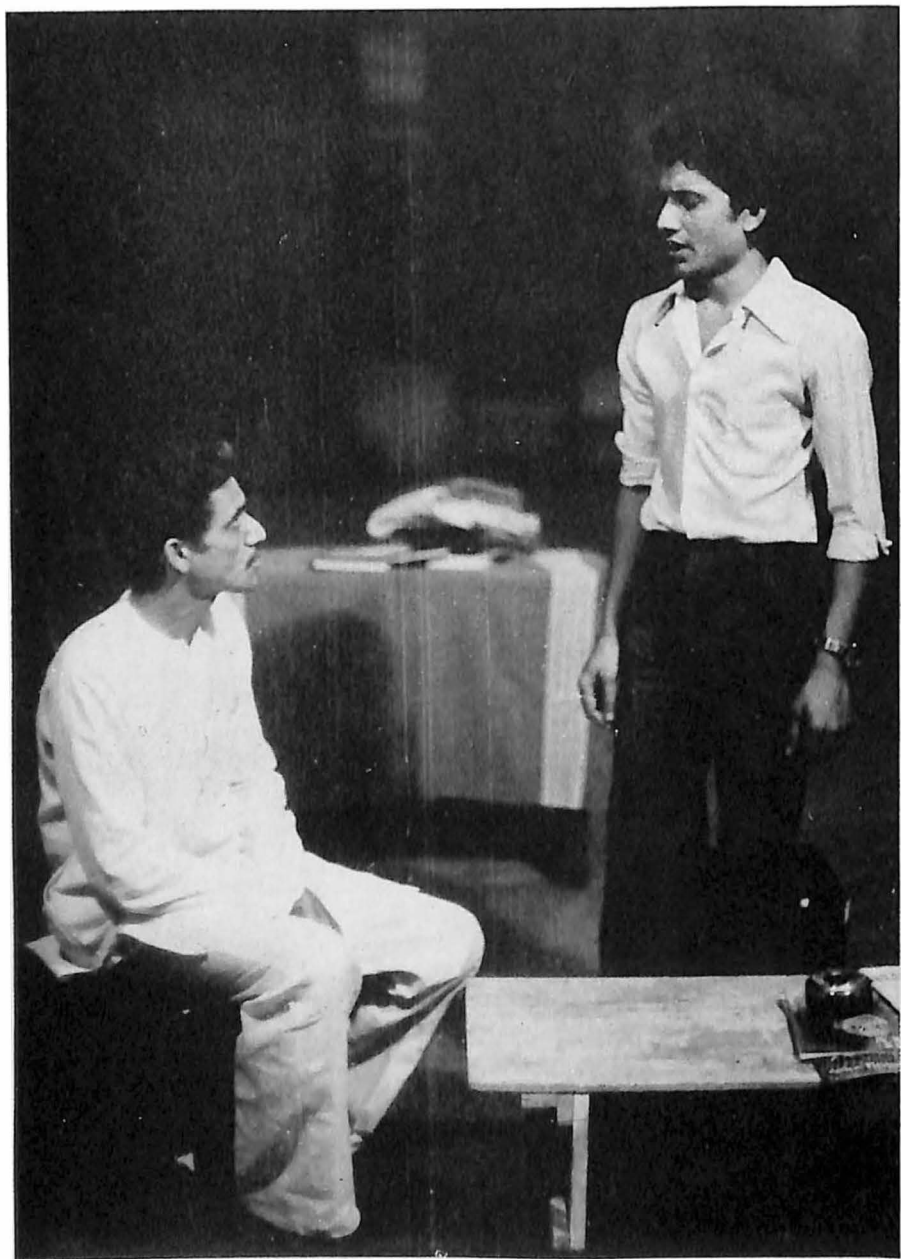
Kulkarni and Saraswati – falling apart.



Kulkarni and Madhavi (Rekha Sabnis) – memories that the inquiry draws up.



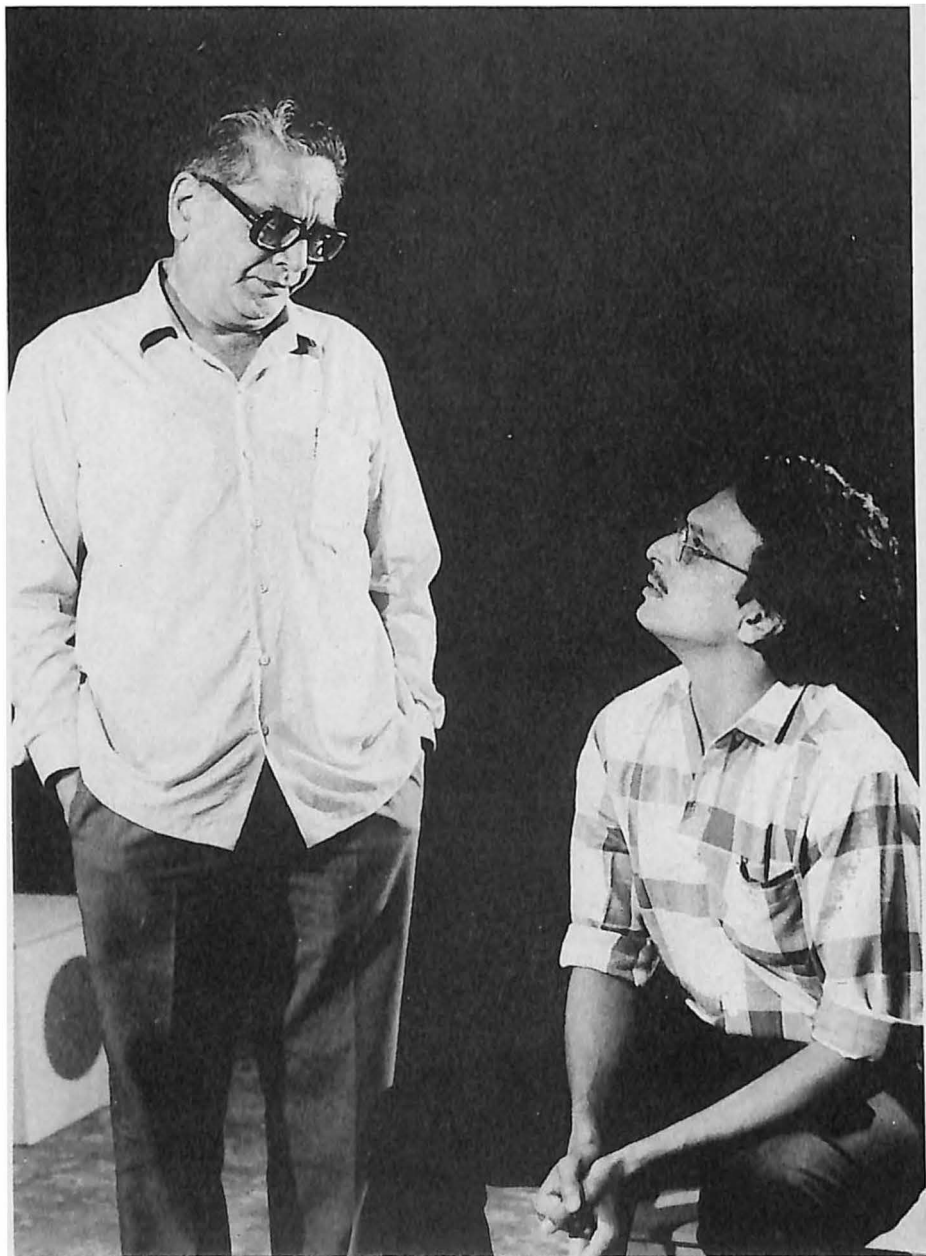
Kulkarni (Om Puri) and Madhavi (Neelam Chowdhri).



Father and son (Madan Jain)



Father and son (Ashutosh Datar).



Father and son – coming to terms.

- P.Y. Did you not write a single play after those three?
- HE. None worth mentioning.
- P.Y. Meaning?
- HE. I wrote a couple of one-acters. But there wasn't much life in them.
- P.Y. One of your one-act plays was published in the November 1954 issue of *Search*. Was there any connection between that play and the taximen's strike of 1954? In other words, was this play based on the Bombay taximen's strike?
- HE. Not true. Though I know people thought and said so. Actually, the play was clearly influenced by Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty*.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Marathi playwrights haven't been known to acknowledge foreign sources anyway.
- HE. You're wrong, Kshirsagar. There was a preface to this play in which I had expressed my indebtedness. What can I do if Marathi critics don't read prefaces? They expect an announcement to be made before the curtain rises—'Abhinav presents Shree V. Kulkarni's latest play indebted to so-and-so and influenced by such-and-such.' That saves them trouble. But it can't be done. People come to see plays, not to hear bibliographies.
- P.Y. Don't talk nonsense, Kshirsagar. It's not a crime to be indebted to the West. All the same, Kulkarni, granting what you say, your play still comes very close to the strike.
- HE. It may appear to do so. I am acquainted with some cabbies. I know their language. It filtered into the play quite inevitably. My main intention was to present the Marathi theatre-goer with people the likes of which he had never seen at close quarters.
- P.Y. However, the interesting thing is that the Party has shown a great deal of interest in the play. You are of course aware that the play has been revived.
- HE. Yes, I receive my royalty cheques.
- VC. Have there been performances of this play in colleges affiliated to our University?
- VELANKAR. Sir, altogether five in the last three years.
- VC. Who was the motivator behind these performances?
- HE. The performers should know. I've not seen a single performance myself.
- VC. There was a private performance of this play last year. There was thunderous applause at the end of it and

- suddenly the Internationale was played. Is that true?
- VELANKAR. What is this Internationale or whatever?
- P.Y. The Internationale is the Anthem of the Communist International. All Marxists revere the song.
- HE. I know nothing about the Internationale being played. I'm not saying it didn't happen. But the playwright can only make assertions about his own work. He has no right to dictate what noises people should make after the show is over.
- P.Y. You know of course that the Internationale was the national anthem of Communist Russia till 1943. Do you think it is right that a foreign national anthem should be played after a performance of your play?
- HE. Well, my feelings aren't hurt by it, that's for sure. Jambhekar, let me tell you once again, the writer has no right to decide what should or shouldn't happen after his play has been performed. Please note, 'after' is the operative word.
- P.Y. Fair enough. Is this Abhinav group of yours still active?
- HE. No.
- P.Y. Are you saying that the group called Abhinav which is now active is not the same group?
- HE. That's right. At least nobody I know is in the group now. It is a totally different organization. Not at all political.
- P.Y. Which one?
- HE. They call it by some terribly in name—you know—Natyavasant, Natyahemant or some such.
- P.Y. Why did Abhinav split?
- HE. That's a long story. But a little different from the stories one hears of splits in other Marathi organizations.
- P.Y. Is it true that the split occurred because Madhavi Bhawe and Vitthal Deuskar left the group?
- HE. You should ask them.
- P.Y. As the chief playwright of the group surely you were affected in some way by the split? You must have been witness to it.
- HE. I was. You know a great deal, P.Y. Or at least you guess right. There was no reason for the group to split. Some people began to find the label 'Propagandist Artist' difficult to cope with. They wanted to free themselves of it. They didn't realize that all art is propaganda.
- P.Y. But all propaganda isn't art, Kulkarni.

HE. Certainly not. And well quoted. But it's not easy to decide which art is mere propaganda. Generally art which propagates ideas one does not like is denounced by us from the roof-tops as not art at all. I was prepared for all that. But some people weren't. There was no place in Abhinav for people whose spirits wilted with unfavourable reviews. That's why the group began to disintegrate. The Abhinav actors who stood on the stage in grease-paint faced a dilemma. On the one hand they knew in their heart of hearts that they had an audience, though it didn't write reviews. And this audience liked their propaganda, because it saw on the stage people it could understand, people of flesh and blood. Yet on the other hand, there was this other world of critics and people like you and me. They couldn't see their way to breaking away from this other world. This was the dilemma which Abhinav couldn't resolve. When I realized this, I quit. But with real pain. With a great weight on my mind. How can I describe the pain of it to you, P.Y.? I had struggled to create something. And I saw the attack building up against the very roots of creation. It shattered the political artist in me. The world turned upside down. Even today the old days come back—seem to come back.

Darkness

Scene 2

In his study. Madhavi has come. Dressed in yellow. She's arranging a bouquet of flowers in a vase. She's humming. He enters and halts, staring at her with surprise and tenderness. He can't help but see that she is not one bit disturbed by his presence. She continues with what she is doing.

HE. Madhavi, you never change. You are blessed with a boon. 'I am forever a yellow butterfly.'

MADHAVI. So? How was your sojourn in jail?

HE. Great. Rather short. I don't think it's very romantic now. My enthusiasm for imprisonment has faded over the years. But things go off now without a hitch. And it makes a nice break for a couple of weeks. You get a

- chance to talk to your co-workers. That gives you an excuse to read Lenin again. The usual thing. You know how it is.
- MADHAVI. You didn't expect me to suddenly zoom in here just now like a comet, did you? I decided to shock you.
- HE. Shock? *(With an edge to his voice)* What kind of shock is it this time?
- MADHAVI. There! Your voice is rising. Why do you have to take things so seriously? You use words like a juggler in a circus. You command words and their meaning the way he commands his saucers. Sometimes they are suddenly sharp. Sometimes suddenly blunt. Sometimes the meaning rises sky high. At other times it's difficult to plumb its depths.
- HE. Never mind all that. What shock are you talking about?
- MADHAVI. It's the eighteenth of September today.
- HE. So?
- MADHAVI. So he's a jolly good fellow—our absent-minded professor—
- HE. So that's the reason for the flowers!
- MADHAVI. Surprised?
- HE. Always have been.
- MADHAVI. Why?
- HE. I had thought that after all the various subtractions and deductions the remainder would be zero. But the remainder is always flowers.
- MADHAVI. You expected only a zero at the end of all the subtractions. I never did.
- HE. Because you never attempted to state the problem and solve it fully.
- MADHAVI. You're right. You people don't understand. You think all questions have to have consistent and exhaustive answers. I've never understood why. Anyway, aren't you going to ask me to sit down? *(Pretends to sulk.)* Or shall I go away?
- HE. With my permission? That would be most unlike you. *(Laughs.)* OK. So what'll you have? Beer or the usual poison?
- MADHAVI. The usual poison will do.

He goes in. Madhavi lingers in the study. She pulls open his desk drawer. Finds a photograph of him and her. Takes it out and stares at it. He enters. Puts down the drinks on the centre table. Madhavi seems to be totally absorbed in studying the photograph.

He approaches her softly. Unable to stop himself he clasps her in a tight embrace. Madhavi stays in his arms for a while, then sweetly disentangles herself. Pretending she's being chased by him, she runs towards the armchair and collapses into it.

- HE. How is it that you never change?
- MADHAVI (with an endearing laugh). It's a question I've heard very often. For the second time today.
- HE. Honestly. The way you move, and smile, your liquid laughter, your love for flowers, your radiant presence on the stage—
- MADHAVI. Those tamarinds we ate, those walks we took, those discussions, those long long evenings, that intimacy, and . . . that mole!
- HE. It's difficult to forget it, Madhavi. My mind accepts it, but my blood won't.
- MADHAVI (laughs, allows this romantic moment to pass). Sridhar, why do you force your mind to rule your blood?
- HE (imitating her). I've heard this question very often. The first time today.
- MADHAVI. Don't evade the question. Anyway, what use is it talking to you? You don't ever listen. You have this habit of analysing everything. The habit won't die.
- HE. Habits are in the blood, Madhavi. That means my blood cannot be controlled. (Seeming to change the subject) How is Vitthal? I read a review of his new play the other day. I haven't had time to see a single play this whole year. But Vitthal's voice, his rich voice, still rings in my ears. Do you remember that day, here, in this house, when he read out some poetry to my young workers? What a voice. Revolutionary poems so rarely find a voice like that. Oh, that voice! And its cadences! I was listening to the tape again last night. The roar of the ocean and the roar of Vitthal's voice. The cadence of those lines—You'll probably laugh at me, but truly, when I think of the coming revolution I seem to hear its roar blending with the roar of the ocean and of Vitthal's voice.
- MADHAVI. Don't you feel at all angry with Vitthal?
- HE. Why with him? With you more likely. Madhavi, you grabbed Vitthal by force! Any one who denies this, lies. Why should I be angry with him? Because a group I was trying to organize was crippled? But that cruel attack didn't come from Vitthal. It came from you—

MADHAVI. There. Your ears are growing hot again. (*She laughs and puts her arms around him.*) Have you written anything new of late?

HE. My plays finished with you. When I wrote them I was convinced I was predicting the country's awakening. The conviction's gone now. It found its ideal utterance in Vitthal's voice and its visual expression in the glorious way you filled out the stage space. My words were only the medium. But I was happy enough with that. You gave me a lot in that year, Madhavi—a great deal. Now suddenly my words are silent—the terrible limitless silence of pre-creation.

MADHAVI. It's this—this that draws me here. Why have you locked up all this vitality in one, all-consuming ideology? Why are you living under a self-inflicted curse, like some Yaksha? Why have you fettered yourself?

[*HE (laughs out as he pulls her to himself to ease the tension growing between them).*

*Madhye kshama shikharidashana pakkabimbadharoshthi
Sa me priyakshi Madhavi shyamalangi*

(*Her waist thin, her teeth sharp, her lower lips like the ripe bimba fruit,
That is my dearest yakshi Madhavi, the dark-bodied.*)

Madhavi realizes that he is trying to change the subject, but finds his faulty Sanskrit endearing.

MADHAVI. Venerable master, your memory's slipping to the waist. (*As she extricates herself*) The first words aren't *madhye kshama*. They are *tanvi shyama* (slim and youthful). Enough of poetry though. Pay more attention to the spirit. (*They toast each other.*)]*

HE. I remember the time we were doing *Tender-blooded Dawn*. There was magic in the air. Vitthal was the

* The playwright offers an alternative version for this piece (within square brackets.)

HE(*takes her in his arms*). I wonder why.

MADHAVI(*extricating herself*). That's not what I meant. I meant mental fetters. And like the typical classical hero you could only think of the body. Forget it. Let's turn to things more spiritual. (*She raises her glass and they drink a toast.*)

rising star. All because of you. Even now he owes where he is to you. What news of him? Haven't seen him lately. Nor you for that matter.

MADHAVI.

Must we talk about Vitthal?

HE.

Not if you object. When I see you, I can't help hearing echoes of those times ringing in my ears. I'd thought you would understand. But it was not to be. You were too self-absorbed. Like a peacock in full plumage full of splendid pride. People were drawn to you. You didn't spread your plume for anybody. The rain had to dance around you and for you. I was the rain, and I danced to your tune.

But oh, the conditions you made—there was no escaping them. The peacock was the only one who knew what was right. A small disappointment, a little thwarting of your will and you withdrew, like a tortoise into its shell. Why did you have to lay down such rigid conditions? Why did you make things so difficult?

MADHAVI.

I didn't make those conditions. Nor did you. They were made by Fate, and they were truly cruel.

HE.

Fate! Don't use such meaningless words.

MADHAVI.

Why? Aren't they true? Were those intoxicating winds unreal, which swept through my blood and sometimes dance in me even now? Why couldn't you have bowed to the music of those winds? (*In sudden despair.*) No, you couldn't have done that. You may not even know what music means. You've forgotten that line of Dnyaneshwar's, Sridhar: 'Sukha chevavuni geetu uga rahey'—The song is silent once joy is ignited. Tell me honestly, Sridhar. Did you ever understand the aesthetics of silence? Frames, moulds, slogans, thoughts, declarations! Music must so often become a whisper, the merest whisper to a flower amidst all the noise. (*A moment's stillness.*) Theatre was the space I wanted to explore freely. Your words would have been my wings. Those words were always under tight control. But there were times when they would give the intellectual in you the slip and take off into their own light, breaking down moulds and frames. Reason would stare, transfixed, at their flight. I knew how those words could fly if given free rein and my heart would ache. I would feel a thrill when the sweat of those inimitable words broke upon my forehead. I would fill out the vacuum on stage with the whole of me, swaying to your words. How could

you think that I was not tempted by that! But you could never understand this paradox.

HE (*softly*). Wait, Madhavi. I have always understood what you said. But I didn't accept it. When words soar into space there's a great force behind them. They take off from moulded thought. But you wanted me to break the mould. That could never be. It's too late. It wouldn't break now even if I wanted to break it. The incidents which seem so poetic to you today were not at all that poetic. Madhavi, you forget too often that you have deceived me. You make my ideas your scapegoat then. Do you remember the night after the twenty-fifth show of *The Tender-blooded Dawn* ? You knew that this soaring heart of mine was hovering around you. And yet you spurned it that night. You mocked at my ideas, my beliefs. I am surprised that I continue to believe even now. That night you saw lust in my eyes, not a trusting love. I have never denied desire. Its purple glow still tempts me. But you saw only that. Why did you make such haste in anointing me the guru, the revolutionary leader? Did you ever ask yourself this question? (*Madhavi takes a large sip. He goes to her, speaking very softly.*) Madhavi, don't think too hard. We all make these mistakes. You knew it then. How can I forget that you satisfied my desire? Those sweet tender memories are with me still. Don't I know how you cosseted me? If you hadn't, would I have seen that mole scatter into innumerable stars in a new moon sky? Madhavi, those memories are as fresh as these flowers. Get up, dear child, get up and wipe your eyes. You mustn't feel too sad that things didn't work out. When wounds reopen once in a while it makes one feel good. We must cherish the memory of those clusters of *champa* flowers, those swirling fragrances. That is what gives me victory in defeat. Madhavi, you made it possible for me to live some precious moments. I shall always breathe the scent of those memories. Truly, Madhavi . . .

Madhavi listens to him, lost. As he pulls her to him . . .

Darkness

Scene 3

The lights come up on the scene of inquiry once again. He is back in the place where he was in Scene I of Act II. And he repeats a sentence from that scene.

- HE. Even today the old days come back . . . seem to come back. But only for brief moments. They fade away again. At the very moment when caterpillars are turning into butterflies they turn back into caterpillars!
- P.Y. (*totally ignores the emotionally moved Sridhar. Only waits for him to return to normal*). In short, Kulkarni, you have not had any contact with Abhinav after the split. You have not met Samant after that. You had no political links with him thereafter. Is that right?
- HE. Yes.
- P.Y. How much sympathy do you have for Samant's present political colour?
- HE. P.Y., who am I to answer this question? The important thing is that the government is not one bit sympathetic to him. He's sure to be punished on that account. That's it. Whether Sridhar Kulkarni approves or not just isn't relevant.
- KSHIRSAGAR. Kulkarni, you have admitted to many things.
- HE. You mean it won't be difficult now to compile the chargesheet against me.
- VC. There is no need to use words like chargesheet, Kulkarni. However, the things that you have directly or indirectly admitted—
- HE. Are as follows—as if reading out the charges—Item one—Professor S.V. Kulkarni is a Marxist. Item two—Small groups have sprung up in this University for the study of Marxism-Leninism. Kulkarni helps them. Translated into official language this means they have Kulkarni's support and inspiration. Item three—by the law of guilt by association, Kulkarni bears the responsibility, through his one-time connection with Samant, of Samant's extreme left politics. Is the list complete or have I left out something?
- P.Y. You have. You inspired and supported the organization of the Class IV workers in this University and you were present at their first meeting.
- HE. There's nothing wrong with that. I was invited. That's why I was present. You weren't invited. Otherwise you

would also have been present. Ultimately the political shade to which this union subscribes should concern you as much as anyone else, P.Y.

P.Y. Quite right. These days, this union has taken on too dark a shade for my liking. We don't want this University to turn into another Calcutta.

HE. What does that mean? I keep hearing and reading that statement very often these days. But I've never understood what it means.

VC. Kulkarni, the meaning is perfectly clear—

P.Y. You'll understand it soon enough. But I'm not going to do the explaining. Because such meanings cannot be explained. Nobody explains what 'becoming Calcutta' means. Therefore one also does not need to explain what 'not allowing a place to become another Calcutta' means.

KSHIRSAGAR. We will not allow the activities in this University to become violent.

P.Y. cuts in just as Sridhar is about to speak.

P.Y. Kulkarni, you can probably see now where the big question lies. I'm not totally unacquainted with your history. Our only interest in your history is to find out whether it shows the beginnings of your present political position. Your work in the last four or five years has not been completely legitimate. I strongly suspect your new organizations. Your polemics are all directed towards quite different objectives.

VC. Kulkarni—

P.Y. Let me ask him, Jambhekar. Kulkarni, you own a flat in town.

HE. Yes.

P.Y. Is it true that some members of the extreme left movement used your flat for one of their meetings?

HE. In what way is the University concerned with what happens in my flat? You might at the most concern yourselves with what happens in my campus flat.

P.Y. Please don't be too clever and legalistic. We have information that such a meeting did take place. Something would have been done about it much earlier had I not stalled it. So there's no need to play games with me. Now proceed.

He isn't quite sure how to deal with this sudden direct attack. Not

that he is afraid—merely a little confused.

HE. Some young people came to see me. They wanted to meet for discussions. They asked me if they could use my place. I said they could. I have no idea what their discussions were about.

VC. It's perfectly clear that you are acquainted with these people. Will you name them please?

HE. No. I will not name them.

P.Y. Don't. But let me inform you that they were members of the district executive committee of the extreme left party. Why did you allow them to use your place?

HE. Do you really want an answer to that question, P.Y.? And will you believe what I tell you? I am convinced that I was not wrong in what I did. Surely, that is answer enough, even for you?

P.Y. I have an even more important question than that. Do you approve of this new politics of violence, Kulkarni? We have succeeded in building something here, good or bad, and there are people just waiting to blow it up. You've got to tell us whether you are on their side. That is the real question. Think carefully before you answer. Our position in this whole business depends on your answer to that.

HE. That's a very difficult question, P.Y. I'd guessed quite early that this was the direction the inquiry was taking. What can I say in answer to this question? I've already told you that I don't support blind violence. But even that is only a half-truth. The truth is that I'm dreadfully scared of violence. I've never seen blood really close—human blood. The idea of using weapons to shed blood, to use guerrilla tactics to bring about a political upheaval here is quite beyond my imagination. This is an enormous country. It requires a man of tremendous stature to inspire it to action, any kind of action—violent or peaceful. I am not that man. Of this I am quite sure.

It's fine to tell people that a revolution can only be brought about with guns. But the man who says so must himself be prepared to carry a gun. If he doesn't, who is going to believe what he says?

But perhaps you are afraid of the idea itself. You needn't be, P.Y. Whole lifetimes are consumed formulating clever theories! In no other place can one

find as many busy wordsmiths as there are here. No harm will ever come from them. All word-happy people are cowards. They have plenty to say about how others should fight revolutions. But do they do anything themselves?

They manage to fool people for a while. Then they see through these non-acting wordsmiths. And one more philosopher is consigned to history. All that remains of him is twenty-five articles, a couple of books and innumerable speeches.

That's all that's left of me too. How would I organize the peasants? I don't even understand their language. Though we live here, we are actually abscondee. People who run away don't make revolutions.

There's no point in abscondee exhorting people to arm themselves and revolt. Who will believe them? Why! Even they don't believe themselves. P.Y., I am honest enough to admit this. Why would I ask anyone to arm himself?

Mind you, I would love to be able to do so. I would love to shout it out with all the strength I have. I would love to have a deluge sweeping away everything there is. I would love to have mountain-high flames engulfing this entire system and reducing it to ashes. How often I have wished it. But I lack the strength to say so. I could raise slogans as well as anybody else. But slogans are not ideas. A slogan only requires a voice. An ideal requires inner strength. I don't have it.

If we've lost, it's because of this. So what do we do? We talk—through force of habit. I don't expect to do much more than be able to hold my head up. The system's the enemy. I don't know how it is to be fought. But I can at least warn people against submitting to its temptations. So that's what I do. What more can a teacher do?

He is tired now. He cannot bear the strain any more.

HE.

What surprises me, P.Y., is why you should be afraid of such a simple business. Why be afraid of a handful of people who learn to stand erect and be destroyed? Answer this, P.Y. Tell me, quite honestly: Why are you afraid of a couple of study groups, a union or two, an

organization and two dozen upright people? Why?

Both Jambhekar and Kshirsagar are trying to say something. P.Y. dissuades both of them. He realizes that he is now totally in control of the situation.

P.Y. Jambhekar, wait. You can talk later. You are confused. Don't make it worse.

Jambhekar is overwhelmed by P.Y.'s self-assurance.

P.Y. Really, Kulkarni! What a naive question to ask at the end of such a brilliant speech. Having stood up to everything you suddenly crumbled. Why else would you have asked such a question?

We are not afraid. Not one bit afraid. We can understand things as clearly as you can.

People who win battles are not the ones who understand what battles are all about. Only two kinds of people understand that. Those who suffer, and those who run away. I know what a battle is. I wasn't willing to be consumed without purpose. You were—

There's only one fear that people who allow themselves to burn uselessly generate. They expose those who have run away. Those who run away don't like this. It is not a question of being afraid. It's just unpleasant. Those who strip us in this fashion must pay the price—You will have to pay it.

I feel sorry, Sridhar Vishwanath. Truly sorry. Because you are my friend— But that is irrelevant now. We'd even arranged a way out for people like you. 'Deep concern', 'sacrifice', 'selfless work' were the words we had reserved for you. There was only one proviso. You were to work, to walk till the soles of your feet cracked but never to reveal to people who the enemy was. Then we would have arranged to give you awards. We would have published your 'thoughts' in volumes. We'd have exalted you as great philosophers. I would have personally spoken on your sixty-first and seventy-fifth birthdays. You would have talked. Your students would have written down your thoughts.

With only this one proviso—you were not to suggest by a single word that we were the enemy.

You might very well say that that too would have been a form of escape. A little more ascetic perhaps. An ascetic escape for you and a self-indulgent escape for us.

With no place in either for burning without purpose.

Sridhar Vishwanath, you have refused to do this. You will therefore have to pay the price. There is nothing I can do about it.

We could perhaps bargain a little over the price. But the price will have to be paid. You missed the chance to run away from the fight. You must face the burning. You cannot escape that.

He is dazed, a little distracted. And then . . .

Darkness

Scene 4

In his study. He and his son. It is evening. The son has come to console his father after the inquiry. The son is modern with catholic tastes. This taste is reflected in his clothes. Not sure about what to do, the son gets up and offers his father a cigarette and lights it for him. Lights one for himself too. They are both disturbed. Very tense.

- HE. I read your poem yesterday. Quite nice. But how much longer are you going to suffer these vague yearnings?
- SON. Who knows?
- HE. I haven't met Yamini for ages. Have you people stopped wanting to meet me?
- SON. What nonsense, Father. Please don't think such things. I don't meet Yamini much myself. Rather, she doesn't meet me. The effect is the same whichever way it is.
- HE. I see.
- SON. The University must have finished its prying today.
- HE. Yes.
- SON. Why did you decide to enter this hideous battle anyway? Maybe I shouldn't ask you this question today. But I just have to.
- HE. I didn't choose to enter it. It chose to throw itself at me.
- SON. You could have escaped the inquiry if you'd wanted to. It wasn't going to lead to anything—you kept saying so yourself. I just can't understand why you suddenly decided to face it.
- HE. If one has to go to the slaughter, why not go with all

- the rites and rituals? The other people also earn some merit out of staging a proper yagna. But that's not very important. Why has Yamini stopped coming?
- SON. It is disappointing when the expected happens. Bitterly disappointing. I suspected there were dissonances. But I put it down to hallucinations. There was a kind of strength even in those moments upon which to build castles of happiness. And yet I didn't believe in it. Didn't expect it to last. And that's the way it was. And yet you think my yearnings are vague, father.
- HE. I'm sorry, son.
- SON. No, no, that's not what I mean. What it means is that I am an awful writer. Finally it's a matter of craft! Please. Don't feel bad. Art needs to be polished by craft. Nobody's to blame for that.
- HE. No, my dearest son, that's really not what I wanted to say—
- SON. I know you didn't. What you are looking for is a 'social context'. Don't I know it? Honestly, don't let it worry you. What you are talking about is the grammar of poetry. I understand. But it doesn't find its way into my idiom. What can I do?
- HE. Don't give up your idiom. It'll produce its own grammar.
- SON. I doubt if it will. All my rhythms are going haywire. I can't catch them anymore.
- HE. Such despair? So soon? Why?
- SON. I'm surprised that you of all people should ask. Don't you understand? Aren't you yourself living a tragedy and do you still not recognize despair? (*A moment's pause.*) Father, do you remember your first prison sentence?
- HE. Oh yes, vividly. It's an old story. It was just a couple of months before or after your birth.
- SON. Please talk to me about it. I want to hear about all forms of imprisonment now.
- HE. There's not much to tell. There was this cell. And four young men, intoxicated with the excitement of revolution. It was a long, long cell. We would talk, the four of us—

The stage grows dark. There's a spot on the son listening, excited. He can hear the four talking.

- ONE. Say something, somebody. Silence scares me. Talk. Sridhar, you talk.

- HE. How many days is it since we were arrested?
TWO. A couple of days? Two months? An age?
THREE. Sridhar, don't ask meaningless questions. You were the last one to come in. Tell us about the struggle. What news of Telengana?
- HE. The fight continues . . . will continue. There have been demonstrations. Flags have been hoisted. There's no turning back now.
- ONE. Then why are we engulfed by this darkness?
HE. It is always dark inside walls. Because there are limits. Within limits, darkness grows vicious and declares itself ruler. Darkness is crowned king—dark nights—nights of darkness—
- TWO. I don't understand.
HE. I don't either. But I understand that this kingdom of darkness will collapse. I can see the new leafing of light. I can smell the first blossom—
- THREE. How can you? From where? Out of this darkness? This darkness that devours? I can't stop feeling that a dark and dense despair is going to reign forever in this world—
- HE. In this world? Of course it will. But this world is only this cell. Beyond it I see light. A pinkish light like the skin of a new-born baby. An assuring light.
- ONE. Sridhar, you are our Sanjay now—the one who sees the conflict between light and dark with a miraculous vision. Is this conflict going to end? Is light going to burst into leaf here? Darkness. A cell. Four walls. A tunnel. An unending tunnel. What immense amounts of blood have been shed! But even the river of blood looks black now. What did Marx feel when he saw the Paris Commune?
- HE. He too must have seen a tender shoot of light—a moving, speaking Manifesto itself.
- TWO. A tender shoot of light—
ONE. Pinkish. . .
THREE. New-born.
TWO. Rivers of blood—overflowing their banks.
THREE. Black—they're slowly changing colour.
ONE. They are turning red. Flags are fluttering—
TWO. In the new wind . . .
ONE. The wind of victory.
HE. Our endurance must last till then. We must come out of the tunnels—victory is ours.
An old man, a mighty mountain and a pick axe.

An old man, a mighty mountain and a pick axe.

An old man, a mighty mountain and a pick axe.

(*Light comes on again.*) What was I saying? What was I saying, son? I was rambling thoughtlessly. It is not all true!

SON (*in disbelief*). Not true? Really not true? Why not?

HE. It's the same reason again. Reality is too prosaic. At least it was this time. What I spoke of was a dream. My blood in those days was like yours. My arteries were full to bursting like yours. But that 'social context' that I talk of stood in the way. Father heard I was in jail. He did his duty. He couldn't resist the temptation of doing me a favour. He was a big name in district politics. His word carried weight with the government in Bombay. He arranged to have me separated from the others. I don't know what happened to them. There were never any conversations in the dark. I was transferred to Yerawada and then set free. I wasn't allowed to dream my black dreams. I am surprised that I should want to ask you this question. Except that I exist now in you. Did I do wrong, son? Why did that pure, honest old man love me so fatally? What right had he to snatch my dreams away from me? (*A short pause.*)

SON. Will Yamini come back to me? Your father had some right to do what he did, Father. But who gave Yamini the right—

HE. You disagree with my point of view—

SON. I don't disagree. I just don't understand it—

HE. It's the same thing. When you say you don't understand, you're trying not to hurt me. You think it makes me feel better. And you know, it does.

SON (*laughs*). OK, so I disagree.

HE. This is the way I think—rights are not given. They are snatched from you. And they must be snatched back. Our tragedy, yours and mine, is that we allow them in the first place to snatch these rights from us, and don't have enough strength to grab them back.

SON. Where do you think Yamini stands?

HE. Don't ask such questions. I asked this question twice and was deceived both times. I don't blame you. Ultimately we are liberals. We constantly see the other side of the coin. It takes the passion out of us. Pledges melt away. Revenge becomes distasteful. The blood in our veins grows gradually colder.

But perhaps we're not even liberals. Am I a Hindu then? This ascetic habit of looking at life as a thing outside of oneself dies hard. It makes one feel so aloof. They think victory is theirs. But it is this aloofness that wins. Suddenly sometimes the blood begins to rush again, the urge to grab our rights becomes all-powerful. I feel tempted to turn all our have-nots into grabbers. It's an irresistible temptation. There's no escaping it. There's probably no way to escape—but you are there— We may be the vanquished but we are still humans. No, I will not allow Yamini to defeat you. Grab her—

SON.

Father, you—

HE.

Yes. It is I. Perhaps not I. You.

SON.

But Father—Yamini—I grab her? Conquer her? (*Turns away unable to bear it. Then comes to a decision, gulps and explains to his father.*) It doesn't help. Grab? Whom? Father, when I met Yamini the other day, I'd decided to let the sparks fly—I grabbed her shoulders, stood her before me and looked straight into her eyes—and my breath stopped. Two coal black eyes. Tired. There was a time when those eyes were embers, which made life glow a vivid red. Those embers don't light up any more. Eyes avoid eyes. What purpose will grabbing those eyes serve? The embers won't burn. I'll be left holding cold ashes. Yamini—can I hold her? Can I? I told her—you are free.

HE (*totally defeated now that the tragedy is complete. He begins to whisper to himself the words he once spoke to Saraswati*). You are free—you are free—but I am self-created—free—self-created—free—self-created.

What do these words mean?

History.

The meaning of all words finally is history. History devours the future.

To travel is to walk in well-worn grooves. Feet don't walk. They are dragged forward. History and the future are one. Primitive and therefore Eternal. Unending. Have you also begun to see life as a berry resting in the palm of the hand? Will this never end?

A moment's pause.

SON.

Now that the inquiry is over, what will happen?

HE.

What will happen? They can't throw me out. They want

to break up the organization of Class IV employees that I have built up! They suspect me of spreading extremist attitudes amongst the students. They could have me arrested. They have enough rules and regulations to help them to that—they are out to brand this Hindu sannyasi, who sees the world from a detached distance, as an extremist and jail him. (*Laughs.*) But it will come. She has gone. Just some memories in between but they turned into flowers. No. It will never happen again. I won't allow it to. I will force the tender-blooded dawn to break. Yamini too will have to return. (*He is exhausted. Collapses into the easy-chair.*) She will come. Son—she will come. Who? Yamini. Which? Yamini or that bright pink dawn? Yamini—the dawn—

The bell rings.

SON. Father. There's someone at the door. Could it be Yamini? (*Goes to his father.*) Father. She has come. Do you think it is Yamini? Yamini . . . the bright pink dawn—Yamini—

He does not speak. Remains still. The words of a poem are heard—

The wall has sunk, the pillar tilts and falls.

It stands devastated, the old charity hall.

The dove, perched upon its tiled roof

Sings a solitary, soulless song.

Curtain